Dover

Hiring Guide:

Sales

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Introduction

Your sales team is the engine of your startup: they keep revenue streams coming in, have a pulse on the pain points and pivots needed to close customers, and can often see where the product needs improvement through direct feedback from prospects.

Get this hire right right and you can start to build a consistent, scalable revenue stream and grow quickly. Get it wrong and you'll burn a ton of time and money. Your first hire is often even more difficult and critical, as they'll set the pace and tone for the team moving forward, and provide them with the necessary tools/training to understand your customer and their pain points.

This guide aims to help you answer the who, what, where, when and why about bringing a salesperson onto your team — we've also backed it up with Dover's internal data and insights from our work with 200+ startups.

Types of sales roles

At startups, the early sales team will probably wear a wide variety of hats. As your company grows, your senior folks will take on less projects and focus primarily on people management.

In this section, we'll describe the functions of each department in more detail.

Sales/Business Development Representatives

SDRs (also called business development reps, or BDRs) are responsible for researching, prospecting, and qualifying leads.

They're typically managed by an account executive, and their day to day involves:

- identifying and reaching out to potential good fits,
- answering requests for more information,
- following up with prospects who downloaded content,
- prospecting on LinkedIn and other social networks, and more.

Once an SDR has determined the lead is qualified, they pass the opportunity to a sales rep, who is responsible for presenting or demoing the product, resolving the buyer's objections, and creating a proposal.

Account Executives

Most SDRs move into an AE position after about 6 to 18 months. As an AE, they've got a lot more autonomy and responsibility including:

- running demos or giving presentations,
- identifying, surfacing, and addressing potential buying obstacles,
- crafting personalized pitches for different buyer personas,
- getting the commitment to purchase,
- and negotiating contract terms

AEs are typically held to quotas — more on that later

Senior Account Executives

If you're building a sales arm at a startup, your Account Executives will naturally move into senior positions as you hire more folks. Senior AEs are still individual contributors, but they typically manage larger portfolios and budgets. They'll also:

- set individual quotas and team goals,
- analyze revenue data to hit targets,
- coordinate sales trainings and call reviews,
- and manage sales territories (whether by location, industry or company size).

Director of Sales

A director of sales works with sales managers to determine sales objectives, forecast and develop sales quotas, maintain sales volume, and remain a crucial part of the hiring process.

They'll maintain a more strategic role than that of a sales manager, and will likely report to the VP of Sales when you're ready to hire one.

They'll be held responsible for the performance of the department, and their bonus will be awarded when the sales organization meets or exceeds goals.

