

Preventing sales hiring remorse

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Many founders flounder with international sales hiring. They end up with sales hiring remorse - and the scars to prove it. A sales hiring mistake results in finger pointing and costs a big six figure sum. Most founders don't use a disciplined hiring process. If they did, and stuck to it, their success rate would be higher.

During the early stages, company revenue is dependent on the founder team. This is not due to their honed sales skills but their deep understanding of customer's problems and how they can solve them.

New sales hires don't have this innate understanding. The great ones will have skills, experience and talents very different to those of the founders. To find them and maximise the odds of success build a disciplined sales hiring process and use the following questions as your guide to prevent sales hire remorse:



During the early stages, company revenue is dependent on the founder team. This is not due to their honed sales skills but more likely their deep understanding of customers' problems and how they can solve them.

1. What exactly do you want them to do?

Are you looking for a hunter of new customers or a farmer to win revenue from existing ones? What do you want them to do? Generate leads? Orchestrate sales? Close deals? Be clear on territories, sales quotas, compensation plan and reporting lines.

INSIGHT IN BRIEF

Most founders flounder with international sales hiring, yet a disciplined process can dramatically improve the odds.

During the early stages, company revenue is dependent on the founders due to their deep understanding of customers' problems.

Before starting on sales recruitment, be sure your value proposition is compelling, and use a disciplined process if you want to prevent sales hiring remorse.

INSIGHT IN ACTION

Creating and following a disciplined hiring process can prevent sales hiring remorse.

Top quality candidates will lose interest if you are not clear on exactly what you want them to do.

2. What is the profile of a successful sales performer?

Seek input from experienced colleagues and industry expert to establish the top 7 profile criteria (skills, personal characteristics, behaviours/ performance and experience) needed to succeed in your company? Think about the profile of existing successful performers. Put this profile at the heart of your selection process. Use it as the benchmark for interviewing, assessing performance and reference checking.

3. Who will help you?

Some CEOs claim to have the Midas touch but experienced help ensures more insightful assessment. Who will help you? Think about who to involve for initial phone elimination, in-person, and final shortlist interviews. Consider also utilising the services of sales recruitment expert and for the US someone like sales training guru Dave Stein who writes an excellent blog on sales hiring <http://davesteinsblog.esresearch.com/category/hiring/>.

4. Where will you find good ones?

Getting star performers is tough and selecting from a small pool is risky. Create options through your own networks, using networking tools like LinkedIn or perhaps recruitment firms? Good candidates often have compensation plans you can't afford. Think about how to position the role to make it challenging and attractive to star performers? What's your big vision for the future? What's in it for them?

5. How will you get the best from the interview process?

Interviews present a golden opportunity, often wasted due to poor preparation and time management. Prepare questions to assess whether the candidate is a good fit for the profile you have created. Use the interview time to probe hard on the areas that are key for success, rather than listening to a CV pitch.

Think carefully about your style of questioning. Lead with a big open question such as - "Tell me about an important customer relationship you built?" Then drill down with more focused questions like - "What tactics did you use to nurture the relationship?" " How would you rate yourself on your ability to nurture important customer relationships?"

6. How can you validate candidates against profile of successful performers

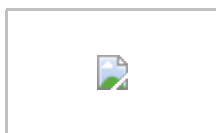
Use the seven questions suggested as a guideline to build your sales hiring process.

Once you have documented your sales hiring process, get help from others, use the board, management team, fellow CEOs etc.

Different traits or personal characteristics are needed for different sales roles. The person who makes a great 'hunter' will not necessarily excel at 'farming' existing customers. Use a reputable psychometric test to help. Remember traits or personal characteristics are hard to change.

7. How will you verify what you've been told?

Don't skimp on reference checking. Collect potential referee names throughout the hiring process, not just at the end. Note previous boss, customer names and fellow worker contact details. Use both volunteered and 'non volunteered' references. Prepare probing reference questions to validate candidate claims, get objective assessment on skills and behaviours and to obtain insight to help the new sales hire's first 90 days.



Select Strategies is a boutique consulting practice, which helps companies make growth happen. In our series, *Growth Insights*, Paul O'Dea and Emer O'Donnell draw on experience from client engagements to look at issues which accelerate or inhibit company growth.

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