

# HOW TO HIRE TOP SALES TALENT

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RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES FOR HIRING TECHNOLOGY  
SALES PROFESSIONALS IN A CANDIDATE-DRIVEN JOB MARKET

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# HOW TO HIRE TOP SALES TALENT

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Everyone knows there is a shortage of talent for technology professionals with the latest skills (especially Software Developers, Computer Scientists & Data Scientists) and those with the necessary skills are commanding increasingly higher compensation as the talent wars heat up.

But did you know that, according to a recent study by Manpower Group, Sales Professionals are now the second hardest position to fill? This is especially true in the Technology Sector where a combination of technical and industry expertise is necessary in addition to highly specialized sales skills.

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Part of the reason may be that millennials, in general, don't like cold calling potential clients in order to make commissions or assume other risks associated with the sales profession such as performance-based compensation plan and the highest turn-over rate of any professional-level career.

They also expect a better work/life balance and work that is more intrinsically rewarding, compared to previous generations.

As previous workers leave the profession (due to promotions into management, alternate or second career paths, or retirement) companies in the technology sector need a long-term strategy for how they will recruit and attract top sales talent or find themselves out in the cold.

whether you realize it yet or not, America's labor shortage is heading up quickly and projected to reach epidemic proportions by 2020. To make matters worse, as the war for talent heats up, candidates are becoming more risk adverse, making them less likely to change jobs or even begin a job search.

What should today's Sales Leaders do to stay relevant as the war for technology sales talent heats up? You need a pro-active plan that will allow you to consistently access the HIDDEN TALENT POOL of passive candidates that have their heads down making sales, but are open to a career opportunity if approached consistently and with the right approach. These passive candidates can be turned into active job seekers, but once they are there will be fierce competition if they are not hired quickly.

In this guide, you will learn what critical steps need to be taken at each of the

## **FOUR STAGES OF THE HIRING PROCESS.**

Each step has its own challenges, so we will review them from the beginning all the way to bringing your new talent on board.

If you can successfully implement the following strategies, you will be able to win the war for sales talent that has already begun. Like most things in life, success begins with planning a good strategy and doing your homework

## **BEFORE YOU TAKE ACTION.**

This is certainly true for hiring and recruitment of top sales talent.



STAGE  
ONE

# Planning / Strategy

One way to ensure failure is to take a “READY, FIRE, AIM” approach to recruiting top talent. After all, would you take this approach to your sales process? Of course not. But many Sales Leaders try to hire by gut and instinct alone, without a plan to ensure they can CONSISTENTLY hire top sales talent. Even a blind squirrel finds an occasional nut, but will they survive the winter? Probably not.

While I can’t build your entire hiring strategy in the scope of this guide, I can tell you the top strategies that most Sales Leaders neglect, giving you a serious competitive advantage over your competitors.

01

→ **BUILD A CANDIDATE PERSONA** - A candidate persona is a composite sketch of your target candidate audience. These can be segmented according to the “Bullseye Method” with a persona for each segment. I will have more to say about the Bullseye method later. But first, you need a persona so you can understand exactly who you are trying to recruit, where to find them, and what motivates them to action. Without understanding your target audience, you will never maximize your recruiting effort. With a well-designed Candidate Persona in place, you can then create an effective recruitment strategy and ensure you can deliver messaging that will gain the attention of your target audience and motivate them to action.



Please see an example of a candidate persona template below\*

**Full Name**

Age: 1-100  
Work: Job title  
Family: Married, kids, etc.  
Location: City, state  
Character: Type

**Personality**

Introvert — Extrovert  
Analytical — Creative  
Conservative — Liberal  
Passive — Active

**Goals**

- The goals this user hopes to achieve.
- A task that needs to be completed.
- A life goal to be reached.
- Or an experience to be felt.

**Frustrations**

- The frustrations this user would like to avoid.
- The obstacle that prevents this user from achieving their goals.
- The problems with the solutions already available.
- The product or service that currently does not exist.

