



Hiring Superior Salespeople



Contents

Chapter 1:	
Our Sales World Is Changing	5
1.1 The Evolution of Salespeople	6
1.2 Specialization of the Sales Organization	9
1.3 The Rungs of DNA Behind Superior Salespeople	13
Chapter 2:	
Ready, Set, Hire!	17
2.1 13 Interview Questions That Reveal True Sales Talent	18
2.2 Don't Onboard More, Onboard Better	23
Appendix:	
Survey Questions and Results	28

Introduction

Hiring Superior Salespeople is a quick-start guide for **hiring managers, sales leaders, management teams, and CEOs**. You'll find that our experience, research, and ideas will help you to find, interview, hire, and onboard superior salespeople.

Why create this eBook?

It's simple. We created this book to help executives and sales leaders find talent that moves their company financially and strategically forward. Hiring sales and sales leadership roles can be very daunting and our goal is to distill everything we have learned and our data from surveying 100 CEOs and founders so you can avoid the hiring pitfalls and mistakes that we all make.

We surveyed 100 executives and founders to understand how they go through the sales hiring process. This book helps identify sales talent needs and provides insight into how to fill those needs with quality people.

What You'll Take Away

This eBook provides a good starting point for:

- Understanding the differences between salespeople from years past and today.
- Identifying the various roles that make up the modern corporate sales machine.
- Discovering the many personality traits that are essential for sales success.
- Asking the right questions and properly exposing superior sales talent.
- Planning the right way to train, onboard, and consistently challenge your salespeople.
- Promoting the right people to manage your sales team and to lead by example.

Chapter 1:

Our Sales World Is Changing

1.1 The Evolution of Salespeople

1.2 Specialization of the Sales Organization

1.3 The Rungs of DNA Behind Superior Salespeople

1.1 The Evolution of Salespeople

The modern salesperson has changed drastically — from [Aaron Ross' revolutionizing prospecting for SaaS companies](#) by establishing the modern SDR role, to the growth of customer success roles, to enhancing post-sale relationships, sales is a process that [requires less salesmanship](#) and more skills that build on customer experience. The next generation of sales professionals will need to develop a success roadmap that they can optimize for both sellers and buyers.

There are three major differences between successful salespeople from previous generations and those today:

1. Today's salespeople use tech every day

The meaning of a great salesperson has shifted. We know turnover is high and [ramp-up time is already seven to 12 months](#). High-growth teams are successful only when they [hire agile, digital and tech-savvy people](#).

Ramp-up time is already seven to 12 months

The B2B sales landscape constantly evolves, requiring teams to quickly adopt new technologies that streamline clearly-defined sales processes. The newest high performer [will be the one who has a more operational approach and who can efficiently incorporate new technologies into their processes](#).

2. Today's salespeople are constantly adapting to modern buyers' needs.

The general framework for a modern B2B sales process is outlined in CEB's *The Challenger Sale*. In it, Matthew Dixon explains, "a *Challenger*[™] is really defined by the ability to do three things: teach, tailor, and take control." He also clearly distinguishes the *Challenger* salesperson from the relationship builder; while the *Challenger* is "focused on pushing the customer out of their comfort zone, the Relationship Builder is focused on being accepted into it."

A Challenger is really defined by the ability to do three things: teach, tailor, and take control.

But today's sales professionals are more than just *Challengers*. **They understand the consumer buying process and then adapt their sales strategy accordingly.** To do this effectively, salespeople take the pros of both *Challenger* and effective project management to drive the deal forward.

They are not only *Challengers*, but they also understand that they must show ROI to both decision makers and end users. We call this the ***Parallel Path sales process*** because there are many stakeholders in even the most basic sale. We run multiple simultaneous sales processes with each client. The modern sales pro must be able to hold many types of conversations.

3. Today's salespeople enhance buyers' existing information on the product and industry through thought leadership.

Whether it's [G2crowd](#) or other software review platform, the availability of product information grows daily. Sales professionals who continue to “product dump” are ineffective, whereas those who provide real industry insights and thought leadership are more important than ever. Inbound leads come prepared with product knowledge and a deeper understanding of the market, and outbound leads have the benefit of both good and bad client feedback of your services even before answering your call.

Given the amount of information available to buyers, salespeople aren't just selling products—**they're reframing the world of their prospects**. By collaborating with marketing teams, Salespeople are now empowered with valuable industry insights and thought leadership. They can intelligently lead prospects to the conclusion that their product is the only solution.

1.2 Specialization of the Sales Organization

With the evolution of sales have come specialized roles to tackle new challenges. Whether it's the huge influence of technology or the increased length of buyer cycles, you need more than just a great salesperson. Here's what the new sales organization looks like:

Outsourced Help

Finding help from external sources, such as [virtual assistants to help build your sales outreach list](#), saves money and keeps your business development reps focused more on sales strategy and less on administrative responsibilities.



