Chapter Four: Sales Talent

A Sales Manager's Most Important Job

In the December 2003 issue of the *Harvard Business Review*, in an article titled "How (Un)ethical Are You?," authors Mahzarin R. Banaji, Max H. Bazerman, and Dolly Chugh write that a manager's fundamental work is "to recruit and retain superior talent, boost the performance of individuals and teams, and collaborate effectively with partners."[i]

The concept that the task of hiring and keeping talented employees is a manager's most important job is reinforced by three lists of managerial rules that I'm sure you remember from the Introduction.

What Really Works

Talent: Hold on to talented employees and find more.

1. Fill mid- and high-level jobs with internal talent whenever possible.
2. Create and maintain top-of-the-line training and educational programs.
3. Design jobs that will intrigue and challenge your best performers.
4. Become personally involved in winning the war for talent.

The Sales Executive Council's "The Anatomy of a World-Class Sales Organization"

Sales Talent Management

1. We hire stellar people. We don't compromise based on availability.
2. We adjust competency requirements as the sales environment changes and clarify performance expectations based on that model.
3. We effectively diagnose skills at the level of the individual, then address those deficiencies through targeted training, mentoring, coaching, and e-learning.
4. We actively collect and disseminate sales best practices across the organization. We never learn the same lesson twice. We never invent the same sales tactic twice.
5. We meaningfully differentiate between average and star performers. We aggressively retain star performers and more quickly manage out underperformers.
6. We effectively identify, develop, and empower future leaders at all levels of the sales organization.

Warner's Seven Basic Rules of Leadership

(www.charleswarner.us/indexpresentatons.html/)

1. Recruit, hire, train, and retain the right people.
2. Create, articulate, and communicate an uplifting vision and mission.
3. Create a culture of innovation and continually communicate and reinforce the core values of that culture.
4. Craft strategies that focus on realizing the vision and accomplishing the mission.
5. Communicate what results you expect and how people will be evaluated.
6. Coach all of your associates as if they were volunteers.
7. Find wins to celebrate

At the top of all of the above lists is recruiting and hiring talented people. I will deal with the other elements in the above lists in this and later chapters; however, for now I want to reinforce the principle that recruiting, hiring, training, and retaining talented salespeople is a sales manager's most important job.

So, let's look at the guidelines for how to hire the best people for your organization.

How to Hire the Best People

Hiring must be part of an interdependent system of talent management that includes:

1. Job description/assignments
2. Recruiting
3. Screening
4. Testing
5. Interviewing
6. Checking references
7. Selection
8. Follow-up
9. Coaching/training
10. Evaluation
11. Termination

Skill and aptitude testing is part of the above system, personality testing is not. In the past, some companies have used personality tests and/or IQ tests for evaluating potential salespeople. However, such tests often caused the companies that used them legal problems. Any type of test is illegal unless it can be proven definitively (with valid and reliable research) that the attributes tested are central to job performance. Personality tests have often been challenged successfully in the courts and few companies have been willing to invest the huge amounts of time and money necessary to validate the efficacy of personality tests. Therefore, few companies use them today.

Another reason I do not recommend using personality tests is because they are relatively easy for reasonably clever sales job candidates to manipulate; they know what answers will make them seem to be pleasant, cooperative, and highly motivated.

IQ tests are just as problematic. First, the standard IQ tests of the past typically deal with problem-solving intelligence (math oriented) and verbal intelligence and leave out the most importance intelligence for selling—emotional intelligence. Daniel Goleman, who formed the concept of emotional intelligence (see *Media Selling*, Chapter 6, "Attitude and Emotional Intelligence"), and his organization, The Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations, have developed tests for emotional intelligence.[ii] However, if sales organizations are going to use Goleman's EI tests, they must validate through research that EI is central to sales job performance. I believe it is, but without extensive research validation, a company faces legal challenges if it uses an EI test.

Therefore, the bottom line is, don't use personality tests, IQ tests, or emotional intelligence tests unless they have been shown to be valid and reliable indicators of successful sales performance. Most companies, especially small companies, don't go the trouble and expense of validating these tests, so if your company is one of those that have not validated tests, obviously don't use them.

However, do use aptitude and, especially, skill tests. For example, if being skilled in using Excel spreadsheets is critical to success in a sales job, which it is in virtually all sales jobs today, it is wise to give applicants a time-based test on using Excel. If creating and delivering PowerPoint presentations is critical to success in a sales job, give a presentation-creating project to an applicant with a relatively fast turnaround time and then evaluate the quality of the presentation's content and the applicant's delivery skills.

Let's now look at the ten elements of an effective talent-management system, which, as in the AESKOPP system of selling, must work in harmoney to be effective and lead to success.

Job description/assignments.

Before you begin to recruit and interview people, you must first know what kind of job you are recruiting and interviewing for. Therefore, it is imperative that you begin with a complete, detailed *job description* that contains the specific assignment for which you are interviewing. A job description is a delineation of the basic media sales job in your department. An assignment is the specific group of responsibilities required for the sales job for which you are interviewing.

A job description should contain the following elements:

1. Relevant reporting relationships
2. A statement of the sales department's mission, goals, objectives, and strategies
3. The details of job responsibilities, necessary skills, and duties (including teamwork)
4. Specific performance expected
5. How performance will be measured
6. Specific assignments

Relevant reporting relationships is pretty straightforward. *A statement of the sales department's mission, goals, objectives, and strategies* is vital to let an applicant know about a sales organization's culture and basic expectations. An excellent place to start with mission, goals, objectives, and strategies is with those given in Chapter 1, "Sales Strategy," of this book. To review, they are:

1. Mission – To get and keep customers and maximize revenue.
2. Objectives –
    a. To get results for customers
    b. To develop new business
    c. To retain and increase current business
    d. To increase customer loyalty
3. Primary sales strategies –
    a. Sell solutions to marketing and advertising problems
    b. Reinforce the value of advertising and of your medium
    c. Create value for your product
    d. Become the preferred supplier
    e. Innovate

4. Secondary sales management strategies – As appropriate to your organization, as outlined in Chapter 1.

By including the objective "to get results for customers," you signal clearly that your sales organization is customer focused. By including the strategies of "sell solutions to advertising problems" and "create value for your product," you signal clearly a solutions-oriented approach and the necessity of creating value. In many media sales organizations, especially in local television and television national sales representative organizations, salespeople have become reactive, proposal-delivery people (sometimes referred to as "package monkeys") who merely respond to requests for avails from agency buyers. Their operating mode is to say, "Here's my proposal; let me know what I have to do to get the order." And, if they get an order, to say, "What's my share?" instead of, "Thank you."

The details of responsibilities, skills, and duties (including teamwork) are important to include because the concept that teamwork and cooperation are an integral part of a salesperson's responsibility is essential to communicate. Duties should include all the functions salespeople are expected to perform. Another good place to start is with the functions of a salesperson as outlined in Chapter 2 of *Media Selling*. See Chapter 2 of *Media Selling* for details of the functions below.

<u>Key Functions</u>

1. To create a differential competitive advantage in a buyer's mind
2. To manage relationships
3. To solve problems

<u>Related Functions</u>

1. To obtain and process orders
2. To provide customer service
3. To manage accounts
4. To monitor the marketplace
5. To recommend tactics
6. To cooperate

You can add to and adjust the above functions, or duties, as appropriate for your sales organization. Also, add a list of necessary skills required such as prospecting, generating solutions-based proposals and presentations, and Excel and PowerPoint mastery.

Specific performance expected and *how performance will be measured* are both vital to be communicated to applicants so they know what to expect. As I wrote above, talent management is a system that has several interdependent elements. Therefore, the two elements of specific performance expected and how performance will be measured must be based on the performance evaluation method used by your company. Performance evaluation will be covered in more detail in Chapter 7, but the one I recommend is based on core competencies. The system I suggest, Salesperson Core Competencies—Desired Performance Levels, is in *Media Selling, 4th Edition* and can be downloaded from the "Downloads" area at www.mediaselling.us. This system is an excellent example of specific performance expectations and how performance will be measured.

Specific assignments are those tasks and functions that are unique to the sales department and sales job for which you are interviewing people. For example, if you have both agency and retail salespeople on your sales staff and the job you have open is a direct sales position, you will want someone with experience, in an particular industry and probably direct sales (as opposed to agency sales) experience.

Recruiting

Recruiting must be an ongoing process and not one that occurs just when you have a job open. You must recruit all the time and recruit actively. This means wherever you go—to conventions, to community meetings, calling on customers, shopping, or dining out—you must be on the lookout for talent.

Several years ago when I was in Phoenix doing a negotiating seminar for a group of radio stations, the sales manager, general manager, and I went to lunch. Our server was a cheerful, attractive young woman who told us about the menu in an enthusiastic, knowledgeable way that created extra value for (made appetizing) the choices. After she served us our drinks, she chatted with us in an effort to learn what we did and where we were from. Based on that knowledge, she did a great job of selling us deserts—cheesecake for me, the New Yorker, and an expensive, luscious chocolate mud pie for the other two. She also sold us bottled water for the table, which I'm sure she got a bonus from management for doing. At the end of the meal I asked her what she wanted to do with her life, and she said with a big smile, "I just graduated from Arizona State and I'm looking around for a permanent career. In the meantime, I love serving food and dealing with wonderful people like you all." The sales manager said, "Well, you're an excellent salesperson," and handed her his calling card and asked her to call him. She did, he hired her as a salesperson, and she eventually became the station's top salesperson. The moral of the story is to always recruit—everywhere.

Some sales managers make the mistake of only recruiting when they have a job open. When someone leaves or is terminated, a sales manger will frantically start looking for people, running want ads, and looking through files full of old resumes. Because an account list is open, there is pressure to hire, which usually leads to a poor hiring decision. If you recruit all the time and interview people even if you have no jobs available, you will develop a pool of available talent when the times comes that you need a salesperson.

Also, even if you don't have a sales job open and you find someone who you believe will be an excellent salesperson, you should consider creating a job for that person. For example, I knew the head of a group of major-market radio stations who hired a benchwarmer, as he called the job. One of his stations was in Los Angeles and had a sales staff of 12 people, nine of them women—all of childbearing age. The station's sales staff was widely considered to be the best in the city, even by competitors, so the group head was reluctant to lose any salespeople. The benchwarmer's job was to fill in for salespeople who went on vacation or maternity leave. When a salesperson returned from maternity leave, her job was still there for her and the benchwarmer usually took over the account list of someone else who was on maternity leave. Of course, when a sales job opened up, the benchwarmer immediately got it. Hiring a benchwarmer was smart sales management because it looked way beyond next quarter's numbers.

