



# Top Sales Management Secrets of HubSpot's Mark Roberge

*Part 2: On Building a  
High-Performance Sales Team*



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# Meet the Authors



## Mark Roberge

Mark is Chief Revenue Officer for Signals, HubSpot's premium sales tool. Under Mark's leadership as SVP of Sales & Services prior to running Signals, HubSpot increased revenue over 6,000% and expanded the team from 1 to 200 employees in five years. These results placed HubSpot #33 on the 2011 INC 500 Fastest Growing Companies list. Mark was also awarded the 2010 Salesperson of the Year at the MIT Sales Conference. Prior to HubSpot, Mark founded and/or held executive positions at start-ups in the social media and mobile sector. Mark started his career as a Technology Consultant with Accenture.

***"After all the analysis, we found 5 common core characteristics that predict success in most sales environments: coachability, curiosity, prior success, intelligence and passion"***

The advertisement features the Signals by HubSpot logo on the left. On the right, there is a notification bubble with a profile picture of Roselyn Dwight and the text "Roselyn Dwight" and "Opened your email: 'Signed Contract'". Below this, the main headline reads "SEE WHO OPENS YOUR EMAILS" and "Works with Gmail, Outlook & Salesforce". At the bottom right, there is an orange button that says "GET IT FOR FREE" with a right-pointing arrow.

# Meet the Authors



## Zorian Rotenberg

Zorian is a sales and marketing veteran and a recognized authority on metrics-driven sales and marketing management in the software industry. Prior to InsightSquared, Zorian was on the management teams of several global software companies including Acronis, Veeam and AppAssure (which was sold to Dell), ranging from \$8 Million to over \$100 Million in annual revenues, each of which he grew by over 100% in revenue every year. He was also CEO at StarWind Software, a software company where he grew sales by 100% globally and North American Sales by 145%+ by using the best practices of metrics-drive inside sales management, lead generation and prospecting.

Zorian has a degree in Finance with minors in Applied Mathematics and Computer Science from Lehigh University and earned his MBA from Harvard Business School.



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# Introduction

No matter how good you are as a manager or how stellar your product, you won't reach your goals if you don't have the right team. This means you must pay careful attention to how and who you hire. What characteristics correlate with success for a rep? How can you find the best reps? In this installment of the series, Mark shares some of his favorite advice about hiring, including:

- The 5 core characteristics of a good rep
- Where to find the best candidates
- Essential interviewing tips

## Q: What are the attributes you look for when you hire a new salesperson?

A: When we started hiring, we wrote down a set of attributes that we thought would be important and we looked for them during interviews. Then over time, we collected more data and measured **which of those attributes that we looked for actually correlated with success**. We conducted over 1,000 interviews and hired more than 60 people before we did our first analysis. So we graded all our sales reps on 14 different attributes [shown in the figure below] and then ran a regression analysis of how high or low scores in particular areas correlated with success. What we found helped us redesign our sales interview by giving us a new score sheet to help us identify the best candidates.

## DEFINE, SCORE, AND ANALYZE CRITERIA

Avg Quota Attainment %		PPR		LTV	
Attribute	Correlation	Attribute	Correlation	Attribute	Correlation
Prep/HubSpot Knowledge	0.39	Prep/HubSpot Knowledge	0.39	Adaptability	0.29
Internet Mkt Exp	0.38	Adaptability	0.37	Intelligence	0.28
Brevity	0.36	Internet Mkt Exp	0.35	Initiative/Passion	0.25
Adaptability	0.33	Intelligence	0.32	Prep/HubSpot Knowledge	0.22
Prior Success	0.31	Initiative/Passion	0.27	Technical Aptitude	0.18
Initiative/Passion	0.24	Prior Success	0.24	Internet Mkt Exp	0.15
Needs Identification	0.19	Brevity	0.19	Rapport Building	0.15
Rapport Building	0.15	Rapport Building	0.15	Voice Quality	0.14
Voice Quality	0.11	Voice Quality	0.06	Needs Identification	0.12
Intelligence	0.10	Technical Aptitude	0.04	Prior Success	0.12
Convincing	0.05	Needs Identification	-0.01	Objection Handling	0.04
Technical Aptitude	0.05	Convincing	-0.05	Brevity	0.02
Objection Handling	-0.06	Objection Handling	-0.05	Convincing	-0.02
Closing Ability	-0.14	Closing Ability	-0.15	Closing Ability	-0.07

Source: HubSpot Presentation

After all the analysis, we found **5 common core characteristics that predict success in most sales environments**:

- 1) Coachability
- 2) Curiosity
- 3) Prior Success
- 4) Intelligence
- 5) Passion

Interestingly, we discovered **that coachability is the most important** of the 5 predictors of success at HubSpot. But the question is how you measure them.

