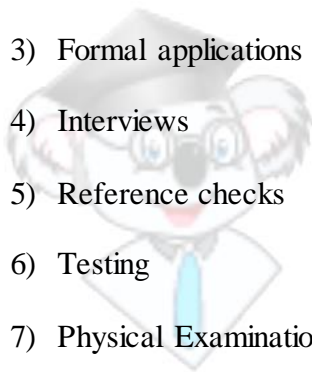


The Selection Process of Salesforce

Selection systems for sales personnel range from simple one-step systems consisting of nothing more than an informal personal interview, to complex multiple-step systems incorporating diverse mechanisms designed to gather information about applicants for sales jobs. A selection system is a set of successive "screens," at any of which an applicant may be dropped from further consideration.

Typical steps in the Selection Process include the following:

- 1) Pre-interview screening
- 2) Preliminary screening
- 3) Formal applications
- 4) Interviews
- 5) Reference checks
- 6) Testing
- 7) Physical Examination
- 8) Issuing letter of agreement
- 9) Planning the first week of work:



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At each step, the employer can reject applicants and if not, the applicant gets final placement.

1) Pre-interview screening

Pre-interview screening is for the purpose of eliminating totally unqualified applicants, thus saving the time of both the interviewers and applicants. The interview application is checked to find out whether applicants possess the predetermined minimum qualifications and experiences and whoever does not fulfil, they do not chance to appear for the interviews.

2) Preliminary interview

The preliminary interview (normally taken by low-level employee) should be short to weed out moderately better candidates who are then asked to fill out the formal application forms and an appointment is made for one or more formal interviews.

3) Formal applications

The formal application form serves as a central record for all pertinent information collected during the selection process. A formal application is filled out after a preliminary interview indicates that a job candidate has promise as a company salesperson. The application form may be filled out by the applicant personally or by an interviewer who records the applicant's responses. In either case the completed formal application amounts to a standardised written interview, since most of the information that it contains could be obtained through personal interviews. Sometimes, sections are reserved for later recording of the results of such selection steps as reference and credit checks, testing, and physical examination. Certain items of information are always relevant to selection decisions, and these are assembled on the application form. Included are present job, dependents, education, employment status, time with last employer, membership in organisations, previous positions, records of earnings, reasons for leaving last job, net worth, living expenses, and length of job-hunting period.

4) Interviews

The interview is the most widely used selection step and in some companies it comprises the entire selection system. No other method is quite so satisfactory in judging an individual as to ability in oral communication, personal appearance and manners, attitude toward selling and life in general, reaction to obstacles presented face-to-face, and personal impact upon others. The interviewer reviews the completed application form before the interview and refrains from asking questions already answered. Perusal of the completed application indicates areas that require further questioning.

Before interviewing potential sales people, management needs to decide on the salary range and minimum skill levels that the new person needs to have. A management team that is working on a hiring strategy may begin with a planning session by listing all the attributes desired in a new sales person. Devising a successful hiring plan means not only evaluating what attributes the company looks for in a candidate, but also what attributes a candidate looks for in the company.

Three simple reports or brochures may be given to the interviewees to strengthen the company's position:

- **Benefit Report**: It covers the company's working environment, pay plans and benefits. A description of the administrative and technical help available to each sales person should be included.
- **Average success report**: It lists the average incomes of the entire sales staff including the highest and lowest numbers. This would help the candidate in estimating how much he or she can earn in the first few years in the company.
- **Unique factor survey report**: It comprises surveys filled out by the current sales people, showing what it is like to work for the company. This survey concept works only when the rest of the company and managerial philosophies are stable and positive.

Typical questions during interviewing

The questions asked to the applicant should reflect the following.

- ***Attitude***: Ever lose in competition? Feelings? How do you handle customer complaints?
- ***Motivation***: How will this job help you get what you want? What obstacles are most likely to trip you up?
- ***Initiative***: How do you feel about working alone? How did you get into sales?
- ***Stability***: What things disturb you most? What is your most pleasant work experience?
- ***Planning***: Give me an idea of how you spend a typical day.