The other benefit of recruiting and interviewing all the time is that your sales staff gets used to it as normal behavior. I have seen sales departments where sales managers will decide they have to get rid of an underperforming salesperson and then start interviewing people. Salespeople are sensitive to interviewing patterns and if they see a sales manager starting to interview, they know someone is going to get axed and you can see the fear in everyone's eyes.

Let your sales staff know that it is your practice to interview continually, whether there is a job open or not. Tell them that is good public relations for your company, that you can keep up to date on the sales talent available in the market, and that you need to have a reservoir of talent available in case any one leaves, is promoted, or in case there is a need to increase the sales staff. I recommend that you spend at least five percent of your time each week recruiting and interviewing.

When you are recruiting, the best candidates come from referrals, according to my experience. Two research studies confirm this view. An article titled "Time Is Everything" in the August, 1993 issue of *Sales & Marketing Management* magazine had a sidebar titled "Culling the Best" that listed sales managers' answers to the question, "Where do you find the best candidates?" In 1995, also in *Sales & Marketing Management* magazine, an article titled "How to Pick Winners" had a sidebar titled "The Search for Top Performers" that listed sales managers' answers to the question, "Where did you look when you need to hire high-producing salespeople?" The answers are in Exhibit 4.1.

Exhibit 4.1
"Where do you find the best candidates?" *S&MM*, 1993

Referrals	48%
Recruiters	31%
Competitors	10%
College placement offices	9%
Newspaper ads	9%

"Where do you look when you need to hire high-producing salespeople?" *S&MM*, 1995

Referrals	47%
Stole from the competition	14%
Classified ad	12%
Salesperson cold called them for a job	9%
Recruiter	7%
Internal promotion	3%
Inherited when I joined company/division	3%
Stole from a supplier	2%
Recruited from a university	2%
Stole from a customer	1%

Even though the sales managers who were surveyed were not in the media industry, the answers above, I believe, are accurate for the media and online industries. I would suggest that for salespeople the best sources for referrals, in order of importance, are:

1. From your own staff (by far the most important, because your staff knows who's good on the street, and from customers (buyers and clients), because they, too, know who's good on the street. Be careful about referrals from buyers, because they might like salespeople who are soft and easy, and, thus, give the buyers low rates and deals that are too good, or they might like salespeople who are easy to negotiate with, or, worse, who take losses too willingly.
2. From competitors. You know who at your competitors are hurting you, so a good way to strengthen your staff and weaken a competitor's staff is to hire one of their effective salespeople. But be careful. First, stealing salespeople from the competition can escalate into a talent bidding war in which sales compensation costs can increase sharply. Also, if you steal a top salesperson from a competitor, you take a risk that the competitor will poach one of your stars. Furthermore, if you steal several salespeople, you might find yourself with a lawsuit for tampering. Furthermore, when you steal people from the competition, you typically get into a bidding was – money is the lure. But remember, there is never is never going to be enough money to satisfy people who change jobs for money only. If they come to you for money, they will do somewhere else for money.

Screening

There are four ways to screen potential applicants: (1) Look over unsolicited resumes, (2) look at unsolicited letters, (3) talk on the phone, (4) give someone a skills test, and (5) see someone in person. Looking over unsolicited resumes is the most unproductive method. You will rarely get an unsolicited resume that yields a promising candidate.

The best way for sales managers to deal with unsolicited resumes is to have an assistant screen them and send a form letter back thanking people for their interest and saying that there are no jobs open at the time, but that you will keep their resumes on file in case something becomes available. File the resumes and then, if you get desperate, go back and look at them, but only if you're truly desperate. And, if you are that desperate, you haven't done a good job of recruiting.

You must reply to all unsolicited letters politely, regardless of how awful the letter is. However, you will occasionally receive a letter from a promising candidate. If a letter is well written, shows the writer has good knowledge of your medium and company, and expresses a high degree of enthusiasm, then have your assistant call the applicant and set up a phone interview, not an in-person interview yet.

You will get phone calls from people looking for sales jobs. I recommend that you take as many of these calls as you can, but make them brief. Give a person two minutes to give you their "elevator pitch" about themselves. If the two-minute elevator pitch is good, set up a screening skills test. If callers don't have an elevator pitch or are otherwise unprepared, then suggest they write you a letter explaining why they want a sales job with your company—that's all, don't say more, because you want to give them as little guidance as possible in order to give them the opportunity to show you how knowledgeable and enthusiastic they are in writing. You're also giving them a second chance. If you can't take a call from a prospective candidate, have your assistant screen the calls. Train your assistant to ask why the callers want a sales job with your company and then to listen to the two-minute elevator pitch. If it's a good pitch, have your assistant set up an appointment, if not, have your assistant ask applicants to write an email explaining why they want a sales job with your company.

Occasionally an applicant will show up at your office unannounced and want to interview for a job. If you don' t know the person or that person's company, ask your assistant to conduct a brief two-minute in-person screening just like would be done on the telephone.

Two things to remember about screening: Always be polite and gracious, even when turning people away—it's good PR—and try to be as accessible as possible and to give people a two-minute opportunity to sell themselves to you—it's not only good PR, you also just might find an undiscovered star.

Interviewing

The selection interview is the most important part of the hiring process. The same thing can be said for the selection interview that is said about democracy—it is the worst form of government except for all the other forms. I have indicated that psychological tests and IQ tests are not good predictors of success in a sales job, so that leaves aptitude and skills tests and the selection interview to do the job.

Just as in selling, successful interviewing begins with setting the right objectives. The objectives of a selection interview are:

1. To assess the attitude, attributes, skills, knowledge, and personality of a candidate
2. To identify past behavior as an indicator of future behavior
3. To asses chemistry and fit.

Problems with the selection interview.

Following are some of the most common problems with the selection interview and some of the common mistakes people make:

1. Confirmation bias (a first impression that we then try to confirm).
2. Stereotyping (remember Susan Boyle on You Tube).
3. Comfort with similar people (the halo effect)
4. Situational influences
5. Interviewer differences
6. Tendency to forget
7. Talking too much
8. Telegraphing the "right" answers
9. Poor environment
10. Arrogance
11. Situational differences
12. Interviewing order in which candidates appear
13. Interviewer differences
14. Interviewer mood
15. Pressure to hire
16. Tendency to be unstructured
17. Tendency to forget

18. Tendency to remember only negatives

Solutions.
Interviewers must conduct structured and disciplined interviews. To overcome the tendency to hold on to first impressions too long and, thus, to stereotype people, interviewers must develop the proper attitude: open, objective, skeptical, and attentive.

Interviewers must be open to new ideas and diverse people, remain absolutely objective during the entire interview, and not allow a positive or negative first impression to linger in their minds. Interviewers must be particularly careful not to be impressed with similar people, such as someone of the same gender, same age, same type of college education (or same college—the old school tie effect), similar social background, and so forth. The natural tendency to like similar people or to be impressed with a common experience is called a halo effect, and you must remain objective to avoid halo effects.

Interviewers must discipline themselves to be skeptical, too. Skepticism is "the method of suspended judgment; systematic doubt…"[iii] Cynicism is being "contemptuously distrustful of human nature and motives…" In other words, don't distrust people, but suspend judgment until the end of an interview.

Finally, interviewers must discipline themselves to be attentive at all times. You cannot be distracted, look out the window, answer the phone, or in any other way fail, even for a moment, to be completely attentive, concentrated, and focused on a candidate. Furthermore, attentiveness means that you must discipline yourself to listen 75 percent of the time during an interview. Listening and talking very little is especially important at the beginning of an interview.

One of the biggest problems in interviewing is that *interviewers talk too much at the beginning of an interview*. Clever applicants will try to get you to talk and will ask you a lot of questions about the job, yourself, your company, the current sales staff, and your boss and bosses. There is a natural tendency to be polite and answer such questions, but don't do it. When you answer questions, you are telegraphing the answers you want to hear. The best way to deflect such questions at the beginning of an interview is to smile and say, "We'll have plenty of time to talk about other things later on, but first I want to get to know *you* better." Do not be sucked into answering questions at the start of an interview.

Be sure you have the right environment for an interview. You want to be in a quiet place with few distractions and to make certain there are no interruptions—have your assistant hold your calls except those from the president of your company or someone higher. One of the biggest complaints people have about being interviewed is that the person who interviewed them was continually interrupted and that they (the interviewee) didn't have a fair chance to be heard. Remember, if you don't hire someone who you have interviewed and you have been distracted, or worse, rude and arrogant and subsequently one of your competitors hires the applicant, that person can't wait to show you that you made a mistake and will be relentlessly competitive. Save yourself the grief; be nice, pleasant, and never arrogant. In every interview you want the people you interview to go away from the interview liking you and wanting to work for you even if you don't hire them.

I have been fortunate over the years and have hired some excellent people, but I learned the hard way—through trial and error—many of the hiring principles I am writing about now. When I was Eastern Sales Manager and then VP and general manager of CBS Radio Spot Sales from 1967-1971, I hired many superb salespeople that went on to be leaders in the radio, television, and cable industry, among them Bill Grimes who went on to be CEO of ESPN, MultiMedia, and Univision, John Lack, who went on to be co-creator of MTV, Herb McCord, who became President of Granum Communications, and Norm Feuer, who became President of Viacom Radio. But I also failed to hire, actually turned off, several excellent people because I was arrogant. I missed out on Rick Devlin and Tom Burchill, both great salesmen and excellent managers, because I was too arrogant and aloof when I interviewed them. Don't be arrogant; it can keep you from attracting good people who often become fierce competitors, to your dismay.

Another environmental issue is the *room setup*. Try not to sit behind a desk with the interviewee across the desk from you—that's too formal and gives you a daunting power advantage. If you can, it is best to have a sofa or a couple of chairs arranged around a coffee table, any setup that is more casual, less formal, and a little more intimate so that it gives the candidate a chance to relax.

Often getting out of your office for an interview is a good idea. Interviews at restaurants can be more relaxing and less tense for an applicant. Also, if you eat while a candidate talks, you can't talk and have to listen, which is good.

