

# Guide To Hiring Sales Superstars!



*“It’s not your people...  
It’s your process.”*

— Gilbert E. Cargill



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# Gil Cargill's Guide To Hiring Sales Superstars!

STUDIES HAVE SHOWN THAT MAKING A HIRING MISTAKE may cost your company as much as \$550,000 per sales person who is a “mis-hire.” It’s very hard to tell the difference between real sales people and the charlatans, who make a living moving from company to company.

These individuals typically trade on their resume. In other words, they earn a living telling perspective employers what a great job they’ll do but then, after they are hired, they fail to do the job anywhere near as well as they promised.

The purpose of this document is to provide you with a very detailed checklist of all the steps that you should undertake before you make the decision to hire an individual. While it may seem cumbersome and time-consuming — remember, you are about to make a half million dollar investment. Don’t make it a gamble.

Wouldn’t you invest a great deal of time, energy and effort to complete your due diligence prior to making a half million dollar investment on anything? Then, why would you make that kind of a mistake on a decision like this?

We, here at **CARGILL CONSULTING GROUP** are specialists in helping companies like yours identify, hire and most importantly, *transition* high performance sales people into your organization.

We know how to tell the charlatans from the performers.

The following checklist will help you do the same.

# 1. Hiring “Friends”

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The manager that hires someone whom he likes is making the mistake of hiring a “friend.” Subconsciously, this manager looks to the new employee as someone that he or she will enjoy being around. Another new friend. Don’t hire based on whether or not you like someone. Hire based on whether or not they can prove that they can do the job the way you want them to do it, so ultimately, they will do the job the way you want them to do it.

As you’ll see throughout the balance of this checklist, those are the only two real questions that you need to keep in mind as you screen candidates for sales and or sales management position. **Can they do the job? And, will they do the job?**

# 2. Failure To Test

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Research shows that many managers make the decision to hire based on their “gut feelings.” These managers rarely, if ever, administer any of the proven, well-known pre-employment tests. These pre-employment evaluations are designed to help you identify behavioral traits that compliment and/or conflict with the requirements of the job. There are even tests available that illustrate what the candidates know about consultative selling. By combining these two tests, you can dramatically reduce “surprises,” that someone that you hired who may have looked great during the interviewing process actually had an “evil twin” who showed up on the first day of work. If you fail to test your candidates you are failing to do the due diligence that should be associated with any half million dollar investment.

## 3. Waiting Until It's Too Late

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A manager who doesn't anticipate attrition is a manager who will inevitably be caught "flat-footed" when you have an empty territory or an empty cubicle. The temptation is to hire a warm body instead of someone who can do the job. We tend to lower our guards (and sometimes even lower our standards), and hire people who are nice in *hopes* that they will do the job in the form, fashion and quantity that is required. Prudent managers anticipate attrition and maintain a level of bench strength at all times. To summarize: a wise manager is always nurturing relationships with perspective sales employees...just in case.

## 4. Rushing

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We rush the decision especially when we have empty territories and/or cubicles. Rushing is another foreshadowing of the half million dollar mistake. Take your time. Remember the old saying, "slow is smooth and smooth is fast." In other words: going slow allows you to make smooth, deliberate, methodical decisions. It allows you to check all of the key points that this report presents. It allows you to verify that the man or woman that you are bringing on board can do the job the way you want them to do the job, and will do the job the way you want them to do the job. Don't rush. This is a half million dollar decision that you are making. I'd rather you have a vacant territory for two or three months than rush and get someone who will not do the job the way you want and need them to.

## 5. Failure To Verify Income

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You should have all sales candidates bring their previous three years W2's in for examination. If they've earned \$30,000 per year for the past three years and your base salary is \$40,000 they would have given themselves a 33% pay increase by getting hired by your firm. Not bad work if you can get it! You'll also find by examining the income of the sales representative whether or not their compensation claims are in line with the amount of money that your organization pays — combining base pay guarantees and or commissions and draws. As a rule, you want to hire someone who needs to make more money and hopefully significantly more money than your base compensation.