- **Insight:** Tell me about your strengths and weaknesses. How would you size up your last employer?
- **Social skills:** What kind of customer (person) do you get along with best? What methods are effective for dealing with people?

Interviewing Techniques

Many companies provide specialised training for those doing interviewing. Scientifically designed rating scales and interview record forms help interviewers to guide discussions along productive lines. Some of the interview techniques are described below.

1. Patterned interview: Here the interviewer uses a prepared outline of questions designed to generate a basic core of information. The interviewer may work directly from the outline, recording answers as they are given, but this may make the conversation stilted and the applicant nervous. Greater spontaneity results when the interviewer memorises the outline and records the answers after the interview.

2. Nondirective interview: In this technique the applicant is encouraged to speak freely about his or her experience, training, and future plans. The interviewer asks few direct questions and says only enough to keep the interviewee talking. The nondirective interview does not pry answers to standard questions, and much time is spent on outwardly irrelevant subjects. Some personnel experts say that a nondirective technique yields maximum insight into an individual's attitudes and interests. Expert interpretation reveals much about the applicant often including things of which the individual is not consciously aware. This technique's proponents claim that it is the best method for probing an individual's personality in depth. The main drawback is that administering the interview and interpreting the results demand specialised instruction.

3. Interaction (stress) interview: The interaction interview simulates the stresses the applicant would meet in actual selling and provides a way to observe the applicant's reactions to them'. This

interviewing technique has long been used by sales executives who, in interviewing prospective sales personnel, hand the applicant an ashtray or other object and say "Here, sell this to me." The objective is to see how the applicant reacts to the surprise situation and to size up selling ability.

Interaction interviewing has become a more complex, and sophisticated, technique. In one version, two, interviewers are required—one uses psychological techniques to set up 'the simulated situations, and the other, who is present but not an active participant in the interview observes and records the applicant's reactions. Because of their subtlety, the delicacy involved in their application, and the importance of expert interpretation, the newer kind of interaction interviews should be planned, administered, and interpreted by a trained psychologist.

4. Rating scales: One shortcoming of the personal interview is its tendency to lack objectivity, a defect that is reduced through rating scales. These are so constructed that interviewers' ratings are channelled into a limited choice of responses. In evaluating an applicant's general appearance, for instance, one much-used form forces an interviewer to choose one of five descriptive phrases: very neat, nicely dressed, presentable, untidy, and slovenly. Experience indicates that this results in more comparable ratings of the same individual by different interviewers. One drawback of the rating scale is that its objectivity restricts precise description of many personal qualities. It is good practice to encourage interviewers to explain ratings in writing.

5) Reference check

References provide information on the applicant not available from other sources. Personal contact is the best way to obtain information from references, since facial expressions and voice intonations reveal a great deal, and most people are more frank orally than in writing. When a reference is located at a distance, a telephone call may substitute for personal contact. Solicitation of written recommendations is the weakest approach and should be a last resort.

Applicants tend to name as references those on whom they can rely to speak in their favour. In addition, there is tendency for references to be biased in favour of an applicant. These tendencies are partially offset by contacting persons not listed as references but who know the applicant. There are 4 types of excellent sources of reference that can provide candid unbiased appraisals.

- a) Present or former employers: These are the people who have observed the applicant under actual work conditions. However, companies normally do not approach a present employer without the applicant's permission.
- b) Former customers: If applicants have selling experience, their former customers are in a position to assess sales ability. It is advisable to contact these individuals without the applicants' assistance, which helps to avoid those who are personal friends of applicants.
- c) Well-known personalities: If references suggested by the applicant are used, it is best first to contact those who are reputable and well-known persons, because these type of people do not stake their reputations on those in whom they have little confidence.
- d) Mutual acquaintances: These are the people who know both the applicant and the employer. They may give frank evaluations and more importantly in this case, the employer is able to judge the worth of such evaluations.

