

CAREER SURVEY

WE ASKED...YOU ANSWERED. HERE ARE
THE RESULTS FROM OUR CAREER AND
INTERVIEW SURVEY



CAREER SURVEY

We reached out to get your views on career advice, interview experiences and what employers are looking for.

We asked our community a range of questions - and the results were quite enlightening. We've brought them all together here in one place for you to read.

Here's what we asked:

What was your worst interview experience ever?

What is the worst interview advice you've ever received?

What advice do you wish you'd taken early on in your career?

What advice would you give to graduates starting a career in sales?

What skills do you see lacking in today's new recruits?

The Worst Interview Experience I've Ever Had

"When I walked into the office for the interview, all I heard was the company's Director shouting at a member of staff. Not the best first impression."

Many businesses forget that an interview is a two-way process – the company is being interviewed by the candidate too! Don't make a bad first impression on your candidates!

"I was interviewed by a hiring manager that didn't tell me anything about his company and what was good about working for them all through the interview."

Interviews are an opportunity for companies to tell the candidate about themselves

– after all, online research can only do so much. Even more so today, candidates are looking for a company who shows the type of culture & brand they will be a part of. It's down to the interviewer to get the candidate excited and interested in working for the company, as it's often the first interaction your candidate will have with your brand. Make it count.

"I was invited to an 'Apprentice TV show-style' bully interview where I was asked questions in such an aggressive tone that, even though I was offered the job, I rejected it on the basis that the interview was giving a representation of the type of business I would be joining."

Again, it comes back to our earlier comment about the interview being an opportunity to make a good first impression on clients. In departments such as sales, it can be common for interviewers to feel they need to be more aggressive in their approach, but does that really result in recruiting the best candidates?

"During an interview, the guy who ran the company made some pretty awful comments including that he wouldn't hire anyone whose name he couldn't pronounce and that admin was "women's work". I'm still ashamed of myself that I didn't just walk out."

Wow, we're really shocked at this one. It's so unfair to put candidates in this position and I'm sure interviewers would never expect a candidate to come in and share these views. Sounds like a lucky escape!

The Worst Interview Advice I Ever Received

"You don't need to do much research, the interviewers will only ask you questions about yourself."

Showing that you've done your research about a company is a sign that you care about the job role you are interviewing for. Going into a call or a meeting with a potential employer without spending 15 minutes researching what they do online is unforgivable.

"Be yourself. Turns out that people like to exaggerate so if you don't wave your arms in the air shouting how great you are, you lose."

Well, we do think you should be yourself, but the commenter makes a good point: you have to demonstrate what you do well and make it known to the interviewer as it's your chance to put forward why you're the right person for the job. But just do it in a humble way, no waving arms in the air in an interview.....

“Write out potential questions and learn the responses. When the interview came around, I couldn’t remember what I’d written and was too focused on trying to remember pre-written answers rather than responding to the questions.”

It’s important to prep yourself before an interview and make sure you’re covering the key questions, “Why do you want to work for us? ; What do you know about us?” etc. However, going into too much detail and trying to memorise set answers won’t help you in a live interview when you don’t know what all the questions are going to be. Try and get into thinking about potential questions in the run up to your interview, answering them in the shower, while you’re driving, in your head and so on, so that you get comfortable with some of the topics, but don’t try to learn things word for word.

The Best Career Advice I Never Took

“Keep an eye open for other opportunities. You never know what else may be around.”

Many people stay in jobs they don’t particularly love for too long, for fear of the unknown. Working with an experienced recruiter, you get to see what is out there, find out a lot more about a potential employer compared to reading a job ad and get to figure out your market value. There’s a world of possibility out there, especially in a buoyant tech industry.

“You should be a lawyer.”

The grass always looks greener on the other side, maybe for the next poll we can ask some lawyers what advice they wished they’d taken...

“Get an MBA”

Nowadays, the barriers to entry in getting an MBA are lower than ever. Even if you don’t get the formal qualification, there’s tonnes of resources online and courses you can do with prestigious US and UK universities for free that get you some of the way there. Have a look at what Stanford are offering: <http://online.stanford.edu/courses>

“Think more about where you want to be in the next 5, 10, 15 years and then start to plan a path to get there. What experience & qualifications do you need in order to get there?”