Sales Enablement

Salespeople require endless information to pitch and close clients successfully. The sales enablement coordinator/manager works with the marketing team to develop digestible and visually appealing collateral for both sales and clients.

Sales Operations

The sales operations associate/manager is a highly analytical, process oriented individual who provides an essential, albeit [often misunderstood](#), role. Ask any sales leader whom they wish they had hired sooner, and the sales

operations person will often be their answer. *Why?* They liaise with the company's teams, forecast milestones, and facilitate and analyze the metrics to get there.

Sales Development Representative (SDR) aka BDR (Business Development Rep) or aka MRR (Market Response Rep) for inbound leads

Along with outsourced help, SDRs build sales lists, call and email leads, and use prospecting tools as the first sales touch point. This allows them to be on-boarded immediately. Grit and hustle are still required qualities, and SDRs also need to be adept at using quantitative sales tools. Their success is measured by sales qualified leads which can be meetings they set or qualification calls they make. They should, however, also work on and complete small deals to build up their confidence and get them ready to become full-on account executives.

Account Executive

These are the people doing most of the deal-making and closing. After SDRs coordinate appointments, the account executive's job is to demo the product/service, identify pain points and service gaps through a holistic discovery process, and navigate the prospect down the funnel.



Usually, account executives are hired once there's a healthy funnel in place and they have enough work to rationalize their paycheck. These roles are typically 50% base and 50% variable pay based on bookings or ACV.

Account Manager

This is the post-sale, client-facing role that's focused on retention and upselling throughout the client's tenure. 73% of those surveyed believe that either client sales growth or retention is the primary responsibility for this role. Most enterprise sales organizations have account managers to maintain and build stronger client relationships to achieve these responsibilities. Compensation is typically based on retention and growth depending on core responsibility. Variable comp is usually not as high of a percentage as the account executive but should still play a large factor.

Customer Success

A more technical version of the account manager, customer success reps sometimes work alongside the sales team during pre-sale to ensure a smooth onboarding process for clients. Post-sale, they typically work in tandem with account managers with the goal of gaining customer advocacy at the end-user level and to identify upsell/expansion opportunities. This role may be compensated similarly to an AM or on usage metrics and adoption. Ideally, this role focuses on making people love the product, so incentives should align to drive that behavior.

Sales Onboarding/Training

Not always a role needed at a startup, but the sales onboarding specialist is a necessary addition when your sales team is growing rapidly and you've discovered a successful sales process.



Remember, an untrained employee can cost you as much financial loss as a bad employee. Instead of firing/hiring new salespeople, increased productivity and profit is the ROI of hiring a sales onboarding trainer to work with fresh and even experienced talent.

To clarify, these roles are not fads or trends; this is the future of the modern sales organization. Just as we've seen many traditional marketing roles become obsolete or passed over by younger, more tech-savvy talent, sales leaders without operational and tech-forward minds will face the same inevitable fate. Remember, the key is to get to solid revenue generation, not to go from 0 to 100 employees the fastest! Devise a plan for utilizing role specialization to increase your organizational efficiency.

1.3 The Rungs of DNA Behind Superior Salespeople

You've now learned how salespeople have evolved with specialized roles and responsibilities, the advent of technology, and unbounded access to consumer information. [But what makes some of them superior to others? We've identified certain traits that are consistent with successful salespeople.](#) I have hired hundreds of salespeople and still get it wrong at times. These qualities may be slightly different for your organization as certain skills may be more or less important based on your sales cycle and type.

“Great salespeople are unafraid, hard working, and won't take no for an answer. The best salespeople are incredibly curious and inquisitive, likable, and have an energy to them; they will earn your trust and you'll do anything they say.”

Abby Schneiderman,
Co-Founder of Everplans

At one of my stops as a VP of Sales, we used assessment testing, [Profiles XT](#), which helped confirm much of the insights below. They may sound cliché, but the results they bring are anything but. Keep your eye out for the following:

1. Coachability

Easily one of the most important qualities of any superior salesperson, coachability is having an open mind and a sponge-like learning ability. Again, sales constantly changes. Without coachability, though, a salesperson cannot adapt to those changes. Coachability doesn't just mean taking advice from a mentor or manager, but actually learning from all aspects of the business including industry trends, competitors' strategies, and even prospects and customers.

2. Curiosity

If the *Challenger* sales style is the most successful, then curiosity is its secret weapon. The average salesperson is okay with trying to make things work with present information, but with curiosity, an above average salesperson asks probing questions to better identify whether the prospect is a good fit or not.

3. Competitiveness, not aggression

Sales, by nature, is competition. Externally, it's a strategic game in which a salesperson uses their skills to promote a product or service to prospects who are often well-informed and likely being sold to by competitors. Internally, a competitive spirit plays a big part in reaching On-Target Earnings (OTE) and in leading a team by example. After all, nobody wants to be last place on the leaderboard. Like most things, this is a trait that's great in the right dose, but [too little or even too much can negatively impact a rep's performance and fit](#). What's noteworthy is that competitiveness surfaces differently in different people. Look for both the quiet and vocal competitor.

