

42 Essential Sales Interview Questions

How to Recruit and Hire Sales Superstars

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Life, the Universe, and Recruiting

Identifying a sales superstar can sometimes be as daunting as contemplating the nature of the universe—but it doesn't have to be.

The 42 sales recruiting questions in this guide can help you simplify the process of qualifying candidates, dig deep into their sales acumen, illuminate their achievements, and understand how they may slot into your company culture.

These questions serve as a complement to your resume and job history review. You can mix and match questions from each section to craft a conversational interview and solicit specific experiences and examples from your candidates. The result is a well-rounded interview that won't leave you guessing.

Onward 

Getting to Know Your Candidate

To successfully interview a potential hire, you have to break the ice and get to know them as an individual. Here are a few sales-centric introductory questions to add to the mix.

1. How would you describe yourself as a sales person?
2. Have you been to our website? Tell me what you've learned about our products and services.
3. Why do you want to sell for our company?
4. Why did you leave your last role?
5. What was your compensation structure at your previous firm? Were you paid a percentage of revenue, profit, or some other measure?

Quick Tip

To avoid the canned interview answers common in highly prepared candidates, ask follow up questions to press your candidates for specifics. If they flounder or contradict themselves, they may not be the right fit. Of course, it could just be nerves, so ask follow up questions until you have a clear picture of your candidate.

Sales Processes

These questions address how sales pros build their pipelines from prospect to close.

1. Walk me through your sales process from lead to close.
2. What process do you use to hunt new business?
3. What tools and technology do you use to research prospective clients, competitors, or your industry?
4. What was your typical sales cycle in your previous role? What were some of your typical deal sizes?
5. What are some of the essential questions you ask prospects in order to qualify them?
6. What products and/or services did you sell for your previous employer and who were you selling them to?

Quick Tip

You can further tailor these questions to suit your company's sales process or use them to weed out candidates who may not be the right fit. Candidates used to short, tactical sales cycles may not thrive in an environment where long sales cycles are the norm, and vice versa.

Customer Relationships

The following questions help you understand how your candidate builds and maintains strong customer relationships, which are key to ongoing sales success.

1. What's more important: building a relationship with the client or closing the deal quickly? Why?
2. What techniques do you use to build rapport with a customer?
3. How do you maintain strong customer relationships?
4. Tell me about a prospect with whom you had a difficult time building a rapport. How did you win them over?

Drive and Achievements

The best sales people are driven by a need to achieve. These questions will help you dive deep into how a candidate was goaled and what they accomplished in previous roles.

1. What motivates you to sell?
2. Among the sellers at your previous position, where were you ranked? How often?
3. What were your goals/quotas at your last position? Where were you to plan?
4. What were your conversion rates from leads to opportunities to sales?

Tenacity

Focus and determination, along with aptitude and process, can also dictate results. These questions will help you understand how your candidate overcomes adversity and forges a path to success.

1. What was your biggest failure as a sales person?
What did you learn?
2. How do you turn around poor sales numbers?
3. What techniques do you use to overcome customer objections?
4. What was the toughest deal you closed and what did you do to close it?
5. When would you stop pursuing a potential client?
When would you re-engage?

Problem-Solving and Strategy

Ditch the brain-teasers and get back to the basics of how your candidate thinks through key issues that may arise over the course of the sales process.

1. What was the most creative solution you came up with to address a pressing customer concern?
2. What would you look to accomplish within the first 30/60/90 days of selling for us?
3. What's the greatest challenge facing our industry? What would be your strategy to overcome this?
4. How do you differentiate between a good deal and a bad deal? What was the last deal you walked away from?
5. What were your typical challenges in landing new sales? How did you overcome them?

Organizational Skills

Being organized helps sales professionals get ahead of the competition. The following questions will help you understand your candidate's organizational skills and how they get things done.

1. Take me to work with you: what's a typical day like at your current position?
2. Describe what the top of your office desk looks like.
3. What resources and support do you need from the company to sell?
4. Describe how you used your CRM within your sales process? If you didn't have access to a CRM, how did you organize your sales pipeline and report on your progress?

Communication Skills

Communicating the message is key for great sellers, which includes listening to what the customer is saying. Ask these questions to learn more about your candidate's communication style.

1. How do you prefer to communicate to internal team members?
2. How did you use your written communication skills to get a point across?
3. What is your most effective sales technique and why does it work so well?
4. Tell me about a time when communication between you and a prospect/client broke down. What did you do to fix it? What was the outcome?

Cultural Fit

Not every role is right for every candidate. Ask these questions to understand how a prospective hire may thrive within your company.

1. Describe your ideal sales manager.
2. Do you prefer to work alone or as part of a team?
Why?
3. How do you achieve buy-in for an idea from multiple stakeholders within your current company?
4. Have you had a customer or a colleague question your integrity? What was the situation and the outcome?
5. Describe a time when you made a mistake at work. How did you handle this and what was the outcome?

Post-Interview Tips

1. **Extend offers quickly:** superstar candidates aren't waiting around for offers and may be entertaining multiple offers.
2. **Continue interviewing:** for exactly the reason above. Keep your candidate funnel full so you always have top talent available if a position opens up.
3. **Follow up on written offers:** a verbal acceptance doesn't always mean the candidate will take your offer, especially if there are others on the table. Follow up to secure a yes and avoid the email black hole.
4. **Process pre -employment checks immediately:** getting this complex process moving sooner rather than later can counter fall-out and expedite starts.
5. **Humanize the experience:** stay in touch with the candidate throughout the post-interview cycle to create a great candidate experience and build excitement for their start date.

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Contact Us

www.acatalent.com

888-750-5627

