

# A Guide to Finding Sales Professionals



By Kelly R. Thompson

*I t finally happened—you fired the toxic salesperson that has been a drain on your company for so long. But now you are the one running all of the sales calls in addition to running your business.*

In a previous article (“Come Out, Come Out, Wherever You Are,” June 2011), I discussed how to find good candidates, but suggested that the interview process could take hours. How are you going to find the time? You ran an ad on Career Builder and Monster and have a ton of resumes, but now what?

## Sorting Resumes

One reason I recommend Career Builder or Monster is they give you more room to put job details in the ad. When we run an ad for a client, we are clear about the position’s benefits, hours and challenges. Because of this, we receive fewer resumes, but the ones we get tend to be from more qualified candidates. Before candidates submit their resumes, they are aware there will be evening or weekend work required; they are aware that they will be responsible for creating their own leads.

Allow candidates to submit their resumes via e-mail only. This allows you to review and organize them easily. Create folders on your computer

labeled “qualified,” “not qualified” and “possible,” and place each resume in the appropriate folder after you review it.

While we recommend considering sales experience when reviewing potential candidate resumes, you should pay special attention to some of the characteristics a successful, self-generating sales professional will need. Look for prior work experience requiring unsupervised work or long hours. For example, former teachers have had to work long hours beyond their time in the classroom. They also know how to explain things to a variety of individuals. Anyone with a lot of restaurant experience may be worth looking at as well. These candidates also have had to work with different personalities, and working in the evening or on weekends is nothing new to them.

While there are exceptions, we place resumes in the “not qualified” folder if the commute to the candidate’s territory is too long. Salespeople will serve your customers as required if they have to drive an hour or more. Also, if someone has a history of sales

jumping, they may not be a strong candidate. Individuals with manufacturing backgrounds are rarely a good fit for a position that requires variable hours and compensation.

The interview process is often cut short, sometimes with costly consequences. Moti-Vitality recommends a four-step interview process.

## Telephone Interviews

Most people who have submitted a resume through Career Builder or another job-posting website have also submitted resumes to other places. Once you have sorted the resumes, dedicate a few days to telephone interviews. Have an assistant call each candidate to schedule a preliminary telephone interview. The caller may say something like, “Hi, this is Sue from ABC Water Conditioning. You submitted a resume to us in response to a territory manager position we have available. We are interested in speaking with you about this position. We are conducting preliminary telephone interviews on Tuesday afternoon between 1 and 5 p.m. Will you be available during that time?”

Potential candidates will almost always make themselves available. Scheduling the telephone interview begins a potential relationship with respect and allows for a more relaxed conversation. Once you have confirmation they will be available during the time you allotted, send the candidate a short e-mail to remind them of the time with the original ad attached so that they can review the company.

During the telephone interview, reiterate some of the challenges of the position. Ask candidates about their income requirements, their hours of availability and what attracted them to the position. If the position is straight commission or requires working in the evening and on weekends, talk about it on the phone to make sure all requirements are understood from the start.

Some potential candidates will be eliminated because they or you lack interest. Either way, the telephone interview takes far less time than a face-to-face interview and allows you to narrow the field of qualified candidates.

If things go well on the phone, invite candidates to a face-to-face interview.

Making the most of your employee search with a thorough interview process

### First Face-to-Face Interview

Hopefully, you will have eight to 10 candidates for face-to-face interviews. Dedicate a day or portions of several days to these interviews. If you try to schedule them between your other tasks, you will likely be distracted and rushed, not giving each candidate the complete consideration needed. This is risky, considering that this individual may be representing your company, unsupervised, in your clients' homes.

During these interviews, you will gather basic information about the candidates. Were they on time? Were they dressed professionally? First impressions matter—a potential sales professional cannot “grow” on you. If something about them turns you off when you first see them, then it is possible that the same will happen with potential customers.

Do not spend a lot of time talking about the position in this interview; reiterate the necessity of creating business and the evening and weekend hours. If you are going to hire a self-generator, make this clear in every step of the interview process. Otherwise, you could end up with a lead-runner that thought the self-generating requirement was optional.

If the interviews go well, do not be surprised if they last for an hour or more. Try to narrow your field down to three candidates for second

face-to-face interviews and invite those candidates back during the same week. The longer you wait, the more likely a potential candidate will find another job opportunity.

### Second Face-to-Face Interview

Hopefully you are closer to your decision at this point. Candidates feel they are getting closer to a new position at this point as well. Use this opportunity to tell them they are competing with a narrowed field; it shows how they might handle a competitive sales situation.

Candidates should bring questions about the position and the company at this time. Use this interview to answer them honestly and thoroughly. Ask what excites them or makes them nervous about the position, and directly address any concerns you had from the first two interviews.

After you complete the second face-to-face interview, you will have a good idea of whom you would like invite to join your team. But if the candidate is married, a third face-to-face interview is strongly recommended.

### Third Face-to-Face Interview

There is not a successful married sales professional in this industry that does not have the support of his or her spouse. Water treatment sales professionals are required to work long hours with varying results. You

will dramatically increase a potential candidate's success if you involve his or her spouse in the decision-making process. Schedule a dinner interview with the candidate and his or her partner. Make sure the spouse understands exactly what the job requirements will be—don't “candy coat” the pros or cons.

There may be times after a dinner interview when a qualified candidate decides he or she cannot accept an invitation to join your organization. While this can be disappointing and frustrating, appreciate that this decision was made prior to spending effort, time and money on training.

### Background Checks

You will have a pretty good feel for a candidate's success or failure potential after completing this thorough interview process, but it is better to be safe than sorry. These individuals will be in your customers' homes representing your company. Take the time to do a drug screening, criminal background check and driver's license check.

If all of this seems daunting, then ask yourself which is harder: spending a week to choose the best possible candidate, or making a quick decision only to find yourself in the same or worse position in a couple of months?

A final option is to hire a company that specializes in hiring and training

sales and management professionals in the water treatment industry. This way, the hiring process does not cut into your time. *wqp*

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