7 Tips To Building The Ultimate Sales Team For Growth 2023

Plus, the hottest insights from the founders and leaders of breakthrough companies in SAAS, fintech & healthtech

SANTA MONICA TALENT

Building a sales team for scale-ups

The 7 tips you need to know!

#1 Your first hire - dos and don'ts

#2 Create a winning sales team structure

#3 Why sales for scale-ups are different

#4 What is essential Vs nice-to-have

#5 Hybrid working for today's sales teams

#6 Creating a powerful sales culture

#7 Mistakes to avoid

Get ready to hit your 2023 revenue targets with the ultimate sales team

We show you how

Building and growing a winning sales team is complex and nuanced because your business is unique in culture, proposition and situation. But, one thing that scale-ups ALL have in common right now is the **pressure on revenue targets and the urgent need to drive sales for growth in 2023.**

We spoke to 10 leaders and founders from breakthrough companies like Workable, CharlieHR and GoCardless who generously shared their advice, and combined it with our own market insights and expertise to bring you **7 guiding principles of any scale up building a sales team.**

This way to build the ultimate sales team

Tip #1 - Your first hire

The dos and don'ts

"**"The reality is that if you get the hiring right, all the rest looks after itself. If you are a start-up or a scale-up…"**

Neil Weston, Openmind Networks, Cyber & SAAS.
"

What you need to know

✔ DOs

Hire a 'doer'

Things might be scrappy at first and you need someone who's accountable, will roll up their sleeves and can hit the ground running.

Be realistic about your budget and market conditions.

Collaborate with market experts in defining the job spec and package. You need to be realistic about your budget and market conditions.

Evaluate the people that you've got already.

Weigh up the risks and benefits of external hires versus promoting internally.

Batch interviews together on the same day for efficiency.

Create a speedy recruiting process. Batch interviews together on the same day for efficiency. Comparing candidates is easier and decision-making is quicker.

Do hire a multitasker

Find a person who can sell while documenting and building processes around their success.

Establish clarity and accountability for the revenue target.

The hire should be focused on creating a clear commercial, sales and marketing strategy.

Do hire someone who can do the job AND train others.

Attitude and will are more important in a scale-up. The person might be a mid-level sales executive or a player-manager, but they have to be hands-on and a player-coach who can do the job AND train others.

What you need to know

✗ DON'Ts

Don't ignore Sales Ops!

You need someone who understands the data, crunches the numbers, and applies systems and processes.

Don't disregard internal promotions.

Having faith in existing people can pay off, so keep an open mind.

Don't leave it too late

Start 2-5 months in advance to allow for up to 6 weeks interviewing and a 1-3 month notice period. Consider the length of your sales cycle and work backwards.

> "**The first thing you need to do is have someone clear and accountable for the revenue target, someone focused on making a clear commercial, sales and marketing strategy, so someone that has accountability**"
>
> Lisa Mandell, Advisor and Partner. Interim CRO for scale-ups.

> **"Firstly, I'd need to find out who I am selling to. I'd start with the customer... What industries and personas are we targeting..? Previous experience within a certain field isn't a dealbreaker but it can help to already "speak the language"..."**

Oskar Karlsson, Workable (SAAS)

> **"I believe that bringing in someone new does have some benefits but comes with a significant risk, so we promoted internally and had faith in our existing people."**

Paul Arnold, 3S Money (Fintech)

Tip #2 - Create the winning sales team structure

> "..understand what competitors are doing positively and negatively and hopefully learn from both their successes and mistakes."
>
> Paul Arnold,
> 3S Money (Fintech)

Design Your Dream Sales Team

The 10-Point Checklist

✔ Start with an audit. You need to identify weak or broken areas in order to fix them.

✔ Define the customer and the product - this will inform the sales team hire. The right 'fit'.

✔ Understand your competitors, learn from their mistakes and successes, or even hire from them!

✔ The sales leader will need to figure out and scale the operating model, then slot the right people into the required roles.

✔ Consider 3 key drivers - salespeople in new business development; a product lead to ensure the delivery of new business initiatives; and client relationship managers to proactively retain and up-sell.

✔ Build a marketing and lead nurturing funnel to keep the inbound engine revved up.

✔ Consider inbound and outbound sales models.

✔ Plan to bring operational rigour to sales. Use graduates keen on sales, high energy, tech-native and smart to improve processes and drive scale.

✔ Every business is different, but plan for scale in line with your business plan and have a phased approach to building your sales team.

✔ As your sales team grows, you need the right cadence of meetings, the right tool sets, and a robust Revenue Operations piece.

" **"At Santa Monica Talent, we have access to the very latest market insights to help you design and recruit your sales team"**

Ellis Seder, Founder, Santa Monica Talent.

