

# new solutions for managers

recruiting



## Too Good to Fail

How to find and recruit the best sales candidates for your company

Hiring in a down market may look like shooting fish in a barrel. But what if the barrel is full of fish you'd never want to catch?

Instead of wading through dozens of inappropriate, unqualified, or below-par applicants, these six tips will help you recruit and hire the cream no matter how big the crop.

- Look at who's in demand. Instead of sorting through piles of resumes and applications from reps who were the first

sent to the chopping block when their companies came upon hard times, go after those who still have a job – because they're the ones companies want to keep.

"Nobody but nobody lays off his or her best salespeople, no matter how tough times get," says sales trainer and associate Barry Maher, of Corona, California's Barry Maher & Associates. "If you want to hire the best B2B salespeople, you really should be looking at those who are

still employed."

Maher, author of *No Lie: Truth Is the Ultimate Sales Tool* (Barry Maher & Associates, 2006), suggests there's opportunity to move in on great salespeople who may be looking for greener pastures. "They're not making as much as you're used to making, so they might well be looking around," he explains.

- Turn to your network. One of the best ways to discover leads for competent sales-



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some familiarity with the company and products and position itself.” He ended up hiring a candidate he’d met before who worked for a competitor.

Sales expert Jill Konrath, best-selling author of *Selling to Big Companies* (Kaplan Business, 2005) and *SNAP Selling: Speed Up Sales and Win More Business with Today’s Frazzled Customers* (Portfolio Hardcover, 2010), recommends even asking customers for referrals. “Talk to your customers,” she recommends. “They know who the good reps are.”

Do a quick sort. If you are looking for the elusive star in the midst of all comers, follow the 80/20 rule and realize that you

### hot tip

Hire from strength.

Look for performers.

can quickly toss out four applications for every one you keep. Make a list of what you’re looking for, and veto anyone who doesn’t meet your minimum requirements. Even though there will be a lot of below-par applicants, there definitely is the possibility of a few winners, as Greenberg discovered. “I could afford to be pretty selective,” he recalls.

- Don’t spend a lot of time at this initial stage; set your bar and stick to it. Sure, you could interview anyone who sends in an application, but at what cost? “In the selling business, there are an awful lot of people who think that liking people and liking to talk are the only two requirements you need,” says Scot MacTaggart, branch manager for PSX, a custom-engineered security system integrator. “Every time we would post a sales job, we spent the majority of our time weeding out poorly qualified candidates. But I’m the one who ends up paying the freight on that,” he says, because the interviews end up being a waste of time.

Ask for more. One way PSX’s MacTaggart separates the wheat from the chaff is by asking in the job announcement for a few additional pieces of information.

“I added a small section of bullet points, which read: ‘Bonus points for bringing A) proof of past success, B) examples of past proposals, C) solid client references, D) experience selling to large organizations, E) records of completed training.’ I got a lot fewer applicants, and the applicants I got were of a higher quality,” he says.

It may seem like you’re asking for too much, but what have you got to lose? You can always reduce the qualifications or requirements if you find you’re excluding too many people. But you may be surprised at what you end up with.

Konrath also suggests paying extra attention to those candidates who demonstrate initiative. “Someone who is a go-getter will do things that go above and beyond the requirements, that will get themselves noticed,” such as offering customer analyses; a six-week plan on jump-starting a new territory; or other ideas, insights, and information. In this day and age, salespeople must initiate contact and break the rules to make sales, she says, so anyone who demonstrates those qualities during the hiring process is a keeper.

Make sure the fit is right. Just because in this market you can hire a Fortune 100 rep with oodles of experience doesn’t mean you should. Knowing what type of salesperson you need to fit your organization right now is critical to a successful hire.

Konrath cautions that if you’re a nimble, young company, hiring people from large, structured organizations may not work. “Their experience and how they work may not be aligned with an entrepreneurial firm,” she says. But hiring a maverick when you need a middle-of-the-road, steady presence can also be a disaster. Take stock of where your sales team and company are and what kind of person you need to help you get to the next stage of your growth.

A down market can be a curse and a blessing to hiring managers. But by setting your sites on the type of person who will best fit your organization and your goals, you can sort through the dead weight to find superstars.

— LAIN EHMANN

people is through your network. Not only will referrals come with a stamp of approval from someone you know, they’ll also likely have a higher level of familiarity with you, your company, and your product line.

When Bob Greenberg, regional sales manager for Agilent Technologies vacuum products division, was recently hiring, he put the word out through his social network, including on LinkedIn. He found the responses to be from higher-caliber candidates than those who came from HR, which he describes as “very helter-skelter” and “not really well suited for the position.”

In contrast, he says, “with the referrals that I got [from colleagues], there was