4. Empathy, or at least the ability to fake it

Sales has the reputation of being a cutthroat career, but more often than not, successful salespeople use empathy to get ahead. You want someone who cares for your customers by providing them with value rather than someone who's only interested in the size of their commission check. In fact, 35% of those surveyed believe that relating to a client or communicating relevant value to them is the most important sales skill.

“Do they understand others’ thoughts, beliefs, and feelings, then act accordingly? Sales is all about understanding the customer and building relationships.”

Brandon Redlinger,
Director of Growth at Engagio

5. Time Management

The best salespeople use time to their benefit. They decide quickly, qualify or disqualify leads fast, and look for ways to work more efficiently rather than just to work more. Every salesperson has a potential revenue value per hour, so when they spend time on things that only minimally impact selling, they leave money on the table. Great salespeople know and use this to drive their daily schedule.

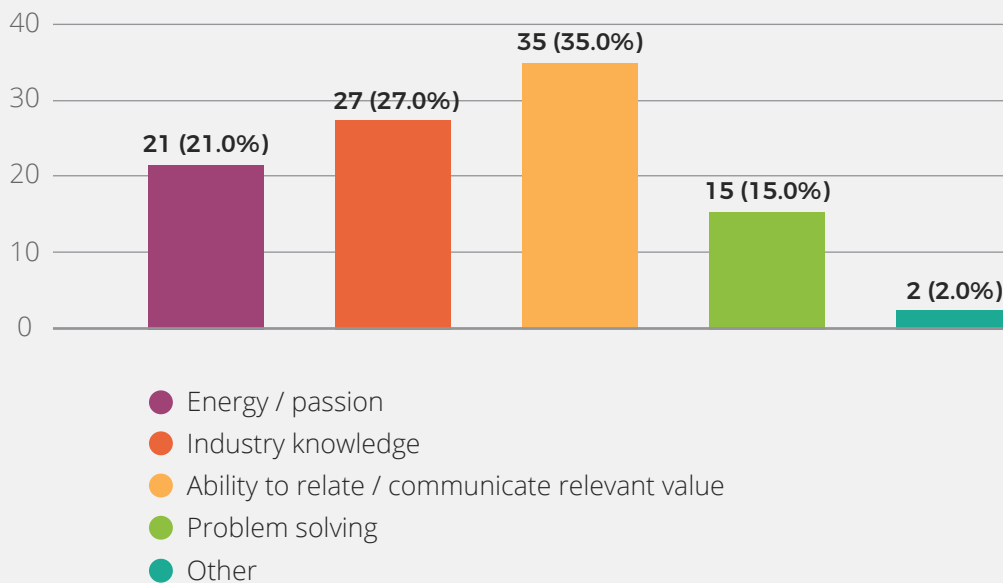
6. Problem Solving/Intelligence

Sales is a tough job filled with highs and lows. And while work ethic is really important, a great salesperson brings a problem-solving mindset to every customer interaction. Intelligence is very important to take a prospect's "NO",

reshape it into a need, and ultimately make it a hard “YES” or, at the least, a conversation piece. This quality is inherent rather than something learned, which makes it harder to spot.

All of these are sought-after traits of any job, but especially so in sales given the role’s impact on the bottom line, especially in startups or small businesses. Having a surplus of some traits can make up for a lack of others within lower-level roles, but it’s imperative that senior sales leaders encompass all of them. Indeed, [finding effective sales leaders](#) is one of the most difficult tasks upper management face.

What skill has proven most important to your sales hiring success?



Chapter 2:

Ready, Set, Hire!

2.1 13 Interview Questions That Reveal True Sales Talent

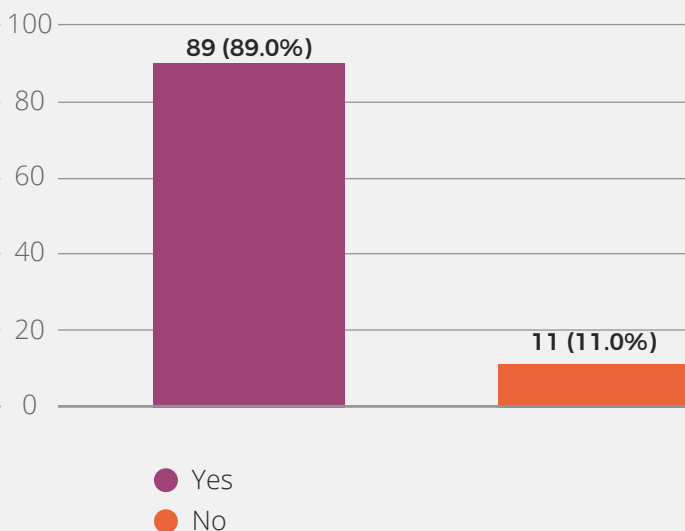
2.2 Don't Onboard More, Onboard Better

2.1 13 Interview Questions That Reveal True Sales Talent

The most superior salespeople don't necessarily come from sales backgrounds. True sales talent reveals itself in different forms, backgrounds, and experience levels. 89% of those surveyed said they have hired non-salespeople who became successful in traditional sales roles. While roles like engineering, retail, and marketing were more common than others, the overall variety of backgrounds hired for sales is vast!

