



THE SALES LEADER'S GUIDE TO HIRING TOP SALESPEOPLE

Level-Up Your Sales Interviews and
Find the Best Fit for Your Sales Team





Hiring. Is. Tough.

It's no secret that finding top sales talent is an ongoing business challenge for B2B sales organizations. As we slowly move toward a post pandemic era, though, sales leaders are facing a full-fledged war to hire top salespeople.

Every bad hire hurts a company's wallet but, for sales leaders, bad hires can impact their credibility and career. No sales leader wants to be perceived as someone who "can't hire the right people." Sadly, too many B2B sales leaders haven't cracked the code for consistently finding top sellers that are well suited to their sales culture.

Personality assessments can sometimes be a valuable component of a sales hiring process. However, they are far from flawless. The often easily discernible nature of questions enables clever candidates to select answers they suspect will get them the job. It's not a stretch to believe sales candidates find ways to make the assessments work more for themselves than for the hiring manager.

You can help limit the room for error associated with personality profiles or behavioral assessments by incorporating interview questions aimed at understanding the candidate at a psychological level. The answers to such questions can reveal individual personality attributes, bad and good behaviors, motivation and mindset. These are the questions you will find in this ebook. Ultimately, in their answers you are looking to learn what candidates value and what makes them feel valued.

My goal in compiling this list is to help you view sales candidates through the lens of human psychology, so you can improve hiring decisions and get a better feel for cultural fit.

You don't need to ask all or many of the high impact question during an interview. Simply incorporate a few questions naturally into the flow of the conversation. You will find your favorites. The questions I've listed should be asked in addition to the traditional ones you use to ascertain skills, competencies, and other requisite candidate information.

I believe one of the most valuable outcomes of using this guide, is that you'll be able to assess whether a candidate will be a good fit for YOU, their sales leader. You will understand the candidate at a deeper level by asking these questions, because elements of psychology are woven throughout. By listening, carefully, to a candidate's answers, you should be able to determine how well you would do with coaching, enabling, and empowering them if they were hired.

Hiring salespeople is never easy, but seismic changes in the world of work are making it more and more difficult to find the best fit. It's no wonder we constantly hear the phrase "talent war." When it comes to the war for hiring top salespeople, though, I think this ebook may become one of your most powerful "weapons."

Happy Hiring!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anita". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letter 'A' being particularly large and stylized.

The First High Impact Interview Question

01

If you could invite one prominent person from history to dinner, who would it be and why?

You'll be gaining some interesting insight, here, beginning with the reaction the candidate has when you ask this question. You'll see if they answer with ease when a question catches them off guard. Do they react with nervousness? Did they find humor in the moment? Buyers ask plenty of "strange" questions - can this candidate stay cool when a curve ball is thrown their way.

The candidate's answer can highlight the traits and characteristics they deem valuable or admirable, so listen carefully to their explanation. Do they share the questions they would ask the dinner guest? Are they trying to solve a mystery? Salespeople should be curious and interested in learning something specific. Do they tell you a story about their choice?

This is a great question to open an interview with because it sets a conversational tone and shows the candidate that you are interested in who they are. Plus, you'll love seeing the moment the sales professional realizes that their usual old answers probably aren't going to work for them in this interview.



Interview Questions for Hiring Salespeople

02

In your opinion, what is the most important skill a sales professional should have? Why? How has it helped you succeed?

03

Describe the best and worst company cultures you've experienced. How did each impact your performance?

Ideally, the sales professional mentions attributes that align with your sales culture when describing the best they've experienced. You want to hear a description that includes things like: integrity, empowerment, winning, growth, collaboration, hard work, and accountability - assuming your culture truly embodies them.

For the WORST culture, note if attributes of your current culture are called out. Obviously, you don't want to hear anything you consider the "best" of your culture mentioned, here. For example, sales professionals often call out "micromanagement" as an attribute of a poor culture. What you call accountability in your sales organization may seem to them like "micromanagement." Ask them elaborate. Clarity is key, here. Take the time to dig into this answer.



04

What do you feel holds you back from getting to a higher level of sales performance?

Whatever their answer is, you need to be able to train for and coach to it. For example, if a candidate were to say that they aren't empathetic enough with their customers....yikes. You know that empathy is extremely difficult, if even possible, to teach or coach enough to make a real impact. Empathy is a prerequisite for elite sales performers in modern sales. By the way, this is just an example. Unless the candidate has been living under a rock for the past decade, they probably aren't going to tell you they need to have more empathy. If they do, though, you almost have to disqualify them on principle.