When you are in a job you like or find comfortable, it’s easy to get complacent. Likewise, if you are regularly promoted, you may be going down a career path set by your employer rather than yourself. Looking critically at where you want to be in the short term, medium term and long term means you can plan out the changes you need to make now

to get there in the future. Do you need to go back to studying and get some industry qualifications? Do you need to get more experience in the marketing department at your current company? There's often lots we can do in our current roles to dramatically improve the chances of getting our next role.

"Don't follow the money."

What makes you accept one job over another? Does it always come down to money at the end of the day? Organisations today are recognising that staff want much more than just a job and a pay packet – that's why there's such focus on health and wellbeing at work, with many companies offering gym packages, flexi-time and everything in between to lure in the right employees. Where would you be working today if you hadn't 'followed the money'?

What advice would you give to graduates starting a career in sales?

"Focus on development, training and a committed on-boarding program to give you the greatest chance of success."

Choosing a company for your first 'proper' job is all about looking at the long-term benefits. You might be focused on getting the highest salary, but an extra £1000 a year won't make up for what you could learn with the right training and on-boarding program.

What development opportunities can your proposed employer offer? What training do they provide? Where could these new skills take you in the future?

The training you receive now will impact on the next job you take, and this compounds over time so make the right choice early on!

"In the world of sales, communication must be absolutely clear... Know the product or services you are selling – you should try to get as much knowledge as your pre-sales consultant."

Don't rely on having a great pre-sales consultant to back you up on the technical knowledge. Try to get as skilled as you can in the products you are selling; understand them, understand why customers need them and pitch the products yourself rather than leaving it to the techies every time. This helps you to better communicate your message to customers and makes you more self-sufficient.

“It’s about listening... not talking.”

We hear this a lot, but do we follow it? It’s easy to jump in and make assumptions during a customer conversation, but give your prospects room to talk and explain their views. Listen to their wider concerns; not just those that impact on your product or service. Watch, listen, observe, analyse.

“Don’t expect to be Sales Director in 18 months. There is so much to learn from so many people. Get a mentor and learn from their experience.”

Sales is fairly unique in that you can achieve in so many different directions: working on bigger accounts, being Account Director, working your way up the ladder into Sales Management. Focus on honing your craft, try not to move around too much and look for a mentor who can guide you through your career to turn it from being a job into a profession.

“Become an expert in a particular industry vertical.”

It’s not really about being an expert in an industry, it’s about being an expert in your customer’s organisation. If they are operating in the manufacturing industry, then get to know the sector and common challenges inside out. Then apply that knowledge to the next customer in the manufacturing industry and capitalise on the knowledge that you accrue.

It’s easier for customers to trust you if you are coming to them armed with knowledge about their industry, business challenges, objectives and needs.

Don’t leave it to your customer to do the hard work of educating you; educate yourself.

“If you’re going for your first sales job, really understand what the role entails day to day, i.e. is it a job making 40 cold calls a day.”

Don’t be lured in by the attractive OTE (on target earnings – usually base pay plus commission) with no idea about the work involved to reach it. Ask your employer what is involved in reaching and overachieving the OTE so that you can see if it is a realistic goal to work towards.

“Be prepared that you will have good and bad days and tomorrow is a fresh start & the next big deal could be around the corner.”

It’s easy to hear advice about getting back on the horse after losing a deal or having another customer put the phone down on you during your sales pitch. But that is sales; and there is always another customer and another deal to work on. Don’t let bad previous deals and experiences impact on your chances at your next deal.

“Making a mistake isn’t terrible as long as you learn from it.”

Sales isn’t as structured as some traditional graduate jobs – a lot comes down to your personality and communication style. So there is a degree of trial and error when starting out in sales to find out what works for you and your customer. Accept that there will probably be some hiccups along the way and learn and analyse what went wrong and how you can fix it for tomorrow.

“Keep asking questions on how you can get better and learn from what your peers do well.”

Ask your customers what you could do better on next time, ask them what they liked about working with you, ask them what they didn’t like about working with your competitor. Ask, ask, ask. Be receptive to feedback – you can’t take all of it on, but be open to finding out what you can do to improve.

What skills do you see lacking in today’s new recruits?

“Drive and determination - most new recruits expect a lot to be given to them rather than worked for.”