So how do you reveal sales talent when it comes from so many different places? Describing the qualities of a superior salesperson is easy, but actually identifying them in potential hires is another ball game entirely.

Have you had experience hiring non-sales people into sales roles with success?



At Skaled, we use a combination of probing questions and the *Who* method of interviewing to obtain complete personality, skills, and experience. Use these 13 questions during your next round of interviews to identify which potential hires have the right skills and attitude.

1. How do you remain knowledgeable on trends considering your target industry or audience?

This question identifies how a potential hire performs the due diligence necessary to move sales conversations forward. Regardless of the interviewee's background, if and how they choose to learn more about their target customers can be applied across industries.

2. Can you explain our company to me?

Salespeople often take complex ideas and present them in simple, easily digestible morsels. This question showcases how much research they've done and how adept they are at pitching ideas clearly.

3. Is meeting quota every time more important than ensuring your customers are happy?

While a "yes" or a "no" could be correct, potential hires who can show empathy with a hunger to win business will do better in modern sales roles where customer success is key.

4. When do you decide a prospect isn't the right fit?

Research shows that successful conversion requires six to eight attempts, but for salespeople time is money. This question identifies whether a potential hire has the quick decision-making and time-management skills of an effective closer.

5. What's your motivation to work in sales?

It's a pretty self-explanatory question, but sales requires a lot of motivation. If the potential hire has trouble coming up with a strong answer, they may not be ready for the role.

6. How do you handle objection?

Sales success requires persistence and overcoming objections. How an interviewee answers this question shows if they can handle the pushback and objections prospects inevitably use.

7. If a deal is lost, do you ever ask the prospect why? If so, what did they say?

Failure comes with the territory, but it's not necessarily a bad thing. Successful salespeople use every lost deal as an opportunity to learn how to improve their strategy for the future. This question will determine how resourceful a potential hire can be – even with a loss.

8. What are some of your go-to questions to ask prospects?

Great salespeople no longer do most of the talking. Instead, they ask relevant questions and actively listen. Potential hires who can't ask the right questions ultimately fail to connect with prospects.

9. What are your thoughts on collaboration within the sales team as well as with other teams?

Sales isn't a one-person show. A potential hire who doesn't believe in collaborating with other sales colleagues focus more on their personal success rather than that of the team and company. And if they don't see the need to collaborate with other teams (i.e. marketing), then they are out of touch with modern sales practices.

10. Why did you leave your last job?

Flat out, this is a very probing question, and the answer should leave you with a better understanding of what the applicant finds important, how your company aligns with their ambition, and any red flags (i.e. laid off vs. fired for unscrupulous behavior).

11. What accomplishments are you most proud of at your last role?

Similar to question 10, the answer here not only shows what the applicant finds important, but also their effectiveness previously. An answer of “never failing to hit quota” is fine, but an applicant who talks about processes they put in place that positively affected the entire sales team or, better yet, company, makes a better, more successful sales leader!

12. When I talk to your boss at XYZ, how will they rate your performance on a scale from one to 10 and why? How do you spell their name?

This is straight from the book *Who* and has been a game changer for us and our clients. The verbiage is critical: saying “when I talk to your boss” instead of “what would your boss say” changes their honesty. Asking them to spell the name lets them know that you actually do plan on contacting their boss so the answers are much more authentic than the typical fluff.

