

A man with a beard and short brown hair, wearing a dark suit jacket over a white button-down shirt, is sitting at a desk. He is looking at a laptop screen and has a wide, joyful smile. His right hand is raised in a fist, suggesting a celebratory gesture. The background is a simple, light-colored wall.

# **The Ultimate Guide to Hiring Quota-Smashing Sales Reps**



THE BROOKS GROUP

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# Introduction

Your organization may have the best onboarding, training, compensation and benefits, but without the right talent, your growth goals are going to be difficult—if not impossible—to hit. Over the past five years, we've helped



**Practices directly related to identifying, retaining, and maximizing the right sales professionals.**

**12 PRACTICES TIED TO "WORLD-CLASS" SALES SUCCESS**

our clients evaluate more than 20,000 people using the

Brooks Talent Index. Based on that work, we've definitely learned a thing or two about what sales organizations need—and want—as it relates to hiring, retaining and growing top sales talent.

Our research clearly shows that those people responsible for hiring and onboarding salespeople are still struggling to pin down the magic formula for maximizing new hire success. While we've seen that the marketplace as a whole has come a long way in improving how it hires sales talent, there still seems to be large gaps.

Of the top 12 practices tied to "world-class" sales success identified by CSO Insights, a quarter



are directly related to identifying, retaining, and maximizing the right sales professionals. But guess what? Only 6.9% of sales leaders said they would classify their sales organizations as "world-class" (following at least 10 of the top 12 identified practices).

Turnover in the sales department is typically much higher relative to overall employee turnover, hovering around 15%. And, with about 10,000 Baby Boomers retiring per day,

a significant portion of the sales workforce will be retiring within the next five years. On top of that is the challenge that sales roles are consistently among the top-five hardest positions to fill.<sup>1</sup>

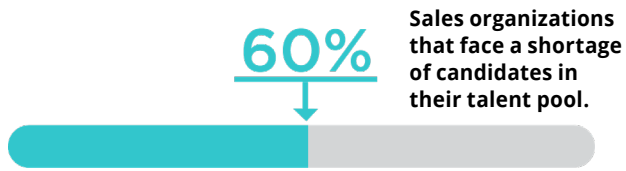


**Percentage of sales leaders who classify their sales organizations as "world-class."**



We've found that 60% of sales organizations face a shortage of candidates in their talent pool, causing delays in filling open positions.

As a sales leader, you likely are pressured to capture the institutional knowledge of your most successful older reps, retain the best mid-career reps you have, and hire and onboard well-qualified Millennials behind them. Hiring is the critical issue facing sales-driven organizations today. While there's no "magic bullet" to guarantee that every single sales candidate you hire will be a top performer, there are most certainly secrets to improving your success rate.



Every year, The Brooks Group helps our clients screen nearly 5,000 sales candidates using our assessment. In this *Ultimate Guide to Hiring Quota-Smashing Sales Reps*, we're going to share with you some of the most important insights we've gotten... and show you how to apply these lessons to dramatically increase the likelihood that you'll hire, onboard, and retain highly successful sales talent.

### **HIRING MYTH:**

#### **You Should Establish Your Top Performer Benchmark Based on Your Top Performer**

The view that "cloning" top performers is the key to superior organizational performance is flawed.

What if an organization's top performers are mediocre or worse when compared to others at a competitive organization? How will the organization ever hire more effectively with that as a benchmark? Clearly, it can't.



# The Cost of Sales Turnover

One of the core challenges in hiring people, no matter the job, is determining how to select the best candidate(s) from a pool of seemingly qualified people. Overcoming this challenge can be quite overwhelming, and the stakes are high. While turnover in any position is painful, sales mis-hires can be particularly costly to the organization.

**Consider the intangible costs when you hire the wrong sales candidate:**

- Lost opportunity costs
- Lost time and energy in hiring, training and managing
- Customer and prospect alienation
- Internal morale problems
- Hiring and re-hiring costs
- Loss of goodwill in the marketplace
- Management headaches
- Loss of resources (travel expenses, equipment, etc.)



