

Sales Leadership: A Compendium of Great Sales Tips

46 Ways for Building Sales Teams

By [John Dietrich, Search Party](#)



Your sales team acts as the vanguard of your company. They're the warriors and hunters of your pack, taking risks in their quest to help you find new customers.

In most companies, however, sales is often one of the most problematic departments. Turnover is typically very high. A widespread failure to produce can send the whole company into a tailspin. Bad sales reps can literally threaten the survival of your business.

We wanted to create a powerhouse reference which would help you hire a sales team that would be the envy of your competition, rather than your biggest headache. We arrived at 46 principles which will help you hire, train, manage and maintain a sales team you can be proud of.

13 Insights for building a great sales

team from the pros



We started by reaching out to some of the smartest minds in sales to compile a long list of insights which will help you build a great sales team. These were so good we wanted to quote them directly. Each and every one of them is highly applicable, no matter what team you're building.

1. The Status Quo Has Got to Go

Charley Dehoney, VP of Sales at [Events.com](https://www.events.com)

"I look for whip-smart people with a track record of exceeding expectations. This may be a former student leader or student athlete right out of college. Or, it may be a customer service professional that has received awards in that role but whose circumstances have changed and they want to get into sales to make more money or earn more recognition. It may also be a sales person who has crushed their quota in every role they've ever had. Either way, I *won't* hire a person that has displayed a pattern of status quo behaviour in their life, no matter how smart they are or how smooth of a talker."

2. Look for the Big Three

[Barry Maher](#), Sales Trainer, and Author of *Selling Power*

"Top salespeople come in all personality types, but they do have three things in common. They are winningly aggressive, which means being aggressive without appearing pushy. They are empathic. They learn a lot about their prospects and work on seeing the world through their eyes, empathizing with their needs, their problems, and their frustrations. Finally, they are constantly working to improve their skills. By the way, don't hire anyone who seems too "slick." To me, the highest praise a salesperson can receive from a prospect is simply, "You make a lot of sense." People who say that don't feel sold, they feel their needs are being met. Of course they may never have realized they had those needs until the rep walked

in the door. And I guarantee customers will buy more from the salesperson who appears to make sense than from anyone they consider to be “a great salesperson.”

3. Create a Culture of Success

[John Vespasian](#), Author: *When Everything Fails, Try This*

“Do not waste your time with little tricks such as prizes, awards, and commendations. Their effect on attracting and keeping good employees will be so negligible these initiatives are not worth the effort. What you need to do is adopt the proven formula for attracting and motivating great employees. You need to create an environment of fast growth and vast opportunity. I mean real growth and real opportunity. You need to create an environment where the assistant salesperson you hired today will quickly become a section manager, a floor manager, or the manager of a new retail outlet. You need to get people to see from day one that your company offers real opportunities because you have a well-thought-out strategy for growth. If you do that, you won’t have to worry about attracting and motivating great employees. You’ll create a culture of success, and your company will grow by leaps and bounds.”

4. Look for People Who Love What They Do, and Get Out of Their Way

Noel Wax, President of the [Groundswell Group](#) and former VP of Sales at CBS Sports Broadcasting

“It is important to find people that are not afraid to work. We look for people that love what we do. Provide them with all the tools and resources they need to be successful, and get out of their way. We look for people that are fearless (or as close to it as can be). There is a natural gift that some of the best salespeople have that cannot be taught. Our top sales people do not like to lose, and they are incredibly creative in finding ways to get in people’s doors in an authentic and meaningful way. Nothing replaces making a lot

of attempts to get our clients and prospects to fall in love with what we do and how we can help their business. We reward top performers well, and hold our sales team accountable for clearly defined and mutually agreed upon goals.”

5. Create Synergy

Kevin Adkins, [Kenmore Law Group](#)

“The members of a team have to complement one another. You don’t want several people that have the same skills and the same deficiencies. A sales candidate needs to show results of past sales. Actions speak louder than words. For me, what a person says to me means nothing. I need to see what they have done. As far as education, the team members, once again, should complement each other. Some should be ‘book smart,’ and some should be ‘street smart.’”

6. Look for People Who Roll with the Punches

Jim Steele, President & Chief Customer Officer of [InsideSales.com](#)

“Look for resilience. Top sales achievers have a unique ability to cope with difficulty, to negotiate obstacles, to optimize performance in the face of adversity. At the heart of resilience is this fact: top sales professionals are pros at denying that a lost sale is a failure. They take rejection as a personal challenge to succeed with the next customer.”