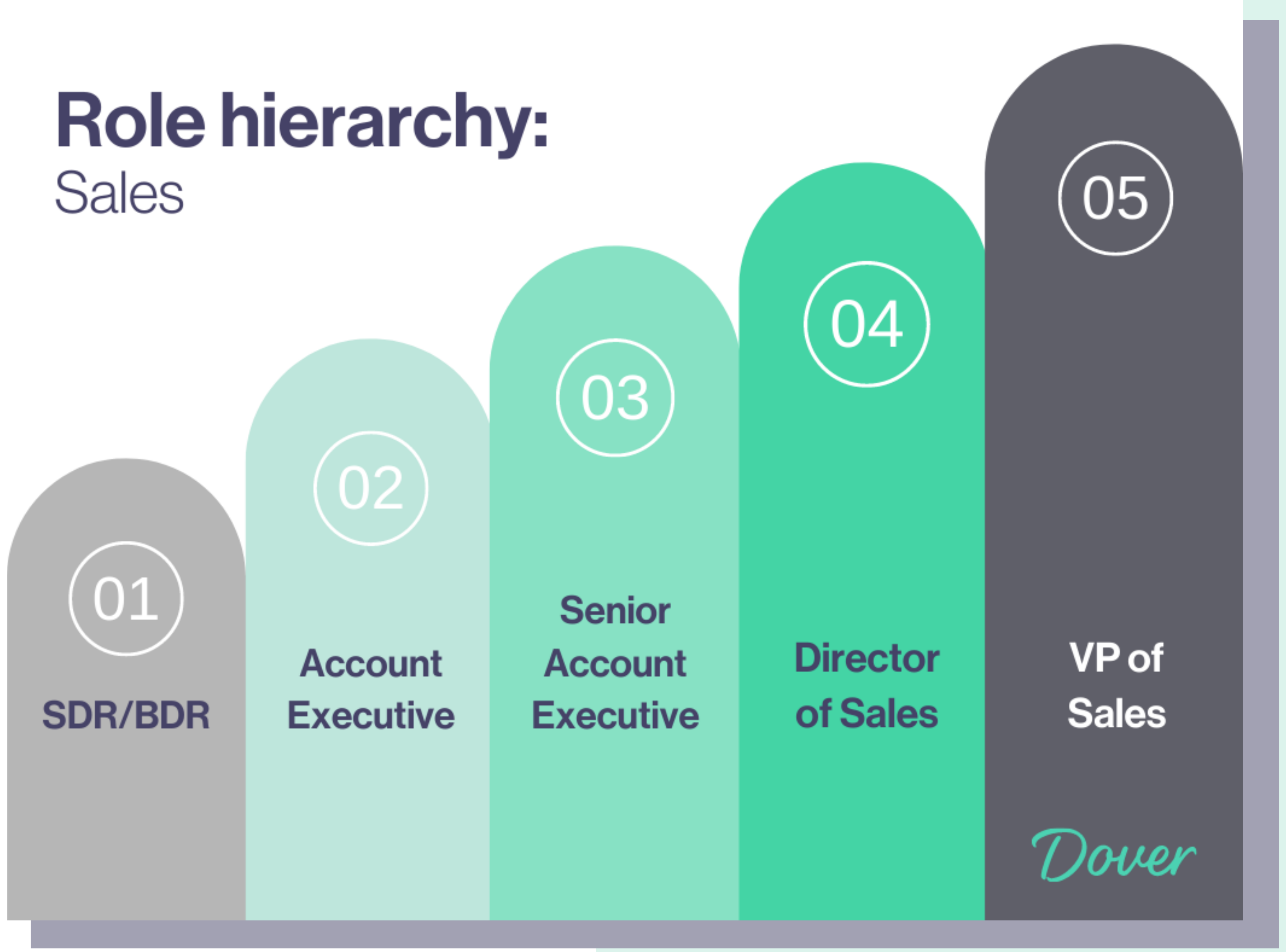
VP of Sales

A VP of Sales acts as part team leader, part thought partner.

Many startups bring in a VP of Sales too early. A true VP of Sales is NOT someone you hire to get sales going at your startup. They're someone who will accelerate pre-existing sales, and bring structure and efficient processes to the table. They shouldn't have to dive in and do IC work, or your sales will actually stall instead of get better.

Core responsibilities include:

- working with Marketing to understand the best GTM (go to market) strategy,
- understanding the post-sales buyer journey to understand which types of buyers are at the highest risk for churn,
- understanding why revenue targets are missed and devising a plan to address them,
- creating a repeatable, measurable, scalable process to engage the buyer where they are versus where you want to force them to be,
- recruiting and hiring the best salespeople,
- helping the team scout, engage, and close better deals,
- reinforcing, and strengthening your culture.



pro tip:

On progression.fyi, or levels.fyi, you can compare your career ladder to those at similar or larger companies than yours to gather insights and inspiration.

Your first hire

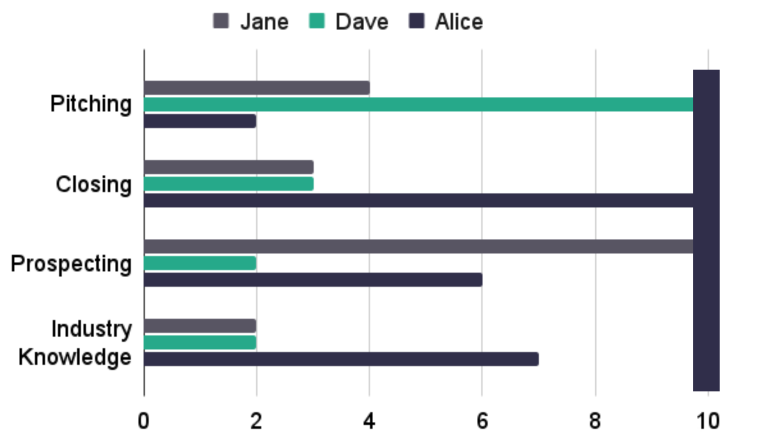
The first salesperson you hire plays a pivotal role in setting the course of the sales team as you scale. They'll be in charge of hiring, creating workflows, and pitching your company without the support of a larger team.

The reality is that anyone who excels across all of these functions is a unicorn and nearly impossible to find. Even a VP will likely have one or maybe two areas they're exceptionally good at.

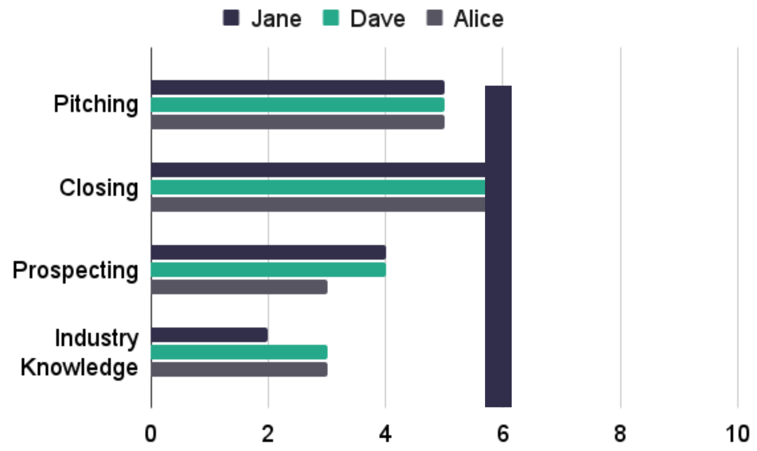
This is why a generalist with 3 to 6 years of experience will typically bring senior enough expertise in all areas, with a spike in one or two of the big sales functions: closing, prospecting, industry knowledge, or excellent communication/ pitching skills.