**THE AVERAGE COST  
OF TURNING OVER  
A SALESPERSON**

And this list could go on and on...

*To take this a step further, let's take a look at the dollars and cents impact of sales turnover. According to DePaul University's 2015 - 2016 Sales Effectiveness Survey, the average cost of turning over a salesperson is \$97,690. Couple that with the intangible costs listed above, and it becomes imperative to get the sales hiring process as effective and efficient as possible (and that includes onboarding, too).*



# The Sales Hiring Problem

It's a statement of the obvious: The purpose of your hiring process is to minimize your chances of hiring the wrong sales candidate and maximize your chances of hiring someone who will be successful. *Unfortunately though, less than 40% of sales organizations we surveyed say they consistently hire top sales talent. And more than 50% say their sales candidate screening process does an ineffective job of consistently eliminating underperformers before they are hired.*

The challenge is that sales professionals are among the toughest employees to hire well because of the

is typically one of their top qualifications. Because of that, they're uniquely able to convince the hiring manager or committee that they're the right person for the job.

Further, many organizations simply haven't identified specifically what their sales role, sales environment, and sales culture require for superior performance, so they're making a semi-educated guess about what success looks like when hiring a new rep. You might as well put names up on dartboard and see whose name you hit!

**The purpose of your hiring process is to minimize your chances of hiring the wrong sales candidate and maximize your chances of hiring someone who will be successful.**



# Person vs. Personality

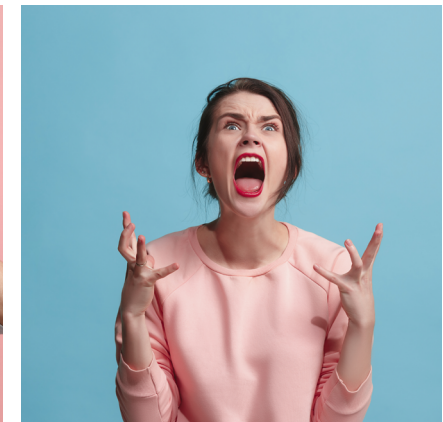
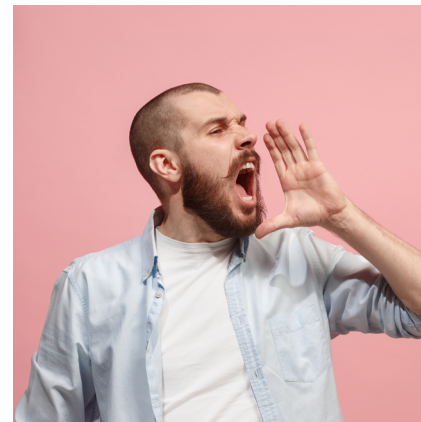
Success at value-based, customer-focused selling in today's intensely competitive marketplace requires deep personal qualities, not just an outwardly friendly and engaging sales personality. Yet, personality—what is visible on the surface—is often mistakenly used as the key determining factor in hiring new salespeople. The common belief is that if a person has a certain personality profile, they will be able to sell.

**We have seen successful salespeople with practically every personality type under the sun.**

Here's why: Personality, by itself, has little to do with selling. Mastering the mechanics of value-based selling is easily within most people's capacity. What matters is this core principle...

**While nearly everyone can sell, not everyone will.**

Many people simply have no fundamental interest in sales. Some may not be motivated or disciplined enough to put forth the effort required to close sales, while others may lack the clarity of focus on key values necessary for sales success. Some simply do not value selling as a profession.



# Soft Skills CAN Be Evaluated

In today's marketplace, we've found that it's absolutely essential that interviewers possess the questioning skills and other tools to go beyond a candidate's outward personality to understand their motivations and capacities. People are complex, and while having the right personality is an essential aspect in success at sales, getting to the deeper motivators and soft skills in your sales interview process is crucial to minimizing sales turnover.