7. Bridge the Generational Gap

Jonathan Kendall, CCP, CPS, CMCT, President & CEO, [PopUpSelling.com](#)

“Sales teams that both understand clients and can operate in the new tech-heavy methodology, and can actually close sales based on the needs and the buying behaviour of the client, must understand the science and hacks of sales to multiple generations. Too few are executing this strategy. For many of Baby Boomer managers, the new sales team is perplexing. In legacy companies, we are seeing a disconnect between the

generations. Where we see tremendous growth potential for legacy companies is in the training of Millennials to understand the Boomer and Gen X buying style...and for the seasoned Boomer sales team to integrate with the new hires on the team and get an understanding of the Millennial way of procuring products and services.”



8. Look for Intuitive Obsessiveness

Tod Browndorf, Founder, and CEO, [Cogno](#)

“We make many B2B transactions a day, and because of this, the two primary skills tend to be baked into the DNA of the individuals we hire, and they are 1. people who are intuitive, and, 2. people who have a faint touch of an obsessive disorder. It’s a tricky balance. Intuition is such a critical trait for our salespeople; they need to know what has potential, who is serious about the transaction, if there is enough volume in the transaction to make it attractive, and all this relative to the amount of time they spend on it. We can’t have our folks spending too much time on opportunities that are never likely to come to fruition, and often the ability to measure this outcome is an art rather than science. As far as obsessiveness; obviously they need to be thorough, and while they are working with an opportunity, they need to make all the relevant and appropriate touches in our sales cycle that leads to a close. If they miss one, percentages for success diminish.”

9. Look for People Who Listen

Noah Dye, VP of Sales and Marketing at [Lewis PR](#)

“There is a misperception that the most successful salespeople are the most aggressive. We’ve all had terrible experiences with pushy salespeople. In today’s world, it’s more about being able to understand the challenges your prospects are facing, and providing solutions to those challenges. So, I

want people that can listen, whether that's online or offline. We all spend too much time talking, that's the easy part. You truly become a successful person, when you learn to listen."

10. Maturity Matters

Patrick Donlin, CEO of [Heartland IT Consulting](#)

"Salespeople should be independent, driven, and passionate as non-negotiables. However, maturity will give insight into what they will do when nobody is watching, how much they need to be managed, and if they can go out and hunt business independently."

11. Look for True Believers

Sam Williamson, Owner, [SEO Fife](#)

"You have to build a team that truly believes in what they are selling. This is something you can't just force on them—they either believe it or don't, and forcing them to believe in it will only make them even less interested. This is why hiring a team that has a passion for the service or product that you are selling is vital to success. If you manage to build a passionate team, you can afford to avoid incentives and targets. I find these 'extras' can often cause friction between team members, which can be devastating for team morale. It's far more efficient to reward the team collectively for their work. However, simple commission can often be an effective tactic to get the best out of your team. Let's face it – it can be hard to work with 100% passion every single day. So if a team member comes in feeling unenthusiastic or disinterested, then they can take their foot off the pedal, safe in the knowledge that if they come in tomorrow and work extra hard, they will be financially rewarded. This approach rewards overall performance rather than day-to-day performance, which is essential to building a successful sales team."

12. Select Great Candidates, and Cultivate Them

Mike Smith, Founder, SalesCoaching1.com

“Have a game plan for training and development. Great salespeople want to be shown how to best offer your product or service. Let them know you have a program in place to do that. Continue to develop their skills, and the increased sales will show.”

13. Adopt a Dual Perspective

Terry Dockery, President, [The Business Psychology Company](#)

“I’ve helped companies build a great sales team for over 20 years, and I’ve done it by adhering to a few key principles. First, decide if you need “A” players (top 10% performers) or if “B” players will suffice (top 20% performers, perhaps with “A” potential), and don’t compromise. Second, identify the top 5 predictors of success and decide how you’ll measure them. The rest is gravy. We like Integrity (doesn’t steal, does what he says he’ll do), Relationship Building (the core skill of consultative sales), Self-Starter (doesn’t require a lot of “management”), Money Motivated (isn’t this obvious for a sales person?) and Team Oriented. Finally, tap the synergy of teamwork. You do this by compensating both on individual and on team performance, and by hiring a Sales Manager who can actually manage. Very often it’s not your best salesperson: sales and management are two very different skill sets.”

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33 General tips on how to hire a sales team

As we started asking around we noticed several themes came up again and again when discussing building a sales team. We’ve

compiled these as a more general, bullet-pointed list for easy reference and action the next time you build a sales team.