Be conscious that there are *situational differences, interviewing order in which candidates appear, interviewer differences, and interviewer mood* that can affect the evaluation of a candidate. Situational differences occur when the conditions under which interviews are conducted change substantially. For example, you might hire a search firm to find viable candidates for a sales job, in which case you might have a tendency to unconsciously favor all candidates recommended by the search firm and neglect other candidates who might be well qualified. Or, you might find yourself interviewing a candidate who the CEO of the company's assistant said, "Mr. Jones (CEO) wonders if you have time to see Jane Doe for an interview?" Of course, you have time, but depending on your past experience with CEO setups, you might be favorably or unfavorably disposed to the candidate and, thus, not be objective.

No matter what the circumstances are and no matter what your prejudices are to favor or not favor a candidate, once you have an interview appointment, you must give all candidates, regardless of how they came to the interview, a fair shot at you and at the job. You must give them at least 20 minutes of your time and you must listen to them carefully and remain objective, just as you would with a top prospect that you have recruited from the competition.

One of the best salespeople I ever hired was Norm Feuer. Norm was recommended to me by Herb McCord, the first person I hired at CBS Radio Sport Sales. Herb was young, very smart, and was working at *Life* magazine. Herb also had a halo effect going for him—he went to Dartmouth, as I did. Fortunately, Herb turned out well, so the halo effect didn't blind me too much.

When I first met Herb's friend, Norm, I was shocked; he was not the typical CBS type. He was short, overweight, wore a rumpled suit, sported a thin black tie, had a cocked eye, wore thick glasses, and, worst of all, had white socks and black shoes. He was also Jewish and at that time there were no Jewish salespeople in the entire CBS radio division and, to my knowledge, in the CBS television division. But because Herb had recommend Norm, I gave him my undivided attention and tried to be objective. After an hour of listening to Norm, I realized he was one of the brightest, most highly motivated, and most competitive people I had ever met. I hired Norm and he became not only one of the top revenue producers but also one of the most popular salespeople at CBS Spot Sales both within the sales staff and with our represented stations. He never did dress in the proscribed CBS Paul Stuart preppy style, although he did stop wearing white socks. I learned from Norm that dressing well is not the same as selling well, and Norm was a world-class salesperson. The other vital lesson I learned from my experience with Norm is always to give people a fair shot at you and the job.

Another factor to be aware of is the interviewing order in which candidates appear. For example, if you conduct several interviews back to back, and one interviewee is awful and the next one is mediocre, the mediocre one will seem like a superstar. On the other hand, if one interviewee is a superstar and the next one is mediocre, the mediocre one will seem like a complete dud. Be aware of these ordering effects and make certain that you take notes on an Interviewing Guide and rate each interviewee immediately after each interview. I will provide you with an Interviewing Guide in Appendix B and a Hiring Decision Scale Workbook in Appendix C; both are also downloadable on www.mediaselling.us.

Another problem that crops up is when more than one person interviews a candidate, and I recommend that at least two, and preferably three, people in your sales organization interview all legitimate candidates. Notice that I wrote "in your sales organization," which does not include anyone in HR. In your company HR might be responsible for finding and recruiting salespeople, but HR should not be involved in the selection process. The people who will manage and work with a candidate are the ones who should do the selecting.

Often when there are several interviewers, one person may believe a candidate is perfect for a sales job while other interviewers may believe the same candidate is unsuitable. By two or more interviewers I mean interviewers in two separate interviews. It is not a good idea to have two or more interviewers in an interview because it makes most candidates uncomfortable and they feel as though they are being ganged up on. When candidates feel pressured, they tend to clam up instead of opening up, and you learn less about them.

The best way to lessen the negative effects of interviewer differences is for everyone who interviews a candidate is to use the same Interviewing Guide, which means asking the same questions and using the same post-interview rating system (a Hiring Decision Scale) immediately after an interview and then to compare notes soon after all interviewers have conducted their interviews.

An interviewer's mood can have a significant effect on how an interviewer evaluates a candidate. "Interviewers in high spirits rated applicants more favorably than interviewers who were down in the dumps…Also, interviewers who were in a good mood remembered more of the applicant's positive traits, while those in a bad mood recalled more negative information," according to psychologist Robert A. Baron. Baron also suggests that male interviewers are more strongly affected by their moods than women are. Baron writes that it is imperative in an interview to separate personal feelings from a judgment of a person.[iv] Therefore, interviewers must be aware of their moods and factor this information into their evaluation of a candidate. Their own mood assessment is difficult for most people, but rigorous use of an Interviewing Guide and a post-interview Hiring Decision Scale can help mitigate the effects of mood.

Often some of the biggest mistakes in hiring salespeople are made when there is *pressure to hire* someone. Having a sales job open usually means lost sales, to one degree or another, as other salespeople and sales management scramble to cover accounts. Top management hates the idea of lost sales, and so there is usually pressure from higher-ups to fill an open sales position. I have hard sales managers moan, "I need warm body, fast," and hire the first warm body that can breathe.

The best way to prevent making mistakes because of hiring pressure is through succession planning. You should have a succession plan for every salesperson on your staff. It's virtually impossible to predict which of your salespeople are apt to leave or when, so you should have someone in mind to take over any job that might open up. For instance, you should have a plan for when your top salesperson leaves. When the top salesperson leaves, you could keep that salesperson's account list intact and use it as an opportunity to hire a seasoned salesperson to sell and service that list.

On the other hand, you could also use the departure as an opportunity to split up the list and distribute several large accounts to deserving salespeople and hire or promote a less seasoned salesperson to service the reduced list. It is always best in such a case to promote from within if possible. When you promote from within, you will usually attract bright, highly motivated young people to entry-level jobs if they know they have a good chance of getting sales jobs that become available. Succession planning includes, of course, recruiting constantly and having excellent prospects waiting in the wings for when someone leaves.

Surveys that include measures of sales staff turnover regularly show that on a national basis, turnover averages about 20 percent a year. In the media industry overall, the turnover ratio is probably similar; however, radio and television stations, newspapers in smaller markets, low-circulation trade magazines, and online start-ups have higher turnover, often as high as 40 percent in some cases. These high turnover percentages are another reason that succession planning and recruiting are a necessity for sales managers, especially those in smaller markets, online startups and those whose industries are prone to high turnover.

The last three problems with the selection interview, *the tendency to be unstructured*, *the tendency to forget*, and *the tendency to remember only negatives*, are the three that cause some big mistakes in hiring. Fortunately, they can all be overcome by using an Interviewing Guide, asking the questions in the guide, by taking notes on the guide, and by completing a Hiring Decision Scale for every applicant immediately after each interview.

The Interviewing Guide.

Using an *Interviewing Guide* that contains the questions to ask candidates, space under the questions to write notes, and a Hiring Decision Scale rating system are necessities for successful interviewing. Now would be a good time to go www.mediaselling.com/downloads.com and to download Appendix B, "Interviewing

Guide" and Appendix C, "Hiring Decision Scale Workbook" so you can look at them while you read this section.

There are many reasons for using a structured Interviewing Guide for all interviews. The first reason is one I learned when I became a sales manager for CBS in 1967. I read the rule in a book about interviewing and it stuck with me and has served me extremely well ever since. The rule is *always ask the same questions in the same order every time you conduct an interview.* The reason for always asking the same questions in the same order is that your mind is like a sophisticated computer; it recognizes patterns. After several years of interviewing and hiring people, patterns will emerge among people who give similar answers to questions. For example, you will see a similarity among the answer given to the question, "What are your strengths?" and the answers given by best salespeople you have hired. You will see a similar pattern of answers given by salespeople who didn't work out to questions such as, "What are your shortcomings," and, "What accomplishments are you most proud of?" Of course, developing a sense of these patterns and correlations typically take at least a year; however, if you're a new sales manager, the sooner you start using an Interviewing Guide and Hiring Decision Scale and developing a list of questions you always ask, then the faster you will begin to see patterns of answers given by stars and by duds.

I've mentioned this next rule above, but I'll repeat it so that you make sure to observe it—*have at least one other person in your sales department interview all candidates.* Remember, this rule also means don't have more than one person in an interview because you want at least two separate candidate evaluations made by different people in different circumstances, in different settings, and at different times.

Another iron-clad rule about interviewing is *never hire anyone after just one interview.* This makes logical sense with candidates about whom you are not sure, but it is often very difficult to carry out with an apparent superstar. Often, a candidate will seem too good to be true, and often that will be the case. It's always best to curb our enthusiasm, have other people interview the candidate, and check around for references (more about checking references later in this chapter). I believe that all candidates for sales jobs should have a minimum of three interviews, and at least one of the three with someone other than yourself. If three is a minimum, then I believe five is a maximum. You'll loose a lot of superstars if you keep them waiting or keep them on the hook too long.

One of the interviews should be with several of the candidates' potential peers and subordinates. When candidates are interviewed by potential peers and subordinates, it's acceptable to have several people doing an informal interview. Send the candidate to lunch or to drinks after work with several salespeople and sales assistants or coordinators. Tell the peers and subordinates *not* to ask the standard interviewing questions, but to try to get to know candidates better and see if they think the candidates will fit in.

Another rule I followed was to have one of the additional interviews to be with someone who was similar to the candidate. For example, I would have a female in my organization interview a female candidate. I found that women usually had better insight into female candidates than I did. I used the same system with people of a different race, ethnic background, or culture than my own. I found that often people who were similar to a candidate would often recognize strengths that I overlooked or didn't understand.

Another hiring rule is *always give candidates an assignment.* You give assignments or skill tests in order to test for specific job-related skills and aptitude. An assignment could be to write a sales presentation for your medium, for example. Give applicants some, but not all, of the material required to complete the assignment, because you want them to show initiative by doing some independent research. In the case of creating a sales presentation, you might not want to tell candidates when you want the assignment completed. If candidates ask when you want it, say, "I'll leave that up to you." You'll find that people who are highly motivated and eager to get the job will return the next day with intelligent, thorough presentations because they are trying hard to impress you. Candidates who take several days or a week to complete the assignment are clearly not so eager, so beware of them. How candidates respond to your requests will be the same way they respond to customer requests when they are selling for you. You don't want salespeople on your staff who are too casual or too slow in responding to requests from customers.

In the case of assignments that test such skills as using Excel spreadsheets or creating PowerPoint presentations, it is a good idea to make them time-based.

