

LEADERSHIP

# The Curious Secret To Hiring Better Salespeople



**Jim Vaselopoulos** Forbes Councils Member

**Forbes Coaches Council** COUNCIL POST | Membership (Fee-Based)

---

POST WRITTEN BY

**Jim Vaselopoulos**

Jim has been there and done that. An experienced entrepreneur, **leadership expert**, and sales pro - Jim can help you get to the next level.

---

Sep 6, 2018, 07:00am EDT



Getty

Anyone who has had the responsibility of hiring sales professionals knows how difficult the process can be. There are countless stories

of the great candidate who was hired and never closed a deal. Part of the reason is that most salespeople have mastered the art of selling themselves. The second part of the equation is that those doing the hiring often take an undisciplined approach in the interview process.

It's not enough to know that a candidate understands the right answer to a question. It is infinitely more important for the interviewer to observe the candidate practicing the correct behavior in response to a question. In my experience, candidates who show they can practice the proper behaviors for success are more likely to have a faster and more consistent path to closed business for you and your organization.

There's a pretty simple approach you can implement to make better hiring decisions in the sales process. First and foremost, start by decreasing the focus on past experience and emphasizing the behaviors that support the foundation of a winning sales culture. I have identified eight behaviors that correlate with sales success:

**Curiosity:** The tendency to identify, question and pursue answers.

**Feedback:** The desire and ability to receive and quickly process feedback.

**Motivation:** Comfort in understanding what truly motivates themselves and others.

**Listening:** The ability to listen for why, in addition to what, how and when.

**Empathy:** The ability to sincerely and authentically identify with a prospect's emotions.

**Closure:** The ability to know when to hang on and when to let go.

**Growth Mindset:** The outlook that enables increased levels of achievement.

BETA

**Timing:** The understanding of when urgency is required and when to be patient.

It is possible to screen for these behaviors with well-constructed questions, creating situations that enable a sales candidate to actively demonstrate them.

In my experience, the No. 1 behavior that is overlooked when hiring salespeople is curiosity. Curiosity is a behavior that is enormously powerful in selling. Questions are the key to unlocking a buyer's intent, motivation and concern.

All too often, salespeople return from failed sales calls only to be asked a question by their sales manager that they neglected to ask their prospect. A frustrating response from many salespeople is, "Do you want me to go back and ask that question?" For as long as there have been sales managers, this situation has surely raised the blood pressures of sales managers worldwide.

And while it is possible to teach a script to a salesperson so they know what questions to ask and when, that tends to be a clumsy and unnatural approach that is off-putting to most prospects. Your business is far better served by hiring naturally curious salespeople.

**Test for curiosity with this line of questioning during your candidate's interview.**

"There are three things you need to be successful in this job. No. 1 is persistence." Then, tell a detailed story about how persistence paid off in a sales pursuit. Feel free to embellish with details and tangents that are relevant to the situation.

Upon completing that statement, mention, “The second thing you need to be successful at in this position is working as part of a team.” Then, tell another detailed story about teamwork and success within your organization.

(Notice the change between cardinal and ordinal numbering between the first and the second points. The slight language change can allow an unskilled candidate to get confused.)

When finished with this story, ask the candidate for an example of how they have worked as part of a team and had success in a sales environment. When they are done, move on to your next question without hesitation.

If the candidate stops you and asks about the third criterion for success, they have demonstrated a level of curiosity and listening that is necessary for successful selling.

If the candidate waits to ask for the third element of success later in the interview, it is not bad -- in fact, it is pretty good. They have demonstrated some patience, as well as timing, in their approach.

If a candidate fails to circle back and ask about the third criterion for success within the organization, they fail to make the grade. Failure in curiosity affects each of the other behaviors in dramatic ways.

### **Curiosity is the key to all other behaviors in sales.**

- If you are not curious, you likely will not be curious enough to independently seek feedback on your performance. The uncurious salesperson often waits for feedback.
- A salesperson who is not curious might have trouble discerning how other people’s motivations can be different from their own.

- Listening starts with questions, and curiosity is the key component for engaging and revealing questions with prospects.
- Without curiosity, it is nearly impossible to imagine how another person may be impacted by a decision or how they feel about a circumstance. Curiosity is a foundational component of empathy.
- A desire to obtain closure with sales pursuits requires a level of curiosity regarding a prospect's intentions.
- The uncurious person may never wonder what is beyond the next horizon. Therefore, it is hard to possess a growth mindset without curiosity.
- There is no better time to speak than right now for a person devoid of curiosity. The uncurious person may interrupt rather than seek the perfect timing to ask a good question.

Feel free to adapt this technique to your circumstances with questions that fit your industry or buyers more appropriately. The key, however, is to leave reason three unsaid -- and see if the candidate is curious enough to ask the obvious question.

And, if your candidate asks about the third criterion for success, make sure you have a good answer!

---

Forbes Coaches Council is an invitation-only community for leading business and career coaches. ***Do I qualify?***



**Jim Vaselopulos**

An experienced CEO, entrepreneur, leadership expert, [executive coach](#) and sales expert - Jim can help you get to the next level. Read Jim Vaselopulos'...

**Read More**