It is imperative that you are able to probe into a candidate's soft skills to determine how well they will match the sales role at your organization and what kind of a cultural fit they will have. These include such factors as:

- Self-starting ability
- Economic drive
- Intensity
- Empathy
- Decision-making ability
- Willingness to impact the behavior of others
- Practical thinking ability
- Conceptual thinking ability
- Results orientation
- Willingness to prospect

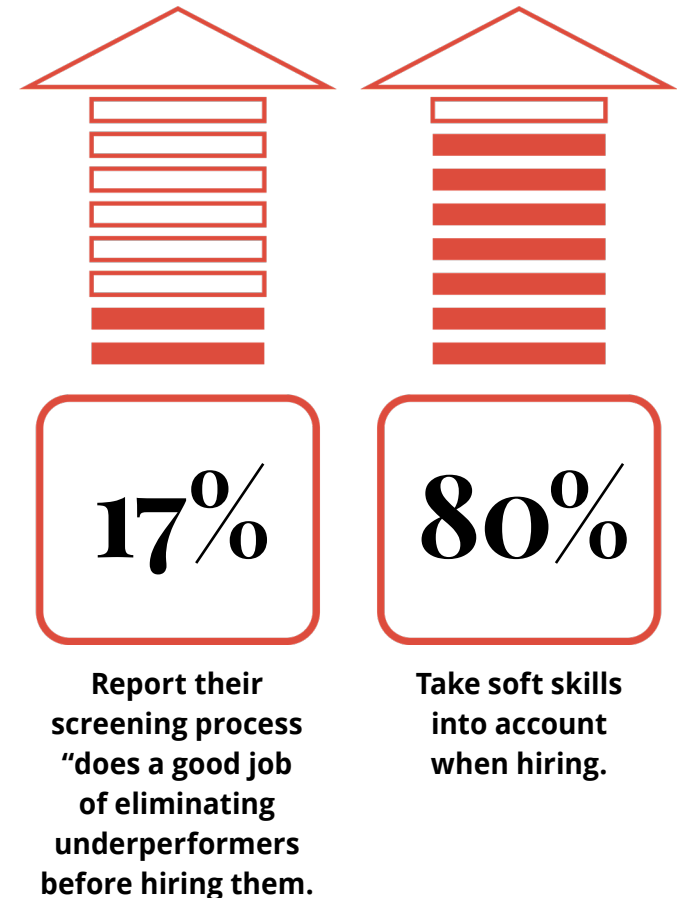
...and many other areas! Most ambitious sales organizations recognize the importance of exploring job candidates' soft skills, and most believe they do a good job of evaluating those soft skills:

*Almost 80% of our own clients surveyed said they take soft skills into account when hiring—the percentage remains about the same whether or not we're counting the clients who use our assessments.*

*However, only 17% of our clients who do NOT use our assessment products report that their screening process "does a good job of eliminating underperformers before hiring them."*

Companies looking to significantly improve their sales interviewing practices *must* invest in the skills of those people charged with conducting sales candidate interviews—from sales managers to human resources professionals—and the tools they use to assess potential hires. If you don't know what you are looking for or how to find it, your odds of success are low.

## THE BROOKS GROUP CLIENTS SURVEYED WHETHER USING OUR ASSESSEMENTS OR NOT





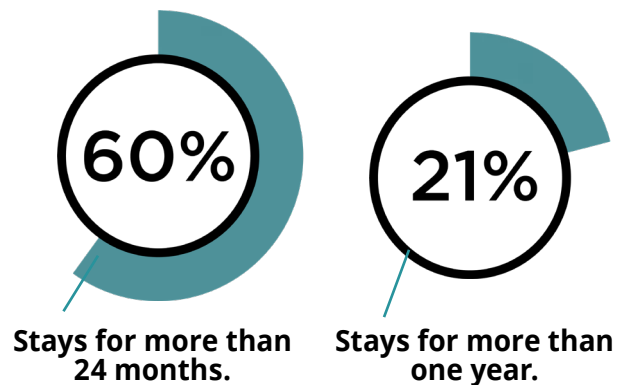
# Best Practices for Selecting Sales Candidates

Though personality and intelligence clearly are important factors in sales success, what truly drives long-term sales performance is the salesperson's value structure (how someone perceives the world around them and establishes priorities) plus their strengths in terms of soft skills (like resiliency, time management, long-range planning, and so on). Long-term success depends upon how clearly a salesperson sees the world of selling, how they see themselves in that world, and how they prioritize the multitude of demands made on them by the profession of selling.