It's our advice that this person have spikes in closing and pitching since they'll be responsible for closing deals on their own unti you bring on more team members. However, if you have an extremely niche product, you may value someone with industry knowledge or experience more highly.

To visualize this, think about this as a graph. **The y-axis represents the different areas of marketing, and x-axis represents a strength of someone on your team. The bar represents an ideal state of performance**: you have a content machine, your ads are humming along, you're hitting your revenue targets, etc.



If you hire people with spikes all around (again, highly unlikely), it'll actually lower the bar for suc-cess, since their individual spikes will be much lower.



Here are a few more questions that will help you to build your ideal role profile:

- **Do they have multiple years of closing experience or managing larger quotas?** There are a lot of things that happen in deals when someone first starts out in sales. Over time, they'll notice patterns and develop workflows for how to handle different plays and strategies.
- **What pace will they be expected to work at?** How many deals do you expect them to close in a month? Six months? A year?
- **Will they need to put CRMs in place and figure out a way to track metrics?** Experience in doing this in the past is a plus.
- **Do they have startup experience?**
- **Do you have a niche product or lots of competitors in the space?** This may signal that your first candidate needs to have a significant spike in industry knowledge (prior experience at a company like yours is sufficient).

4 signs you're ready to hire a sales team

1. You aren't able to meet your revenue number -- but the pipeline or opportunities are plentiful.

Most entrepreneurs start out as the first and only salespeople for their companies, but eventually, your pipeline will outpace your bandwidth. If you're an entrepreneur who's spending more than two hours a day on interacting with prospects -- or generating new business -- it's probably time to hire a salesperson who can take over for you.

2. You know where your target customers hang out.

This ties in a bit with question one, as your channel might also be the best path for distribution because it's where your target customers typically network or go to learn more about their job (like LinkedIn, for example). However, the answer might not be so cut and dry, or a channel might work for some time and then suddenly stop driving results. Part of your first sales hire's job will be to experiment and research new channels for growth.

One way to decide which department they should live in is to consider how your target customers are currently finding competitive products or services. For example, if you know from competitive research that clients are finding out about data migration solutions through recommendations from friends, you may want to hire a brand marketer who can work on driving top-of-funnel awareness. If they're finding out about them through Instagram ads, you'll want to hire a growth marketer to build campaigns.

3. You have lots of competitors in your category.

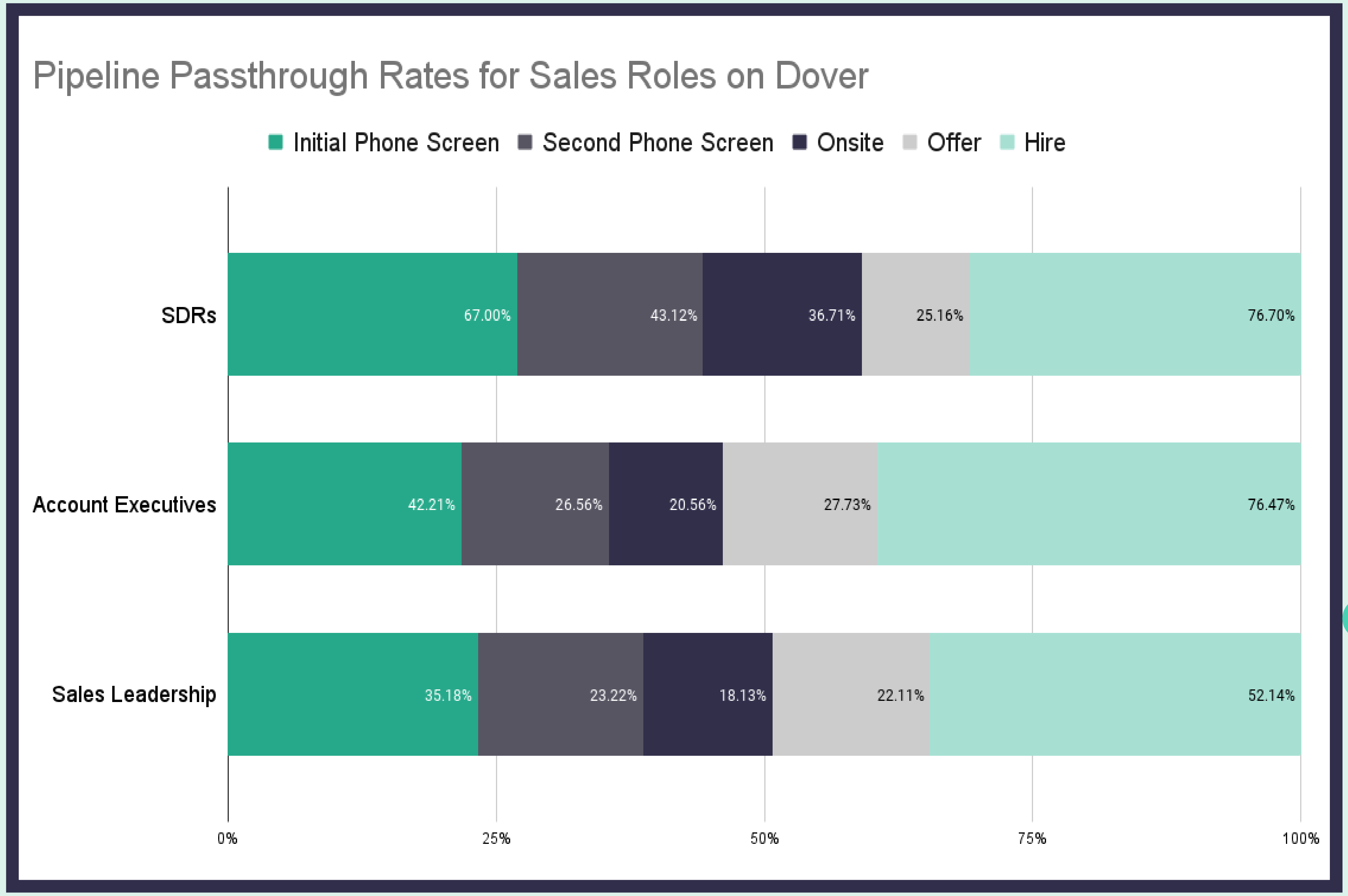
Additionally, ask yourself this: are your competitors dominant players with strong brands? Do they have endless marketing budgets? Are CACs in this space huge because everyone is outbidding each other?

