

The best sales teams are a lot like great schools: They care about results, but the way they achieve them is by being relentless about developing the inside sales skills of their reps. In fact, the best sales teams are most often led by someone who is more like a sales *coach* than a sales *manager*. This dedication to developing inside sales skills ultimately creates a sales team that not only hits its short-term goals, but instills a culture of learning and self-improvement in order to achieve its long-term goals as well.

But it's not always so easy. Superb inside sales skills don't always come naturally to young reps, and sales leaders often feel like they don't have the time or mastery to adequately coach their reps. We know how important this process is, though, so we boiled everything down to the **14 inside sales skills every sales rep must master**.

(If you want to improve your sales skills and maximize your potential, check out our FREE guide: [What Makes a Great Sales Rep?](#))

1. Product Knowledge

A sales rep who doesn't perfectly understand the product they're selling is a completely ineffective rep. Product training should be one of the very first things you teach new reps – they should be able to explain in detail how each product works, what business value it offers, and the reasons it appeals to your company's ideal customers. This will help ISRs (Inside Sales Reps) craft their sales pitch effectively, and ensure they highlight each product's strongest features. Deep product knowledge is honestly one of the few things that [separates the top 1% of reps](#) from the rest

2. Strategic Prospecting Skills

Once ISRs have the product knowledge to sell, it's time to do some prospecting. However, while many sales leaders have their quota-carrying reps also do early cold-calling, I actually don't suggest for ISRs to do cold calling. From a unit-economics perspective, it is obviously considerably more cost-effective to have your Sales Development Reps (SDRs) do cold calls, while your quota-carrying ISRs should be doing more sophisticated prospecting – what I call “strategic prospecting”. This means searching for referrals through existing connections to new prospects that fit the target buyer or ideal customer profile. It's also important for [reps to go back to Closed-Lost opportunities](#) with whom they already had previous conversations and try to revive them. Another strategic prospecting activity is to ask for referrals from existing customers, and even talk your investors (VCs) for referrals to their portfolio companies. All of this is fair game for the quota-carrying ISRs to do prospecting.

3. Rapport Building on the Call

ISR's have a disadvantage over outside sales in that they're not meeting with prospects face-to-face. This means they have to work harder to build a connection with busy and sometimes hostile strangers over the phone. Some sales reps already have a natural ability to [create an instant rapport](#) with a prospect, and only have to finesse it. Other reps can learn to research prospects in

advance and find common ground to empathize with the person on the other end of the line. Whether you're chatting about sports, attending the same college, or just the weather, rapport should not be underestimated.

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4. Buyer-Seller Agreement

In order to set mutual expectations and to make your prospects more comfortable, sales reps should learn how to create a Buyer-Seller Agreement, (aka "[Upfront Contracts](#)" as Sandler Sales Training calls them), to set the tone for all calls and meetings. These are verbal agreements at the beginning of the sales process that outline expectations for both sides. For example, a sales rep can ask a prospect, "Is it OK to ask a few questions about your business and then I will show you a demo of our product to see if there is a potential fit for both of us?" It allows the prospect to feel comfortable and understand what is coming next, so no one feels ambushed by the next step. It also allows the sales rep to open up a two-way street in the selling process so that both parties get to a win-win conclusion.

5. Active Listening

Most sales reps feel comfortable talking to prospects, but listening is another story. ISRs need to become proficient in [active listening](#), or listening with a strict focus and asking intelligent follow-up questions. People can usually tell if you're really listening to them, rather than just thinking about what you'll say next – and most people appreciate a good listener. Great listening skills can help reps empathize with prospects to learn more about their business and pain points. With that knowledge, they can then sell more effectively and offer a better solution.

6. Communication

On the phone, the tone of voice, volume and pace of a sales rep's speech are surprisingly important sales skills. In sales, how you say things to a prospect matters more than what you say. According to Sandler Sales Training, only 7% of communication relies on the content of what you say, whereas 38% of communication is about other attributes of communication such as tonality, etc. As you may have heard before, it's not what you say but how you say it. Reps should try to subtly mirror a prospect's tone of voice and style of talking – if a prospect is more formal and polite, speak similarly; if they're more informal and joke around, do the same. This helps prospects feel familiar with you, and relate to you more easily to create rapport. Reps also need to speak clearly, not too quietly, and not in a monotone. You need to let your emotion and personality shine through, so that the person on the phone knows you're a human, and is interested in talking to you.

