



FUSE

Executive Hiring Excellence

Introduction

Building a high performing leadership team is critical to success. It is imperative to do the proper upfront work when exploring and screening candidates. This package will provide step-by-step guidance on how to ensure you are properly looking for and finding the best possible candidates for your company.



VP of Sales



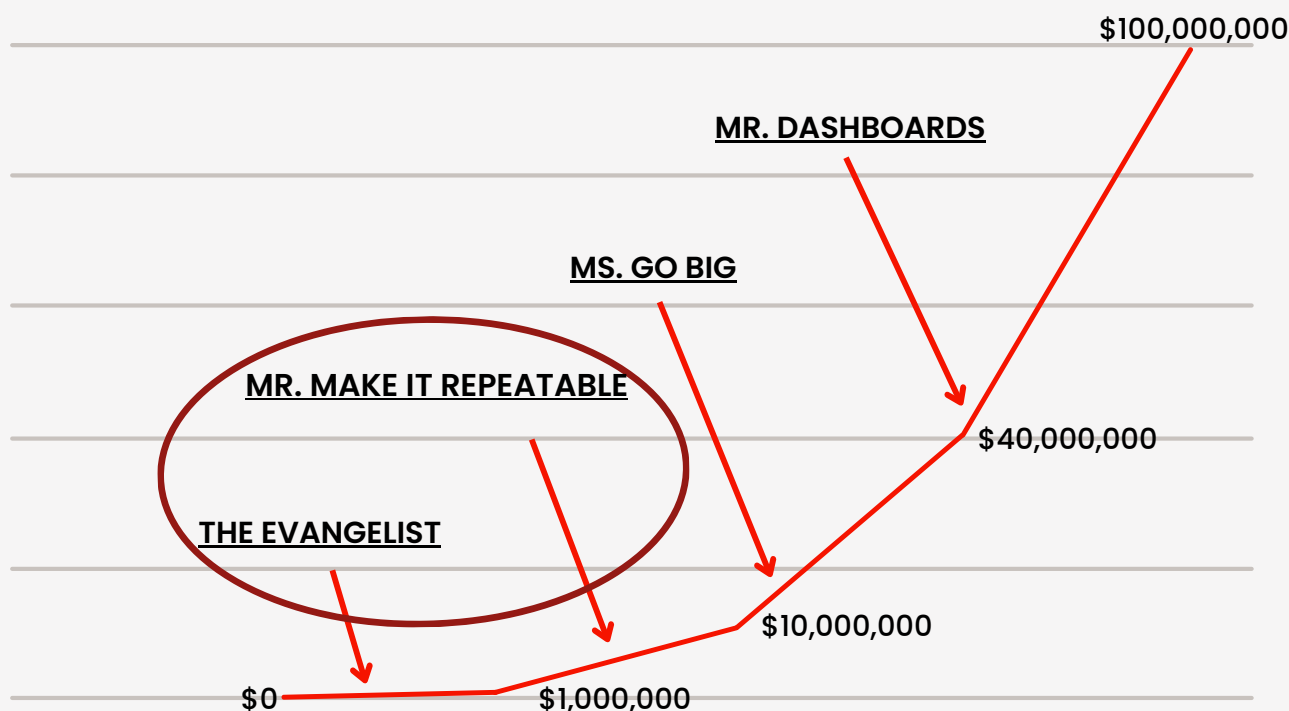
STEP 1:

Understand the role you are hiring for + build a framework

Before you set out to hire your VP of Sales¹, it is important to:

1. Identify the company's current needs / stage of growth
2. Understand what traits matter for a Sales leader at the company's current stage
3. Attract and go after an individual that is stage appropriate

**** Note: The following proposed framework is for an early-stage VP of Sales. You may need to adjust your framework based on your company's maturity. ****



¹ **VP of Sales vs CRO:** A VP of Sales works directly with contributors, a CRO manages Sales managers + may own other business units such as customer success.

² Picture source: [Saastr](#)

Framework for stage.