If so, you might want to put money into building an exceptional brand or product/customer experience. That means solidifying your pitch and figuring out how to position yourselves against your competitors.

4. You have product-market fit.

Even an excellent salesperson won't be able to make an impact if you haven't proven that people are willing to pay for your product.

This means that you'll likely have at least 5-10 customers. With a core group of adopters, you'll be able to start to identify trends in the sales cycle that will help you understand how to build a process around sales.



Top job boards for salespeople

General:

- LinkedIn
- Indeed
- AngelList
- We Work Remotely
- Remotive
- Sales Gravy
- Venture Loop
- TechSalesJobs

Women:

- Hire Tech Ladies
- In Her Sight
- Power to Fly
- Where Women Work
- Career Contessa
- Fairy Godboss
- Elpha

Underrepresented groups:

- Power to Fly
- Diversity.com
- iHispano
- Black Career Network
- Black Jobs
- HLPA
- WorkplaceDiversity
- Diversity Jobs

How long will it take me to hire a salesperson?

The unemployment rate for tech jobs is 1.3%, its lowest level since June 2019 and about one-third of the national rate. As more startups open up their talent pool by adopting hybrid or remote work models, the projected growth rate for tech jobs over the next decade is near twice the national jobs rate. That means that hiring salespeople is about to become harder than ever.

On Dover's platform, we've seen that candidates **reach onsites 50% faster and are nearly 40% more likely to convert to an offer** when passing through our process management. We credit that to creating a positive, transparent and responsive candidate experience.

If you're curious, the graph on the left breaks this down further by role type.

Optimizing outreach

Focus on the you vs. the I or we.

The goal of an initial recruiting email is solely to get candidates on the phone. You'll have an opportunity to sell them on the company during the interview process. Spend the majority of your message talking about the role, answering:

- How much impact will they have?
- How much autonomy and ownership do you offer?
- Who will they be working with day-to-day?
- What are some projects they'll work on in the first six months?

Optimize messages for mobile.

Emails are read on mobile — think of the scroll test; if they have to scroll more than twice, they're probably not reading the entire email. Get the important information in first.

Have a direct CTA .

Include specifics and action steps for the candidate. Writing: "Can you hop on a call within the next few days?" is much more specific and commital than "Are you free to chat sometime soon?"

Get your pitch down to two sentences.

Salespeople are master storytellers. They have a better eye for a good vs. bad pitch, and will likely delete your email if they feel they can't easily understand what your company does. Focus on making your pitch a problem and solution statement, like "We're working to solve X to help Y."

Use flattery and personalization.

In the crowded tech space, catching a talented candidate's eye often requires a personalized pitch. Crafting an email subject line or LinkedIn message that references one of their unique experiences or interests will get their attention much faster than a generic recruitment message.

