

How to Hire a Service Sales Star

Past Success Selling Products or Systems May be a Negative

The most common question I'm asked is "what should I look for when hiring a service sales rep?" I always welcome this question because I know the right sales person is the key ingredient for a successful program. I'm also glad the manager realizes there are some unique skills required to sell service that are not prerequisites for product sales. Without any hesitation I can say I have reviewed well over twenty thousand potential service sales rep resumes, interviewed over five thousand candidates, and hired over one thousand service sales reps. Have I hired some duds? More than I would like to remember. On the other hand I have hired some of the top producers in their individual industries and probably have a higher batting average than most. I've listed a few of the less obvious traits to look for when hiring a potential overachiever.

Abstract Thinking – One of the primary differences between selling products and services is the need to have *outstanding* communication skills. Typically there are no product specifications, bid documents, drawings, etc. in service sales. Rarely are there glossy product brochures or slick demos available to wow the prospect. A service sales call is usually a one on one discussion. This situation requires more than using the right words or accurately responding to questions. Abstract thinkers have the ability to reduce confusing information into understandable concepts. They have an intuitive ability to paint a picture using words that help the prospect understand what they are selling and why they need service. Abstract thinkers don't hard sell the prospect; they enlighten the prospect to the benefits of service, therefore allowing the prospect to make the right decision.

Provider not Big Game Hunter – Regardless of the market segment, the price of a service agreement is far less than a hardware sale. Companies go to great lengths to retain product sales reps that bring in the big dollar projects. Most overachieving product sales reps are skilled at big sale hunting. Selling service requires more prospects, more calls, and more sales to overachieve. I look for a person who views each win, regardless of size, as a big win. The lack of this attribute is usually why reasonably successful product sales reps usually become mediocre or even poor service sales reps.

Activity Driven - Some people are thinkers, while others are doers. To be an overachieving service sales rep you need to be both. Think it than do it, no room for procrastinators. There is no substitute for direct sales activity when selling service. It's not about reviewing plans for a major project or spending days preparing a bid package for a big job. It's about creating an activity plan that will lead to success. More importantly it's about implementing the plan. The calls have to be made to generate good proposals. Prospecting must be a part of every day. Working four good days a week will not get it done. I look for someone who held a previous position that required a lot of hard sales work. I look for someone who is comfortable making countless phone calls, and not intimidated by making five or more in person calls a day. Success in service sales is directly related to direct sales activity.

Integrity – A person's integrity is almost impossible to read, but I know from experience it is a common trait of all overachievers. Think about it. A service sales call is usually a face to face meeting. The services being sold will be performed by someone else, the promises or commitments will be kept by others, and we want our money in advance. Without question the prospect needs to trust the service sales rep. The first two minutes of an interview with a sales candidate often reveal all that is needed. Does the person look professional, act confident, and composed? I always ask myself, would I buy from this person? Is the person embellishing, are their egos enlarged, or do they agree with me even when what I say is out of line? If the answer is yes to any of the above, it's a no go. I want honest, trustworthy people that have been raised with a work ethic that is based on effort not entitlement.

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