**Motivations**

Incentive  
Fear  
Achievement  
Growth  
Power  
Social

**Preferred Channels**

Traditional Ads  
Online & Social Media  
Referral  
Guerrilla Efforts & PR

**Bio**

The bio should be a short paragraph to describe the user journey. It should include some of their history leading up to a current use case. It may be helpful to incorporate information listed across the template and add pertinent details that may have been left out. Highlight factors of the user's personal and/or professional life that make this user an ideal customer of your product.

Criteria to consider when building your Candidate Persona include: Generation (such as Baby Boomers, Gen-X, Millennials, etc.), Years of professional experience (this will also determine their maturity since it correlates with age), locations (where are they likely to live and the supply/demand ratio for talent by location), work environment & culture, hobbies & interests, Schools attended, membership in professional associations, clubs & Meetups joined, tech stack used, social media presence, life goals, work-life priorities, income history & career goals, and anything else that is likely to correlate with the person possessing the necessary KSAs.

Since there may not be enough candidates that fit your perfect Candidate Persona, it's best to develop 2-3 personas and rank them based on priority. This is what I call the Bullseye method because the first persona is hitting the bullseye and the next ones are larger concentric circles making a bullseye.

**02** → **INTERVIEW STAKEHOLDERS** - It's best to gather the input of all stakeholders that have knowledge of the specific KSA's of your sales team. This might include any other Sales Managers, Top Sales Performers, Sales Support staff, your Human Resources and Talent Management team, etc. This can also include any outside stakeholders such as consultants, search firms, channel partners, customers, etc. It's best to create a questionnaire to gather everyone's input, then build a composite that takes everyone's input into consideration. Of course, as the leader of the sales team, the buck stops with you so your judgement should be the final determining factor.

**03** → **BUILD YOUR TARGET LISTS** - This will include target lists of specific companies, industries and sectors that employ your target candidates. You can also build lists from organizations they are likely to join (ex. National Association of Sales Professionals). These lists will be used to build the master list (also called Longlist) of all potential candidates to review and/or contact.

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T W O

# SOURCING/RECRUITING

**N**ow that you have a master list containing everyone you want to reach and where to find them, you now need to consider how you will contact them.

01

## DEVELOP A MULTI-CHANNEL RECRUITMENT MARKETING STRATEGY

- Here we borrow from the Digital Marketing Playbook more than a little. Since response rates to cold calls and emails are low, you need to warm up your audience first. You will then want to build a steady drip of communication so they become familiar with you and keep you in mind until they are ready to respond. While there is an increasingly long list of potential channels. The most effective are as follows: LinkedIn Messages & InMails, Email Drip campaigns, Social Media posts, Phone Calls, SMS, Voicemails, sharing "By Invitation Only" job postings. You can also use retargeting ads for your job posts or company promotional materials depending on your budget and whether you are building a future talent pool that warrants the added expense and time.

02

**DON'T POST THE JOB** - This is the most common mistake I see Sales Leaders make and the one most encouraged by internal stakeholders in Human Resources and Talent Acquisition. The reason is simple; this will increase the number of candidates you have to review and some will be good enough to hire. This is also a relatively inexpensive sourcing strategy and one that takes the least amount of effort. So why do I discourage this practice? Simple.



If you are seeking top sales talent, you are targeting PASSIVE CANDIDATES. They are not applying directly to jobs unless something has already sparked their interest. But once they see the job is advertised (especially if it's been up for a while) they may begin to wonder why you can't fill the job. It also works against the message you want to send, that you are highly selective and only interested in the TOP TALENT in the market. If you want the elite, then you must treat them as such. So when a candidate goes to your website and doesn't see the job posted, you can tell them that you are only reaching out to a select few people that you know would be a perfect fit for the position. This also lets you sell the job instead of the job posting. After all, who knows the benefits of working on your sales team better than you?

