

# THE TEN MOST COMMON SALES HIRING MISTAKES

AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

Insights and lessons learned  
from Kingman Lennox  
- the leading name in the  
recruitment of sales and  
business development  
professionals



Want to know how to ensure you hire the best  
sales talent?

Want to know how to dramatically reduce  
turnover in your sales team?

Just read on...



Kingman Lennox  
Sales Performance. Delivered



Our ability to interpret what our clients' businesses need and source the right people to answer those needs is what makes us stand out from the crowd

## Foreword

Hiring sales and business development talent is fraught with difficulty. It's a discipline with no formally recognised qualifications and where personal branding is integral to success.

Unfortunately this has created a loophole, one that has allowed people able to sell themselves but not much else to secure revenue generating positions. After witnessing many companies make simple but avoidable hiring mistakes which put their growth at risk, we launched Kingman Lennox.

Over the course of many years selling solutions, managing sales teams and successfully recruiting top sales performers for companies, we know what it takes to build productive and effective sales teams.

We have studied, dissected and quantified the characteristics that separate the sales stars in any sector. Drawing on our own experience we can tell the difference between the people who can just talk the talk and those who can really deliver. We understand the sales process, the traits and characteristics needed to identify opportunities and convert them into sales. We help companies secure their futures by hiring the best sales people.

*Mark Gillanders*  
Managing Director





## The Challenge of Recruiting Top Sales Talent is Evolving

If you are managing a sales team one of the most critical aspects is finding the right talent. No amount of training, coaching, managing or incentivising is going to get results from people who don't have the experience or competencies to deliver. And the kicker is, whilst it's always been difficult to find good talent, the war for talent has become much, much tougher. In today's increasingly competitive global economy it means that:

1. There is more competition for sales professionals who can deliver results on a consistent basis.
2. Businesses who have top people look after them, ensuring money isn't their only motivator
3. These top performers are reluctant to leave comfortable, established environments to join a new company with all its unknown and risks.

The typical model of hiring says that you place an ad or work with an agency and pick off the best applicants. However, this is a recipe for spending a lot of time going through CV's of 'C' and 'B' players and hopefully hiring some of the B

players - the classic needle in the haystack approach. High performing sales organisations know that the best talent isn't watching the job boards, they are busy selling and entertaining regular calls from recruiters. Current technology makes this an awful lot easier. Now that everyone has access to social business networks such as LinkedIn and Twitter, competitors can easily pick through your team to identify your key players, and then actively chase them.

You have to be ahead of the game and make your recruiting efforts pay. Avoid the top ten recruiting mistakes and you will soon have a team full of high performing sales professionals who are happy to be part of your team. These aren't revolutionary changes, just simple, common sense adjustments to the way you look at and go about hiring and building successful teams.





## The Challenge

There are three major obstacles to building high performing sales teams:

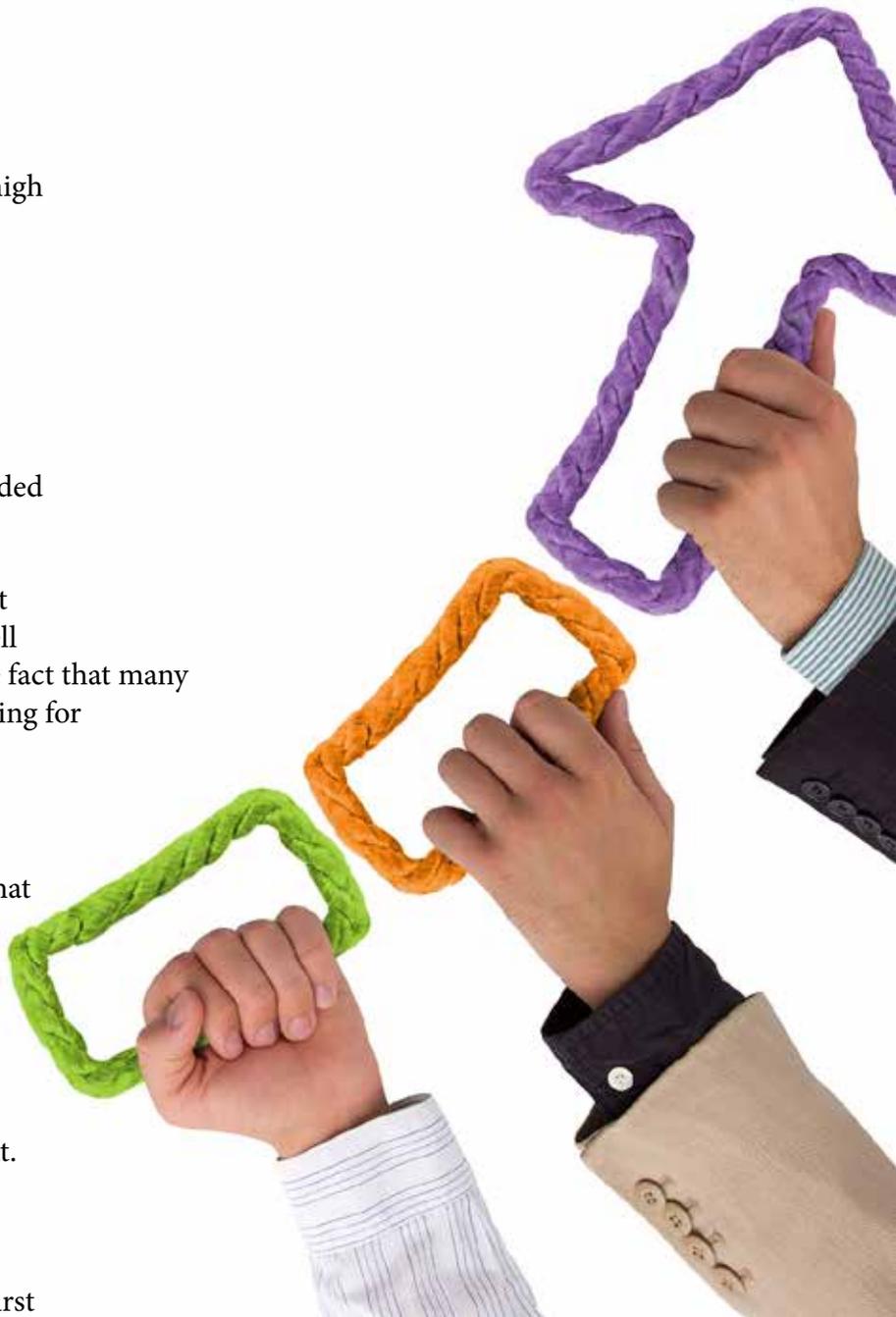
1. Good sales and business development professionals are rare. Numerous studies have shown that 20% of the sales professionals make 80% of the sales.
2. These professionals are difficult to land. Top performers will tend to be well rewarded and well looked after by their current employers.
3. Sales professionals are notoriously difficult to evaluate - because they know how to sell themselves. Finally, combine this with the fact that many companies don't know what they are looking for or need in the first place.

## Your Commitment

Building high performance teams requires that you commit to some basic principles.

1. Settle for nothing but the best.
2. Put in place a comprehensive system for attracting the best including marketing, networking and headhunting.
3. Become very thorough in evaluating talent.
4. Keep score. It's not about filling seats, it is about delivering sales results.

To build a high performing team you must first avoid making the Ten Most Common Sales Hiring Mistakes...





## Mistake #10

### Hiring based on gut feel

#### Problem:

While a person may feel right sitting across the table from you and answering easy questions, your gut feel alone is not enough to always make the right choice.

A firm handshake, an engaging personality and easy patter will often give us a good gut feel about someone. However, nine times out of ten, the hard truth is; the candidate that performs the best is the one that scores the highest against a defined criteria such as competencies, experience, proven success and fit with your sales environment and culture.

#### Solution:

Map out exactly what you need and objectively evaluate all candidates using the same criteria, same process and same interview questions. Uniformity of approach may seem boring, but it is critical in evaluating all candidates using the same scorecard and same rulebook.

Your gut feel is important but only if it is backed up by clear metrics.