If you have to bring candidates in from out of town, have them interview several people in your organization in one day. Ask them stay overnight and give them an assignment for the next day and give them most of the material they need to complete the assignment.

The last rule I developed after years of interviewing was *always control an interview.* It is very easy to lose control of an interview, especially when you interview smart, assertive people. These types of people will try to take over the interview and, like politicians do, give prepared answers to what they want to talk about and not answer directly the question you ask. Do not let interviewees control the interview. Keep them on track and make sure they answer the specific questions you ask. You can say something like, "We're getting off track. Please give me specific answers to the question I asked," and repeat the question.

Also, some interviewees have a tendency to ramble, especially about all of the tasks they have done (not their successful accomplishments) in an attempt to emphasize their experience. What someone has done is not as important as how well they have done it. Don't let interviewees ramble and waste your time. The Interviewing Guide provides you with a structured interview that progresses logically through a planned sequence of questions, all of which you want answers to. If you allow candidates to ramble too much, you will not have time to get through your entire list of questions.

Structuring an interview.

Exhibit 4.2 shows how to structure an interview. There are three phases to an interview: The *exploratory phase* that should last at least 20 minutes and no more than 25 minutes. As I have written above, you want to give everyone you interview a fair shot at you and the job, even though your first impression might be negative. In your Interviewing Guide you should have a question that ends the exploratory phase and gives you the opportunity to terminate the interview if it is obvious that the candidate is unqualified or unsuitable for the job. The second phase is the *specific phase* in which you ask specific questions to get a more in-depth portrait of the candidate. The last phase of an interview is the *wrap-up* phase in which you give candidates an opportunity to ask questions and to sell you on why they are suited for the job. If you get past the first 20 minutes of the exploratory phase, then the remaining two phases should take at least 40 minutes to an hour, which means the full interview should be at least one hour long.

Another rule to follow when asking questions within the structure in Figure 4.2 is to *ask open-ended questions the vast majority of the time*. Open-ended questions yield much more valuable information than closed-end, yes-or-no questions. You may have to use an occasional closed-end question to confirm something, such as dates on a resume, but use them infrequently. For example, ask candidates how they spend and average day at work rather than what their job duties are or, worse, anything that can be answered with merely a "yes" or a "no."

Exhibit 4.2

Suggested Interview Format

Step	**Desired Result**
Phase One: Exploratory	
Try to put candidates at ease with a friendly welcome. Explain your role in the structure of your company. Give the details of the job position and the assignment. *Do not tell candidates what you are looking for*.	Relaxes candidates somewhat, make them more open, and gives them understanding of the job for which they are interviewing.
Briefly review resume information, especially education and work experience to confirm it is correct.	Make sure that data on the resume flows properly and is logical and correct. You are saying, "This is who you say you are," and lets them make any corrections. It also serves as a gentle warning for candidates not to exaggerate their experience during the interview.
Ask several open-ended questions to probe about early family experiences, family environment (brothers and sisters), educational achievements, part-time and summer jobs, extra-curricular activities, and early interests and passions.	Be careful and don't ask forbidden questions about mother or father's jobs, nationality, race, or stuff like that. But if you ask open-ended questions such as, "Tell me about yourself—your early years." And then probe with, "Anything else?", you'll tend to get answers that give you some insight into candidates' goal orientation, birth order, achievement orientation, competitiveness, range and balance of interests, general level of intelligence, and verbal communication

	ability.
Probe with open-ended questions about candidates' post-degree (if they have a degree) job progression, especially the reasons for taking and leaving a particular job and why they accepted their next job.	You learn about candidates' career orientation, stability, and maturity. At this phase don't probe when people say they left a job, but don't give a reason. Make notes of such departures, but pass over them—you'll come back and probe for specifics later. You're looking for goal orientation here, too.
Phase Two: Specific Questions	
Probe candidates' ethical values.	This can get dicey. You obviously can't ask people if they are honest, because no matter whether they are or not, they will always answer in the affirmative. But you can ask questions such as, "What is your definition of ethics?" or "What do you think business ethics means?" to try to assess candidates' ethical compasses – their sense of right and wrong. These questions are not terribly revealing because good liars will lie; however, such questions do give the message to candidates about the importance of ethical values to your company. One thing to look for is evasiveness or uneasiness to questions about ethics, morality, and their sense of right and wrong.
Review candidates' job responsibilities and performance on the last three jobs. Ask open-ended questions that require answers about the situation or environment in which their performance occurred. Probe to discover what results candidates achieved and how they achieved it.	You learn about candidates' performance and results, how goal oriented they are, and how organized and disciplined they are. You also learn about their self-esteem and internal or external locus of control.[1]

[1] People who have an internal locus of control are self-confident and optimistic because they take internal, personal responsibility for their actions and performance. They believe they can control their performance outcomes. If they succeed or fail, they will take responsibility. People who have an external locus of control typically have low self-esteem and are pessimistic because they believe their performance outcomes are the result of good or bad luck, because of a good or bad boss, or because of a good or bad customer. Success or failure, in other words, is never because of them or their fault; it's due to an external force.

Probe for candidates' specific career plans and goals and how they think they are doing so far.	Provides an assessment of candidates' ambition, goal-orientation, planning ability, self-confidence, and self-image. Also, indicates internal or external locus of control and growth orientation. These future-oriented questions will elicit prepared answers, so what the answers indicate is how relatively intelligent a candidate is. If they don't have a growth-oriented stock answer, they aren't very smart because they should know that growth an objectives are what you're looking for.
Ask about how candidates organize their work day and probe to find out how hard they work.	You are looking for someone who is well organized, is a good planner, and works hard. People who regularly get to work early are not only more than likely hard workers but also have discipline.
Present several hypothetical sales problems and ask how they would solve them.	You learn how candidates' conceptualize problems and solve them. You also learn if they are logical and organized. At least one problem should be about understanding people.
Ask questions that give some insight into candidates' emotional intelligence and understanding of people.	If you can ask for an assessment of someone you both know, it makes it easier to compare candidates' level of understanding with your own.
Ask about candidates' feeling about their strengths and development needs (shortcomings).	You learn how candidates see themselves, about their openness, about their self-image, about their maturity, and about their honesty. Asking about weaknesses or shortcomings is a stock question that virtually all interviewers ask, so if candidates do not have a well-prepared thoughtful answer, they are not too prepared. Also, if candidates give you a short list of strengths, believe them. Especially believe them if they don't say they are "smart" or "bright."
Ask about candidates' intellectual activities, especially reading. Ask them	There is a correlation between how much people read and how bright they are. When

what they liked or disliked about a book, a blog, or a movie.

candidates talk about books, magazines, blogs, and movies, you can assess how verbally adroit and intelligent they are.

Phase Three: Wrap-up

Wrap up the interview by saying something like, “We only have a few minutes left,” and ask such questions as, “Give me three good reasons why you want to work for this company.” And, “Do you have any questions for me?”

This last question is the most important because it shows you how much research candidates have done on your company and you. Smart candidates do a lot research. The question also gives candidates another chance to sell you on themselves and to summarize their strengths. The last question gives them the opportunity to gather information about your organization, you, and the job.

Strengths of the selection interview.

I have detailed above the problems with selection interviews and how to overcome these problems. But interviews also have many benefits.

The first, and most important, benefit of an interview is that *you learn how to motivate a candidate*. By asking questions that probe candidates’ strengths, shortcomings, goals, and personal needs, if you hire them, you will know what turns them on and how to best motivate them. Next, interviews help you *assess candidates’ chemistry and fit.* Paper and pencil IQ and personality tests won’t tell you how well the other people on your sales staff will like a candidate, how well candidates will fit in, or whether you will like them. You also can asses candidates’ values and ethics in an interview and know if they fit in with your organization’s values.

The above discussion about chemistry and fit brings up another hiring rule: *Never hire someone you don’t like.* Think about it; if candidates can’t make you like them, what are the odds that they will make customers like them, because customers are certainly as tough and demanding as you are. And there is a corollary to this rule, which is to *trust your gut.* You will probably be afraid of making a mistake with the first couple of people you hire, but soon you will gain confidence and learn to trust your instincts. Just like in sports such as football, it’s disastrous to go into a game afraid of losing or afraid of making a mistake, you must go into a game or an interview with the confidence that you will make the right decision.

Of course, you will make mistakes, everyone does. But that is how you learn, by making mistakes. I always figured I was ahead of the game if I was right 50 percent of the time. After all, the best hitter in modern baseball was Ted Williams, and his highest batting average was .406—successful less than 50 percent of the time—and no baseball player has hit .400 for a season since Ted Williams did it in 1941.

One reason that you will make mistakes is that many experienced salespeople are experts at selling themselves; they have learned to be superb interviewees. They are much better at selling themselves in interviews than they are at selling a product consistently over a period of time. Another reason is that some people are pathological liars. They are so good at lying and deceiving people that it is difficult to spot them in just a few interviews.

So, steel yourself to the fact that you will make mistakes. But an even bigger problem than making mistakes is to invest your ego in decisions and fail to act quickly when you realize you've made a mistake. Often sales managers who make a mistake in hiring someone are unwilling to admit the mistake, fearing they will look bad for making a poor hiring decision. You will look even worse if you fail to correct a mistake. Act fast and cut your losses; have the courage and self-confidence to admit your mistakes.

Exhibit 4.3 shows some interviewing strategies that will help you make better hiring decisions.

Exhibit 4.3

<u>Interviewing Strategies</u>

Strategies	**Desired Result**
Put candidates at ease.	You want them to be open, to trust you, and to reveal as much about themselves as possible.
Don't talk too much,	Especially at the beginning of an interview, shut up. Listen actively (nod, gesture, and smile) to encourage candidates to spill the beans about themselves.
Don't smoke.	Never smoke when you interview someone. Don't compromise on this rule. Never ask an interviewee, "Do you mind if I smoke?" All candidates will feel they must respond, "No, I don't mind," no matter how they feel and, then many will suffer through a physically uncomfortable experience.
Probe for specific, detailed answers.	Don't accept generalizations or philosophical answers. Insist on very specific, in-depth answers to your questions. Second and third follow-up questions are the most important questions you will ask. For example, you might ask about a candidate's sales performance (open-ended). The follow-up question might be, "Give me the details on how you accomplished the 20 percent increase."

