



INSIGHTSQUARED



HubSpot's Mark Roberge on

Hiring Rockstar Sales Reps

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Meet the Author



Mark Roberge

Mark is Chief Revenue Officer of the HubSpot Inbound Sales Division. Prior to this role, Mark served as HubSpot's SVP of Worldwide Sales and Services from 2007 to 2013, during which time he increased revenue over 6,000% and expanded the team from 1 to 450 employees. 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.

Mark holds an MBA from the MIT Sloan School of Management where he was a semi-finalist in the 2005 MIT \$50K Business Plan competition and was awarded the Patrick McGovern award for his contributions to entrepreneurship at MIT. He holds a bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering from Lehigh University. Mark has been featured in the Wall Street Journal, Forbes Magazine, Inc Magazine, BostonGlobe, TechCrunch, Harvard Business Review, and other major publications for his entrepreneurial ventures.

"To succeed as a sales manager, you must think big, make bold decisions, and constantly challenge the norm."

Introduction

You can't hit your sales goals without the right team in place. No matter how well you manage, how impressive your product is, or how great your company culture is, you won't be able to execute without capable sales reps and managers.

No one knows this more than Mark Roberge, who helped grow HubSpot's renowned sales team from one member to more than 200. Over that time, he developed a famous system for finding good candidates, assessing them well in interviews, and onboarding them as efficiently and fully as possible.

Mark sat down with us to share this much-imitated system so that anyone can build a world-class sales team. In this eBook, Mark discusses:

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

Building a Team of Rockstar Reps

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.

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.

How do you approach sales management?

A: I turn to science and data whenever possible and make sure all my decisions are supported by data. This data-centric approach has also helped me be a more entrepreneurial leader – **think big, make bold decisions, and constantly challenge the norm.**

What's your mission as a Sales Executive?

A: To achieve predictable, scalable revenue growth, which I accomplish by using five tactics:

- 1) **Hiring** the same type of successful sales person.
 - a. I use 14 criteria to rate each applicant during an interview.
 - b. And then, down the road, I perform a regression analysis to see how they performed after they were hired so I can fine tune the characteristics I'm looking for.
- 2) **Training** each sales rep in the same way.
 - a. All of my new reps go through training during the first month on the job, which consists of designing a website and getting 100 Twitter followers. At the end of that month, each new hire takes 3 examinations and gets an assessment grade from a trainer, which correlates extremely highly to the ultimate success of that rep.
- 3) Providing each salesperson with the **same quantity and quality of leads.**
- 4) Having the salespeople work the leads using the **same process.**
- 5) **Developing leaders** to execute and perfect the process.

How do you get the most from your reps?

A: If you want to get the best performance from your sales reps, you need to understand **the four types of goals** that drive them:

1. Performance
2. Professional
3. Financial
4. Personal

Knowing how these goals motivate your reps will help you coach them and better identify the right incentives to compel them to work more effectively and efficiently.

What are some of the biggest mistakes you made setting up your sales team?

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.

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.

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.

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**.

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

Where do great sales reps come from? What makes them succeed? How can you know ahead of time if they're going to work out. Mark Roberge needed to answer all of these questions in order to build the sales machine HubSpot needed to achieve rapid growth.

That's why he designed the process laid out in this interview — and now you can use it to build your own sales force. Any sales leader will tell you that finding and hiring the right candidates is one of the hardest and most important parts of their jobs, so hopefully his one-of-a-kind blueprint will help you remove a bit of the uncertainty.

If you're hungry for more tips for hiring great sales reps and building a high-performance inside sales team, check out some of our other resources:

1. [What Makes a Great Sales Rep?](#)
2. [The Definitive Guide to Building an Inside Sales Team](#)
3. [The Best Questions for Sales Interviews](#)

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About InsightSquared

InsightSquared is the #1 Salesforce Analytics product for small and midsize businesses (SMB). Unlike legacy business intelligence platforms, InsightSquared can be deployed affordably in less than a day without any integration costs and comes preloaded with reports that real business people can use. Hundreds of companies and thousands of users around the world use InsightSquared's award-winning analytics to maximize sales performance, increase team productivity and close more deals. Based in Cambridge, Mass., InsightSquared was recently named one of the "Best Places to Work in Massachusetts" by the Boston Business Journal.

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