05

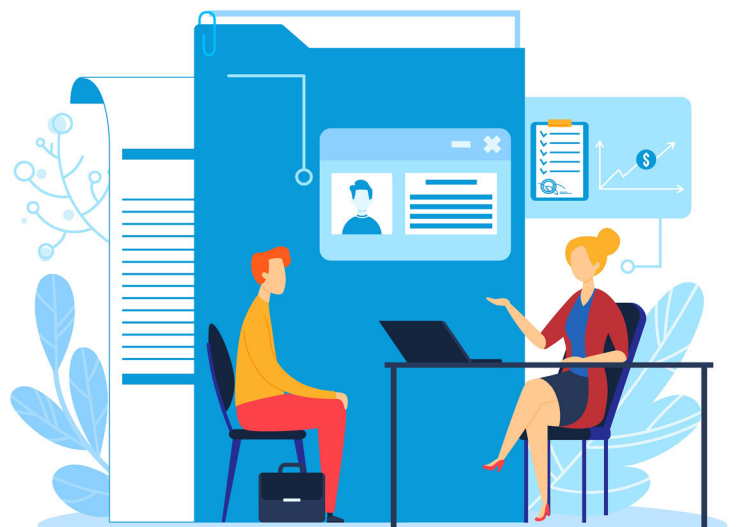
What is something unique that you do as part of your sales motion that differentiates you in the customers' perspective?

06

What part of the sales process do you think is the most difficult and why? How do you feel you perform at that difficult stage?

07

Walk me through a situation where you gave a customer bad news. How did you handle it? How did they take it?



08

Please give me an example of how you manage customer expectations. What do you feel you can improve in your approach?

09

What values does your ideal company/employer have?

10

Describe your worst sales leader. How did they impact your performance?

11

What characteristics of a sales leader help you perform your best?

12

Tell me about a time when a teammate went above and beyond to help you win. How did you respond?

The answer to this question will help you see how willingly they acknowledge the efforts of a helpful teammate. Note how difficult it is for them to answer this question, that may be an indicator of how easily they appreciate others. Someone who is comfortable giving credit where it's due will easily answer the question because it's something they've experienced and appreciated.

People want to help people that will show them gratitude and give them the credit they deserve. If the candidate struggles to answer this, it could mean they aren't someone who likes to ask for or accept help. They may inadvertently make someone helping them feel uneasy or awkward. A candidate that thinks like this isn't likely to foster the culture of collaboration and support that accelerates growth. Ask follow up questions to help you really get a feel for where their head is at.

What are your expectations for coaching from your leader in terms of frequency and discussion? How important for you is sales coaching from your leader?

Do your best active listening, here, please. The candidate will make a split-second decision as to whether they'll say they don't need much coaching, which they think is easier for you, or tell you they expect consistent, quality coaching, which they know requires more from you.

Elite sales professionals expect ongoing coaching and development. However, they may believe you'd prefer having less responsibility for them and not respond with their true expectations.

Self-reflection time. If you are not a great coach and aren't disciplined with coaching quality and frequency, then you shouldn't hire a candidate that expects it, even if it means you pass on a star. It's likely great coaching helped them to become Elite. If you can't provide that, you will frustrate them, and they won't achieve their potential. Or, worse, they will lose motivation and demotivate others on the team, as well.

Be honest with yourself and let that honesty guide your decision. If you are inconsistent and somewhat ineffective with coaching your team, you are better off choosing the candidate with lower expectations of their leader. As much as you need your employees to meet your expectations, employees have expectations of leaders that you need to live up to. An elite performer won't be elite for your company if you can't or won't meet their expectations around coaching and development.





14

How do you prepare for customer meetings?

15

Walk me through your agenda for a first face to face discovery meeting.

The first step in their agenda should be to ask questions to truly understand the buyer. Then, once the questions are done, they would start talking about their product or solution. The idea, of course, is that by learning what is valuable to the buyer, up front, they will tailor their positioning of the product or solution to align with what the prospect deems valuable.

A generic pitch has no place in a first call (or ever, really), unless the customer requires it. If the candidate does talk about "giving their pitch," you should ask a follow up question about how they'll make a qualification decision after the first meeting. If they're doing all the talking, they likely won't learn enough to make a good qualification call.

There is no such thing as an Elite sales professional that doesn't choose to ask powerful questions and understand what is valuable for the customer. That's how they create personalized, differentiating value that protects them from competition and the "do nothing" decision.

16

What is your most powerful discovery question to learn about a buyer's intent and urgency to buy? How about to learn their budget?

17

Imagine you are working with a sales new-hire and you must teach them how to qualify better because that has been identified as their weakness. How would you go about helping them?

18

When you realize the prospect you have met with a couple of times is not the decision maker, how do you proceed?

19

If I were to call a previous client of yours, and ask them to give me 3 words to describe you, what words would they choose? Why?