Finally, once you have their attention, you will send them a "By Invitation Only" job application so you can gather their information and provide them with the information that will help you sell the opportunity. This velvet glove approach will represent your employment brand better than even the most well-designed careers page can do alone. You can still send them there to read about the benefits of working for your organization, but this way you are able to control the first impression, which makes all the difference if you are seeking the elite performers. If you only want "good-enough" candidates, the most of the standard recruitment strategies will work just fine. Be honest with yourself if you really want or need to hire top sales talent or not. If not, then you can stop reading this guide. But if you have read this far, I doubt this is the case.

→ **03 THINK LIKE A MARKETER** - Most job descriptions read like a laundry list of requirements and daily duties of the job with no thought that this is also a piece of marketing material. A well-written job description should make someone WANT the job and want to work for your organization. They need to be intrigued and told first the benefits for THEM and only then should it describe the qualification and duties. After all, if you don't gain their interest, then the rest of the information doesn't matter.

You will also need to craft your email sequences, SMS messages, LinkedIn posts, etc. so that you lead with a compelling proposition that makes them curious and sparks their interest. There will be plenty of time to qualify them once they are in your interview pipeline. For now, you want to get them engaged and motivated to take the time to update their resume, research your company and make time in their busy schedule for interviews.

Other supporting documentation you need would include a Benefits Summary Sheet, Product/Service Brochures, Press Releases, and other collateral materials. You will provide this information at various times throughout the process to help keep them engaged.

Finally, you will want to have your “Elevator Pitch” down so when you speak with them you can tell them in 2 minutes or less why they should want to work for you. Once you have them engaged, you can continue to qualify them and allow them to qualify the position.

## 04

→ **PROTECT YOUR EMPLOYMENT BRAND** - Have you read the reviews of your company on GlassDoor? Have you Googled your company with keyword like hiring, career, “work for”, etc. to see what information is out there. Can you account for any bad reviews? Have you asked for good reviews? It’s what you don’t know that kills you. I can’t tell you how many times I recruited a top candidate with a well-crafted message sequence, spoke with them in detail about the position and gaining their interest, only to have all my hard work ruined once they went to GlassDoor. This is especially true if you are hiring Millennials. They grew up going to Yelp and other online review sites for everything from where to eat dinner to what shoes to buy. Of course they are going to look for crowd-sourced reviews for something as important as their career.



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# SCREENING/SELECTION

**N**ow you that you have built your Candidate Persona, developed your Multi-Channel Recruitment Marketing Strategy, contacted top talent and Gained their interest, the hard work must be done right?

WRONG!

It's now time to vet the talent pipeline to ensure they really are the Pink Unicorns you believe them to be. And if they are, you must continue to increase their interest level at every stage of your interview process to ensure the selected candidates will accept your employment offer. So what are the steps to ensure you can land the top talent once they are properly vetted? Use assessments to measure what you can't see.

- 01 → **USE A JOB** - specific Scorecard for gathering interview feedback from all stakeholders. The scorecard should be designed to measure the KSAs for the position, as well as their behavioral traits to ensure they are a good Cultural-fit for your sales team and for the company overall.
- 02 → **MEASURE THEIR BEHAVIORAL AND MOTIVATIONAL TRAITS** using something like the DISC assessment. There are a number of great assessment tools on the market and you will need to try several to see what works best for your needs. But if you are not using some form of behavioral science as part of your screening strategy, you are flying blind. You can't

see a person's motivations, but they can be measured. If they are not a good fit, they will not stay long. Let's not forget the biggest expense in hiring for any position is the cost of a BAD HIRE. This means they are a good fit for the team and organization and not just that they are well-qualified. There are also Sales-specific assessments which couch their traits in sales terms. I'd recommend using a sales-specific assessment, but it isn't absolutely necessary if you already have one you like that works well for you.