Tip #3 - Why sales teams for scale-ups are different

The most fundamental difference within a start-up is that there are few if any reference points - you're starting with a blank page. At a more established business, you're likely to have processes and an existing structure to build from, but at scale-up, **it's about trial and error and therefore it requires a very particular type of person.**

> "**You're going to have to have someone who's happy to fail quite a lot, quite quickly. Because that's the only way you can learn.**"
>
> Oscar Hackett, Cledara (Fintech)

Differences between a start-up and an established business

1
Size of team - scale-up teams are likely to be smaller, grittier and more fluid. This dynamism is not for everybody.

2
Lack of reference points or historical learning in hiring - it's trial & error.

3
Mindset and culture at a scale-up is still developing and growing. This requires a particular type of leader and employee.

4
There are constantly changing requirements for skill sets if the product market fit is still being figured out.

Key characteristics of a scale-up salesperson

1
Adaptability - constant change is something you can rely on in the scale-up world.

2
Ability to handle pressure - there is always a sense of urgency and you need to find people who can handle that.

3
Resilience - people who are happy to fail often and learn from it.

Tip #4 - The ideal hire

Identifying your essentials Vs nice-to-haves

Industry experience is less pivotal in successful sales teams than personality and emotional intelligence. Although it might depend on what you're selling, degrees are rarely a prerequisite to sales success - hunger and energy matters more, and knowledge gaps can be solved through training.

A senior salesperson who's ready for management but yet to take that step could be the perfect fit for a scale-up, but diversity in skills and experience is even more vital. Great sales teams blend juniors and seniors, technical, non-technical, and a variety of different backgrounds.

"

"I think it's all about personality. If you've got a very strong sales leader, then I think it's best that they hire on personality and drive as opposed to expertise and experience."

Léyoh Goodall, Sales Director (SAAS)

Real-life tips from our panel leaders and founders

1

Identify your gaps

Alfredo Esposito, Kapaga (Fintech)

"I strongly believe in diversity. You need to bring in people that are different. When I structure my team, I want to understand what I've got, and I want to get somebody different."

- If you have a team that is heavy on seniors, hire juniors for fresh ideas.
- If your team is pure sales but they lack a little bit of technical knowledge, then bring in somebody who is more technical.

2

Be realistic and prioritise

Oskar Karlsson, Workable (SAAS)

"I'm OK with non-industry experience. It's preferred as it can help to speak the same language as your customers already but it's not a dealbreaker."

- List the key skills and attributes that you've seen being successful in the past.
- If your list describes a superhero, then narrow it down to what is non-negotiable and what you can work with. Flex the description depending on the seniority you're looking for.

3
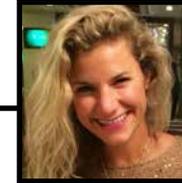
Hard versus soft skills

Lisa Mandell, Advisor and Partner (Growth Advisor)

"..emotional intelligence is so critical in all kinds of leadership roles.. especially the CRO role."

- If you have a strong sales leader, hire on personality and drive as opposed to expertise and experience.
- Degrees can be useful and a good demonstration of achievement, but are not the be-all and end-all for sales.

4

Calum Macleod CCO (Healthtech)

"I have made lots (of mistakes), but often it's rarely been the fault of the individual hired, instead my misunderstanding of what is needed. 30 years sales experience and sales management does not always equate to the street smart, tactical needs of an early stage start-up. Some individuals, excited by an innovative opportunity with massive purpose and potential, don't understand that they will need to get their hands dirty in the more mundane aspects of closing sales (contract detail, GDPR etc.)."

Tip #5 - Hybrid working for today's sales teams

Finding the right balance for your business

Remote and hybrid working is not going away and it can be a divisive issue, particularly in the sales environment. **Are you for or against?** Let's look at the pros and cons.

Positives

Personal choice

Giving people choice and flexibility can be empowering and widen the scope of the hires you attract - geographically and demographically.

Pitfalls

Bad for learning

Being remote can inhibit immersion in product and can be a barrier to day-to-day learning from peers and seniors.

Culture and community

Building a lively and dynamic sales culture can be easier when salespeople are mostly in the office together.

"Hybrid for us means you come in whenever you want. So there is a mix. I like it this way so that people can do whatever they feel comfortable with."

Oskar Karlsson, Workable (SAAS)

".. with the young age of the sales team we've got, they all want to be in the office everyday. We have a good time. For a lot of these people it's their first big job in London, they want to be out and about amongst people. I think this contributes to the culture really well, people enjoy being in our amazing office"

Oscar Hackett, Cledara (SAAS)

"I think the remote hybrid model is bad for learning. Bad not just for learning products, but just hearing your colleague drive a successful pitch. I gained all of my ability to sell and to explain things by being immersed in the old fashioned sales board on the wall. You need to find a way of breeding that sort of environment combined with technology.