6) Employment tests

As used here the term tests refers to a procedure, techniques or measurement instrument for ascertaining characteristics such as aptitudes capabilities, intelligence, knowledge, skills or personality. Sales managers may approach the testing process in any one of several ways. They may decide the following:

- Not to use tests
- To administer tests and interpret the results themselves
- To administer tests and have someone else interpret the results
- To turn the testing over to consulting industrial psychologists

Sales managers should have the ability to judge the value of tests whether or not they ever use them. The purpose of testing is to determine whether applicants have the necessary traits required for successful selling, so that selection process results in lower turnover and increased

performance. While conducting tests, managers must see whether the tests have 2 vital characteristics, which are:

- **Reliability:** It is the degree to which the tool measures the same thing each time it is used. For example, the scores of a reliable should be similar for the same person taking the same test over time
- **Validity:** It is the degree to which the test measures what it is supposed to measure. For example, a valid test should predict the job performance of an applicant in a particular relevant situation.

Types of Tests

Four types of psychological tests are used in selection systems for sales personnel:

- a) Tests of ability
- b) Tests of habitual characteristics
- c) Interest tests
- d) Achievement tests measure how much individuals have learned from their experience, training, or education.

a) Tests of ability

Tests of ability measure how well a person can perform particular tasks with maximum motivation, i.e. these tests are measures of best performance. Tests of ability include tests of mental ability (intelligence tests) and tests of special abilities (aptitude tests).

- Tests of mental ability, or intelligence tests, are used in a wide range of applications and have higher validity and reliability than most psychological tests. They measure primarily abilities such as namely, language usage and comprehension, and abstract reasoning or problem-solving ability.
- Tests of mental ability indicate an applicant's ability to learn quickly and to arrive at accurate answers under pressure. They determine creativeness, originality, or insight.

Certain tests measure special abilities or aptitudes, such as spatial and perceptual abilities, speed and reaction time, steadiness and controlled movement, mechanical comprehension, and artistic abilities. Aptitude tests used individually aid in making selection for some industrial jobs, as illustrated, by the use of perception tests in selecting clerical personnel. But because selling requires diverse aptitudes, and sales job specifications differ even among competing companies, an especially designed battery of aptitude tests is needed for sales personnel.

b) Tests of habitual characteristics:

Tests of habitual characteristics gauge how prospective employees act in their daily work normally, i.e. these tests are measure of typical performance. These include attitude, personality, and interest tests. Attitude tests are more appropriate as morale-measuring techniques than as selection aids. They ascertain employees' feelings toward working conditions, pay, advancement opportunities, and the like. Used as sales personnel selection devices, they identify abnormal attitudes on such broad subjects as big business, labor unions, and government. Their validity is questionable, since people often profess socially acceptable attitudes they do not actually have. Attitude tests do not measure the intensity with which particular attitudes are held.

c) Interest tests:

Interest test measures an individual's interest in a particular type of job. A basic assumption implicit in the uses of interest tests is that a relationship exists between interest and motivation. Hence, if two persons have equal ability, the one with the greater interest in a particular job should be more successful in that job. These tests help in determining whether or not the person is interested in doing the job or not. If the information that is obtained is accurate, then it can help in making a proper decision, and the candidate can be selected.

d) Achievement tests:

Achievement tests measure how much individuals know about a subject or have learned from their experience, training, or education. The achievement test for sales applicants must assess the

knowledge that the applicants possess in areas like product, marketing channels, and customer relations.

7) Physical examinations

Since good health is important to a salesperson's success, most companies require physical examinations. Because of the relatively high cost, the physical examination generally is one of the last steps. However, for the pharma and other sales jobs where salespeople have to travel too much with a heavy sales portfolio, physical condition is critical to job performance and hence physical examination must be positioned early in the selection system.

8) Issuing letter of agreement:

Once the final candidate is selected, time comes to put the offer in writing. The letter of agreement should explain exactly what the offer is, and what is expected out of him or her. It is a statement that describes the rules and procedures of the company. A typical letter of agreement may include aspects like salary and commission rates, minimum performance expectations, standards of evaluation, ethics and professionalism etc. This letter needs to be signed by both, the manager and the new sales person, to prevent serious disagreement in the future.

9) Planning the first week of work:

The first few days in any new job are stressful and uncomfortable. It is the job of the sales manager of the new sales person, to make sure that his or her first week is as productive and busy as possible. It is also important to realise that the orientation continues throughout the first year of the sales person's working in the company.