The Brooks Group's clients who use our Brooks Talent Index of benchmarking jobs and assessing people are three times more likely to say that their sales candidate screening process "does a good job of eliminating underperformers before hiring them."

Nearly 60% of our assessment clients report that their average sales hire lasts more than 24 months; 21% last more than a year.

## THE AMOUNT OF TIME SALES HIRES STAY FOR THE BROOKS GROUP ASSESSMENT CLIENTS



## 10 Tips for Hiring Top Salespeople

1. Don't hire just to fill an open spot quickly.
2. Don't hire just because you "like" someone.
3. Know EXACTLY what your environment requires for top sales performance.
4. Look beyond the formal interview.
5. Use an objective, statistically valid assessment for hiring.
6. Have the finalist(s) spend a day in the field with your top rep.
7. Formally evaluate the strength of their sales skills and intuitions.
8. Check to be sure the candidate invests in their own personal and professional growth.
9. Get specific about sales scenarios in your interview questions.
10. Stop convincing yourself to overlook yellow or red flags.



## THE KEY FACTOR IN SALES SUCCESS

How many times have you added someone to your team who appeared to be an outgoing, glittering, and powerful personality, only to discover six months later they could not perform? What you see in those cases is the true person emerging from behind the surface personality. The “sales personality” is an outdated idea. All other things being equal, personality is driven by deep psychological needs—needs for stimulus, connection, order, accomplishment, belonging, and so on. Interestingly though, our “inner person” is driven by our value structure. What does that mean? Well, let’s look at a few examples:

- A top salesperson in a fast-paced, low base/high commission retail sales environment may be strongly motivated by economic gain and influencing other people’s decisions.
- A top salesperson in healthcare services may be strongly motivated by altruism and a sense of obligation to help others.
- A top salesperson to the government sector may be motivated by knowledge acquisition and following procedures.

Never again can you hire someone just because they have a good personality or someone swears they’re a “born salesperson.” To build a sales force that will succeed well into the 21st century, you must advance to the next level. Filling your sales force with the right kind of people requires you to answer the most important question about each and every candidate who faces you across the desk:

### **Will they sell our products or services in this environment?**

Here’s why this question is so important: Any reasonably intelligent person can master the mechanical steps of value-based selling, but achieving long-term success in sales requires the right person. When a salesperson fails or underperforms, it’s usually not the steps of the sale that trip them up, it’s their attitude about selling, their product or service, their customer, and/or themselves. How somebody sets priorities, what they value most, and if they have empathy for their fellow human beings will ultimately drive their sales performance.

The good news is you can get an idea of what it takes to get your sales team to perform at peak levels in today’s crowded market.



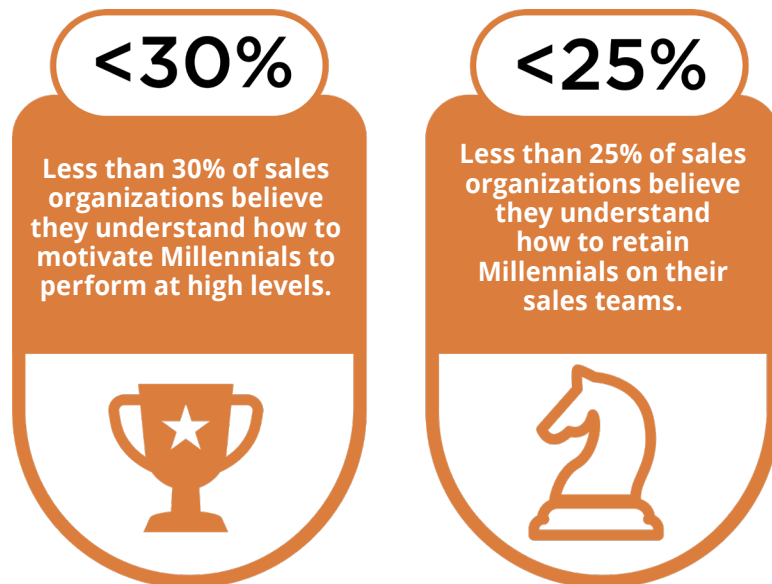
# Millennials on Your Sales Team: Best Practices for Hiring and Retention