## Mistake #9

### Hiring who's available instead of who you need

#### Problem:

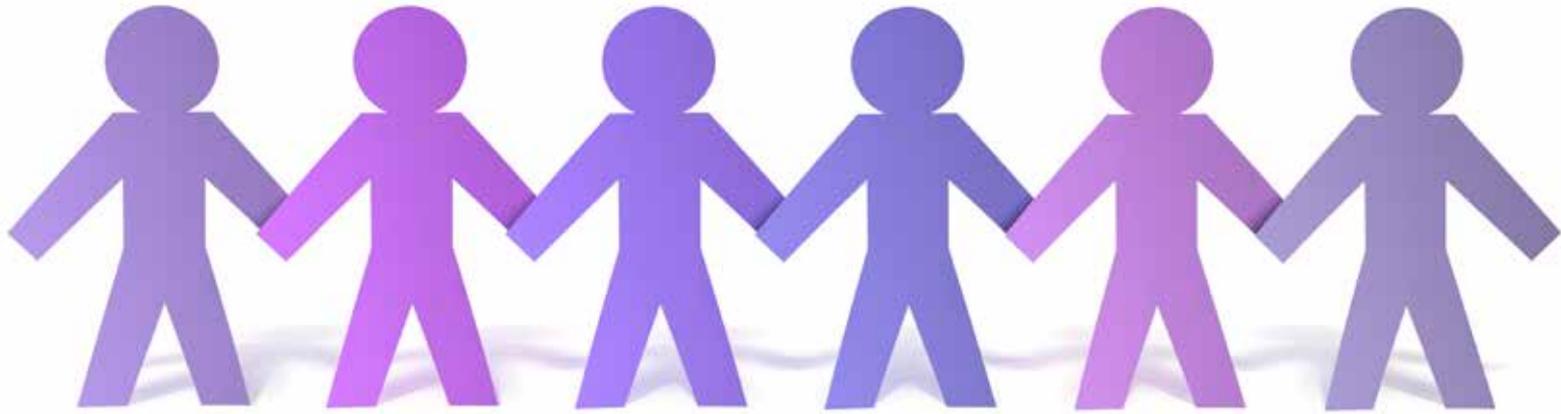
In the hiring process urgency can be your worst enemy. The pressure to achieve budgets and targets can be immense and very often a sales manager will succumb to the pressure and quickly jump to hire the first person that looks good. But getting sales hiring right takes patience and in the end the hiring manager that makes quick, but wrong, decision usually ends up wasting more money and time investing in someone that is not the right fit. However, this is not a license to procrastinate. It is a building block on the solution to Mistake 10 - take the time to map out exactly what you need.



#### Solution:

Your best bet is to know the sales competencies your people require and look for them when interviewing.

Past success in a previous company, even if it's in the same sector, is not an effective gauge of likely performance in your company. This solution requires you, the hiring manager, to do a fair amount of work. Defining the sales competencies your people require can be no easy task but this upfront work will make it easier and more transparent to evaluate new hires.



## Mistake #8

### Hiring a product sales person to sell solutions

#### Problem:

Your hire is a seasoned sales professional with a background of hitting targets. References checked out, previous employers speak highly of them. They have no problem with the challenge of building their customer portfolio from zero. Hard worker. Likeable person. Quickly puts together your business offering and is out pitching sooner than expected.

You're getting some business. Not enough of it. You're not getting the big accounts. The ones that can make a real difference to the development of your business. Your hire has focused purely on differentiating your product in the marketplace.

#### Solution:

Product innovation just doesn't give the competitive advantage it once did. Truly unique products are few and far between. You need a solutions seller. Someone who can nurture a close relationships with clients based on insight, support and trust. Customer intimacy is paramount.





## Mistake #7

### Hiring someone from a big company into a small company

#### Problem:

So the person you want to hire has an impressive background with a well known name. They've been responsible for generating the kind of revenue your business needs and are attracted to your company and the challenge of helping you build it. The problem with hiring sales talent with big company backgrounds is they've become accustomed to a well established support system.

Sales professionals from larger businesses don't need to establish credibility, they have sales support in the form of people or technology and regular leadership guidance nationally or globally. Although the intentions of the sales person may be good, moving to a small company can be frustrating and often leads to a short tenure.

#### Solution:

You need to be very clear about the scope of the roll you're offering, the roles and responsibilities and the challenges of a smaller business. A good way to do it is to track the sales sequence in the current role with the role you're offering. Pinpointing the challenges up front, making sure the candidate recognises they may need to go back to basics on the sales pipeline management, take on some admin, rely on their own initiative, and just may need to repeat the name of the business when approaching clients.





## Mistake #6

### Hiring the person with the best CV

#### Problem:

It's fairly common to have CVs rewritten by a professional, often with the job the candidate wants to hand, so experience can be revised to reflect the requirements of the role.

Choosing only the best written CVs to put together your interview list means you'll miss out on some solid Sales Professionals who didn't go down the professional CV writer route. A CV is a door opener. You'll only learn whether the candidate is right for you by challenging what is on the CV at interview stage.

#### Solution:

Compile a list of the skills and experience your business will need to reach its goals and use it to guide your candidate selection for interview.

Delve into claims of strengths and accomplishments to see if they can back up what they say on their CV with detail.

Use exploratory questions that will challenge whether the candidate has the experience, ambition and character traits that your business needs to hit its objectives and revenue targets. Psychometric testing of candidates is also an option, the process helps to confirm if someone is who they say they are.





## Mistake #5

### Hiring without doing thorough reference checks

#### Problem:

The CV looks good, the candidate seems like the perfect fit for your business. They've got the experience and qualifications you need and a well established network in your industry.

At the interview you asked them questions to ascertain whether you like them. They're clear on what the job entails and the remuneration works for both of you. You hire them without doing a background check. Three months in you realise that their performance is simply not meeting expectations and it isn't going to work.

#### Solution:

360 degree checks will give you a more rounded view of the candidate. Employment history and qualifications are easy to check. The references on their CV will tell you one side of the story (the really good part) but you really need to get a real sense of the person you're thinking about adding to your team.