## **Q: How Do You Define and Measure these attributes?**

A: The way we measure coachability is by always including a role play in an interview. After the role play, I ask the candidate to self-assess, which is a great starting point. If they say something like “Well, I feel like I handled this situation well, but I wish I could’ve done this other one a little bit better,” I know that they are self-reflective and that they really analyzed the situation. That’s a great starting point. And then I’ll give them one piece of positive feedback and one piece of negative feedback, which initiates a dialogue that can be really telling. Are they taking notes and asking follow-up questions to clarify what I mean? This effort tells me a lot. You can tell how quickly they learn what you tell them and how receptive to feedback they are.

- **Coachability** is definitely the #1 predictor of success, but the other 4 are also really important.
- **Curiosity** is another essential trait. A rep who naturally asks great questions, listens well and is always trying to dig deeper is someone who won’t rest on their laurels and will make sure that they are always improving.
- **Prior Success** also correlates really well with success here. It doesn’t necessarily have to be prior success in our exact space, but prior success in some sales capacity is a really good indicator of high performance. If they were one of the top performers among hundreds of other reps at their prior job, they’ll succeed in any environment.
- I measure **intelligence** by how quickly someone can internalize new concepts and repeat them back to me during an interview.
- I also look for a rep that has **passion** in what they do. We have a sales rep who is a Sloan MBA and she is super-smart, but she has no experience in sales. Yet she has passion. She loves working with people, loves selling. And she is OK hearing, “No” hundreds of times per week, which is hard for a lot of people.

As a final, more general point: when we hire, we look for salespeople to transform into “**trusted advisors**” because in the world of SaaS, people can buy on their own without talking to a sales rep and, according to Corporate Executive Board (authors of the Challenger Sale), 57% of the buying process is over before the buyer talks to a sales rep. Today, reps must be trusted advisors and consultants rather than aggressive salespeople. So we always look for people who can really embrace that consultative aspect of modern sales.

## **Q: From your analysis, what didn't correlate well with success?**

A: We were surprised, but many of the attributes we initially thought would predict success – closing skills, objection handling and, most surprisingly, experience – didn't really correlate. Remember, this is for HubSpot, and experience can correlate well with success in other contexts.

But for us, **experience didn't matter as much**. I did a lot of experiments with experience level – like was it better to have 15 years of experience or no sales experience – and there was a strong correlation between success at HubSpot and less prior experience. In fact, we've found that 2 to 5 years of experience is ideal – as people have more experience, they become less moldable, which is important in our space because most reps have never sold something like our product before.

So, more than specific experience, I look for past success. For example, we have a rep who never sold software before but had been a top performer at a Pharmaceutical company, and he's a top performer here. I'd much rather take someone who performed really well in another industry who hasn't sold anything like our product, than someone who's average, but knows our industry.

## **Q: Rep experience doesn't matter so much?**

A: As it turns out, no, not for us. Finding someone with a ton of experience is much less important than finding someone with **high potential**. And this potential goes back to the attributes we determined did correlate with success: coachability, curiosity, prior success, intelligence and passion.

So it really comes down to accurately identifying this potential, which really depends on your specific context: Who are you selling to? What kind of product are you selling? What types of problems are you solving? All of these things determine what the right sales rep is for your company.

So for us, I've found that prior experience in our specific space doesn't necessarily correlate to success at HubSpot. I've hired people who had performed well in a similar context but who didn't do well with us. I've also hired people from totally different contexts who came in and did really well with us. So instead of looking for experience in our space, I look for people with the traits that we've determined predict success at HubSpot. To do this, we carried out a regression analysis a couple of years ago.



## Q: Where do you find good candidates?

A: You can't find great candidates on job sites, but sometimes good recruiters can help. The best sources of great candidates, though, are **your company**, your **sales team**, your own network, local sales **networking events**, passive recruiting on **LinkedIn** and **networking** with salespeople and asking them for referrals.

## Q: What interviewing tips do you have?

A: Because finding the right reps is so important and because, like I said, there is a huge cost of a bad hire, we take interviews really seriously. These are my 3 favorite interview tips:

1. Have the candidate perform in several **role plays** throughout the interview process. Make sure these role plays are as specific to your company and context as possible, and have the candidate prepare for these exercises in advance.
2. Because we've found that coachability is so important, I think it's essential to **coach the candidate** throughout the interview process to gauge their ability to respond to coaching. So, for example, conduct a role play, give the candidate feedback and then do another and see how they incorporate the comments you gave them. How the candidate responds and adapts to coaching during an interview is a huge predictor of their potential, in my opinion.
3. For sales roles that involve calling prospects, conduct at least one of the **role plays on the phone**.