Use pauses and silence.	Experienced television reporters know that they get much more information if they are silent after the person being interviewed answers a question. Silence makes people being interviewed nervous, so they keep talking, often revealing much more than they might have wanted. Use pauses and silences to get interviewees to talk more and reveal more.
Ask lots of focused situational questions.	The more focused questions are on specifics of the job and details about skills, and industry knowledge, the more you will learn.
Concentrate on past successes, not too much on experience or education.	Experience can be deceptive; it can be 10 years of experience or one year of experience repeated 10 times. Beware of the halo effects of education. Some of the most successful people in the media didn't go to college. Focus on past successes in all types of endeavors, even in high school.
Don't clone yourself. (One of the biggest mistakes hiring managers make.)	Respect and look for diversity. Don't hire too many people similar to yourself. The more gender, racial, ethnic, and age diversity—all diversity—the better, because your customers are diverse. Also, with the input from a diverse staff, you will make better, more informed decisions.
Keep an open mind.	Don't be affected by first impressions, halo effects, or stereotypes. Don't respond to negatives either, just as in negotiating (see Chapter 12, *Media Selling, 4th Edition*).
Look for strengths, not shortcomings; always hire for strengths.	Inexperienced and ineffective interviewers look for negatives (knockout factors) and tend to remember them more clearly than strengths, because they are afraid of making a mistake. Superstar salespeople have lots of strengths and also some shortcomings. If you try to hire someone with a minimum of shortcomings, you will more than likely get someone who is mediocre. Concentrate on and hire for

	strengths and overlook a few shortcomings.
Find out why candidates want to *do* the job, not *have* the job.	Too often people are attracted to the glitz and glamour of the media, and want to have any job just to get in. Be careful of hiring people who are dazzled by the media and who have stars in their eyes. You want to hire people who love selling and are passionate about your medium. Also, be wary of people who come from wealthy or socially prominent families, they often do not have a strong work ethic or passion to succeed (they have already made it). I have had great success with salespeople who come from hard-working middle-class or blue-collar families whose role models are industrious parents. Lastly, make sure that candidates know what the sales job you have open entails—the paperwork, the frustrations, the rejection, and the pressure.

Attributes and attitudes to look for in a selection interview.
Now would be a good time to re-read Chapter 5, "Attitude," of *Media Selling, 4th Edition.* The twelve attitudes required for success in media selling detailed in Chapter 5 are incorporated into the attributes and attitudes to look for in a selection interview.

Exhibit 4.4 shows the attributes and attitudes to look for in candidates. Some articles and books on hiring refer to *attitudes and attributes* as personality traits or characteristics; they all mean the same thing in the context of this chapter. The Interviewing Guide and the Hiring Decision Scale evaluation system incorporate these attributes and attitudes.

Exhibit 4.4

Attributes and Attitudes	**Rationale**
1. Integrity	As indicated in Chapter 3, "Culture," of this book and in Chapter 3, "Sales Ethics," in *Media Selling 4th Edition*, honesty and integrity are the most important attributes for salespeople to possess. You cannot have salespeople working for you who misrepresent your company to customers or who lie or exaggerate to get an order. Customers must trust your salespeople above all else.

2. Passion (Self-motivation) a. Commitment b. Ambition c. Goal orientation d. Growth orientation	Self-motivation is the second most important attribute for a salesperson. Candidates must have an overwhelming commitment, a compulsion, to sell, a passion to succeed (ambition), a strong desire to win (competitiveness), have clear, realistic goals, and want to learn and grow. With younger people, learning and growing is more important than money and benefits. The opposite is true with more mature salespeople, especially those with families.
3. Intelligence a. Mathematical (problem-solving) b. Verbal c. Practical d. Creative e. Emotional (others and self)	All else (integrity, passion, knowledge, maturity, etc.) being equal, always hire the smartest person. The three most important things to know about potential candidates are, are they honest, passionate (motivation), and able (intelligent)? Intelligence is not just the numbers on an IQ test. As you learned in Chapter 6 of *Media Selling, 4th Edition*, intelligence has multiple dimensions. In selling what you are mostly looking for are problem-solving, verbal, practical, creative, and emotional intelligence. You will learn a lot about candidates' problem-solving, verbal, practical, and creative skills from how they complete the assignment you give them. In engineering or technical jobs, mathematical/problem solving skills are important, in sales, customer service, and marketing jobs, verbal skills are important. In other words, can someone communicate effectively what they know?
4. Job-relevant knowledge	You want to find out how much someone knows about your industry, company, and field – job-relevant knowledge. Knowledge is not the same thing as experience. Don't assume how much knowledge people have if they have been in the industry nine years – ask questions.
5. Job-relevant skills	You learn skills by practice. You can flush out job-relevant skills by giving people tests and assignments
6. Optimism/self-confidence (positive	Optimism and self-confidence are two

self-image)	sides of the same coin. If people have confidence in their ability, they will be optimistic about the future; they believe that by their actions they can affect the future positively. People who are optimistic have self-confidence and an external locus of control, which means they will take personal responsibility for their performance (won't unrealistically blame others for failures). Optimism and authentic self-confidence also signal an underlying positive self-image and high self-esteem. You can pick up on low self-esteem when someone is defensive or has an external locus of control – plays the blame game.
7. Flexibility/coachability	You want to hire flexible people who are open to change. People who are the opposite and are rigid are difficult to coach and to teach new methods and skills. Rigid, inflexible people are not open to change, do not take directions well, and, thus, are not coachable. Avoid them.
8. Chemistry and fit	Hire people you and your sales staff and support staff like and who have similar ethics and values.
9. Maturity/realism	Maturity and realism are a reflection of positive self-esteem. Mature, realistic people are typically aware of their strengths and shortcomings and aren't afraid to discuss them openly. They know what they are good at and not so good at, and, more importantly, what they need to improve on. Beware of people who lie by saying, "I have no shortcomings," or who try to fool you (and themselves) when asked about their shortcomings by saying something like, "I'm too honest." These people are trying to hide something and are not realistic about themselves; they are immature. You also want people who are mature enough to be realistic about their goals and objectives.

Interviewing questions.
The Interviewing Guide in Appendix B and in "Downloads" on www.mediaselling.us lists the questions to ask in a selection interview for a media sales job and what you expect to learn from each question.

It important for you, as a sales manager, to adapt the questions in the Interviewing Guide to your specific sales situation—to your medium, to your company, to your sales department, to your sales objectives, to your sales strategies, and to your sales job description and assignment. Use the same format as in the Interviewing Guide I provide for you so that you have space on it to take notes on candidates' answers. Also, download the "Hiring Decision Scale Workbook" and create a Hiring Decision Scale as indicated in the workbook and put it at the end of your Interviewing Guide and use it to rate candidates immediately after every interview. There is a sample of a Hiring Decision Scale in the Interviewing Guide.

After you have developed your own Interviewing Guide and Hiring Decision Scale, submit it to your company's legal department or counsel for approval. Laws about what you can and can't ask are continually changing and different states have different laws, so be sure to get legal approval and know what you can and cannot ask.

Once you have modified the questions and created your own Interviewing Guide and had it approved, ask the same questions in the same order from then on so you can see patterns—put your natural computer to work.

Letters of recommendations and resumes.
Letters of recommendation are virtually worthless. Did you ever see one that read, "Don't hire this turkey?" The only letters of recommendation to pay any attention to are those from highly credible executives who write long letters that are very specific about why the candidate is especially qualified and passionate about your open sales job.

Resumes are not very worthwhile either. Studies have shown that 45 percent of resumes contain false information. Colleges and resume writing courses and services always say to claim as much responsibility as possible and to hype it with "positive" language. In other words, resumes are systematically exaggerated. Look over a resume quickly to check dates, make sure it flows properly, is logical and correct, and confirm the facts with a candidate, but don't give the exaggerations any credence until after you have probed in an interview. For example, you won't read on a resume, "I was fired from this job for never selling anything and for embezzling," you have to probe to find out why someone left a job.

Realistic job previews.
It's important to be realistic about the available opportunities and not oversell the job you have open. You must control candidates' level of expectations about your job, because there is a tendency for candidates to over-simplify a job and assume they can do it easily and that it will meet their level of expectations (often unrealistically high), which are dictated by their monetary needs, not reality. Lower their expectations by giving them a *realistic job preview* and by telling them it will take much longer than they expect to make the money they hope for and to learn the complexities of your product and of the job. By lowering their expectations, they will be happier when they make more money than their lowered expectations and master the product and sales process in your

organization sooner than they were told they would. The same rule of under-promise and over-deliver, as indicated in Chapter 8 of *Media Selling*, that produces satisfied customers will also produce satisfied salespeople. "Realistic job previews lead to more organizational commitment from employees, less turnover, and higher job satisfaction," says Ben Dattner, who heads his own consulting firm. Over-promise, he warns, and 'the honeymoon will come to a rapid and unfortunate end.'"[v]

Reluctant candidates—ones you think you want.
Don't call a reluctant candidate (people you think you'd like to hire but have indicated in previous discussions that they are happy where they are), have someone else call them—a search firm, one of your salespeople, or a buyer or client—so a candidate will call you. You want candidates to call you because it puts you in a stronger negotiating position.

When you interview a reluctant candidate, ask the same questions you ask every other candidate, but at the end of the interview, sell the job a little bit more than you normally would. It's important to remain as objective as possible and ask the same questions because, if the candidate is as good as you hope, you will have a good comparison between the answers the good candidate gives to those other candidates give—you'll see patterns.

Checking references.
In large companies, HR will usually check references, but I have found this is usually an exercise in futility. Most companies know that they are liable for a law suit if they say anything negative about a previous employee, so they only confirm the dates a person worked at the company and the person's position. You learn nothing about a candidate this way. First, references given by candidates will, of course, be good ones, so why bother? Second, always get permission from a candidate to check references because you don't want to jeopardize candidates with their current employer if the employer doesn't know the candidate is looking.

Check with colleagues in the business—friends and colleagues whose judgment you trust. It's best to deal with these colleagues face-to-face whenever possible, because they will be more open than on the phone. Colleagues in the business who are honest and whom you trust will usually give you an honest assessment because they know they will probably call you some day. Check with several people—the more the better. Sometimes it can be useful to check with buyers or customers whom you trust. But be careful about asking customers about a candidate. If a customer raves about a candidate and urges you to hire the person, and you don't hire the candidate, the customer can get upset because you didn't respect the customer's opinion.