On Dover's platform, outreach that contains a personalized sentence results in 10 to 30% more interested responses — even if those candidates have responded as not interested to another company's outreach. And even if the individual isn't looking to change careers at that exact moment, they're likely to keep you in mind once they are ready to consider new opportunitie

Include relevant links to:

- Your LinkedIn profile
- The job posting for the role
- Your company website
- Any relevant press (if you haven't had a write-up yet, you can also consider writing a blog post about why you started your company)

Follow up 2-3 times.

Many people may not respond to your initial reach out, especially secondary connections. In fact, **our data shows that you double your response rate by sending 2-3 follow-ups at 3 day cadence**.

Your follow-ups should be shorter than your initial outreach. It's ok to reinforce a key point, but consider introducing a new concept to avoid being too repetitive. Ideas include additional press, or employee testimonials.

30%

increase in interested responses in outreach that includes details about the candidate's interests or past roles.

Let’s take a look at an example

Subject: Launch new products at BlueVine - fintech startup with $200M raised

Hi [redacted],

I'm a MIT grad/engineer running a boutique search firm for software and bio startups. Your nearly 6-year tenure and rise into management at [redacted] caught my attention. I thought you might want to learn more about BlueVine or connect for a broader discussion of the market & your career goals. Plus, it's always good connecting with fellow alumni! :)

(And BTW, if you want to keep working in the city, I could see [redacted] and [redacted] also being worth discussing/having on your radar.)

BlueVine has raised nearly $200M in venture funding and made over $1B in small business loans the past 5 years. Their engineering team is based in Tel Aviv, but we're looking for a hands-on eng manager to build out a new product group in Redwood City and develop our new generation of products.

This is an opportunity to have the impact and flexibility of an early-stage startup, backed by the resources of a high-growth business. BlueVine has made a big dent in the lending world but harbors much larger abitions. It would be great to tell you more.

Feel free to put time on my calendar for an intro call. If the timing isn't right, I'm happy to circle back later or grab a coffee. Would love to see if I can be of any help. Warm regards!

Personalization and flattery.

High-level overview of company funding, investors and customers.

Focus on impact and scope of the role.

Direct CTA — including a calendar link can double response rates.

Designing an interview loop

With salespeople, the interview process is about finding the right strength instead of a lack of weakness. As mentioned earlier, it's difficult to find someone who exceeds in all areas of sales, and your goal is to figure out where their spike in strength is.

Pre-interview: be transparent about the steps in your process early on.

Nerves are a part of every interview. One way to reduce stress and help your candidates put their best foot forward is to include key information about the interview process early on, in places like your job description and in outreach or calendar invites.

You should include who the candidate will speak with, as well as detail the different stages of the process.

1. Initial sell conversation

Your first intro call is an opportunity to garner interest in the role, and your company with the hopes of moving the candidate into a traditional interview process. Read more in our Selling and Closing Guide.

2. Remote screen #1

The first remote screen tends to focus on the candidate's background, experiences, and any particular personality traits you're looking to evaluate. A first-round phone screen should quickly qualify the candidate for or eliminate them from further evaluation so that no one is wasting their time.

Additionally, they can help you:

- Check for potential dealbreakers early on (e.g. availability, relocation, proficiency in sales CRM platforms, pitching and closing, etc.)
- Ask for clarification on information in candidates' resumes or LinkedIn profiles
- Evaluate candidates' verbal communication skills (especially if they're going to work in a senior or managerial role)
- For passive candidates, learn about their goals and desire to switch companies
- Their passion for your problem space and hands-on technical expertise

Save more in-depth skills assessments for your second screening interview.

Download our phone screen scoring rubric templates to get started.

3. Remote screen #2

This second screen tends to focus on technical or practical skills. This interview should map to the hard skills in your rubric.

This is where the candidate may also as you more hard-hitting questions about the business, such as your revenue streams, funding and future vision.

At Dover, our philosophy is to give them an open-book view of the business. Most candidates should know (and do know) that joining a startup is a risk. **Transparency will lead you to candidates who are curious and creative problem-solvers, want to collaborate, care about autonomy and believe the pros of joining your startup outweigh the risk.**

If you choose to be more cage-y with this information, you run the risk of hiring someone who ends up leaving if they feel they were sold a faulty vision of where the business is headed and what the job entails.

4. Take home assessments and work samples

Asking sales candidates to do a mock pitch helps you see and evaluate their communication style and ability to research/consolidate information. More on this here.

5. Onsite Interview

If candidates make it to the final stage of the process, you have enough conviction that they would be able to do the job. The point of an onsite is to assess culture fit and increase the likelihood that the candidate signs.

Y

ou can read more about running an onsite interview process in this guide, but at a high level, we suggest choosing 3-4 focus areas from your hiring rubric that you care the most about for a product manager. Hiring managers should assign which question set will be covered by the interviewer during each portion.

6. Debrief

After a candidate has gone through your onsite process, the hiring manager should meet with all interviewers to discuss whether or not an offer will be extended.

