



Topgrading Tips

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Cut Phone Screen Time 80%

Telephone screening, according to a recent survey, takes up to 20 hours per person hired! This article will show you how to cut the time 80%, to about 4 hours.

Readers of my books know that Topgraders use the phone screen to reduce the number of candidates to those who will be interviewed in person, and the phone screen is usually a "trash-compacted" Topgrading Interview. It takes an hour. OK, but an alternative is to use questions that more quickly flush out great candidates. When a job has objectively measurable results, like sales rep, a quicker phone screen than the "trash-compacted Topgrading Interview" can be used. This article contains phone screen questions for sales rep, but consider it a model; you can develop similar questions for other jobs.

The following questions were developed by Greg Alexander, a Topgrader and one of the greatest sales executives I've known, and, as of last week,

co-author of a book we just agreed to publish with Portfolio: ***Topgrading Sales Organizations***.

Here are the telephone screen questions for sales rep:

1. **Please describe your territory.** (Is the sales rep selling based on geography, product line, or names of accounts? Is he/she really on top of the territory?)
2. **Please describe the quota system.** (Is the candidate measured on revenue, gross profit, unit sales, new accounts, etc.? How well does the candidate explain the keys to success?)
3. **Please describe your production.** (Nail down performance vs. targets. How engaged is the person? Make excuses? Get answers to #1 - #3 for more than the present job, perhaps the last three jobs, to perform a more thorough screen.)
4. **Please describe your compensation plan.** (Is there understanding of how sales rep success drives company success? Is the person motivated?)
5. **Please describe your company's value proposition.** (This should be an "elevator pitch," 30 seconds.)
6. **Please describe your major competitor's value proposition.** (The differences between #5 and #6 should be very clear.)

7. **Please explain the top three objections you must overcome to close sales, and how you overcome them.** (Does the candidate beat the competition?)
8. **Please describe your typical day and week.** (Does the person work hard and work smart, doing administrative work after hours?)
9. **What do you like most and least about your job?** (A complainer? Would things be different in your company?)
10. **Please describe what you like and dislike about your last two bosses, and give your best guess as to what they would tell me in reference interviews you would arrange, are your strengths, weaker points, and overall performance.** (Do you fit the profile of what the candidate likes in a boss? Does he/she come from a competitive culture? Is the person honest, or doing a whitewash?)

By the way, Greg Alexander is the owner of Sales Benchmark Index (www.SalesBenchmarkIndex.com), and he's identified dozens of benchmarks that you can measure your sales organization against and figure out how to improve it.

For those new to Topgrading, here are our broader recommendations on how to reduce phone screening time and end up with *just* terrific candidates to interview face to face:

1. Recruit from your Virtual Bench - people you already know are great.

2. But if you have to run ads, cut 150 resumes down to the best 30 the good 'ol fashioned way - wading through those incomplete documents Sunday afternoon while watching TV.
3. Send the 30 the Topgrading Career History Form, which asks for complete comp history, likes and dislikes of jobs, every month and year for every job (people can hide jobs when they just give years and not months), and a full self appraisal. A week later all the completed career history forms can be reviewed in an hour, cutting the 30 candidates to maybe 6.
4. Then call the 6 and use the phone screen questions, and you'll be left with 3 or 4 of the truly best candidates to interview in person.
Follow these steps and you can cut 20 hours of phone screens to 4 hours, *and* get better candidates to interview in person.

Best,

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