Don't let references influence you too much. Candidates might have been poorly managed, might have been assigned an unproductive list of accounts, or might not have been properly motivated. I believe it is better to trust your own intuition more than the recommendations of others.

The ultimate hiring rule.
All things being equal (and they rarely are), always hire the smartest person. If two candidates seem to be equally highly motivated and passionate about the open job and selling, hire the smartest of the two. You can teach people almost anything (if they are

coachable), but you can't teach people to be smart. The only thing that can overcome a deficiency in intelligence is motivation, but *you* can't motivate people, they come to you motivated. All you can do is provide an atmosphere that unleashes their desire to succeed and win. So, self-motivation comes first, then intelligence. The combination of high motivation and high intelligence is what produces superstars.

Search firms.
Just as you would with a candidate, check a search firm's reference before hiring it. Check with trusted colleagues. Some search firms specialize in media sales jobs by industry. Search firms can be a good resource for contacting reluctant candidates or candidates from a competitor. If you use a search firm, give it a complete description of the job and the assignment; the more detailed and thorough the job description is (including realistic compensation ranges), the better job the search firm will do.

Search firms can be helpful, but they are not good at identifying comers or raw, rookie talent; they typically provide safe, expensive people.

Making an offer.
Most companies have their own procedures for having prospective hires fill out applications and making an offer. However, as a general rule, you want to make sure that all candidates fill out an application and sign it. A resume is not a legal document, but a signed application is, so if candidates lie on a resume, there is little you can do, but if they lie on an application and sign it, it could be cause for termination.

Following are the steps you should go through in making an offer:

1. Begin the offer meeting with a sincere complement and an encouraging comment. Say something like, "We have put you through an exhausting interview process and we believe you're the right person for the job. We really like you, think you'll fit in well, and be successful."
2. Summarize and review candidates' strengths—the reasons you want to hire them. By reviewing candidates' strengths, you give them positive reinforcement and make them feel wanted. You also make some of the negative elements of an offer, that you will go over later, easier to accept.
3. Thoroughly review with candidates the job description and assignment. Too often hiring managers give short shrift to this step or over-sell the job in their eagerness to hire someone. It is a good idea during this step to present another realistic job preview; be positive but realistic.
4. Review your company's employee handbook, with special emphasis on benefits and pay procedures.
5. Review how candidates will be evaluated, if you have a performance coaching system, go over it in detail. There should be no ambiguity in candidates' minds what kind of performance is expected and how their performance will be evaluated. Ambiguities in this area can lead to messy and expensive law suits if the candidate is hired and subsequently terminated. See Chapter 7 of this book for the performance coaching system I recommend.
6. Review your offer letter, which will come from the general manager or publisher (the top executive of your unit, not from you as sales manager). It is imperative that you have a rule that no employee may start to work without an offer letter, which should

include details about the job—what is expected—and about the compensation. Also, most lawyers advise having a statement in an offer letter to the effect that "employment is terminable at will by either the employee or the company" and require candidates to acknowledge that you reviewed the statement with them and to sign the offer letter signifying that they understand the conditions in it. Furthermore, many companies have a sentence in their offer letters that indicate something like, "I understand that no one other than the (general manager or publisher) is authorized to enter into any agreement contrary to the offer set forth in this letter."[vi] This sentence avoids confusion with informal offers or promises that might be made by more creative managers who might be over-eager to hire someone.

7. Give candidates the offer letter and allow them to take it home and think it over if they want to. Just as with customers, you don't want to use high-pressure tactics. Remember, how you treat salespeople is how they will, in turn, treat customers. There is a danger in giving candidates an offer letter and letting them have a few days to think it over (as in any negotiation, you must set a deadline on your offer; three business days is best, I think). The danger is that candidates will use the offer letter as leverage (a BATNA—see Chapter 12 of *Media* Selling) to get a raise from their current employer. I have rarely seen this happen, but if it does, use it as a learning experience. Go back over your interview notes and see where the candidate might have given a clue of his or her uncertainty or intentions in some of the answers. Also, make a note that the candidate used your offer as a BATNA and inform HR so that your company will never make the same mistake again and ever offer the candidate another job. What the candidate did, in essence, was bait-and-switch selling, and you don't want that kind of person selling for your company. Furthermore, look at such an experience positively—you have been saved from hiring the wrong type of person.

If candidates accept your offer and go to work for you, make sure to follow up in one month and three months with an informal interview and ask how they are doing. Is the job what they expected and are they getting adequate training on the product, procedures, and processes?

Letting People Go

The first rule of letting people go, is never, *never terminate someone in anger*, under pressure, or in a crisis. Firing people in anger or in a pressure situation will inevitably lead to a wrongful termination law suit. More, important, it isn't fair to an employee, and if you fire impulsively it makes you look awful and feel awful the next day.

The second rule of letting people go is *always do it in person*. Never fire people on the phone. Never have someone other than the top sales executive let people go. The biggest complaints you hear from fired employees is, "They did it on the phone. They didn't have the decency to tell me to my face." If you are the sales manager or advertising director of a sales department and the person being terminated reports to a local sales manager, for example, you should have the local sales manager present, but you should do the firing. If someone other than the top sales executive terminates an employee, the terminated person will demand to see the top sales executive in an attempt to argue the top person out of the decision. Termination meetings must have an air to finality about them, which is why you have both the top executive and the sales manager who the terminated person reports to there. Some companies require that and HR person be present, too, but I don't think that is necessary if the top sales executive conducts the termination meeting. Don't let HR alone fire someone, that's too impersonal and too insensitive. On the other hand, it is a good idea to send terminated employees to a pre-arranged meeting with an HR person so the HR person can go carry out the legal requirements of letting people go, such as explaining severance pay and insurance benefits and option and collecting keys and IDs.

Therefore, the next rule is *have a check ready*. When people are being let go, the first thing they think about is money—their security. If you have a check ready for them and explain all of the financial arrangements (vacation, severance, benefits, and health insurance pick-up options—a legal requirement), it reinforces that it's a final decision because everyone knows about it—the boss, HR, and the financial people (if the financial people know about it, everyone does). Talk about money first, it makes the meeting more businesslike, less personal, and less fault finding or blaming. If you don't have an HR department and can't send employees who have been let go to a pre-arranged meeting with an HR person, ask for IDs and keys. All of these details are difficult to carry out and seem a little ghoulish, but they are necessary for creating a sense of finality and for legal reasons.

The next rule of letting people go is to *make it short and gentle*. A termination meeting should last no longer than 10 minutes. By keeping it short, you save the person the pain and humiliation of a long, blame-filled meeting in which all the person's shortcomings are detailed. Spare them. Don't offer refreshments, don't greet people warmly or in a overly friendly manner when they come into your office. You want to be serious, businesslike, and as gentle as possible.

When a person being terminated comes into your office say something like, "Fred, we have something very serious to talk about. I'm sure this is no shock to you because we've had many discussions about your performance. We've decided to make a change. This doesn't mean we think you're a bad person—you're not (if that's true)—but it just isn't working out. This is the wrong type of sales job and the wrong type of place for you and, so, we're letting you go. We have a check ready and a summary of your severance and benefits." (Either you deal with the financial details, or, better, send them on to an HR person to deal with those details.) In any case, you want to do all you can to preserve people's dignity and self-respect. Next to losing a family member or a divorce, losing a job is the most traumatic event in most people's lives. Therefore, you want to let them go with as much grace and kindness as possible, if for no other reason than to keep terminated people from saying too many damaging things about your company. I've seen research that indicates that about 45 percent of people who are let go say good things about the company that fired them, and many of them wind up with a better job. Make sure your company is one in that 45 percent.

If it is appropriate and authentic, you can say something like, "Fred, you're a good, honest person, and I'm sure in a less competitive, more service-oriented sales position, you'd do a good job. I'll be glad to give to a good recommendation along those lines." In other words, offer to help them find a job and that is compatible with their talents. Of course, you can't offer a recommendation if someone is being fired for lying or embezzling. You must be authentic and honest in what you tell people. Don't make promises you can't keep just to try to seem like a nice person.

The next rule of letting people go is *if it is a surprise to them, you have done something wrong.* By conducting regular performance coaching and evaluation sessions, as you said you would when you hired people, you continually let people know where they stand and how they are doing. If salespeople are not doing well and are in trouble, you have to let them know (complete details on performance coaching are in Chapter 7 of this book). If you have had regular performance coaching and evaluations meetings with your salespeople, have set appropriate improvement goals, and have had them write and give you a performance improvement contract, you are, in a sense, letting them fire themselves. Also, if you have been honest with people, it will come as no surprise to them when it is time for them to leave.

The next rule of letting people go is *be general, not specific, about why employees are being let go.* And the corollary, *never argue and don't apologize.* Terminated people hurt and their initial reaction is often anger and they often demand wrathfully, "What did I do wrong? Give me specific reasons." The tendency is to react to anger with anger, and, therefore, to respond with a laundry list of transgressions, mistakes, and losses. This is the worst response you can possibly make. First, it's like kicking people when they are down. It's cruel. Second, such a response starts an argument. If you give specific details, the person being fired will immediately become defensive and shoot back a series of excuses and rationalizations. The argument and the escalation have begun.

Sometimes, managers have a tendency, when faced with anger and demands about specifics, to apologize, to say, "I'm sorry; I wish I didn't have to do this." As John Wayne said in "She Wore a Yellow Ribbon," "Never apologize. It's a sign of weakness."[vii] Never apologize or say "I'm sorry," because it indicates remorse on your part and gives the message to the terminated employee that there might be a chance you'll change your mind.

Finally, giving specifics, as tempting as it might be, opens you up to a wrongful termination lawsuit. Often people will say, "Write me letter detailing everything I did wrong." Don't fall into this trap. Just tell them, "I understand that you're upset and feel hurt. Do yourself a favor, go home, reflect on things, and think about whether you want a long list in writing and on the record of all the specific reasons why we made the change. It might possibly hurt your chances of getting another job. Call me next week and let me know if you still want something in writing." Ninety nine times out of a hundred, people won't call back and won't want a letter. If they do, consult your lawyers and have the lawyers write the letter if they think one is appropriate.