7. Qualification Questioning

ISRs need to start off every sales conversation by asking questions during the Discovery phase to analyze a prospect's business needs (i.e. Needs Analysis). It's important to not just throw random features and benefits at the prospect hoping something will stick. In fact, I tell ISRs to stop sharing all of your product's capabilities all at once. This is a bad tactic. Instead, you need

to delve deep to discover your prospect's business pain and how your product can help them solve it by asking qualifying questions. These questions help you determine what you should share about the benefits and value in your product based on what is going to be most important for them. Beyond the Discovery stage of the selling process, over time, ISRs will need to qualify prospects for Budget, Authority, Need, Timeline, Competition and Buying Process in order to get all the key criteria that will help them get to the purchase. Being good at qualification is critical to be a successful ISR.

8. Time Management

The most effective ISRs are able to make the most of their time, with more dials and more connects than other reps. The key to being highly productive is using good [time management](#) skills. You need to train each rep to sort through leads to find the most promising ones, and not waste too much time on a deal that isn't going anywhere. You can use analytics to identify the industry, business size, and other characteristics of ideal leads, and share the information with your team. It's vital to make the most of the hours in the day to bring in more deals per rep.

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9. Objection Prevention

Great sales reps practice the art of proactive "Objection Prevention" and not merely "Objection Handling" and can thus reduce some of the most basic objections by way of how they approach a sale. Train your reps to be strategic and think ahead by studying what typical objections come up in most cases. For example, there is no reason to get to a point when a prospect can say, "I don't have a need for this" or "Call me again in a few months".

It is possible to be proactive and address a common objection before it even comes up. For example, at InsightSquared, many of our reps hear people say "You do reports for sales but I can get reports from Salesforce anyway." Instead, we preempt that objection by sharing during our Discovery Call that our cross-object sales reports are impossible to run in the CRM and yet these reports can save time for the Sales VP or CEO to run and can help grow revenue significantly and all this is possible in a few clicks of a mouse button instead of days spent in Excel with data that will be antiquated by the time you're done.

10. Objection Handling

Even the best reps can't prevent every objection, so it's important to help your team prepare for objection handling when they do hear one. Reps have to be on their toes so that the sales process doesn't end abruptly and they lose the opportunity at the deal. On our sales team at InsightSquared, we [coach reps to empathize, soften and ask good questions](#) to understand what is genuinely at the core of what the prospect is concerned about. Reps need to learn to sincerely understand the prospect's problem, ask for more information, and offer clarity to help the prospect overcome their objections. You should do extensive role play and training to help prepare your team for this.

11. Demo skills

For many B2B products, the demo is critical to starting a sales process. Sales reps need to not only understand the product, but must be able to show off its capabilities to a prospect effectively through a demo. Demos are challenging in that reps need to first discover what benefits will be most important to solving a prospect's pain, and highlight the business value of those features during the demo. Throwing too many features at the prospect is a bad tactic and can overwhelm and confuse them. This is another [skill that you should practice with your reps](#), so they can practice their demo presentation, and clearly be able to show off the product.

12. Gaining Commitment

Great ISRs can get a prospect to commit to a deal fairly quickly. The key is making sure the right people with the right approval power are bought in to the process as the sale progresses. Reps must continually ask questions, assess the prospect's needs and reinforce what the prospect is interested in buying. Reps should ask "Is this helpful? Is this how you envision it?" and more. By forcing the a prospect with buying power to acknowledge again and again that you're offering them real value, it helps push them to commit to a deal.

13. Closing Techniques

Now that the ISR has convinced the prospect that their company needs the product, it's time to close. Managers have to train reps to push prospects, ask for the order and get it signed fast. A lot of prospects will try to push the closing date back a few weeks or a few months, and your rep may be trying to reach a monthly or quarterly goal for the team. In this case, reps have to establish a timeline, and push the prospect to sign using a compelling event. This shows how the prospect is missing out on revenue by not having the product in place now. With the right combination of pressure and value offered, reps can learn to close deals sooner.

14. Post-Sale Relationship Management

Many of us forget to thank customers and to continue building and maintaining the relationship after the sale. Firstly, it's important to be appreciative for the business regardless of whether the customer will buy from you again. This is just common sense and common courtesy. And those sales reps who are genuinely appreciative are the ones who typically grow professionally and become masters of their craft. Furthermore, you don't want your customers churning later and going to a competitor. Additionally, your customers can and will refer you to other customers. Finally, even ten years later you can still go back to the individual to whom you sold years ago and they may still become a customer even when both of you are in a new and different company. Relationships really matter; it's that simple. Yet some reps don't engage in post-sale with their customers. This is a key area at which I encourage all ISRs to get really disciplined.

Make sure your reps are ready to sell, and have all the sales skills they need to be a successful ISR. By teaching them these 14 key skills, you will improve their sales abilities. The power is in your hands to train your ISRs effectively and see your sales numbers soar.