- Charisma and polish aren't everything. In fact, many people are now very wary of the traditional, extraverted, fast-talking sales guy. You'll want to avoid hiring reps who still present this way.
- Look for candidates who are interested in building a long-term sales career.
- Candidates who take the time to invest in their own sales education and personal development are particularly valuable.
- Look for candidates who understand the industry and its challenges.
- Make sure the candidate truly understands the value of your product. If they don't understand the value when they walk in the door they'll be unlikely to understand it six months from now, and doing the research is "Job Interview 101." Ask them to describe how the product or service will solve a prospective customer's problems. Ask them to describe who that is. Throw out some common objections and see how they meet them.
- Look for consistency—great candidates exhibit the same success behaviours again and again.
- Look for people who try to better themselves in *all* aspects of their lives, not just in sales.
- Look for reps who are highly curious and who ask a lot of questions. The quality of the questions they ask will tell you a great deal about how well they'll do when it's time for them to uncover the needs of potential customers.
- Degrees and GPAs are not good measures of sales success. Experience and drive are far more valuable.
- As with many positions, it can be prudent to look to your own industry network first. If not, [working with recruiters](#) who specialize in your industry can be a great choice.

- Look for anyone who loves competition – athletes, former entrepreneurs, and anyone else who loves to win.
- Be careful in the [interview process](#). You don't want to get "sold" on someone who isn't suitable!
- [Cultural fit](#) is just as important for hiring sales reps as it is for any other department, if not more so. Look for someone who is in alignment with your company's core values.
- Honesty counts—a lot. A sales representative who will lie to score a quick sale will hurt your company in the long run.
- Over and over again, we heard that extra "incentives," contests, in particular, tended to harm morale and did very little to increase performance. Take a pass on using them.
- Look for reps who are excited about commission-only jobs, rather than intimidated by them. Unless your company has advertised base + commission, a rep who asks about a salary base is probably not going to be as driven as a representative who is excited about the very large financial opportunity that a commission-only job can represent.
- Keep in mind that achieving sales success at a past company does not guarantee success at *yours*. The representative's approach needs to match your company's approach.
- If someone isn't performing, set clear expectations and coach them on the concrete steps they can take to meet those expectations. If they continue to underperform, let them go quickly, before they can drag down the morale of the entire team.
- Boil your entire sales process down to a predictable system, and train reps on the system. This gives reps a predictable series of tasks to tackle each day, as well as a predictable process to execute when they're in front of a potential customer. This results in less time wasting and fewer spun wheels.

- A positive attitude can create success, even in a timid introvert.
- Look for candidates who are interested in meeting the rest of the team. You want to find team members who will support one another.
- Make sure you understand your own organization's sales cycle, ideal customer, and process so that you may effectively communicate these vital ideas to the rest of your team.
- Don't lead by the numbers. Metrics are useful, but constantly comparing people to their metrics is demoralizing and unhelpful. Instead, seek to inspire your team.
- Focus on measuring the sales representative's engagement with the activities that lead to success. Those are predictable and are within each representative's control. Ultimately, the results of any individual sales call is within the customer's control, not the rep's. Only the customer can say "yes." Fortunately, if the team keeps doing enough of the right things, the results will come. In short: it's about holding the team responsible for the things they *can* control, and adopting a no-excuses mentality when it comes to those things.
- You can't slump on [writing a job description](#), even if you think it should be obvious! No two sales jobs are alike. A job description will tell your sales team what it takes to be successful from the moment they start work.
- Don't tell a candidate to "sell you that paperclip" or "sell you that stapler." The results will not be a reflection of the representative's ability to succeed at your organization. Furthermore, many top-notch reps will be put off by this exercise. Focus on uncovering the representative's approach to selling *your* products or services.
- Go right ahead and ask the [tough questions during the](#)

interview. Tackle every potential red flag you see. You're not doing this to disqualify the candidate per se. You're doing this because it's an outstanding exercise in how the candidate will respond when a potential customer starts throwing out objections. Let them meet your objections to hiring them, and see if they take it a step further and ask for the job (essentially, asking for the sale)!

- *Don't* "go with your gut." This will often result in hiring a candidate because you found him or her to be charismatic. Remember, you're interviewing people who specialize in building a rapport. You want to keep values, cultural fit, preparedness and the other qualities of a great sales rep at the forefront of your mind when it's time to make a decision.
- Look for stamina. You need people who will keep pushing and working until the job is done, not people who will take a 2-hour lunch or who will drive around for an unnecessary extra 45 minutes because they're tired and discouraged.
- Look for people who are teachable. Much of sales management is really about coaching. A representative who already thinks he knows everything won't be responsive to this coaching. You don't need people whose egos will get in the way of getting the job done.
- Use positive reinforcement. Sales is a stressful job. Negative reinforcement will only result in depressed, stressed representatives who can't perform.

Bonus tip: Make sure *you* stay positive, interested, and curious during the hiring process, and make sure you continue to reflect those qualities as you lead your team. Your own attitude will set the tone for each representative's continued outstanding performance. Energy matters! Once you've gone through all the hard work of hiring the right people, trust them and expect the best of them. Employees can tell when you believe in them, and they will work hard to live up to that

belief.

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