Directions: See the stage framework below. The goal of this framework is to help you:

1. Define your sales leader needs based on your company's particular stage of growth
2. Understand how sales leaders should evolve over time

<p><u>0-1M</u></p>	<p>0-500k – Usually too early for a VP of Sales</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Founder / CEO is likely the head of sales. The Founder needs to experience selling directly to the customer base and establish a true understanding of the market need. • The business is pre-product-market-fit (PMF). • The CEO will be directly recruiting the first few AEs to see if they can get the story right (aka sell the way the CEO does). <p>500k-1M – A VP of Sales could potentially come in here</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is some PMF or the company needs a sales leader to spearhead the PMF work. • Customers are now willing to pay for some of the value they are attaining through your product (and your team will be iterating the product based on that). • It is a good idea to bring in a VP of Sales in this stage if the Founder/ CEO struggles with selling*. This would be a strategic hire to help find PMF / define the selling motion + story. • *Note: this type of VP of Sales will require a different comp plan, as they are essentially stepping in as a Co-Founder. You will need to properly incentivize. Also, this person will likely still need to own a quota or some part of an ARR target.
<p><u>1-10M</u></p>	<p>In most cases, this is the first place where a VP of Sales will come in</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is established PMF (or moving in that direction), and the company is seeing inbound leads. • The CEO may still be needed in a ceremonial role for some deals. • The company's brand isn't well known yet. • There is need for repeatability and expansion in a few deals. • The sales team is around 15-30 FTEs depending on deal sizes + duration of contracts.
<p><u>10-40M</u> (FOR FUTURE)</p>	<p>During this stage, you may begin to consider hiring a CRO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is strong PMF and increased inbound momentum. • The sales team will comprise 30-40 people. • There are sales systems in place, or being built. • There will be a handful of referenceable accounts.
<p><u>40-100M</u> (FOR FUTURE)</p>	<p>A CRO will be leading in this stage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Sales team will comprise 40-100 people. • The product / sales motion has expanded into multiple geographies. • Your sales team will comprise VPs at the regional level.

STEP 2 :

The mandatory deliverables of a sales leader

Overview: The following provides an overview of the three most important deliverables of a sales leader: the ability to (1) close sales, (2) build teams, and (3) build + deliver against forecasts. Understanding these deliverables will help you prioritize and have full awareness about the person you end up hiring – you need to be comfortable with the strengths and weaknesses of the candidate.

(1) Close Sales

The first key component to a successful sales leader is deal experience. The candidate needs to:

- Have found and closed lighthouse accounts
- Have a previous, verifiable track record (**Note to CEO:** you need to dig in here, i.e. reference checks)
- **Note to CEO:** The candidate will likely have a good story here on their previous deal experience. It is your job to dig deeper and verify.
- Suggested interview topics/tips to help you cut through the “fluff”:
 - Ask them to provide examples grounded in specific past company experiences / roles. Do not ask broad, abstract questions.
 - Ask them about the hardest sale they have done (then ask deeper questions, and see how much they can attest to. Are they on the details?).
 - Ask them about failures with product, sales, or systems from past roles.
 - **Note to CEO:** If this person was truly involved in what they are claiming, all comments will hold true throughout. Pay close attention to this!

(2) Team Building

The candidate must know how to build a high performing sales organization.

- This includes skills in hiring, developing, and firing. (Ask the candidate to give specific examples of where they’ve done each of these things.)
 - **Note to CEO:** understand the candidate’s stage of life/ career here. If you are screening/hiring a younger person, it is probable that they have done less (i.e. perhaps less experienced with firing). Or if the candidate is older, perhaps they have not been hiring much as of late. Be sure to dig deep to uncover these pieces!

- Sample interview questions:
 - “If you join this team, who are 3-5 people who will follow you?”
 - “Of the people you hired in your previous company, how many have become leaders in their current companies?” (**Note to CEO:** Be sure to follow up on this to make sure their answers are consistent!)
 - “How did you set the goals for your team? What % of people were hitting the goals? If they were not hitting the goals, were they on a PIP? What was the outcome?”
 - “How did you learn to manage to high performers and deal with poor performers?”

(3) Forecasting

The candidate must have the ability to build forecasts and have a history of success executing against those forecasts. (**Note to CEO:** depending on your own skills, this might end up being a collaboration between the CEO + VP of Sales).

Questions to uncover previous experience / aptitude:

- “Where did you learn a solid forecasting process? Explain this experience (did you learn at your first job, second job, or still haven’t?).”
- “While you were in your last company, how well did you perform against your goals?”
 - “Did you set the goals? How did you set the overall team goal?”
 - “Did you get it right the very first year?”
 - (**Note to CEO:** if the candidate says they have been hitting their goals every time, this is a **RED FLAG**. It is important that they are upfront about failures and show ability to learn + right size.)
- What was the growth rate you were able to help drive for your last company?
- What experiences have you had with a disastrous forecast result? What did you change after that? (Let them describe assumptions they made they should have a good answer and not be shy about describing. You want to see if they are a “Problem solver.”)
- **Note to CEO:** Make sure in all of these answers that they can provide quantitative details around the drivers, i.e. avg ACV, sales cycles, capacity, etc.