We're trying to get people into the office twice a week. And we're trying to integrate some sales and marketing teams. Having that collaboration is really key."

Andrew Lowe, CRO, Social Value Portal

Tip #6 - Creating a powerful sales culture

4 steps to creating a winning sales culture

Creating a competitive and incentivised culture is central to building a high-energy sales environment. Good communication is vital - your business needs a clear vision and your sales teams need to fully understand and embrace what that vision is.

1 : Communication and inclusion

- Hold daily, weekly, monthly and quarterly catch-ups. Team meetings to share successes, what's working and what's not.

- Communicate the numbers: Who's got the biggest deal? Who's got the most pipeline?

2 : Celebration and recognition

- Celebrating and rewarding success appropriately creates a competitive and healthy culture.

> **"You need to create a structure.. You need to have regular meetings for feedback, and once or twice a week with everybody.. to make sure that there is communication, because otherwise, they feel alone."**

Alfredo Esposito, Kapaga (Fintech)

3 : Understand what motivates the individual

- Take the time to discover what incentives resonate with your team and generates the strongest motivation. Everyone is different - think about kudos and recognition, appreciation, financial bonus or promotion.

"People are different and they care about different things. So having flexibility in place to accommodate is key, if that is financial incentives, clear career paths or L&D."

Oskar Karlsson, Workable (SAAS)

"I don't believe anything will give a sales team more energy than the belief that it is great at winning customers, driving growth and making money."

Timi Olotu, CharlieHR (SAAS)

4 : Goal setting

- Establish and communicate clear goals achievable with stretch.
- Consistently hitting revenue targets that positively impact the growth of the company creates positive energy and momentum.
- Reflect how these goals support and drive the bigger picture and company vision.

Tip #7 - Mistakes to avoid

1
Manage expectations and be clear about what the day-to-day role involves in very specific terms. If hiring someone from a large corporate and particularly into a senior role, they need to understand the differences in environment at a scale-up.

2
Trust your gut! The right person is out there. You just need to define what you need and go and find them.

"If there is any doubt, you shouldn't make the hire...I made a couple of such hires that didn't work out."

Oscar Hackett, Cledara (Fintech)

3
Don't hire a grad as your first sales hire – you're better off doing it yourself as a founder.

4
Don't underpay.

5
Make sure you let go if it's not working.

6
Don't hire from logos only – they are not the only talent pool.

Build your sales team and hit your growth targets in 2023

Take action today and hit Q1 at full speed

We offer a fully confidential and complimentary hiring audit to give you an instant, clear and actionable solution. We apply our expert knowledge of the markets, sectors and competitor insights to your unique business. Together we will:

- Understand your requirements and challenges,
- Define your business objectives,
- Set realistic budgets,
- Create the perfect job spec, and
- Identify the best hiring solution for you.

Meet your hiring deadline – start 2-5 months in advance to allow for up to 6 weeks interviewing and 1-3 month notice period.

Book a call with Santa Monica Talent today - with no obligation

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Meet the panel

A huge THANK YOU to our 10 leaders and founders from the SAAS, fintech, healthtech, social impact and growth advisory sectors.

Paul Arnold

Chief Revenue Officer
3S Money
(ex Bloomberg)
£8M Series B

Alfredo Esposito

Chief Revenue Officer
Kapaga
(ex Bloomberg)
£1.9M Seed stage

Léyoh Goodall

Sales Director
Social Value Portal
£4M Series A

Oscar Hackett

Head of Sales
Cledara
£20m Series A

Oskar Karlsson

Sales Director
Workable
£50M Series C

Andrew Lowe

Chief Revenue Officer
Social Value Portal
£4M Series A

Calum Macleod

CCO
Experience with
Healthtech scale-ups

Lisa Mandell

Advisor and Partner
Interim CRO for
scale-ups

Timi Olotu

Director of Revenue
CharlieHR
(ex Facebook)

Neil Weston

Chief Revenue Officer
Openmind Networks
(ex GoCardless)

About us

Santa Monica Talent supports game-changing brands achieve their explosive growth targets.

We help build exceptional sales, marketing, HR, product, operations and leadership teams. We provide services designed for Series A, B, and C scale-ups, or high growth companies of 20 to 200 people.

 The Santa Monica team has a successful record of C-level hiring across the technology industry - including fintech, insurtech, crypto, healthtech, HR software, SAAS, AI, and social impact.

Contact us today

Remember to start 2-5 months in advance in order to have your hire in place when you need them. Free audit with no obligation.

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Salary Calculator

For real-time analysis of the latest salaries and equity, check out our free salary and equity calculator, updated quarterly and designed especially for Seed and Series A to late-stage scale-ups.

Try the salary calculator

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