You may realize in a debrief that you have insufficient information to make a hiring decision, and in this case, having a formal conversation is still helpful because it will help you uncover what signal you may be missing on a candidate and align on what next steps (if any) to take. This could mean more assessment, or a revamp of your rubric or questions.

How to structure a debrief

1. **First, make sure that interviewers are not talking about the candidate before everyone has written up this feedback.** If you can, schedule a debrief on the day of an onsite interview to decrease the probably of interviewers biasing each other.
2. **Ask interviewers that participated in the panel to simultaneously throw out rankings from 1 (low) to 4 (high)**. By doing this at the same time, you prevent bias or a junior team member being swayed by a senior team member.
3. **In the order that the interviews were conducted, ask each interviewer to explain their rating.** Start by recapping what they were asked to evaluate in their interview, so the room has that context. The hiring manager should take notes and enter them into your ATS, or a spreadsheet.

   If you're having trouble understanding how the interviewer landed on their rating, you should ask follow up questions, like "this interview sounded positive, what would you have needed to see to give a strong yes, vs. a yes?" or "why was this a weak no vs. a solid no?"

A note on social fit

When hiring marketers, you obviously want to select folks that you would enjoy working with. However, despite someone having the best resume, you might not groove with them in the way you'd hoped.

In this case, you have to ask yourself two important questions:

1. **Are they inconsiderate and rude, or just different from me?**
2. **Will their social skills affect their spike?** I.e. If they're a poor collaborator or can't communicate ideas, this could be a good enough reason to not hire them as a product marketer.

If you simply find that someone's personality is a bit different than yours, remember that interviews can be nervewracking, and difference in personality leads to diversity in insights and creative approaches. Unless someone is truly unprofessional, don't penalize them for personality.

Onsite mock pitch assessment

The goal of an onsite assessment for a salesperson is to get a sense of how they pitch, how they deal with difficult customers, and how well they handle questions on the fly. You aren't necessarily looking to see if they get everything 100% correct — instead, you are looking at how they break down the problem you're solving, how they handle tough conversations and how well they consolidate and communicate information.

Make sure you're assessing for good thinking, not just someone who validates your thoughts as a person who thinks about your company's mission day in/day out.

Here's how we'd structure a mock demo:

- **The prompt:** Outline how long the session will be, what it will entail and how you'll measure success. For mock pitch/demo calls, we advise teams to let candidates know that the call will not take more than an hour: 45 minutes for demo, and 15 minutes for questions/ feedback at the end.
- **The context:** It's best if this is an initial conversation with points of contact. This will give you signal on how well your rep would set a first impression.
- **The panel:** Bring in two of your sales reps (or other stakeholders, if this is your first hire) to sit in as the "points of contact." It's on the candidate to understand the varying needs, objections, and decision-making impact of each person.
- **The pitch:** Have the candidate create a few slides about your product and how it can solve the pain of the company you're speaking with — this shouldn't be longer than 4-5 slides.

Additionally, here are two tips for conducting take-home assessments fairly:

1. **Create a rubric so you can assess candidates in a standardized way.**

Depending on the type of assessment you're conducting, you'll want to create a set of criteria that are dealbreakers — answers that would mean a candidate wouldn't move on to the next round. This helps to eliminate bias and assess candidates as equitably as possible.

2. **Provide enough context for them to succeed.**

Even though part of a rep's job is to do their own research, you don't want them to spend extraneous time tracking down information that is critical to succeeding. Remember, their job is not to articulate what your company does perfectly — the goal is to understand how they communicate with others and convey information.

Make sure to give them enough info on:

- How your product is priced
- Your buyer personas and their use cases
- Information about the mock "company" and why they wanted a demo
- Common objections from customers

