

### Hiring Sales People - Criteria for Success

*By Charles Bernard, president, Criteria for Success, inc.*

It doesn't matter how much training, coaching or counseling you apply. It doesn't matter how many probationary periods you allow. Most of the time, as head of sales, you are going against the grain if you have hired the wrong salesperson. This situation always takes an emotional toll on a manager and on a team. You take an even bigger financial hit in lost opportunity dollars and costs to replace that person.

Unfortunately, most managers start recruiting when someone is leaving. That often means they settle for second best, or end up with someone just to fill a void. This can be a costly error. Think about the impact an incompetent rep can have on a territory. Customers will find it hard to trust the next rep that makes a call. If you are always recruiting, you have a file full of pre-qualified candidates you can call upon when needed.

Be ready to reject stereotypes. The best salesperson you can hire is an aggressive extrovert who has been selling for 10 years, right? Yet many clients have told me that they felt more comfortable with unseasoned introverts, saying that they were more trustworthy, even if they were less experienced. Many inexperienced reps, with a great desire to learn, push themselves harder to succeed and do better on the job, exhibiting more loyalty, and requiring less high maintenance. How can you spot this type of talent? At Criteria for Success, inc., we use a very effective six step hiring system that we developed for our clients. I hope that in reading the summary of our system you will be more successful in your own hiring process.

### ▶ **Step 1 – Job Description.**

Although most of you are familiar with the proverbial Job Description, make sure it contains sections that describe “Responsibilities,” “Accountabilities” and “Reporting”. Responsibilities describe the “doing” of the job. “You are responsible for making calls, conducting face-to-face sales calls, developing sales proposals, issuing quotes, etc.” “Accountabilities” describe the expected results. “You are expected to meet or exceed your quarterly quota, to maintain satisfied clients in your territory (as measured by our annual client survey), to have developed and discussed a quarterly sales plan, etc.” The “Reporting” section tells the salesrep what must be reported to their manager, and when. “You must submit a pipeline and activity report every Friday by 4pm.” Bottom-line, the Job Description identifies what essential qualities and behaviors are needed for a rep to be effective in your sales organization.

### ▶ **Step 2 – Job Posting**

A job posting can be an effective medium for generating candidates but when you’re running a general ad, such as “Marketing rep wanted, potential for making lots of money, great opportunity for career advancement, etc.” you run the risk of getting a high number of unqualified responses. I recommend an additional step. Give instructions to your candidate to submit a cover letter along with their resume. Be specific about what you want to see from them. Ask for a summary of why they are qualified for the position, as well as identifying their top three philosophies in succeeding in sales. You may discover a variety of useful things about your candidate right away. You will also get to see a writing sample in the mix. Incidentally, if you do not receive a cover letter answering these two questions and you decide to interview the person anyway, it might be a good idea to ask these two in person, right off the bat.

### ▶ **Step 3 – Interview Template**

Create a template of best practice open-ended, situational questions to expose specific qualities. These should tie back to the Job Description. For example, if you are looking for discipline and good organization skills, you might want to ask the candidate to describe what they would do upon returning to the office immediately after making a sales call. If they answer with things like, “entering notes into the company CRM (customer relationship management) system,” “scheduling follow-up phone calls and meetings in the calendar, etc,” then they just gave you a good response. Avoid asking, “Are you organized?” What do you think their answer will be?

Along with your prewritten questions, have a way to rank the responses on a scale of 1-3, with “3” being the highest. Tally up the score and compare scores if other people are interviewing the same candidate.

#### **Step 4 – Online Assessment**

I am a big fan of online D.I.S.C. (the sales version) assessment questionnaires. The acronym DISC stands for the four personality styles represented by the letters: Drive, Influence, Steadiness and Compliance. These assessments take approximately 20 minutes for the candidate to complete using an Internet browser. People have claimed that the reports (typically 25 pages or so) are uncannily accurate. They describe a person's communication and behavior style. It might indicate that they like to cold call, are detail oriented, are verbose in selling situations, bring a very analytical approach to the job, or it might reveal a lack of attention to detail. I make this report available to candidates as well and then discuss the content openly in a face-to-face interview. Their responses can be very telling.

#### **Step 5 – Situational Presentations**

Any turkey can talk the talk, but if you want to see an eagle in action, watch them fly! One way to see how well a salesperson can perform is to ask them to give you a presentation. There are several ways to do this, one of which is to hand them pre-printed scenarios. I also like one that is not printed, but where the candidate goes up to a dry-erase board or flip chart and draws four columns, with headings for each one. These are "What are you passionate about?" "Besides paperwork, what do you not like to do, but will do anyway?" "What is a personal and professional 'win' for you?" and "Anything else you would like to communicate." As they stand up and write answers in each column, you can observe their body language, look for chinks in the armor, and generally engage in a dialog with them as the facilitator. It shouldn't take too long and it allows them to discuss a familiar subject. You may take away additional key good and bad impressions that you missed in a sit-down scenario.

#### **Step 6 – Ramp-up-Plan**

The person is hired, references checked, offer letter signed and start date established. So, are you all set? Picture this: It's Monday morning, day one has begun in the salesperson's new job, and reception calls, asking where would you like your new employee to go? You say to yourself, "Oh No! Is it that time already?" Having nothing prepared, you answer, "Mmmm let me think for a second....OK, send them to HR. Have them fill out paperwork!" This may or may not sound familiar, but one thing is certain, most of us are ill prepared to bring a new hire up to speed. Therefore, consider documenting a comprehensive two-week ramp-up-plan, in advance. This does not substitute the 30, 60, 90 day goals that many of you have in place. This plan consists of very specific activities during this critical induction phase. At the same time, assign your new hire a peer level "mentor" to show them the ropes and to answer questions, which help them deal with tactical day-to-day issues. Include field trips early on in the plan. They can experience what they will encounter later on and it will clue you in to their demeanor in front of a prospect or client. It is also a great frame of reference when discussing selling your products and services. Remember to include other people in the ramp-up-plan and schedule meetings with the new hire in their calendars as well.

An additional tip: Encourage current employees to refer new hires. Few know your company as well as the people in it. Some of their recommended friends or acquaintances might be a perfect fit for you. Any employee (not only sales staff) should get monetary compensation if the person they recommend stays more than 90 days. This gives incentives for all your employees to recruit! A referral bonus can range anywhere from \$1,500 to \$3,000 per qualified employee. Also, carry the recruiting message with you. A note on the back of some of your business cards might say "I was very impressed with your professionalism – if you are ever interested in a selling career at my company, please call and reference this card."

*For more information about this approach or to speak with one of our consultants about improving your sales email us at [info@criteriaforsuccess.com](mailto:info@criteriaforsuccess.com) or call (212) 302-5522*