

# How to find 'A-players' when interviewing rep candidates

A rep firm/agency owner I work with tells me he is so captive to some poor performers he hired that he hesitates to go on vacation. And when he does get away, he can't relax because he is continually fighting fires back at the office.

Where did he go wrong when hiring these people? He interviewed thoroughly and checked references. Geoff Smart and Randy Street's book "Who" offers the answer. He didn't aim high enough. Smart and Street urge managers to search out "A-players," whom they define as "candidates who have at least a 90 percent chance of achieving a set of outcomes that only the top 10 percent of possible candidates could achieve."

Securing these A-players will take up more of your time at the hiring stage, but it will save you serious time and money in the longer run.

In the best-seller "Good to Great," author Jim Collins sums up the same hiring philosophy: "Get the right people on your bus and into the right seats ..." Be very diligent in hiring people who talk to your customers, run your sales force, assemble your product and sit in the corner office. The following guidelines will help fill your bus with A-players.

## Hiring the right people for your bus

After you have initially screened candidates and weeded out the obvious non-fits, set up the first in-depth interviews. Try to line up at least one more person from your rep firm/agency who can co-interview with you.

## Walking through a candidate's career

Structure the first interview as a chronological walk through the candidate's career. Use five simple questions for each job (listed below and liberally lifted from the pages of "Who"). Your goal is to hear the stories behind the scrubbed resume highlights and, in the process, gather an immense amount of information that will help you to make a wise hiring decision.

If this exercise seems too much like a grilling session, think of yourself as a biographer

rather than an investigative reporter trying to gather dirt.

## Five important questions to ask

### 1. What were you hired to do?

You are trying to understand the candidate's view of the goals and targets of the job and how their success was measured.

### 2. What accomplishments are you most proud of?

This question will elicit the stories behind the polished statements on a resume. A-players will tell you about accomplishments that match the job outcomes they just described to you.

B and C players will talk about events, people they met or aspects of the job they liked. You won't hear much about measurable results, though.

### 3. What were some low points during that job?

People may hesitate to share their lows; however, we all know there isn't a rep alive who hasn't experienced a low, or a bunch of

lows, on a job. Don't let the candidate off the hook; keep pushing.

### 4. Who, specifically, were the people you worked with?

a) What was your supervisor's name, and how do you spell that (even if their last name is Jones)? What was it like working with him/her? What will your supervisor tell me about your greatest strengths and areas for improvement?

You've got to love this line of questioning. It shows that you are serious about contacting their former bosses, so they better tell the truth. It also elicits responses that illustrate how a candidate got along with past bosses.

The A-players will probably give high praise to the coaches and mentors who have helped them over the years. The B, C and D players might use words such as "jerk," "moron," "useless." Just think what they might call you later down the line.

b) How would you rate the teams you

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by Nicki Weiss

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## FEATURE ARTICLE: Building the bridges

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### Manufacturer sales firms (reps) bridge to manufacturers in four steps:

- **Identify** the components of line profitability for your firm. Where are you spending your time, and what are the measurable results based on the anticipated sales cycle? (ROTI: return on time invested.) Time = Money!
- **Consider** what actions are being asked of you beyond writing up a sale and earning a standard commission? Are there areas, tasks, reports and meetings that are being expected and not rewarded?
- **Communicate** to motivate. How often in your manufacturer or territory meetings do you revisit your contract, revisit your deliverables, and revisit the subject of motivating and incentivizing to promote line focus?
- **Value** those actions that increase the worth of your firm. Is this a line that recognizes you as a partner, understands your culture and contributes deliberately to your business success?

### Manufacturer sales firms bridge to their salespeople in four steps:

- **Identify** the talent, skills and corresponding actions that provide reliable and consistent sales success. Then go hire based on that list!
- **Link** the actions and reward factors that motivate the individual. "Incentivization" is not a one-size-fits-all proposition.
- **Develop** their sales skills through deliberate and consistent on-the-job training, formal online or live training, committed supportive mentoring, industry association participation and professional sales certification (CSP).
- **Support** relationship building, "emotional favorite" status, SME (subject matter expert) expansion and individual business growth for the salesperson.

Relationships are built with bridges — lots of them — visible, strong, consistent and easy to maneuver. Regardless of your role as manufacturer, distributor, rep firm executive or salesperson, you are in the business of increasing revenue and decreasing cost. Period.

Invest with MRERF. Our job as YOUR Manufacturers' Representative Educational Research Foundation is to ensure that you have the resources and training to realize your goals, build those bridges and celebrate success. Our job is to offer ONLY those programs that address the manufacturers' rep business model. You are in it. Partner with those who understand your needs, your challenges and your rewards.

Contact MRERF at [www.mrerf.org](http://www.mrerf.org) and join us at our next CPMR, CSP or MBP class. We hear you, we understand, and we are ready to help you build that next bridge! ■

## SALESWISE: Hiring A-players

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worked with on an A, B, C scale? How would you rate the team when you left it on an A, B, C scale? When we speak with members of your team, what will they say were your biggest strengths and weaknesses as a manager?

Once again, these questions show that candidates better tell the truth because you will be following up with their former team members. Get curious about details, and don't accept vague answers.

### 5. Why did you leave that job?

Dig deeper if you hear general answers such as, "My boss and I didn't connect." Or "I was struggling working on my own." Find out why, and keep plugging until you have a clear picture of what actually happened.

You need to know if someone left after being successful (A-player clue) or if they were pushed out (B or C clue). You never know what you might hear as the picture fills in and the person's true identity is revealed.

You will still have to pursue further conversations with promising candidates and their references, but these five questions will get you off to a good start.

**Talk back:** I would love to hear back from you. Let me know your most successful interviewing techniques or your worst hiring blooper.

**Business video recommendation:** What is the most important factor for success? Dr. Joachim de Posada, an adjunct professor at the University of Miami and a motivational speaker and author of "Don't Eat the Marshmallow Yet: The sweet secret to success in work and life." Visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0yhHKWUa0g> and watch him describe why people succeed ... or don't. ■

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