The next rule is *let people go on Friday afternoon,* if you can. Some books on hiring and firing indicate it is best to terminate people in the middle of the week so they can go out and find another job right away. I don't agree. By letting people go on Friday afternoon, you give them the opportunity to go home and think about it and cool down. If they have children, Saturday is a day off and kids expect their working parents to be home, so it is not a shock to see them not at work. In this way, parents can tell their children in their own way at a time they deem appropriate. Also, I think it is important for people to cool off before they go out to look for another job. I recommend that people take a vacation and think about their future. Are they sure they want to stay in sales? In the media? Is this an opportunity to do something they've always wanted to do? If terminated people look at their situation as an opportunity rather than a problem, it often helps them make a positive career change.

Also, by recommending that people cool off and contemplate their future, you may be doing them another favor. People who look for a new job immediately after being fired often do so angrily and with a chip on their shoulders. This negativity comes across in subsequent interviews, which can hurt them.

The next rule is *have people leave immediately and come back to clear out their space over the weekend.* Allowing people who have been fired to walk around with drooping shoulders or crying and saying sad, angry good-byes to everyone in the office is terrible for morale—their own morale and their colleagues' morale. Plus, you know they are not saying anything nice about you as they are saying their angry goodbyes. Do the terminated employee a favor and save them the embarrassment of other people seeing them angry, sad, and depressed. Do the other employees a favor and save them the embarrassment of having deal with a colleague who has been fired. And save yourself the grief. Make arrangements with security to let terminated people in your offices over the weekend to collect their stuff. Furthermore, if they are accompanied by a security guard, they are much less likely to steal anything and less likely to take sensitive information with them.

A final thought about letting people go—it's the most difficult and unpleasant thing managers do, which is why so many managers avoid doing it and put it off too long. In addition, managers often avoid letting people go because they think it might make them look bad to their bosses to fire someone they hired. Just as hiring is a manager's most important job, letting poor performers go is equally important, because it's unfair to your company and to other good performers to keep poor performers around. A good way to de-motivate good performers is to keep mediocre performers on the payroll.

I learned in my sales and sales management career that the salespeople in any media sales department know who is good and who is not. Everyone sees how disciplined and organized their colleagues are, how they treat their customers on the phone, how many orders they get, and how hard they work. Effective salespeople respect management that weeds out mediocre performers and rewards the top performers, because that way they perceive management as being fair.

How to Train and Coach Sales Talent

In sports, someone who coaches an individual is typically referred to as a trainer, but someone who coaches a team is referred to as a coach. In business it's the opposite. A trainer is someone who trains a group or team of people and a coach is someone who coaches an individual. I'm using the business meanings of the two terms in this book.

If you'll look back at the beginning of this chapter, you'll see that recruiting, hiring, training, and retaining talented people is clearly a sales manager's most important job. If you look at the second element in the *What Really Works* criteria, you'll see that "create and maintain top-of-the-line training and educational programs" is number two on the list. In the Sales Executive Council's "The Anatomy of a World-Class Sales Organization" criteria, you'll see the second and third elements are, "We adjust competency requirements as the sales environment changes and clarify performance expectations based on that model" and "We effectively diagnose skills at the level of the individual, then address those deficiencies through targeted training, mentoring, coaching, and e-learning." Training and coaching the people they have hired is a sales manager's second most important job.

Sales training.

Before sales organizations begin training their salespeople, sales management must thoroughly plan a program that will provide answers to the following questions about training and education:

1. "Did they like it?" (Reactions)
2. "Did they learn from it?" (Learning)
3. "Did they use it?" (Behavior)
4. "Did it make a difference?" (Impact)

When a sales organization asks these questions before embarking on sales training, the scope of the training goes beyond one-shot, quick-fix seminars and enters the realm of a comprehensive, long-term, well-planned sales education program for which results can be evaluated.

It is virtually impossible to evaluate the bottom-line effect of a single, isolated sales training session. Typical evaluations of short-term training consist of collecting opinions of participants about the quality of the training. Regardless of what they are asked about, most participants evaluate the entertainment value of a session (it's like counting laughs), how well organized it was, and how smoothly it ran (including the quality of the food served).

It is good to know the answer to the question "Did they like it," because if salespeople enjoy a training session the chances are they will probably learn something from it. However, without asking the other three questions, there is no way to evaluate the bottom-line effects of sales training.

The reason for asking the four questions above is to evaluate a training program on an on-going basis, not to prove the value of the training. The goal of evaluation is continual improvement of a training program. When evaluation data are collected and used to make training programs better, the bottom-line proof tends to take care of itself.

Sales training objectives should be set in five areas: attitudes, emotional intelligence, skills, knowledge, and organization. Evaluation should focus on improvements in attitudes, emotional intelligence, skills, knowledge, and organization and not on measures such as making budget, revenues, or profits, which are affected by many variables, including the economy, ratings, circulation, product quality, or company reputation, among many other possible variables.

There are six stages of designing and evaluating a sales training program:

1. **Assessing needs.** There are five phases of assessing needs:
    a. Problem assessment. Are there performance problems that need to be corrected?
    b. Change assessment. Have changes in the internal or external business environment made performance and strategy changes necessary?
    c. Opportunity assessment. Is there a particular business opportunity that presents itself?

d. Strengths assessment. Does the sales organization have some specific strengths that can be improved. All training does not have to be deficit oriented; it can enhance what is being done right.
e. Strategy assessment. Training can be proactive and set a new course and strategy for a sales organization, it can point people toward a higher level of performance on newly defined dimensions, such as customer satisfaction.

There are a number of methods for assessing training needs, including employee attitude surveys, internal case studies, group consensus, expert reviews (such as top management assessment and outside consultants), knowledge tests, customer satisfaction surveys, and sales performance audits. See Appendix D for an example of a Sales Audit for radio or television stations or rep firms, which can be easily adapted for a newspaper, magazine, or an Interactive sales operation.

The end objective of needs assessment is to set specific learning objectives and evaluation criteria for assessing the training.

2. **Assess training design**. Decide what program design alternatives will accomplish the learning objectives most effectively. Design assessment requires asking the following questions:
    a. How to begin the training—with seminars, meetings, parties, contests?
    b. What training techniques to use—role playing, simulations, case studies, lectures, reading, conferences, online e-learning?
    c. Do it in house or hire outside experts?
    d. How to get everyone's commitment at all levels?
    e. How to facilitate the transfer of training to the job, and how to get support from supervisors at all levels?
    f. How to shape expectations for success?
3. **Assess training delivery**. Monitor how well programs are being implemented and succeeding.
    a. Review training plans. Top management must show interest in and continually review the on-going training plans. If top management forgets to ask sales trainers "how is the training going," training will disappear.
    b. Interview salespeople. Sales management must talk to key participants in the training on a regular basis to get candid feedback on how the trainers are doing.
    c. Observe training meetings. Top management must attend occasional training session and make first-hand evaluations of the training program and trainers. Sales management must attend all training sessions and make firsthand and ongoing evaluations.
    d. Gather trainee reaction. Top management and sales management must continually ask trainees, "what did you learn" and "how did you like it?"
4. **Assess training outcomes**. Measure how well learning objectives are being achieved.
    a. Establish accountability. Who is responsible for training? Who is responsible for measuring results? If training doesn't succeed, trainers

must understand that it's the fault of the program and the teacher, not the students (who hires people who can't learn or aren't coachable?).

   b. Count the right beans. Organizations get the performance they measure. Look at improvement on the performance dimensions for which you've set learning objectives: new business, retail development, sales presentations at high levels, or customer satisfaction, for example.
   c. Look for unintended results. Are you really getting the results you want? Have you emphasized new business development in your training, but are salespeople neglecting to call on current accounts? Is your training producing too much internal competition?
   d. Determining mastery of skills and knowledge. Do you have tests, role playing, and other feedback mechanisms that indicate if salespeople are remembering anything? Keep in mind that individual performance will vary tremendously according to individuals—some will learn a lot and learn it quickly, others will learn a little and learn it slowly. Even though your training expectations must be realistic, you have to have some testing method to know who's learning and who's not.
   e. Planning for skill transfer to the job. For example, do sales managers ask in regular one-on-one sessions how people are using the skills and knowledge they have learned? Do sales managers give feedback to salespeople on presentations they make, feedback on customer satisfaction surveys, and provide reinforcement and rewards for implementing training lessons?
   f. Marketing the results of training internally. Always provide feedback to individual trainees and to the organization about the results of training. Let salespeople and upper management know that training is working, that performance is improving by collecting and communicating anecdotes about successes that have come about as a result of using a training lesson.

5. **Evaluating how learning is used on the job and improves performance**.
   a. Conduct regular performance appraisals at all levels of the organization.
   b. Review learning objectives and training programs regularly.
   c. Conduct regular customer satisfaction surveys.
   d. Adjust programs to meet new objectives determined from feedback from trainees, management, and customers.
6. **Assessing the payoff**. Determine how well the training investment has paid off.
   a. Consider a broad range of training impact variables, such as increased billing, increased market revenue share, customer satisfaction, cost savings, increase in new business, higher rates, increased number of calls, lower staff turnover, number of people promoted, target accounts landed, high-level client calls, more effective use of inventory, or effective use of sales management, for instance.

Virtually any training a sales organization attempts is good. Rarely does even the most ineffective training actually hurt sales performance; at the very least, sales training sends salespeople the message that their company thinks enough of them to try to help them do their jobs better.

However, eventually top management asks (and should ask) the question, "Is the time and money we are spending on sales training paying off?" It is impossible to answer this question for a one-shot sales seminar or a series of isolated training sessions, but is should be possible to assess the payoff of a well planned and executed sales training program.

One thing to keep in mind, the Internet has provided the opportunity to make sales training programs much more cost effective than in the past. Rather than taking salespeople off the streets and flying salespeople into a training site from multiple locations or flying sales trainers to multiple locations, e-learning can be designed so that salespeople can do it from home on their own time and at their own pace and not be taken off the street. Few media sales organizations are taking advantage of e-learning, and doing so could give your sales organization an edge over your competition. Look into it.

No matter what the training delivery method is, in order to measure a program's results, it must be part of a comprehensive, continuous sales education program that not only includes well-designed training interventions but also includes clearly defined learning objectives and concomitant evaluation criteria to measure progress toward those goals. These evaluation criteria must be determined in advance of training and must be measured and reviewed on a continuous basis.

Systems must support the goals of a training program. Educating salespeople to develop new business and then not rewarding them with recognition and money for doing so will assure that the training will be eradicated. Talking about getting high rates in sales meetings has little effect if sales managers cannot track rates by salesperson by time period and then publicize and reward the results on a regular basis.

