

Are You Unknowingly Sabotaging Your Sales Hiring Plans?

By **Marie Warner**

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Recruiting accomplished and experienced Sales Achievers has never been an easy hiring task. If you are a Sales Manager or Human Resources professional, you may have realized that this critical staffing task has become increasingly difficult in the past 24 months.

Whether in a weak or strong economic market, finding and hiring superior sales talent remains a challenge. A fourth quarter 2008 survey of hiring managers revealed that 35% still plan to add to staff in 2009, and new sales and sales analytics positions are increasing even in the last, "troubled" quarter of 2008. (sources: *McKinsey Quarterly* and *Bernhart Associates*) We are still in a **"Sales Candidate's Job Market"**.

Given these extra challenges in hiring sales talent, many clients are turning to professional recruiters to help grow their sales teams. My clients rely upon me to help them identify and recruit sales talent more quickly.

Did you realize that the average opportunity cost of an uncovered sales territory is **\$50,000 to \$80,000 each month**? If a professional search firm can help fill a position two weeks sooner than using internal resources only, the payback is compelling.

Equally critical, often the hiring manager is filling both sales manager and the sales rep role in order to keep an open sales territory "warm" and customers engaged until the new sales person is hired. It's challenging and time consuming to try to wear both those hats, and to perform both jobs effectively and successfully.

In this current "candidate's market" for job hunting, hiring managers realize how critical it is to find and hire a talented sales professional (and the bad outcome of a poor hire.) Managers must also focus on finding sales professionals likely to *"fit" their culture* and succeed in their firm. And, if this task itself weren't hard enough, they need to hire with **speed**.

Yet I have found that many sales managers **unknowingly sabotage their own recruiting efforts**, setting their hiring clock back to zero. Here are *four common mistakes* I have witnessed that derail sales recruiting efforts, and send that scarce and valuable resource - the experienced, proven sales talent - off to work for another company.

1. Delusions of Grandeur

Hiring managers must be realistic about what their company and their open position can offer a candidate, and what type of sales candidate - in experience and qualifications - they can reasonably attract. I recently worked with a 15 person startup, an information systems integrator, located in a small office in an aging office park. The Head of Sales and CEO insisted that the ideal candidate be a *top-performing "A-Player"* from one of the leading IT consultants or Enterprise Software giants. Yet they were unwilling and unable to even match the earnings of such talent. To quote a colleague, *"Sorry, you may think you are attractive, but you are not the prettiest girl at the dance."* This firm rejected several qualified and affordable candidates with proven track records in related though less "prestigious" firms. Weeks passed before these hiring managers realized that they needed to re-set their job requirements to reflect the achievements and relevant experience of a candidate - not the firm names on a resume.

2. Hurry up and wait.

Another common mistake made by hiring managers is to **urgently source** a number of candidates to fill an open sales territory. Responding to this need, the recruiter screens, interviews and qualifies a number of superior candidates who are interested in exploring their job opening. Then, after this initial "rush to action",

the hiring manager *delays days or even weeks before scheduling interviews*. As I said earlier, the hiring market now is a sales candidates' market, and sales talent will interpret that slow-down as a lack of interest to focus on other firms who are pursuing them more urgently. Once a candidate has been qualified, a hiring manager should **plan on weekly to twice weekly interaction** to advance the candidate - or to drop that individual from consideration. If a hiring manager is not able to give a search this degree of attention, solicit help from others in your company who can, or postpone your hiring efforts until your other priorities are addressed.

3. Dance for me!

Two decisions are made in each successful hiring. The Manager decides to extend an offer, and the candidate determines that offer is acceptable. I recently recruited sales representatives for a firm who put sales candidates at every level from pre-sales through national account manager through rigorous interviewing with multiple managers, plus other "proof" steps, such as a sales role play or product presentations. Often these role plays would deliberately become antagonistic so that the company could evaluate the reaction of the candidate under stress. These techniques may be valid ways to evaluate a candidate. Unfortunately, such **high pressure interview techniques** are just as likely to drive a confident, top performer away from your company.

The hiring manager must also respond to the evaluation that the candidate is making about them. **This is a duet, not a command solo performance**. If a hiring manager is interested in a candidate, he or she must become an enthusiastic (and realistic) promoter of the firm and the opportunity in order to "close" the desired candidate. This includes describing how and why that candidate would be a valued member of the team, and how that individual can succeed within their firm.

4. Low ball! Strike three! You're out!

A final common error made by hiring managers that derails their hiring efforts occurs when a preferred candidate has been found, and the job offer is about to be extended. Anticipating either entering a salary negotiation with the candidate - after all, this is a sales person - or hoping for a bargain hire, the hiring manager makes a *low-ball offer in writing*, with no prior discussion with the candidate. That offer is often less than the candidate is making now. It is the first money offer from the company that the candidate receives and reviews from the company.

A well-known sales skill fundamental is that no "price proposal" made in writing to a prospect should be a **surprise**. Yet that is precisely the behavior of the hiring manager. The candidate is unpleasantly surprised at the low-ball offer, thinking; "Is that what they think I'm really worth?" In a competitive job market, this low ball offer can be the catalyst to send the sales candidate - after hours of interviewing effort and resources have been invested by the hiring company - straight to the ranks of another firm's sales team.

Perhaps you have never made these four errors - and if so, I applaud your hiring savvy. For more successful recruiting in today's candidate's market, avoid these four mistakes as you build your sales team. And if you wish to improve your hiring efforts with the assistance of a Sales Search Professional, please call me, Marie Warner of Warner Professional Sales at (617)489-4528 or email me at mwarner@warnerprosales.com

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About the Author

Marie Warner is founder and President of Warner Professional Sales, LLC. Warner Professional Sales helps companies achieve **sales force success through people, performance and planning**. Warner Professional Sales helps companies get more revenue growth from their sales force by *recruiting* the right sales staff, 2) *training and developing* those sales professionals to consistently exceed revenue goals, and helping management to define and implement the best sales "process" and tactics for sales cycle control, territory assignments and quota planning.

Marie brings to client engagements over two-decades of leadership in the sale of technology, consulting and financial products and services to the Fortune 1000 and major financial institutions. This includes nine years of experience as Chief Sales Officer, in both enterprise-level and start-up organizations.

Marie Warner has authored articles in ***Mass High Tech, SalesResources.com, SalesVantage.com, EyesOnSales.com, Software Sales Journal, SalesDoctors,*** and ***Women's Business*** addressing successful sales strategies and tactics. She is a member of NETSEA (New England Technology Sales Executives Association), WITI (Women in Technology, International), Human Capital Institute, The Commonwealth Group, NAPS (National Association of Personnel Services) and participates in numerous other entrepreneurial, technology and marketing organizations.

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