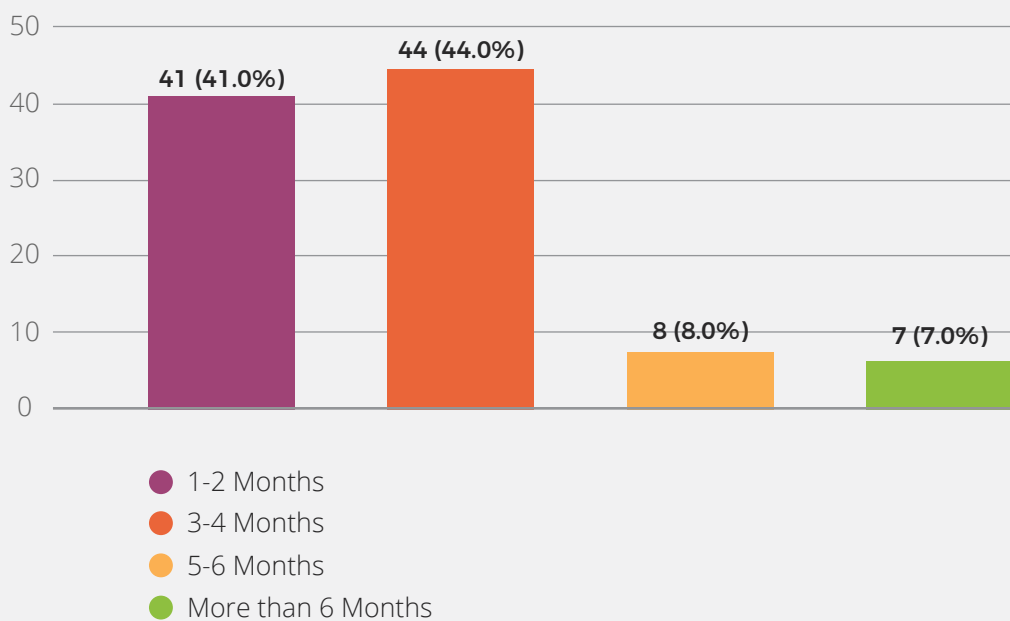
13. Do you have any questions for me?

Good interview questions are meant to elicit deep insights about a potential hire but it shouldn't be a one-way street. It's important to keep in mind that strong prospective sales hires should have an array of questions they've prepared for you. What questions interviewees ask can not only determine how much research they've done, but also provide a glimpse into their discovery process. If you see a clear strategy to their questions—them genuinely wanting to learn more about the role, sales structure, company, competitors, and compensation, then it's a good indication of how effective their discovery process will be on the job.

2.2 Don't Onboard More, Onboard Better

Finally, you've hired your salespeople and sales leader. What next? The answer is simple: onboarding. Why? Split nearly evenly, 41% of those surveyed said that new sales hires require one to two months to ramp up and on-board, while 44% believe it takes closer to three or four months. And with [40% of all new employees leaving within their first six months](#), what happens in those first one to four months is crucial. An important aspect of hiring superior salespeople is to ensure they stay long enough to make a difference. To do this, you must implement a solid onboarding strategy.

How long does it take your sales reps to ramp?



Build a resource base and consistently maintain it.

Building out a resource repository leads to a more streamlined learning process. This library can have content ranging from sales scripts, pitch decks, and recordings of successful deals, to company information and sales tech help documents.

A very important step companies often forget when onboarding sales hires is getting them acclimated to clients. A large portion of this resource base should focus on the company's customers, what they do, what industries they're in, and the trends that affect them. HubSpot's CRO, Mark Roberge, ensures that all his new sales hires get classroom-style training on their customers.

“They experience the actual pains and successes of our primary customers: professional marketers who need to generate leads online. As a result, our salespeople are able to connect on a far deeper level with our prospects and leads.”

Mark Roberge,
Professor at Harvard Business School
and former CRO at HubSpot

New hires are responsible for consuming and projecting this large amount of information. Having it easily available allows them to focus on learning instead of losing valuable time trying to find what they need. Make this resource library open-sourced so new hires can also add their own knowledge. It will not only provide unique perspectives but also bolster collaboration.

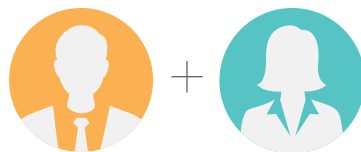
After, role play with a purpose

Roleplaying for sales onboarding purposes has been around forever, but as industries, customers, and their needs change, so too does the need for relevant training. Roleplaying is a very time-consuming activity, so make sure it's impactful.

Start by creating "subjects" or takeaways for every role-play session. This segments the learning process into easier-to-handle bites rather than an overwhelming experience. Make sure you're using real-life situations relevant to each specific sales role. Not only should you provide feedback, but also ask the sales trainee for their feedback on both themselves and the roleplaying process itself. Continue these steps until each subject is consumed to a high standard, and don't forget to keep a lookout for their coachability throughout!

Finally, create a mentorship program

Being a self-starter is a great trait to have for a salesperson, but that takes up a lot of time and guesswork. By providing a mentor to new sales hires, you pass on core company values and strategies more effectively.



Giving new hires a mentor whom they can shadow for a couple of months creates a one-to-one learning relationship in which questions are readily answered. More importantly, it provides a setting where performance, job adjustment, and professional growth are discussed without the

pressures found in new-hire reviews. It takes an average of eight to 12 months for new hires to acclimate to their role and perform up to par.

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With a thorough onboarding process, that time can be cut down by 34%—almost a difference of four months! Onboarding provides greater hiring retention, more satisfied managers, and happier, more engaged salespeople.

What's next?