## 6. Failure To Do A Background Check

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This is an inexcusable oversight and it leads to all sorts of significant complications. I recently ran into a CEO on an airline flight who confessed the fact that he had hired a sales professional without checking his background. This individual had a series of DUI's on his driving record and actually had his driving privileges revoked by the state authorities where he resided. Due to the fact that no background check was conducted, this individual was hired and he was given a company vehicle. I think you can fill in the blanks from here. The resulting accident cost the employer hundreds of thousands of dollars in unexpected liability payments, due to the fact that the employer failed to do a background check. Furthermore, I will never support my client's decision to hire someone who is severely delinquent in child support payments. Nor should you hire someone who has a significant level of credit problems. These credit problems will come to haunt you and your companies, as these individuals can bring a "soap opera" into your building. By "soap opera," I simply mean that every day will present a new and different drama and each of these dramas will have some impact on you or the new employee's co-workers. Or worse, on your customers.

## 7. Failure To Check Their Credit

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I can practically say “ditto” in this paragraph to everything I’ve said in number 6 on the previous page. Checking their credit will give you insight into their income requirements and how they manage money and how reliable they are. Credit checks can indicate whether or not the new employee can do the job the way you want him or her to do the job and will do the job the way you want him or her to do the job.

## 8. No Drug Test

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In today’s world, its fool hardy to hire someone without having them comply with a drug test that is approved by your local authorities. Another version of the “soap opera” occurs when an employee is hired with a serious drug problem. Again, there will be a drama everyday and each of these dramas will have a severe and negative impact on the co-workers. More often than not — especially as this new employee interfaces with customers — he or she will have an extremely negative impact on your customers and could, in effect, become a one person “sales prevention” department.

## 9. Failure To Simulate Selling

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All unemployed sales people, especially the ones that have developed the career path of going from employer to employer to employer, have a great deal of experience in interviewing. Ironically, the more often they've been fired the more often they've interviewed and gotten rehired. In my experience, these individuals are more skilled at interviewing than most of the managers and CEO's who are hiring these people. Beware! You probably are at a disadvantage when interviewing one of these people. This is why it's vital for you to require the candidate to perform sales simulation (AKA "role playing.") Observe their behavior. Observe their willingness to participate in these exercises. If their behavior and/or presentations aren't what your looking for, then you should immediately run the red flag up the flag pole and take a second and or third look at the individual. People who perform badly in these simulations will perform badly once they're on your payroll. So, why spend the money to bring them on board?

## 10. Believing The Resume

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*Dunhill Research* published a study several years ago that showed that somewhere north of 90% of all resumes circulating at that point in time contained exaggerations and/or out-right lies. Consequently, I encourage you to approach each resume as a work of creative writing. Observe the behavior and the performance against the reality of the applicant to see whether or not the resume reinforces or conflicts with it. You'll also find, if you want to take just a moment for entertainment purposes, by Googling the phrase "resume writers" you'll find hundreds of thousands if not *millions* of individuals who will write a creative resume for someone — literally claiming that they are anything they want them to be. For only \$60 one can become a nuclear physicist at least "on paper."

## 11. Failure To Check References

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This is another painful way to make the wrong hire. Never hire anyone without checking their first and second level references. Second level references are the people who, in all probability, were not prompted by the candidate to take a phone call from you. The second level references are the ones that provide, in my experience, the most accurate and thorough appraisal of the behavior, performance, professionalism, ethics and reliability of a candidate. Never hire someone without a thorough first and second level reference check.

## 12. “Visiting” Not Interviewing

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I’ve observed hundreds of interviews during the past 35 years that were conducted by sales managers, CEO’s and business owners. The consistent mistake that I’ve observed is that these individuals *visit* with the applicant — they don’t *interview* the applicant. They never put the applicant on the spot. They never force the applicant to answer any awkward or challenging questions. Even worse, many of the executives that I’ve observed have incorrectly turned the tables and have started selling the applicant on the company. They’ll say things like “this is a wonderful place to work” or “our product is the absolute best.” Or “you’ll really do well here.” If you are one of those managers who sells applicants on your company, you really have no idea whether they *can* do the job nor will you know whether they *will* do the job.