## Q: How do you onboard your new salespeople?

A: Well it goes back to that first month training program that I talked about a little earlier. **For their first month on the job, our reps don't sell anything** – they learn about the pain of our potential customers by starting a website and driving traffic to it. It's a little unorthodox, but we really believe it's incredibly important to teach our new reps, on a fundamental level, how to do their target persona's job, and train them as consultants and experts who can solve our customers' pains.

This connects with one of my primary philosophies, which is to hire and train reps not to "Always Be Closing" but to "Always Be Helping."

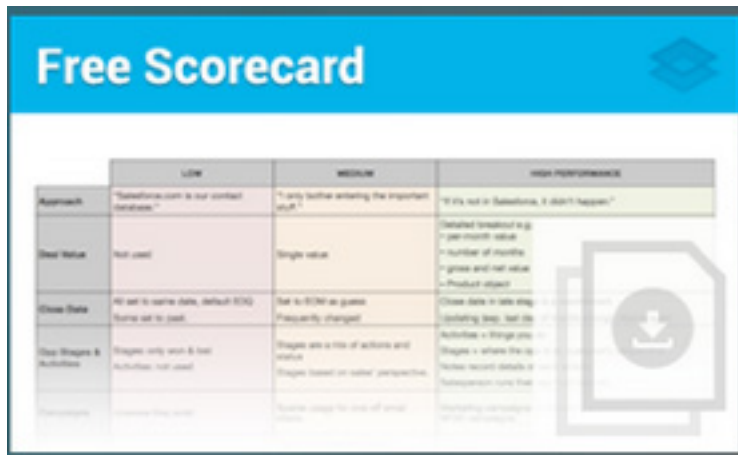
# Conclusion

Once you've designed and built your team, the hard work begins: coaching and managing it to success. This part of the process trips up many sales managers, but it doesn't have to. Over his years at HubSpot, Mark has honed his coaching skills and developed a strong strategy for managing his team to success. In the third installment in our six-part series -- "On Sales Management, Coaching and Training" -- Mark shares these secrets with you by answering the following questions:

1. How important is coaching to a Sales team's success?
2. How do you diagnose the right skill to work on?
3. What are some skills you have your reps work on?
4. Why is it important to focus on one skill at a time?
5. What do you do once you've identified the one skill?
6. How do you provide consistent training to your reps?
7. How do you evaluate a sales rep?
8. What are some of your favorite rep development tactics?
9. What is your promotion philosophy?
10. What is your firing philosophy?
11. Do you pay recurring commission?
12. How do you think about On-Target Earnings?
13. How do you use contests to motivate your reps?

# #1 for Salesforce Analytics

## NEW Scorecard



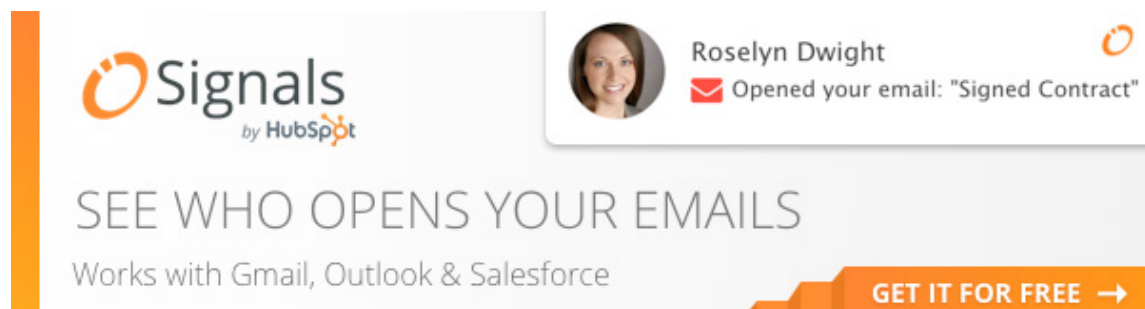
	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH PERFORMANCE
Approach	"Salesforce.com is our contact database."	"I only bother entering the important stuff."	"It's not in Salesforce, it didn't happen."
Deal Value	Not used	Single value	Detailed breakdown by: - per month value - number of months - gross and net value - Product type
Close Date	Not set to same date, default 01/31 Not set to deal	Set to 01/31 as guess Frequently changed	Close date in sales stage
Deal Stages & Activities	Stages only used & not Activities, not used	Stages are a list of actions and not used Stages based on sales' perspective	Activity is stage step Stages = where the deal is. Recent deals of Salesperson show that Salesperson is doing what they should be doing

Want to learn to build a high-performance Sales team like Mark Roberge? Check out our 2014 Checklist for great Sales Managers.

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Opened your email: "Signed Contract"

SEE WHO OPENS YOUR EMAILS  
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