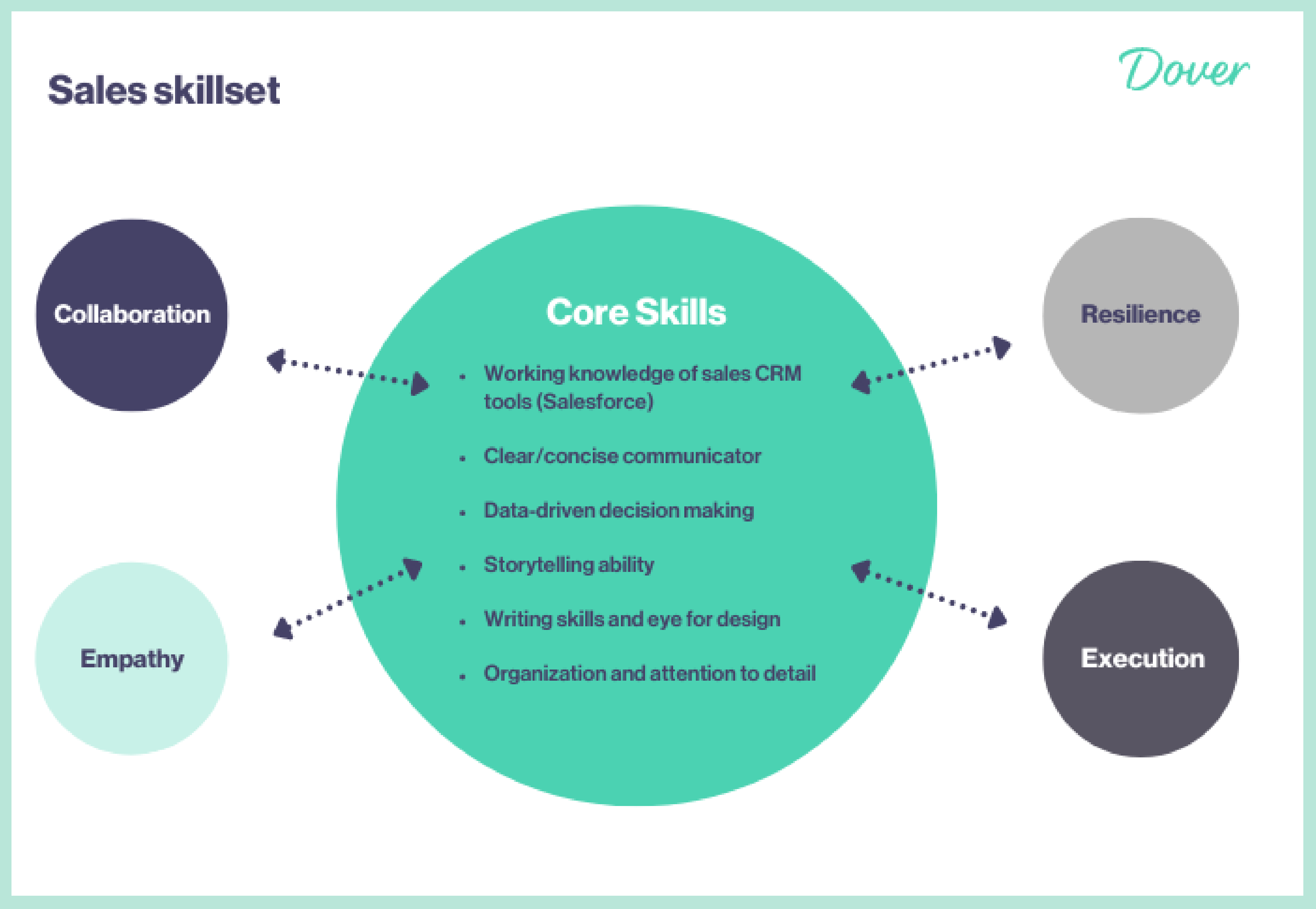
Skills and requirements

Core requirements

- Working knowledge of sales CRM tools (Salesforce)
- Clear/concise communicator
- Data-driven decision making
- Storytelling ability
- Writing skills and eye for design
- Organization and attention to detail

Secondary skills

- Collaboration
- Empathy
- Resilience
- Execution without clear direction



Soft skills

Collaboration

A salesperson will need to meet regularly across your team to understand new productfeatures, customer pain points and continue to optimize and iterate on buyer personas.

They'll need to be able to recognize which customers are not successful using your platform, or how to sell/save customers when you're experiencing churn. They'll also need to understand how the product works in detail, and how to align messaging across the organization so that what customers are sold is what is being delivered.

Example question: "Tell me about a time you disagreed with a member of your team and how you resolved it."

- **Weak answer**: Defensiveness, or placing blame on others, the problem resulted in gridlock or deprioritization rather than compromise and solution.
- **Strong answer**: They have humility and self-awareness. They're able to diagnose where and why they needed to compromise, and how they did so. A candidate who ends their response by saying what they learned from the situation and how they applied these lessons going forward should get serious bonus points.

Execution

Your early team will likely receive projects without crystal clear direction or a baseline metric to build off of — it's important that they can do the research required to make decisions and iterate in order to reach an end goal.

A sales hire for your early team should be comfortable with conducting research, scoping, and defining success metrics and then (and only then) acting upon them. This is also why you want to hire someone with a few years' of experience who understands or has experienced different strategies, roadblocks and channels.

Do you have an example of a time you've not had clear direction of a project?

- **Weak answer**: They've either never worked in an ambiguous environment, or recoil at the idea of working without definitive directio
- **Strong answer**: They can describe specific situations in which they've worked with little guidance and enjoy working autonomously. They're able to discuss the roadblocks and hurdles involved, describe a thorough re-search and iteration process, and articulate how they sought feedback and revised the scope while still aligning with the company strategy or vision.

Empathy

Empathy in sales doesn't only increase revenue — it increases referrals, and retention. A 2019 study by Gartner, found that **customers are most motivated toward growth purchases when they see the sales rep as a trusted adviser who boosts their confidence in their purchase decisions.**

Salespeople aren't psychologists, but they should be able to understand how to form genuine relationships with prospects and notice larger shifts or patterns in customer need.