Because Baby Boomers are retiring in such great numbers, many sales organizations are struggling to fill their shoes. Generation X sales professionals—those in the much smaller generation between Millennials and Baby Boomers—are increasingly in management roles, but they are challenged by hiring and working with Millennials for many reasons. Chief among complaints about Millennials are: “they’re job hoppers,” “they can’t communicate without a screen,” and “they’re all so entitled.” While arguments both for and against these perspectives abound, we predict that history will be kinder to Millennials than most Gen Xers and Boomers are today—haven’t the “slackers” of Gen X have become today’s corporate executives, inventors, and business owners?

Just for one example: According to Pew Research Center studies, Millennials are just as likely to stick with their employers as their Generation X counterparts, and college-educated Millennials stay with their employers longer than their Gen X counterparts did at the same age.<sup>2</sup> Student debt, a tight job market, and other factors have had real effects on Millennials’ ability to follow the same career pathing that Boomers (and many Gen Xers) followed.

*While defending or criticizing Millennials is not the subject of this report, it is important to note that less than 30% of sales organizations we surveyed believe they understand how to motivate Millennials to perform at high levels. Even fewer—less than 25%—believe they understand how to retain Millennials on their sales teams.*

## UNDERSTANDING MILLENNIALS IN SALES ORGANIZATIONS



## PERSON BY PERSON

Just as not every Baby Boomer or Gen Xer is just like the other, neither are all Millennials the same. For every self-absorbed, “entitled” 20-something, there’s a self-aware, generous, ambitious 20-something. We believe that understanding what makes individual applicants “tick” is essential to hiring people of any age or outlook.

Your challenge as a hiring manager is identical no matter what position you are trying to fill or whom you’re trying to attract:

**Find the person who can, will, and wants to do this particular job in this particular environment.**

If you have benchmarked the sales position accurately, you can assess individuals against it to get started at finding “best fit” employees, whether they’re Millennials or not.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Fry, “Millennials aren’t job-hopping any faster than Generation X did.” Pew Research Center, 19 April 2017. (Accessed 8/28/17 via <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/19/millennials-arent-job-hopping-any-faster-than-generation-x-did/>)



**As you benchmark the sales role, think carefully about where your company is trying to go in the future. Your top performers today may not be wired in the same way as those who will take your company into the future.**

## **BUILDING AND SUSTAINING ENGAGEMENT**

It is imperative to assess and evaluate sales candidates on a person-by-person basis. While there may be generational patterns visible across thousands of individuals, when you are hiring for a sales role, you're looking for ONE individual who may or may not have anything in common with a stereotype. This is why the Brooks Talent Index is so valuable—it gives you a deep-dive into each individual applicant's behaviors, motivations, and personal skills.

Knowledge of cultural, economic, and social factors that shape Millennials—in combination with understanding of individual applicants'

### **HIRING MYTH: All Assessments Are Basically the Same.**

Unfortunately, most of the assessments available to businesses on the market are some form of behavioral assessments only. The problem with behavior assessments is that they aren't exhaustive enough to determine if someone will perform long-term in your organization.



unique motivators—can allow us to lead, coach, and manage them in a way that fuels their passion and creates engagement. And that will make us all happier, avoid frustrations, and get better results now and into the future.