Were they responsible for the revenue generation they claim on their CV or was it a team effort - speak to their line manager. What was it like working with them? Speak to former colleagues? Speak to clients about their approach to business. This may involve a few hours of work but will be well worth it.





## Mistake #4

### Hiring based on industry experience instead of sales competencies

#### Problem:

You insist the candidates you interview have a background in the products or services you sell. You value technical and product knowledge above sales skills. You figure it will take longer to teach someone about your products/services than it will do for someone with the product knowledge to learn how to win business.

The person you hire does have technical knowledge but their sales skills are weak and they lack the core attributes that determine sales success.

#### Solution:

Sales people have competencies that are supportive of successful selling and which take years of experience to master.

Competencies like presenting, solution creation, qualifying, closing, establishing trust and confidence and prospecting can be transferred. Often sales people from different backgrounds can bring a fresh approaches and ways of doing things which can revitalise a business.





## Mistake #3

### Hiring a farmer when you need a hunter

#### Problem:

You hire someone who has a background of turning big accounts into huge accounts. Their clients speak really highly of them. They get on with everyone in your business.

They come up with brilliant ideas, smart ways to collaborate internally and externally. You can see a steady increase in revenue and a comprehensive strategy for maximising accounts.

The problem is your business has ambitious growth targets. Growth of market share is high priority and your new hire is falling short on new clients. You hired a farmer.

#### Solution:

Know what kind of Sales Personality you need for your business. It's much easier to do this up-front than to make the hire then try to mould them into what you need while making them miserable and frustrated. If market share is your target then you need to look for someone who has a track record of identifying, qualifying and winning new accounts.

You need a networker, an independent energetic individual who loves seeking out new opportunities.

Join us!





## Mistake #2

### Hiring a talker not a listener

#### Problem:

The ability to speak easily and confidently in a way that makes people want to listen has always been associated with people who sell. It's easy to sit back in an interview and be charmed. Easy to sit back and be seduced by a smooth talker, an engaging individual who doesn't really need your input to hold the floor and tell you all about who they are and how they work, the people they've sold to, the success they've enjoyed, the challenges they've risen to. You hire them and they quickly absorb your business proposition. The problem is they are not delivering results.

#### Solution:

Today's world of B2B Sales requires people who listen first then talk. They'll need to be able to take a prospects challenges and objectives and build solutions around them, not broadcast (talking without necessarily needing a response) about how brilliant the solutions they have are or what they're working on for other clients.

Yes you still need a sales professional able to engage people, but engagement should stem from a considered tailored interaction.





## Mistake #1

### Hiring enthusiasm over experience

#### Problem:

The management team gives a directive to go for 'more energetic Sales Professionals'. Basically they think high energy and enthusiasm is key to what they need to achieve. They select a candidate who infected them in the interview with enthusiasm, their willingness to learn and inquisitiveness about the business and it's future. Your hire struggles with objections and is on a steep learning curve when it comes to creating value with the customer. They need to be constantly managed which means you end up consuming valuable resources without the requisite return.

#### Solution:

Do not judge a sales professional on an apparent lack of enthusiasm at interview stage. A reserved demeanour is common in highly experienced business builders. They know their value. They'll be weighing up your answers to questions which will help them weigh up where they can add value, deliver or develop their career.

An experienced candidate will know the position they're interviewing for will need energy, determination and commitment. They won't take it lightly. Keep your focus on what competencies and skills and experience the candidate has.



**Kingman Lennox is a specialist sales and business development recruitment consultancy that works with clients to help them strengthen their teams by finding and recruiting the best talent.**

We recognise just how challenging it can be for employers to recruit sales talent, and it is because of our ability to deliver exceptional results in this notoriously tough sector that clients choose to work with us time and again.

Kingman Lennox is more than just a recruitment agency, we provide true recruitment consultancy through our expertise in the sales process and the function of effective sales teams. Our team has real world experience in sales roles from the front-line through Director level positions.

We recognise that the success of any company is dependent upon the quality of its people – and nowhere is this more apparent than with sales positions where the quality of your team can have a profound impact on business performance.

That's why at Kingman Lennox we provide a range of services and a customised approach to find not just a great candidate but the right person for your company – that key individual who can make a positive impact on your business. We accomplish this by bringing together our expertise in sales with a consultative approach and an uncommon level of market insight.

Whether you are a hiring manager that's tired of the same CV's continually turning up on your desk, or a candidate that's tired of agencies who don't understand your needs you will find that Kingman Lennox is not just refreshingly different but, most importantly, is truly able to meet your needs.

“ Kingman Lennox is dedicated to providing a truly first class recruitment service that is underpinned by pragmatic advice and the highest possible levels of quality and service.”

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