**03** → **DEFINE YOUR INTERVIEW PROCESS** - I'm continually surprised when I engage with a new client and ask about their interview process and realize they haven't given this a second thought. Why is this important? Well, for starters it's difficult to work a plan if you don't have one. Things have a way of stalling if you don't know what the next step is and when it should occur. Would you let your sales team go out there without a territory plan and firm understanding of the steps in the sales process? I certainly hope not. Yet this may be the most common mistake I encounter with otherwise great sales leaders. Another reason this is important is that candidates want to know where they stand in the interview process. What step are they on and how long will the process take? If they don't know, they may give up while waiting for the next interview. Remember, they are likely being courted by another company or their current employer so you don't want to lose momentum. Like in sales, time is the biggest deal-killer. Don't let this stop you from hiring your next Sales Superstar!

Steps should  
include

- a → Be sure to notify all interviewers of their role in the process and how they should give feedback.
- b → Set a timeline for the interview process with a target start date and milestones such as 1<sup>st</sup> round of interviews complete, final interview, offer presentation/accepted target date, etc.
- c → Create Scorecards for all interviewers to use with pre-defined rating criteria
- d → Be sure and allow for candidates to give at least two weeks notice before start date.
- e → Be sure that all interviewers know the process and can tell the candidate the next step when the end the interview.

→ **04 BE TRANSPARENT** - While this may seem contradictory to my previous advice about how to market the opportunity, this is actually an integral part of that process. Candidates need to know they can trust you and nothing earns that trust more than honesty. Tell them about any challenges the company has faced and how you intend to overcome those challenges. After all, they are going to find out eventually and it's better they heard it from you first. Also, the more you share with a candidate, the more they will share with you. Don't forget that interviewing is a two-way street, especially for top talent. They have options and will sense if you're trying to pull the wool over their eyes. Candidates comment to me quite frequently how impressed they are when a hiring manager shares less than flattering information with them. Ironically, it turns out that the best way to sell the position is by telling them about the challenges and problems and not just focusing on the good parts. Otherwise, they will remember the old adage "if something seems too good to be true, it probably is" and quietly remove themselves from the process. Allow them to speak with other sales reps on the team and not just your top producer.

→ **05 SALES PRESENTATION OR 30/60/90 DAY PLAN** - This is important if they will be giving sales presentations or product demos. The sales presentation should be a product or service they already know. You want to see how they represent a product after they have studied up and know their product. The other option is a Territory Plan, often referred to as a 30/60/90 Day Plan. The purpose of this is to have the candidate tell you how they would approach their territory and what steps they would focus on to get ramped up and productive. It's not important that their plan matches your sales training plan although this is something you want to discuss before extending them an offer. It's best to pick EITHER a Sales Presentation OR a Territory Plan and not both. Remember, they will already be going through multiple interviews and taking an assessment. Don't make it any harder than necessary to get through the process. The trick here is to focus on what is important to ensure the best hire while keeping the process as streamlined as possible so you don't lose good candidates with a bad process.

→ **06 CREATE AN EXCEPTIONAL EXPERIENCE** - Be sure to follow up regularly, avoid missing or being late for calls and interviews, send regular updates so candidates know their status in the process, provide as much information as possible and otherwise treat the candidate the way you would want to be treated. This has two benefits. It will increase your offer and hire acceptance rate significantly, while also helping to establish a great employment brand. Glassdoor has a whole section dedicated to candidates rating their INTERVIEW EXPERIENCE, meaning candidates that you don't hire can also give their anonymous feedback. Don't poison the well of future candidates by neglecting the candidate experience.

STAGE  
THREE

# OFFER/HIRE & ONBOARDING

**N**ow that you have identified, recruited and screened a Sales Superstar, it's time to make them an offer! This should be the fun part where you get to deliver good news, but there are a few things to remember to you don't lost the candidate at the alter and undo all your hard work. While some may consider the offer and onboarding as separate steps, I feel they are so intertwined it's best to think of them as one step in the process. However, an argument could be made that these are separate steps. Either way, my advice for what to do are the same.