What's the biggest challenge you see for yourself and your potential team in the next year?

- **Strong answer**: If they address how evolving roles sometimes clash with established workflows, they prove that they're willing to compromise and understand the importance of flexibility.
- **Weak answer**: If they discuss "hitting quotas" versus "building relationships,"or if they're too optimistic about the future of the company, it might signal a poor sense of self-awareness, potential seflish motivation (i.e. hitting my bonus vs. helping my team), and a lack of self-awareness.

Resilience

A salesperson might face rejection on a near daily basis, especially at a startup. Finding someone who can handle this thoughtfully and push through customer doubts will be vitally important. If these objections are approached in the right way, they give your team a valuable opportunity to ask more questions, learn about a prospects' needs and tailor your pitch accordingly.

Though many people think resilience is inherent, it's actually a skill that can be taught. Carol Dweck, a popular psychologist, coined the term "growth mindset" to describe a person who believes they're not limited by inherent traits or abilities. Instead, they believe have the capacity to learn, grow, and improve. At a startup, this is especially important, as folks with fixed mindsets typically are less innovative and take less risks. Those with a growth mindset also tend to have a wider view of the business and its future vision, whereas those with fixed mindset focus on short-term or quarterly goals.

How do you handle customer rejection or objections? What is your most disappointing closed/lost deal and what did you learn from pitching or working with the prospect?

- **Strong answer**: They talk about difficult situations with humility and stress the importance of learning as they go, admitting when they don't know the answer, and bouncing back quickly from mistakes or difficult conversations. Bonus points if they describe what they learned or how they implemented it moving forward.
- **Weak answer**: They describe fearing adversity or struggling to think on their feet, or they speak downright negatively about the prospect. They also don't describe what they learned or how they incorporated feedback into their pitch process afterward.

Compensation, equity, and commission

Salary

Compensation for marketers, like other roles, varies based on company size, equity and other types of benefits. We recommend downloading our compensation guide or checking out this blog post if your startup is new to benchmarking/researching and setting salary bands.

First, you'll want to sign up for a compensation benchmarking tool (we recommend Pave), but there are plenty of free calculators that can give you a general sense of salary data in different locations, industries, and company sizes. Sites like Glassdoor, Elpha, progressions.fyi and levels.fyi can be extremely helpful as a reference point.

Regardless of which option you choose, you'll always want to cross-reference more than one tool to ensure you're making an informed decision.

A solid base salary range for sales development representatives in 2022 is $60-$80K depending on experience, location, and the amount of scope they'll have within the sales team. The chart at the right breaks it down by seniority.

Equity

Equity for startup employees is a trickier subject to tackle than compensation. It's dependent on a number of factors, including your funding, size of company and which hire number they are (i.e. the earlier the higher, the greater their risk and the higher their equity should be.)

As a general rule, you should keep you startup and equity bands within the same percentile — for example, **if you're targeting 75th percentile for equity, and the salary for that role $155K, that would equate to 1.36% ownership in company** (for a company that has raised from $3 to $10 million). A great resource on equity compensation is the Holloway Guide to Equity Compensation. Programs like Pave or OptionImpact provide equity benchmarking alongside salary bands.

ROLE	MEDIAN SALARY + EQUITY
SDR	$90K
Account Executive	$150K
Director	$250K
VP	$330K

Source: BuiltIn, 2022, Median salary + equity

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Commission

Your commission breakdown should acheive three goals:

1. **Motivate employees**
2. **Retain emplyoyees**
3. **Be profitable**

First and foremost, your compensation plan needs to be fair. It needs to give reps a certain level of security, because as a startup, you're likely to have many changes to your go-to-market that could affect a rep's compensation through no fault of their own.

The first thing you'll need to determine is the OTE for each rep**. OTE is a sales rep's base salary plus how much you project them to make in performance incentives or sales commissions.**

If you're an early stage startup just starting your sales function from the ground up, go with 70% base. If you've been around longer and can more accurately project performance, feel free to go heavier on the variable comp. But never under any circumstances go lower than 50%. Your salespeople will appreciate the security of fixed income, and be a whole lot more satisfied with the job.

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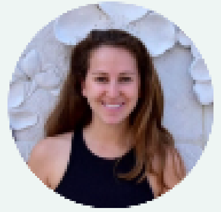
Looking to uplevel your recruiting strategy?

Dover is an end-to-end recruiting solution that helps high-growth teams achieve their hiring goals through automation and operational excellency.

Learn more at www.dover.com**.**

“**Working with Dover has meant we get support on all fronts**, and from every angle of recruiting including sourcing, optimal channel usage, and interview best practices.”



Sofi Pechner
Head of People Operations
Mozart Data

Helping some of the world’s best startups recruit top talent:

stripe

Lattice

Benchling

scale

INSTABASE