We would love to believe that this book answers every sales hiring question, however, we're huge proponents of constantly learning and continually providing insights. With fresh articles, interviews with some of the best minds in sales strategy, and case studies of rapid-growth companies, [our weekly newsletter](#) is a great nothing-but-sales addition to your inbox. Once you sign up, you'll also receive a discount code to join our new Virtual Sales Academy, a learning platform developed in partnership with Sales Hacker to provide sales training at your fingertips.

By now, you've read 3700 words, but did we miss something? Do you have sales hiring tips that have helped you land awesome talent? Are you ready to implement some of these learnings for your sales team today? I'd love to hear from you at jake@skaled.com.

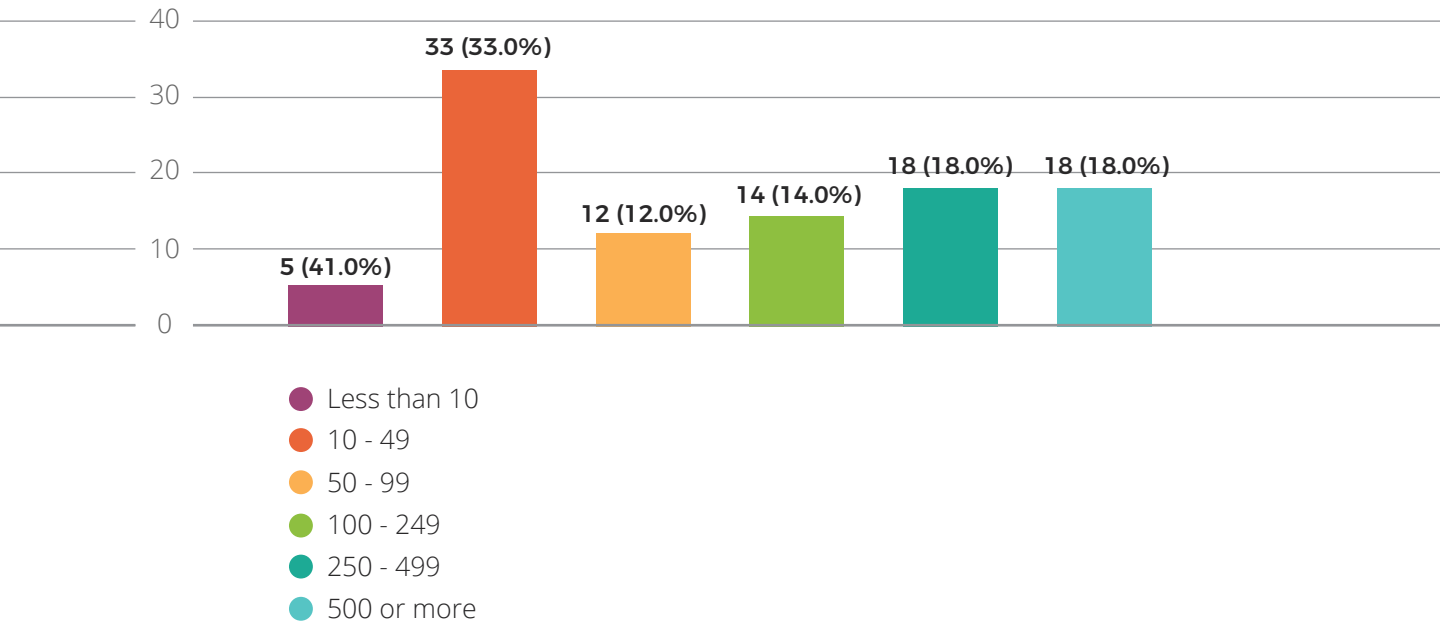
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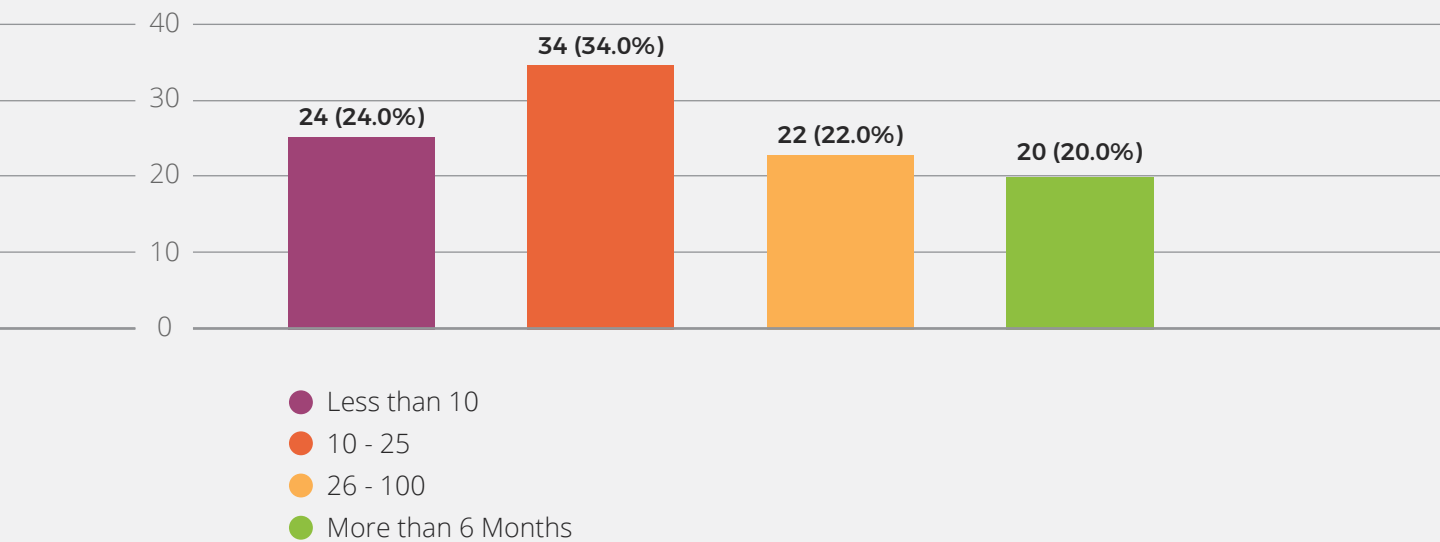
Appendix:

Survey Questions and Results

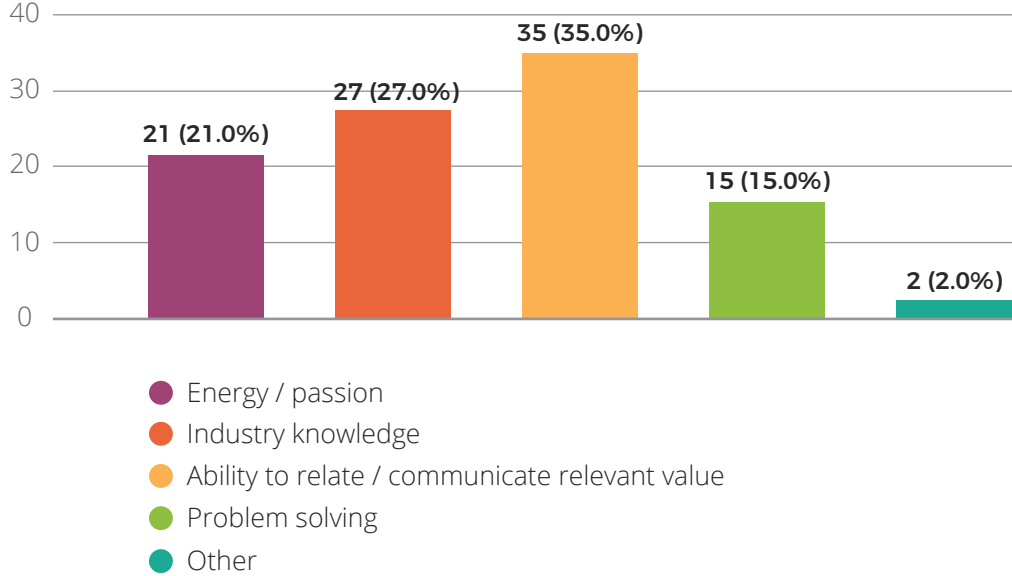
How many people work for your company, in all locations?



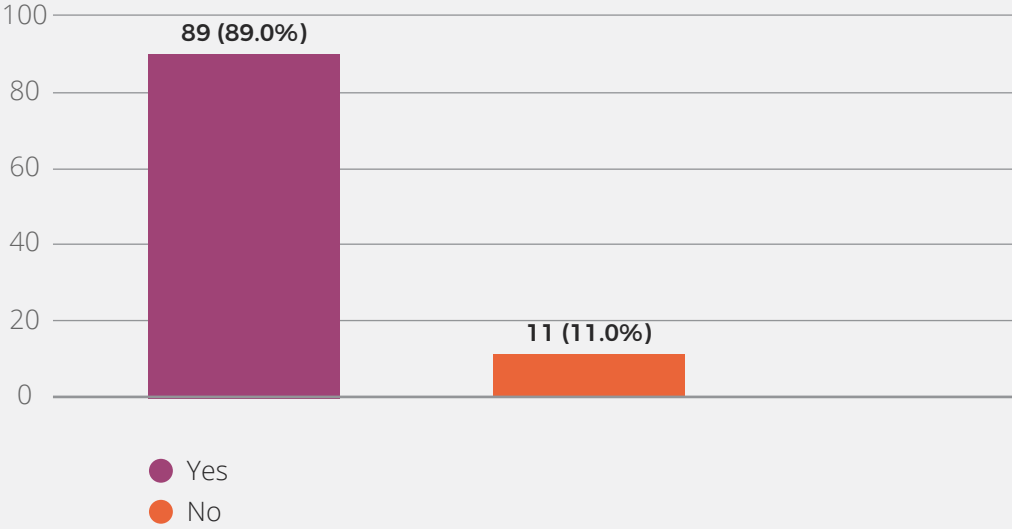
How big is your sales team?