20

What was the most difficult piece of feedback you ever received? How did you react? Did you make any change as a result? If so, how did you change?





21

What do you do to ensure you stay current on customer industry trends, security trends & technologies, or sales best practices?

Use the Following as Your Final Question.

22

What would you like to know about our company, product, or culture?

People who truly want a job will have done significant research and ask a few detailed questions. The type of questions they ask (i.e. company, product or culture) will give you insight into what they believe is necessary for their success. Will they ask a culture question first? A product one? A company one?

There's no right or wrong answer. However, if they ask something that is readily found on your website, they haven't earned the right to move forward in the process. If they can't do enough research before a job interview and choose to just 'wing it,' what do you think they will do to prepare for a customer meeting?

In general, though, you hope for someone to ask about the culture because that is one thing that is critical for both their success and yours, if they get the job. Be sure that you answer their question about your culture with complete honesty, no one wins if the culture is not the right fit.



Additional Notes

These questions DO NOT replace the standard questions you need to ask in an interview or for top grading. These are aimed at **ENHANCING** your interviews to better understand the candidates' mindset and behaviors. You still must ask the "standard" questions about previous experience, results, skillsets, and competencies.

Do ask the first and last questions for each interview, if you can. You shouldn't ask many or all the questions listed, here. Ask only the ones you feel are most meaningful for your sales culture and context.

There's a big difference between asking questions and questioning. This is an interview not an interrogation, so keep it conversational. Use follow up questions to help you transition to the next question so it doesn't feel like rapid fire questioning.

Note if the candidate immediately started to build rapport with you when the interview began. Were they engaging? Did they ask you a question? Did they try to relate with you? Did they succeed? How did they make you feel? Did the candidate send you a "thank you" email.

At no point should you find yourself trying to persuade the candidate about how great your company and the role are. You need to give them the information they need to decide if selling for your company is the best fit for them.

As you go through the interview, make a list of the candidate's traits, characteristics, and behaviors. What were some gaps in these areas?

Take time to write down how well you think the candidate did with asking for the job (i.e. asking for the sale – trial close.)





Post-Interview Reflection and Analysis

Once the interview has ended – ask YOURSELF the following questions to help you crystallize your thoughts and determine your impression of the candidate.

01

Did this candidate ‘WOW’ me? Why? How?

If they didn’t ‘WOW’ you in an interview for a job they need, do you think they will be able to ‘WOW’ customers in day-to-day sales conversations?

02

How would this candidate enhance our team? Our culture?

03

How confident am I that the candidate has the knowledge, skill, and will to be a high performer in this role?

04

Would I buy from this person? Why or why not?

05

Will this person do a good job managing the customer's expectations?

06

Will this candidate be able to successfully navigate the customer's political landscape?



07

How well will this candidate be able to partner with internal resources to deliver the most valuable outcome for the customer?

08

Is this candidate someone that I would invite to have dinner with my family?

This is not a silly question, it's a POWERFUL test of the "softer" skills that differentiate an average sales professional from a high performing sales professional. Seriously, think about it, would you? If they weren't that likable or didn't gain your trust and confidence enough for you to invite them to dinner with your loved ones, do you think they will have what it takes to endear themselves to the client and leave a lasting positive impression?

09

What 3 words would you use to describe the candidate?

Write the words down. Now, how well do you think the 3 things you wrote down will help them differentiate in customer conversations?



Reference Reviews and Considerations

When doing references, I recommend you request previous customer references (at least 2) in addition to the standard, prior employer and personal references.

The sales professional you want to hire will have NO issue getting a customer to do a reference for them. You WANT sales professionals with that level of customer confidence and trust. If you sense hesitation in getting the 2 customer references, ask more questions such as:

- How do you develop, maintain and grow customer relationships? Please provide examples.
- What do you do to build trust with your customers?
- Provide an example of a long-time customer – possibly even across different jobs you've had. How did you achieve that level of confidence and depth in the relationship?

- What percentage of your previous customers would readily refer you to their contacts so you can position your products/services? Dig deeper based on their answer by asking: Why did you give yourself such a high rating? Why didn't you rate yourself higher?

When doing the customer references, be sure to ask the following question: What three words would you use to describe {candidate name}?

Finally, compare and contrast the answers for the "Three Words" questions:

- The three words the candidate said customers would use to describe them.
- The three words YOU felt described the candidate.
- The three words the customer references actually said described the candidate.

How close was the candidate's assessment to that of the customer? How close was the customer's assessment to yours? Are there any words that were in each person's list? What were they and how important is that attribute to their success in sales?

Let's Connect!

815-210-6918

anielsen@ldkadvisory.com

www.ldkadvisory.com

