

# HOW TO HIRE TODAY'S BEST SALESPEOPLE

By John A. Palumbo

It's only natural that experienced managers believe they are good interviewers and often hire largely by instinct. But even the most experienced manager can be fooled. According to research done by Michigan State, relying on interviews alone for hiring decisions is effective only 12 – 16 percent of the time, yet more than 85 percent of managers use nothing but interviews when hiring. It's a waste of time and money if we find our new hire really can't sell. Or, more commonly, we see that he or she doesn't perform well in either our selling or corporate environment, or our target market, creating problems for himself/herself and the company.

There are ways to guide managers once they believe they've found a good candidate. Very simply, managers can evaluate behavior, predict motivation, and estimate sales skills, as well as foresee how a person will interact with others. Learning these methods is cheap compared to the alternative – many sales managers estimate the cost of a hiring mistake at 200 – 300 percent of the salesperson's annual earnings.

A manager should consider three separate dimensions that are critical to finding the best sales professionals:

## 3 Dimensions of Selling Managers Should Consider:

1. HOW do they sell?
2. WILL they sell?
3. CAN they sell?

## **HOW does this person sell (their predictable behavior)?**

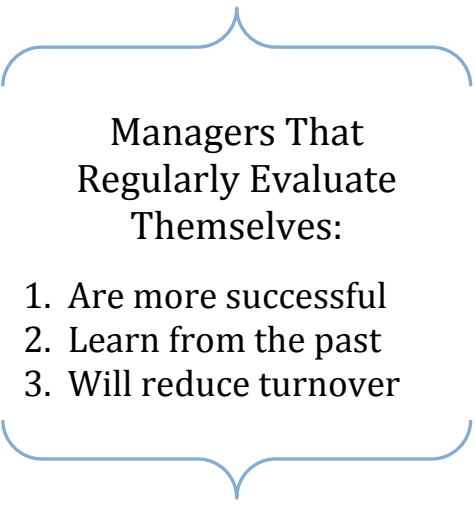
“Good” vs. “bad” techniques are not evaluated here. Rather, an employer needs to look inside the applicant’s head and determine how he/she will behave in a given selling situation and understand the candidate’s basic selling style, including how dominant or passive the interviewee will be in a sales situation. Does he/she have good people skills or is he/she a “Lone Ranger?” Managers can reach a clear understanding of how an individual will communicate and how he/she can be motivated, along with his/her ideal work environment.

## **WILL a person sell (their personal values and attitudes)?**

Will the applicant do what’s necessary to succeed? What are his/her personal interests and values? Is the interviewee driven by money, ambition or ideas? (In my experience, it’s mainly the drive for money that determines whether or not someone will make it in sales. Money motivations push a salesperson to close.)

## **CAN a person sell (their pure selling skills)?**

In answering this question, a manager wants to look for pure skills – the ability to demonstrate a product, influence a prospect, close, and follow up, to name a few. Additionally, knowing a candidate’s skill level determines how an applicant stacks up against top producers in the industry.



### **Managers That Regularly Evaluate Themselves:**

1. Are more successful
2. Learn from the past
3. Will reduce turnover

Why examine all three facets? Simple – what happens when managers interview the guy who has taken all the best sales seminars, but doesn’t have big volume numbers? Or a sharp dresser who presents herself very well but has never made much money? Having the insights from all three perspectives will provide a realistic overall picture of a potential candidate.

Additionally, I recommended that managers evaluate themselves to see how they interact with others and manage most effectively.

There are other benefits of self reflection:

### **You'll become a more effective manager.**

Occasionally a manager will use self reflection to change a salesperson. That's not the idea. This is a tool for the *manager* to change! The average manager communicates one way – his/her way. The best managers know each salesperson is an individual. Let's say salesperson Suzy is a no-nonsense, bottom-line type. Bob, on the other hand, is more creative and needs more guidance on details. Learning how each one communicates and individually tailoring your words and training, whenever possible, will result in better performance, higher morale, and increased productivity.

### **Establish a pattern of success in hiring.**

Over time, you'll be able to identify patterns for future hiring based on the comparisons of best salespeople as well as those who didn't work out. You'll be able to see how the new applicants compare to top performers and the others on your team. That will help confirm your impression of them from the interview.


### **Build a better sales team and reduce turnover.**

Is the salesperson you're interviewing a lone wolf or a team player who will work well sharing a site? Mixing incompatible personalities within a specific sales environment can damage morale and drag down sales versus selecting the best individual for every selling situation in order to build a winning team every time.

Now, you can take the time to learn to determine all these different behavioral styles – but sales managers looking for a quick fix can use a profiling system where the evaluation is done for them based on years of scientific study. Some companies charge in excess of \$1,000 for these tests, but excellent products are available with the same results for as little as \$200 – 300. (So don't overpay!) Given the expense of filling a sales position (and the lost sales if the salesperson doesn't work out), the expense for these kinds of tools is trivial.

Bottom line, these tools (whether the manager has taken the time to evaluate behavior or taken the quicker route of ordering a profile) are behavioral profiles and they're cheap insurance. They help managers make the best informed decision when they hire.

Managers ask me all the time if the assessments are really worthwhile and I have one answer – “These reports won't tell you anything you can't discover on your own in six to eight months. The real question is: do you really want to wait that long to find out you may have made a mistake or could have made a better hiring decision?”

Let's face it, we're used to spending only a few hours interviewing an individual to represent our company and be responsible for millions of dollars in transactions. A wrong decision can cost a company thousands of dollars. Today's top sales managers want every bit of information available at their fingertips so they can hire today's *best* salespeople. 

Continue to learn from the sales master, **John A. Palumbo**, in his recently published book that is certain to help you improve your sales!



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*John A. Palumbo is CEO of The Sales DNA*



*Institute, an idea studio and research laboratory for sales and marketing management. He has presented hundreds of speeches and seminars internationally on the science of sales and influence. He has been instrumental in restructuring the Sales DNA or thousands of individuals from small, family-run companies to large-scale developers such as Trump Grande International. Visit [www.SalesDNAProfiles.com](http://www.SalesDNAProfiles.com) or e-mail [PalumboJ@aol.com](mailto:PalumboJ@aol.com) for more information.*