

FOR: Bank Sales Managers

Interviewing New Candidates

To consistently perform at high levels, a salesperson needs three things:

1. An over-arching sales management process
2. Well-developed market management skills
3. Effective face-to-face selling skills

To assess a salesperson's market management and face-to-face selling skills during a job interview, use a structured interview that includes a sharp focus on "work samples."

When setting the appointment with the candidate, ask him to bring the following to the interview:

- A copy of any document that shows sales goals for the last year
- A copy of sales reports that show his results against those sales goals

A job interview is a sales call. The candidate should be using his best sales call process, using his sales skills to impress you. During the interview you should keep these questions in mind:

- Is the job candidate more interested in developing an understanding of your needs or pitching his product (himself)?
- Does he take the time to fully develop your needs?
- Does he listen carefully?

In the interview you will be asking the candidate to demonstrate a series of sales-related skills. In each case, observe how he handles the task and record your impressions.

Here is a six-step approach for interviewing for a business banking or commercial banking position that is designed to gauge an individual's sales skills.

Interview Sequence

1. Give the candidate a chance to get to know you and build rapport.
Key Issue: Is he adept at social conversation?
2. Provide an opportunity for the salesperson to explore the needs of the job.
To get started, you could say, "*We have some flexibility in our conversation today. I'll leave it up to you; where would you like to start?*" or "*Before we spend a few minutes talking about you and your experience, is there anything you'd like to know about the position?*"
Key Issue: Did he carefully develop the needs of the job and then summarize them?

3. Create an opportunity for the salesperson to match his experience to the needs of the job. You could say, *“Having heard about the position, tell me about you and your experience.”*

Key Issue: Did he match his solution (his experience and capabilities) to the needs of the job?

4. Review his sales goals and sales reports. Are the goals of the same type and quantity as those of your sales team? Has he met, exceeded, or greatly exceeded his goals? You could say, *“Take a few minutes and tell me about your sales goals?”* Then, you could say, *“Tell me how you managed your time and activities to ensure that you exceeded your goals.”*

Key Issue: Did he clearly articulate strategies and tactics for achieving his goals?

5. Provide an opportunity for the salesperson to demonstrate his market management skills. *“I’d like to ask you a question about a situation that our commercial bankers typically face. We have a large number of customers, prospects and centers-of-influence in our markets. This creates a market management dilemma for each of us. So here’s my question. Let’s say that you come to work for us and we give you:*

- *A portfolio of 100 customers*
- *A prospect list of 150 companies*
- *A COI list of 10 CPAs in town who are referring business to other banks but not to us*
- *Challenging goals for loan growth, deposit growth, and fee-based revenue growth*

Given this market situation, how would you manage your time to have the best shot at exceeding your sales goals? Please be as specific as possible.”

Key Issue: Did he segment his market and manage his selling time intelligently?

6. Give the candidate a chance to demonstrate his face-to-face selling skills. Set up this part of the interview like this: *“As you know, this position requires 20 to 30 sales calls per month. That’s a lot of time in front of customers, prospects, and COIs. To help you be successful, we provide very specific sales training. But to get a clear idea of where your skills are today and where you would fit into our training sequence, I’d like to ask you a favor. Would you do a quick role-play with me?”* Wait for a response. *“I’d like you to sell me this pen. Here’s the situation. You are an office supply salesperson who calls on business owners. I am a prospective customer and you have called on me twice before. During a third call with me, I ask you if you carry any ‘nice’ pens”. (You do-- Mont Blanc, Cross, etc.) Please take a few minutes to think about how you would sell me on your pens. You’ll have 10 minutes to make the sale. “I’ll leave now and be back in five minutes. Then we can begin. (If he explores your needs, tell him the pens are awards for high performing sales people on your sales team.)*

Key Issue: Did he explore your needs and match your needs to the features of the pen?

A structured interview like this may not provide everything you need to know about a prospective Relationship Manager’s sales skills, but it will certainly give you a good idea of how he will act in front of your bank’s customers and prospects. If this is valuable

information for you, try this approach the next time you have questions about a candidate's sales abilities.

