

## WASHINGTON BUSINESS JOURNAL

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### Tips and talk

# The more a job candidate talks the more you learn

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A tough economy can be the perfect time to hire the Rock Star Rainmakers away from your competition. However, hiring for sales can be one of the most daunting things to do. We all know that sales people are the best

interviewers — and most sales managers are easily “sold”. It is easy to hire someone you immediately like just to get the hiring process over and a person added to the team to grow the pipeline. Always remember to hire

slow and fire fast by watching the pipeline. Some companies will rush to hire rather than discussing, evaluating and confirming the candidates’ past results to make the best guess of their future success. Sometimes we hear what we want to hear.

In the interviewing process, companies need to be selling their company to the candidates. However, is the sales candidate really answering our questions or giving us one slick line after another? For example, I am hired frequently to help clients hire a sales team where I conduct telephone interviews followed by in-person interviews if initially successful. I ask the candidate what their quota was. Let’s say it was \$5 million. I ask what percent of quota they achieved, and they say 110 percent for the year. By digging deeper, I learn the candidate has two inside salespeople supporting him by identifying the leads, or he admits that he has two junior outside salespeople working for him. However, earlier he said that he finds his own leads.

When asked for clarification he responds “I do, they are on my team!” Ask focused open-ended questions to find the truth for the best hiring decision.

How do you dig through the slick fluff and find honest past results? Take the time to read the resume before the interview so you can find inconsistencies. Schedule long interviews with different members of your

team and compare notes. Have some interviews be individual and some in a group where the individual interviewers join to look for inconsistencies.

Scheduling several interviews in the same day for one candidate can be stressful, which can also be optimal to see how they handle stress. Hiring a salesperson is different from hiring for other positions since they spend their time in the field with clients alone without you.

Using a consultative approach of asking great open-ended questions can get the candidates talking 80 percent of the time. It is acceptable to let them talk themselves out of a job so you don't make a hiring mistake. The more they talk, the more you learn. You need to know if they talk too much. They won't be consultative salespeople if they do and you should not hire them.

A great opening question is: "Please tell me anything and everything you want and then I will tell you about the company and the comp. plan." Rock Star Rainmakers answer with "I will start by telling you why I am the best candidate for this job..." This answer tells a few things about the candidate: They can take control and lead a conversation; they have thought through what they bring to your company and why they will be successful. They do not start discussing the resume, they make it about how they solve your needs as the hiring company.

The following are some responses to the opening interview question: Telling me all about his wife, kids, schooling and his work experience, without me asking personal questions. Another candidate was a PhD,

focused on school experiences with little talk about his work history. It appeared he loved being in school, so I asked if he was going to get another degree and learned he was going to start Law School at night. The demands of the job would not work with for him, so this candidate was out. Another person said we should not be interviewing him at all! We should be selling our company to him because of his incredibly successful background and contacts! Who were we to be evaluating him, we were lucky to have his interest! Wow! That was helpful for me, Next!

Some companies try to create a high stress interview by putting the candidates in a bad seat perhaps in a chair that wobbles. One person, who was hired by a client for a VP position of a fortune 500 company, said he

was absolutely certain they put him under a very intense light directly above him. He sweat the entire interview in his wool suit and it was winter. He asked around and co-workers admitted they do that. Beginning with his first day he had a negative

feeling about the company and withheld his best effort. He quit six months later. I do not advise doing this to candidates; if they sense what you are doing most will not take the job, others if desperate will take it until they find something with a more positive culture.

Hiring the wrong salesperson has a great opportunity cost, be careful and pay attention to red flags.

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