### **The following four areas are particularly important in attracting and retaining employees identified as Millennials:**

- **A clear promotion path.** Contrary to their reputation as a “now” generation, most college-educated Millennials are willing to work to attain their goals. They just lack the patience for generic promises of “advancement” and unending work hours with no reward in sight. When we hire Millennials (if they are good matches for the job benchmark, of course) it can be helpful to work with them to establish a clear pathway toward advancement.
- **Work-life balance.** This concept reared its head when Generation Xers in the workforce—many of whom had been latchkey kids—began getting married and having families. Millennials, in general, work to live...not live to work. They want to be able to do a good job and be rewarded for it, and that reward may not look like overtime pay, an extra bonus, or public recognition. Instead, they may respond favorably to flexible schedules, more time off, opportunities to volunteer, corporate wellness programs, and social events with colleagues.
- **Purpose and meaning.** Company culture and job satisfaction often are more important to Millennials than salary, etc. When interviewing younger people, it's usually a good idea not to just pitch a job; instead, pitch a meaningful career for a company that has a strong stated purpose.
- **Personal impact.** Millennials want to contribute to the betterment of the world. In general, they are quite civic-minded and willing to adopt an “all for one, one for all” mindset. It's important to them to make a difference with what they do professionally, so they will appreciate affirmation that their efforts, specifically, are helping your company achieve its stated mission.

# A New Way Forward: The Whole-Person Assessment

The tools we offer our clients help them to weed out low-potential sales candidates and hire only the people who stand the greatest chances of succeeding. There are so many things that an interview process—even a strong one—won't reveal.

## For example:

- Will the candidate be looking for another new job in 6-12 months?
- How coachable is the candidate?
- Which candidates are likely to have a strong start by selling to 'friends,' then a sharp decline?
- How will the candidate respond to rejection, change, a lengthy sales cycle, or lack of supervision by their manager?
- How likely is the candidate to lower price or give away product to get the sale?
- Will the candidate likely leave a path of destruction behind, requiring "cleaning up the mess" following each sale?

## The Brooks Talent Index enables our clients to assess a potential hire by giving a clear picture of:

- Will this person sell? (personal skills)
- Why will this person sell? (motivators)
- How does this person sell? (behaviors)
- Can this person sell? (job skills)
- How well will this person sell in this environment? (job match)

What's more is that once they're hired, the Brooks Talent Index gives sales managers excellent tools for managing and communicating effectively with their people and creating a unique environment for each member of their team. These abilities—understanding the true potential of a job applicant and being able to onboard and coach them effectively—are of increasing importance in navigating intergenerational relationships in the workplace.



# Conclusion: Hiring Should Be Based on a Process, Not Guesswork or Luck

While we know assessments are invaluable in the process of hiring and retaining top salespeople, we caution against over-reliance on any one hiring tool. In brief, our overall approach to hiring follows the 4 “Rs”:

- **Rapport** – What kind of connection does the candidate make with you and other interviewers? Will he or she be a fit with your company’s (and team’s) culture? How will they come across to the prospects and customers they will need to work closely with?
- **Report** – A strong assessment tool like the Brooks Talent Index allows you to compare any candidate to a benchmark for the job you’re trying to fill in terms of behaviors (how they’ll sell), motivators (why they’ll sell), and personal skills (if they’ll sell at all).
- **Resume** – A resume is a reliable standard that can tell you a lot about how the person thinks about him or herself, and it is a window into how they’ll present themselves to others.
- **References (and Background Check)** – This is a must-do. There is simply no substitute for checking a candidate’s references.

Patience is an essential skill during the screening and selection process, especially in the process of locating a top-performing sales professional.

Our best advice is always to be on the lookout for potential good



hires. Once you do uncover that person you believe has potential, following an organized hiring process that includes all four “Rs” will give you the confidence that your gut instinct is correct... or that the individual doesn’t have what it takes to take your organization into the future.

## REMEMBER:

**You are hiring people to take your organization to success in the next 5-10 years, not repeat the last 5-10.**

Keep your eye on skills that will be important moving into the future!



## About The Brooks Group

Founded in 1977, The Brooks Group is an award-winning B2B sales training company focused on bringing practical, straightforward solutions to your sales force selection and training challenges.

The Brooks Group provides a suite of proven sales and sales management development programs, industry-leading reinforcement tools, and best in class assessments.

### For more information

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