Furthermore, salespeople must be given regular feedback on how well they are performing on the evaluation criteria your sales organization uses. Without feedback, support, and a reward system that reinforces desired activities, learning will become extinct.

Finally, top management must be committed to a sales training program and continually involved in giving feedback. For example, when top management visits a sales department or remote sales offices, what the bosses talk about and what is on their calendars gives salespeople clearer, louder messages than anything that the top managers say. If top managers make several new-business development calls, it gives an entirely different message than if they huddle behind closed doors in budget meetings.

Thus, to be effective, sales training must be part of an overall, continuous, well-planned program that has clearly defined objectives and evaluation criteria that are determined in advance. Systems, including compensation, recognition, and reward programs, must be designed to give regular feedback to salespeople, and top management must be committed to and be involved in the program.

Coaching.

According to Waldroop and Butler in an article in the *Harvard Business* Review titled "The Executive as Coach," "…the goal of coaching is the goal of good management: to make the most of an organization's valuable resources." The authors go on to write, "It sounds simple, yet many executives don't know where to begin."[viii] Coaching an individual is more difficult and takes more emotional intelligence skills than training a group of people does. Effective coaches understand what questions to ask when assessing a situation, evaluating problem behavior, and judging their coaching abilities.

The focus of coaching is on behavior, but as Waldroop and Butler point out, "…behavior never takes place in a vacuum."[ix] A coach has to assess the impact of problem behavior on others in an organization and on customers. Before you coach someone, you have to ask the who, what, when, where, how and why questions that a journalist would ask. The why question is the most difficult, because it is usually difficult to uncover the underlying reasons for problem behavior. If the problem behavior is new, are there things in a person's personal life that are affective behavior? Is the person in the middle of a divorce? Is there a sickness in the family? Probing for underlying personal reasons is difficult and it usually takes several coaching meetings to get to the bottom of problems. Coaches must be sensitive and not push too hard; the goal is to understand not to pry or to judge. Being non-judgmental is critical.

You must also look for effective behaviors as well as ineffective ones. Too often managers who try to coach people focus on negative behavior, which is usually met with defensiveness because people think you are trying to build a case to fire them. You must have the attitude and communicate it that the objective of coaching is improvement and being more effective, not making a case for firing someone.

You must also decide whether the problem behavior can be corrected or if it is a result of one or more character flaws. Waldroop and Butler indicate there are three tests that reveal whether or not a problem behavior is based on character:

1. Is the behavior part of a pattern seen in different contexts? For example, a person with low self-esteem may try to hide it by buying an expensive car or getting invited to the "right" parties. Such a person probably "…evaluates other people professionally and socially on the basis of status and generally avoids taking risks that might jeopardize…" the person's own social standing.
2. Is the problem behavior generally observed over a period of time? For instance, has a person continually cheated on income taxes or done it just once when in a tight fix? Has a person consistently dodged responsibility or just once because of being overwhelmed?
3. Is the behavior part of a pattern? "Character flaws tend to express themselves in a complex array of behaviors rather than a single one."[x] A coach might be able to change one or two behaviors, but most other negative behaviors will more than likely remain unchanged.[xi]

If the negative behaviors that you have observed are infrequent and are in response to a particular situation, they are relatively easy to change. If they are frequent and deeply entrenched, they are extremely difficult to change. The point is: Don't take on impossible coaching tasks; invest your time solving behavior problems that can be solved.

Furthermore, becoming an effective coach requires emotional intelligence, especially in the area of self-knowledge. Waldroop and Butler indicate that "…coaching someone else may require behavioral changes on your own part as great as the change you expect of the person you are coaching."[xii] You have to figure out what of your own behaviors might get n the way of coaching. For example, are you highly competitive and quick to act, judge, and talk? Are you continually pressed for time and to meet deadlines in the short term? Compare your behavioral profile to the characteristics of an effective coach. A coach must use the approach of a teacher, not a competitor; of a helpful, patient colleague, not a judge. A coach must reflect before acting or talking and must encourage the person being coached to do the same. To be an effective coach, you must remain objective and suspend judgment (just like you do at the beginning of a selection interview).

When you coach a person, the first meeting is critical. People being coached must leave the initial meeting with their egos intact. They need to know they are appreciated and have room to improve and grow. At the close of the first coaching meeting, you must be able to say, as Waldroop and Butler advise, "I don't want you to leave this meeting without going back to my opening comments. You are very important to us, and we would not be having this conversation if I did not value you and your contributions very highly. There is a real problem here, and I want to work on it with you so that you have a rewarding future in our organization."[xiii]

The authors also write:

> Despite your best efforts, many (salespeople) confronted with their behaviors for the first time will resist the feedback and deny the behaviors. If that happens, remain calm and say, "You need to understand how other people experience working with you." The message to send at the outset is that you are accurately relating what you and others experience in their relationship with the individual. If the (salesperson) continues to resist, let go. In the words of the fly fisherman, sometimes you have to let the fish run. A day or two of reflection can greatly increase a (salesperson's) receptivity to coaching advice. Once you broach the subject, however, you must follow through with it. Nothing will be gained by avoiding the issue.

Here are the techniques that Waldroop and Butler suggest that effective coaches should master:

1. **Practice active listening**. See Chapter 7 of *Media Selling* for in-depth lessons on how listen actively and non-judgmentally. Effective managers must be effective listeners, so you must practice your listening skills if you hope of be good manager and coach.
2. **Support learning through action and reflection**. An effective coach must support salespeople's learning process by asking during a coaching meeting, "What happened? What did you do? How successful do you think the action was? How did you feel before, during, and after? How did other people react? Did you get any feedback? Do you need to follow up? An objective a coach must get people being coached to realize how their behavior affects their ability to succeed, and the best way to accomplish that is to get them to reflect on how others might be reacting to their behavior.
3. **Move from easy to hard**. Waldroop and Butler write, "One of the best pieces of advice that we can give…is to move from easy to hard, much as learning to ski on the beginner slopes gives a skier the skills and confidence to advance to intermediate runs. Do not expect the behavioral goal to be reached without some trial and error along the way. If you need to work on several behaviors, pick the

one that is likeliest to change quickly and with the least amount of trauma. Then move on to successively more entrenched behaviors."

4. **Set microgoals**. Set small objectives at the beginning of coaching that are small, micro pieces of larger objectives and then move the performance bar steadily higher and higher.
5. **Use tape delay**. By using tape delay, a coach encourages people who get into trouble by talking too quickly in meetings before thinking to wait for five seconds before reacting in meetings.
6. **Practice script writing and role-playing**. Encourage people who have trouble communicating effectively to write scripts and then play out possible scenarios.
7. **Set up relationship-repair meetings**. Coaches must ask people they are coaching a lot of questions about what is happening in bad business relationships. When salespeople are ready to work on the bad relationships, coaches can help them script and play out an initial meeting.
8. **Give more positive feedback**. Sales managers have a tendency to focus more on problems than on successes. When coaching, don't just discuss negatives, but encourage people and discuss positives. Praise incidences of good behavior. Rewards are the best way to change behavior.[xiv]

In the "Money & Business" section of the Sunday, March 14 *New York Times* there were two articles concerning two books about coaching on the *Times* "Business Best Sellers" list for that week. The first article summarized the book *Nice Girls Don't Get the Corner Office*, in which author Lois Frankel gives advice to women who want to be successful in business. Frankel claims that, in the book, she is trying to eliminate the wrong decisions women make at work—mistakes that are often a direct result of their upbringing. "Being quiet and unassuming and seeking consensus may promote harmony in relationships, but may not gain you much notice at work, Ms. Frankel contends. She repeatedly urges women to be more assertive in the workplace," Paul B. Brown writes in the *Times* article.[xv]

In the second article titled, "Teamwork, and Caring," Paul Brown reviews *The Carolina Way: Leadership Lessons for a Life of Coaching* by Dean Smith and Gerald Bell. Smith ia the Hall-of-Fame University of North Carolina basketball coach (Michael Jordan's coach in college). Brown writes about the lessons Smith teaches in this "male-oriented book," which are:

1. **Focus on the factors within your control.**
2. **Make sure that your people "play hard," "play together," and "play smart."** In other words, demand consistent effort and have everyone concentrate on a team goal and make sure they execute strategy.
3. **"The most important thing in good leadership is truly caring."** Dean is quoted as saying that the best people in any profession care about the people they coach and the people who are being led know when it's faked or not there at all."[xvi]

The point I'm trying to make by referring to these two business best sellers is that often women need different types of coaching than men do, but everyone must to coached to understand and practice the principle that team goals, not individual goals, are what must be focused on ever day and that there is no substitute for consistently working hard. And coaches must lead the way by practicing what they preach.

Coaching and changing people is neither easy nor does change come about quickly. Coaches must be patient and allow for an occasional slip backwards. In the end, though, by having the discipline and patience to be an effective, understanding, caring coach, you will increase your emotional intelligence and people management skills. And these skills are the most important ones for ultimate success in business. If you coach your salespeople to win, you will win big.

Test Yourself

1. Why is hiring a sales managers most important job?
2. What are the ten elements in an interdependent hiring system?
3. Give several reasons (including legal ones) why personality tests are not effective for hiring salespeople.
4. Give several reasons (including legal ones) why IQ tests are not effective for hiring salespeople.
5. What is the best source for finding new salespeople?
6. What are the three objectives of a selection interview?
7. What are the 15 problems with the selection interview?
8. Why is it important to ask the same questions in the same order in all interviews?
9. Why is a realistic job preview important?
10. What are the four questions to ask about sales training?

Case Studies

1. "Burnout" case in "Case Studies" link on www.charleswarner.us
2. "The High Priced Talent" case in "Case Studies" link on www.charleswarner.us.
3. "The Wrong Person – Sales" case in "Case Studies" link on www.charleswarner.us.

Project

From the "Media Sales Management" link on www.mediaselling.us, download the "Hiring Decision Scale Workbook" and complete all four exercises. If you are not in a sales department, do your best to complete the exercises using people in a job with which you are familiar.

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Endnotes

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[xiv] Ibid. p. 116-117.
[xv] Brown, P. 2004. “Correcting Mistakes, Woman to Woman.” *New York Times.* March 14. p. BU 4.
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