## 13. Failure To Create A Training Plan

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Hiring a new sales employee without a plan to train him or her is a guaranteed way to make the half million dollar mistake. All too often I've observed new employees start into companies with nothing more than a "welcome aboard," directions on how to make their own coffee and a cheerleader chant such as "go get 'em!" The training plan should be thorough and should be inspected by management regularly.

## 14. Failure To Create a Transition Plan

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The transition plan dove-tails with the training plan. But, the transition plan calls for specific inspection points during the first 12 to 16 weeks. I typically recommend a weekly inspection of the candidates' growth and proficiency. As the hiring manager, you must know that the training plan you laid out is being adhered to, and more importantly, the applicant is "getting it." The transition plan holds the new hire and his or her manager accountable for the successful and profitable transition into your organization. The transition plan should be presented to candidates prior to extending the offer of employment to them. Believe it or not, I've actually had candidates look at transition plans and declare that they are "a lot of work." Wouldn't you like to know that a minimum acceptable level of work (from your point of view) is "a lot of work" from the candidates' point of view. That delta between your minimum and their comfort level speaks volumes to how badly they'll do during their first few months of employment with your organization. They'll get off to a bad start and things will only get worse.

## 15. Alignment

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The “secret sauce” to hiring good sales people is to make sure that everything about their behavior, performance compensation requirements, selling style, sales skills, dress, grooming, appearance, communication, reliability, performance, and professionalism aligns perfectly with your organization. Admittedly, it’s virtually impossible to achieve perfection. But it is possible to come close. Failure to achieve alignment means that the new employee will probably cause friction within your organization. While he or she won’t be doing this deliberately, the damage is just as severe. Seek alignment in all vital areas and you will inevitably wind up with someone who will become a superstar within your organization.

## 16. Assuming Money Motivates Human Beings

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Nothing could be further from the truth. All research shows that money is not a motivator. Rather, for real sales superstars money is the “scorecard” that they use to evaluate themselves against their standards. You will make a serious mistake if you feel that a strong and financially rewarding plan can and will motivate someone to do something they can’t do or won’t do. For instance, how many five-foot eight-inch tall men play in the NBA? The answer is none. The reason being, that regardless of the amount of money they could make, they don’t have the DNA, skills, performance, background or training to perform at the level that the NBA requires. The same is true in your sales force. Holding a huge carrot out there that can’t be achieved due to a lack of appropriate DNA, alignment, skills, desire, attitude, (hunter vs. gatherer) will do nothing but kill motivation for the person you are ironically, trying to motivate.

## **17. Assuming Sales Success Equates To Management Ability**

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This is a big mistake that is made especially when you are hiring from the outside to fill a management position. At some point in the growth of all entrepreneurial organizations, management must be brought in. Don't hire a manager just because he or she is a good sales person. There is no data in existence that accurately correlates sales ability to the requirements and skill sets of being a good manager. In most cases, the lone wolf attitude of the successful sales person does not translate into the requirements of a proficient sales manager/coach.

## **18. Poor Recruitment Ad**

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Your recruitment ad is the starting point of the whole process. Does your ad have enough energy in it? Is it written to attract people that you want to come to work for your organization? Or, is it bland? Excited people want to work for exciting companies. Your ad should be exciting if you're trying to attract excited people. Make sure that your ad aligns with all of the other factors in your organization.

## 19. Ignoring The Natural Selling Style

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Your most steady, reliable customer base within your organization has a buying process or pattern that must align with the sales style of your sales people. For instance, if the preponderance of your buyers buy in a consultative fashion then the man or woman you hire should be a consultative sales person. Research has shown that there are five distinctly different selling styles. Failure to pay attention to the buying style of your typical customer when hiring a sales person can lead to misalignment which will drop the probability of success from 70-80% down to as low as 17%. During the course of your interviewing, make sure you determine with certainty the selling style of the candidate that you are considering bringing on board.

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## 20. In Closing

Hiring a sales person or a sales manager is a very risky job if done incorrectly. If done correctly, it is the launching pad for future growth and success within your organization. Don't hire because someone says they're a great sales person. Make sure you force them to prove their claims.

If you'd like some assistance in hiring a sales professional, please call on us to discuss our **Interviewing and Screening Service** which incorporates my sales simulation process, screening and testing services.

GOOD LUCK AND GOOD SELLING,

**Gil Cargill**

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