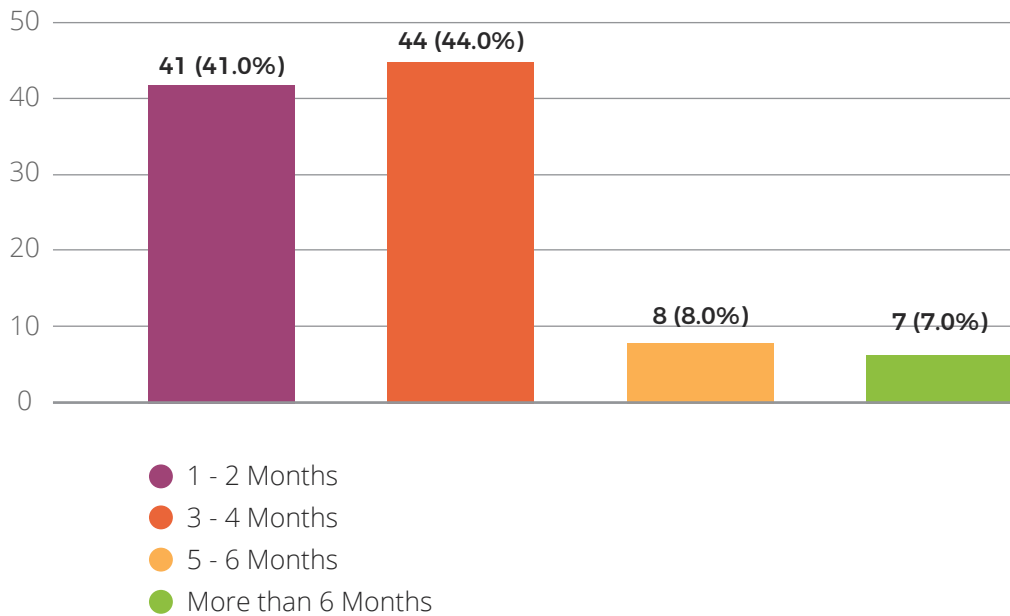
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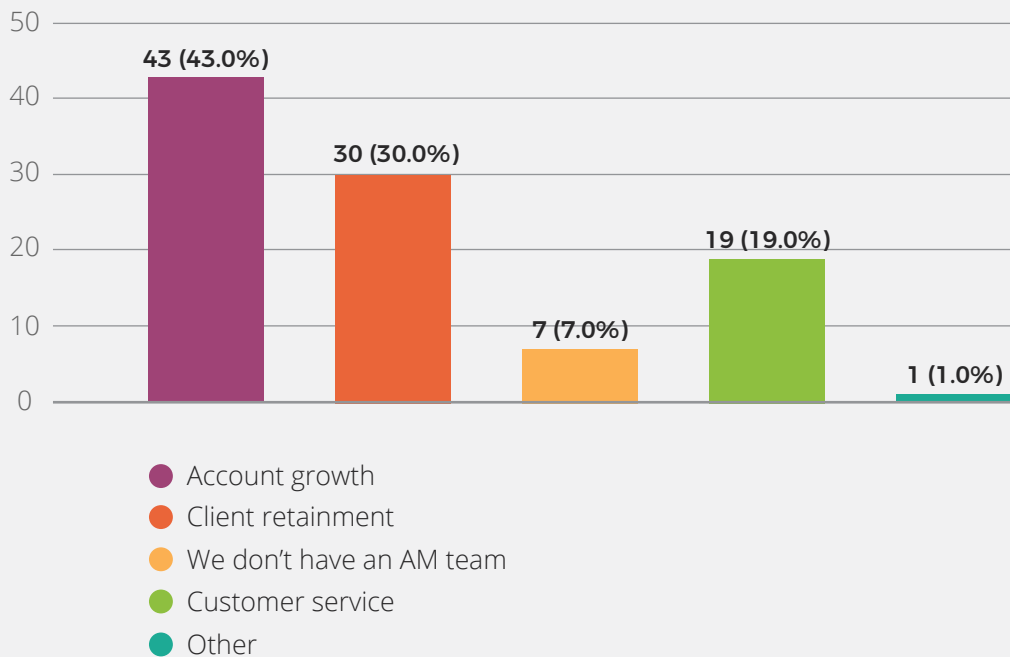
Have you had experience hiring non-sales people into sales roles with success?



How long does it take your sales reps to ramp?



When hiring for Account Managers, your main goal for that function is:



What are the signs you need to scale up your sales team? Select all that apply.