There are some factors you can’t control or change. But what is in your control, is demonstrating drive and enthusiasm for your job. If you’re unhappy with your role, then change it. But don’t make your own life, and that of your employer, miserable by turning up every day without any enthusiasm.

Whatever role you’re in, for the time you’re in it, look for ways to expand your skills. Perhaps you want to get into a Field Account Director role but you’re currently working in Telemarketing. Look at how you can expand your current role to gain more experience; by shadowing other Account Directors, or taking on further responsibilities within your customer accounts. If you can move to a new role, then do it. But if something is holding you back, such as a lack of qualifications or experience, then use the time in your current role to work on impressing your employers and gaining that extra experience.

“Seeing work as a ‘job’ rather than a ‘career’.”

When you view your work as ‘just a job’, your perspective changes. Your idea of achievement is based on short-term goals, usually money related. Your focus is on achieving this month’s revenue goals only, rather than thinking about how you can develop and progress.

When you think in terms of a career, your focus shifts to how you can improve yourself, and your job, to reach your own personal goals. This could mean moving to a position with more responsibility or working in a specific department or industry that you love. It also means you look at your current role as a stepping stone to bigger and better things, so you invest time in achieving in different ways; by gaining more experience in a wider range of areas, making contacts in different parts of your company, and by filling in any qualification gaps before your next job move.

Looking at what you do as a career rather than a job doesn't just serve your employer, it serves you and makes you think about your own personal long-term aspirations.

“In sales specifically, we’re seeing a lack of drive, fearful of cold calling on the phone and poor basic command of written English language skills, i.e. when writing business emails or customer proposals.”

Selling is one area where drive is key – after all, what’s going to make you get back on the phone after a customer rejection?

As for cold calling, some degree of speaking with customers on the phone is required in any sales role, but there is evidence to suggest that millennials don't like making, or taking, calls as much as their older colleagues. Research from the Guardian suggests that over 75% of UK adults own a smartphone, but a quarter of them never use their phone for making calls. Could our increasing reliance on email and messaging have made cold calling even harder for younger recruits?

Another point raised in this answer is the question of good language skills; across spelling and grammar. You don't need to be the world's expert when it comes to deciding if your use of Oxford commas throughout your customer proposal document is appropriate, but everyone working in sales should have a good level of written and spoken English in order to communicate effectively with customers. Making spelling mistakes in customer emails, or not using capital letters throughout an entire email (trust me, I've seen it), is a sign that you've not taken the time or care when communicating with your customer.

And sales is, after all, about communicating well with your customers.

“Self-belief.”

Interesting point, as some of our other interviewees said that the problem was that newer recruits had too much self-belief and not enough determination.

Or perhaps, a lack of self-belief is making people less confident in their role, and consequently less enthusiastic about completing their work and setting themselves challenges?

“Less knowledge of products & no sense of account management.”

Sales is a complex job that often doesn't get the credit it deserves. Not only do you need to get yourself skilled up on the products or services that your company is selling, you

also need to learn skills in order to complete your job; around account management, cold calling, prospecting and client engagement.

What is your onboarding and training process for new sales recruits? Is it structured, or left to existing sales management to come up with their own individual sales training initiatives? Statistics tell us that organisations with a standardised onboarding process enjoy 50% greater new hire productivity, so the upfront investment is worth the increased productivity further down the line (Source).

“We see a lack of toughness in new recruits to deal with the rough patches, coupled with a lack of determination to push themselves & try new things. New recruits should watch and learn from the best, use their initiative & ask questions.”

We agree with this, especially in sales, but we also think that employers have a role to play in creating an environment and learning program that can support new recruits. For example, do new sales graduates feel supported with mentors and advisers to get through rough sales patches? Are they trained to understand that there are natural sales cycles and how to protect their performance against delayed deals?

Sometimes we see candidates apply who might have the qualifications and academic record, but who lack the real-world experience of working. But these candidates need a chance to develop this understanding, so employers and candidates need to meet in the middle. The employer needs to bring training and support to the table, and the candidate needs to bring enthusiasm and a willingness to learn.

Find out more about YourPrime Recruitment and how we're supporting candidates and organisations with their hiring strategies.

<http://yourprimerecruitment.com>



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