01

→ **CHECK REFERENCES ASAP** - While some candidates are not ready or willing to provide references until they have been extended an official written offer letter, others are more than happy to provide references when things are moving towards an offer. Since candidates don't control how quickly their references respond, it's best to get on this as quickly as possible. This will help you avoid the temptation of skipping this all-too-important step in your excitement to hire a superstar. While most candidates will pass this step, it should never be skipped. It's a vital part of due diligence along with a criminal background check, education and degree verification. You can speed up this process by providing a form for written references, but speaking with someone in person has its benefits as well. This is a preference since the research does not indicate one form is more accurate or beneficial than the other.

- **02 DEMONSTRATE YOUR ENTHUSIASM** - Be sure to communicate your excitement when extending an offer and let them know you value them. This should be clear from both the written communication (email with offer letter) and when you speak with them in person or over the phone. Make sure they “feel the love” and remember they are probably being courted somewhere else whether they share this with you or not. It’s human nature to be excited about someone who is excited about you. This is true in both the dating world and in business.
- **03 WALK THEM THROUGH THE OFFER** - This can be either in person or over the phone, but it should NEVER be skipped. I have seen candidates decline an offer because of a misunderstanding on the offer letter. Unfortunately, by the time this was understood it was too late. The candidate had already committed to another offer or was soured by what they thought of the offer, it’s just hard to get the candidate back to a YES. Don’t leave this to chance. This can be done by the Sales Leader or a member of the leadership team, but should not be done by an administrative person. They may not know how to handle a problem and things go sideways. If you have engaged a search firm for the search, it’s best to let them handle this step. This is an area where we recruiters have expertise. After all our livelihood depends on it. That being said, if you prefer to deliver the offer yourself, be sure and review the offer letter with the recruiter before it is presented so they can help ensure offer acceptance and a smooth transition as they join your team!
- **04 ONBOARDING FOR SUCCESS** - Be sure someone is communicating with them after they have accepted the offer. They still need to tender resignation and are at risk of a counter-offer from their existing employer. After all, we are most likely talking about their top sales producer. Don’t leave this to chance. Make sure someone is assigned to help them with any questions related to company policy, benefits, new hire orientation and onboarding. This should be someone besides the Sales Leader who should stay focused on making sure they are having a great onboarding experience.



# WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS



Finally, have a game plan for their first day of employment and a sales training plan in place for new hires. Why hire top talent if you aren't going to set them up for success?

Now that we have reviewed the critical steps to take at each of the four stages of the hiring process, there is one last thing you must do and it must be done across all stages of hiring if you want to consistently hire top sales talent as the talent pool continues to shrink and demand for this talent continues to increase to historic levels. You must **HIRE WITH URGENCY**. Successful companies are moving quickly and keeping candidates fully engaged at every step of the process while companies acting like it is still a buyer's market are getting left out in the cold. This does not mean you should take short cuts in your hiring process, but you must be willing to speed up the timeline for candidates that are moving quickly. This might require you push your hiring team from time-to-time, but the consequences for ignoring this all-important step can spell disaster.

The days of posting jobs and screening resumes are gone. If you remember nothing else from this about hiring top talent, remember this. In a candidate-driven market, the candidate is king. Expect they are receiving multiple job offers, expect their current employers will make counter-offers and expect they will be off the market faster than ever before. If you act with urgency and follow the steps outlined in this guide, you are on your way to building a world-class sales organization for years to come.

At this point, you have an outline of a successful hiring plan in theory. Now you just need to put it all together into your own sales hiring playbook to reference as you build out your new recruitment and hiring processes. While this guide will set you on your way to success, you will likely encounter challenges along the way that are unique to your organizational needs that will require minor tweaks or additional strategies or tactics in order to implement successfully.

If you have mission-critical sales roles to fill or are feeling the pressure to fill those empty territories, then I'd like to invite you to sing up for a

## **FREE STRATEGY SESSION.**

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