

# 1001 RÉSUMÉS

## FINDING THE 'NEEDLE' IN A RÉSUMÉ HAYSTACK

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EDITORIAL | JOHN HASKELL

**The word on the street is “cutbacks,” but getting sales is still the name of the game.** One small business recently needed a new salesperson for a very good territory. The owner placed ads in all of the electronic vehicles, local papers and industry publications, as well as industry websites. *The results were overwhelming.*

If résumés and inquiries were dollar bills, the company would have found a new stream of revenue. Now the owner and his associates faced a huge challenge; they were thrilled to have choices, but they did not want to choose the wrong person for this important position.

This overwhelming response is typical in tough times, but often, it has nothing to do with the opportunity your company is providing — it's just that there are lots of people, qualified and unqualified, seeking a job. Tougher times make many good people available, but the price for wrong choices is very high. How do you find the “needle” in the sales résumé haystack? Here are a few steps to help managers be successful when sorting, selecting and interviewing potential candidates.

### Sort to a Manageable Group.

First, select two or three trusted associates to take the résumé stack, review every résumé and identify three categories:

- 1 The first and easiest is called the “C” or “no way” group. These people are clearly the ones you *aren't* interested in hiring.
- 2 The second is your “B” group, which stands for “maybe,” but not very likely. Hold on to this one for a second review, only if none from the top group pan out.
- 3 The third and most important group is called “A” and these résumés represent the candidates who have a 90% chance of being the right one. Important note: This has to be a group limited to 10% or fewer of the hundreds of résumés you received. Hopefully, you have fewer than 10 A's.

## TOUGHER TIMES MAKE MANY GOOD PEOPLE AVAILABLE, BUT THE PRICE FOR WRONG CHOICES IS VERY HIGH.

### Develop Decision Criteria – Story Boarding.

The next step is to organize a planning session focused on determining the most important criteria in selecting the next salesperson, and then use a technique called “storyboarding.” This system uses 3”x 5” Post-It pads, one of which is given to each session participant.

Each participant puts down his or her thoughts about what criteria they find important, one idea per sheet, and passes them forward to the leader, who then puts the Post-Its on a large white board. The leader reads the idea out loud and, when necessary to get clarity, discusses the statement with the person who wrote it.

### Create Categories.

As your team works through the Post-Its on the board, many of them will probably come up with similar groups of criteria, which is fine. However, the following categories should always be represented in the storyboarding process:

**Previous sales experience** — Clearly the best candidates will be successful salespeople with at least five years of experience.

**Clear record of accomplishment** — The résumés you receive may be all over the lot, but everyone should agree that the right candidate has to have a good, clean résumé. The résumé should state the person’s accomplishments in a very clear, concise manner.

**Professional development** — The best candidates should have some experience with formal sales training. One specific kind of training shouldn’t be necessary, but some type of formal training should be. When moving forward to the interview process, be prepared to discuss training and the benefits derived from the training.

**Personal experience** — The best candidates should have some type of personal experience, such as certain hobbies, military service, musical training, or sports. For example, a musician might be a better listener who understands the value of practice, or someone with military service may have a stronger ability to follow rules and stay focused on a task.

There may be other criteria not listed here. For example, in some more technical fields, very specific education and experience may in fact be vital. Or in some geographic areas, regional sales knowledge or experience may be essential. Sometimes it’s easier for Southerners to sell to other Southerners. Depending on your situation, you may have one or more criteria that your team feels are essential elements in the selection process. There is no right or wrong. Your team knows what is important.

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### Define the Interview Process.

Next, have your team discuss the in-person interview, and the specific questions and techniques that will be used to sort through the A’s. Here are some categories to consider:

**Customers** — Ask the candidate what his customers would say about him as a salesperson. Can your candidates please provide you with three customers from any previous jobs, phone numbers and background information so you can call them to discuss the candidate?

**Employer(s)** — Make sure you ask the candidates if you can speak with the current employers. If not, why? What about previous employers? Who are they and what will they say about the candidates?

**Sales situation review success** — This is a very important part of the interview process: Ask the candidates to describe, in depth, their most successful sales experience. Why was this such a big success? How do they feel they contributed to this sales success?

**Sales situation review failure** — Ask the candidates to also describe a situation where they lost the order or failed to make the sale. Why did they miss this sale? What went wrong?

**Motivation** — You want to get a sense of your candidates’ motivation. How does he/she work? What are his/her work habits? Is he/she an early riser? What about writing skills? Does he/she make lists? Your team may think note taking and list making are very important indicators of discipline and organization.

**Interpersonal interaction** — How do your candidates behave? Body language? Crossed arms are a sure sign of defensiveness; crossed legs seem to the team to be impolite or sloppy. What happens when one of the interviewers interrupts him/her? How does the candidate handle interruption? Does he/she shift into listening mode? What is the interviewer’s feeling toward interaction with the candidate? Do you like talking with him/her?

By using a team or group interview process, your team will have an easier time reaching a consensus. Everyone is looking at the candidate and listening to him/her at the same time. Each person can debate what he or she saw and heard and what it means. There is no scientific way to select a salesperson. But, applying these points in a team interview process will help you sort through the abundance of candidates to find that *excellent* needle in the sales haystack. 