***Disclaimer*:** while all of these components are critical, it is possible that you will be comfortable hiring a candidate who has strengths in only two of these three categories (i.e. forecasting becomes a joint responsibility between CEO and VP of sales). Ideally, a candidate would have all three, but if they are the best candidate and are complimentary to your skill set, perhaps it will work for the particular stage your company is in. Just make sure you are not going in blind!

STEP 3:

Thorough Diligence is a MUST

Now that you understand your company's needs + the key deliverables for the sales leader you're targeting, it is important to do the proper upfront work ahead of the interview.

(1) Tips on reading a resume – things to pay attention to:

- **Find a demonstrable track record of success** – Make sure there is evidence of the candidate moving up in their career (i.e. vis-à-vis the companies they joined and roles attained). You want to know the candidate is constantly trying to improve.
- **Frequency of job change** – If there is apparent “job hopping”, dig into the reasons why. You want someone who is a builder. If the candidate was only at a company for one year, they likely did not have time to build anything while there – it takes at least 3 years to build something substantial in a sales program. If the candidate was in their last three roles for less than 1 year each, it is an automatic pass.
- **Are they an “A-Player”?** – Did they work at winning companies? Generally, “A-Teams” hire “A-players” and will drive significant output from them. Be sure to investigate the candidate's prior companies and see if they have reputations for strong accountability models. If not, it is important that the candidate is aware of that and articulates it to you.
- **Do they have numbers to describe results they achieved** – Sales is a quantitative measure of success. A candidate's resume must be OUTPUT-based, not activity-based and full of qualitative descriptions.

(2) Cautions right off the bat:

- **Referrals** – Do not advance internal, or in-network recommendations too quickly – dig in deeper. Do not immediately assume that the candidate will be a fit just because they come in referred from people you trust.
- **Do not assume executive recruiters are the reference check** – DO IT YOURSELF.

(3) How to complete good reference checks:

- **Allocate substantial, quality time** – reference checks are beyond a “check the box” activity. Who you choose for your company’s Sales leader(s) is the most important decision you will make besides your product team, so it is important that you spend ample time preparing for and conducting reference checks.
- **Ask for a well-rounded, “360-view” list of references** – Ask the candidate to provide references from three different levels – someone who worked above them (manager), a peer, and a direct report.
- **Understand what you are asking for / looking for** – Most people will not agree to do a reference call if they do not have good things to say. As such, make the conversation about FIT, not about generically judging whether this person is “good” or “bad”.
- **Spend time preparing the list of questions** – this is crucial for ensuring you get the most out of the diligence call. Be sure to ask questions that aim to figure out what the person can DO, not what they are like (at least at first). As noted above, culture fit is important and something to address, but you must first understand what the person is capable of, as this will be the initial go/ no go point.
- **Do more LISTENING than talking on these calls** – the more talking the reference does, the more you will learn + the more data you will collect. A good rule of thumb is: 90% listening, 10% talking.
 - **When you talk:** Any speaking you do should be to describe the role and traits you are looking for upfront. OR what you want to validate and / or risk areas you would like to get insight on. Once you have stated those items upfront, direct the conversation from there.
 - [**Note to CEO:** If someone is vague in explaining why said person is no longer at their company, they are probably not disclosing something to you = **RED FLAG.**]
- **DO NOT be swayed by a single reference.** Use it as a data point, not the absolute truth.

MORE RESOURCES :

Use additional interview questions to determine cultural fit.

Look for the following additional traits to determine further compatibility with your company's culture. See overview of traits + guiding interview questions below.

1. Has previously dealt with a track record of growth in a chaotic environment.

Interview questions/topics to use:

- "How do you approach competing against other name-brand players in the market?"
- "How did you manage to recruit, develop, and build a cohesive team while doubling or tripling sales?"

2. Perseverance – the ability to deal with ambiguity and change. Fearless of rejection.

Interview questions/topics to use:

- "Tell me about previous deals you lost to a competitor, and what you would have done differently to try to change the outcome?"
- "What is one of the hardest deals that you / your teams have closed? Give an example of a very important strategic customer that required multiple quarters of effort to land. How did you keep your team focused throughout?"
- "When you are dealing with a large, strategic potential customer how do you think about offering a fair pricing structure, while also holding your ground on your product's value (i.e. not offering excessive discounts)?"
- "When was a time you had to completely restructure a company's sales strategy?"
- "Tell me about a time where you had to influence or change a team's culture."

3. Excellent communicator.

Interview questions/topics to use:

- Ask them to describe the customer issue that your company is trying to solve. Can they articulate it well? Or is their attempt at least demonstrating they can storytell?
- Can they crisply articulate their intuition, advice, and thoughts around how to take your business to the next revenue milestone in the next 1-2 years?

