

by Allen Anderson

4 Stages of Selling

A common problem my staff had when they first started in job placement was trying to sell too soon, often believing they were in a selling relationship with an employer, when they were not.

This over-eagerness to make a sale is an inefficient use of time; it turns off employers; and the low success rate discourages and burns out staff.

To organize selling activities, I have identified an important series of steps to successful job placement selling. The overall goal remains getting a job, but the route to that goal involves completing four smaller steps, each with its own separate objective that must be accomplished before moving on. Of the four steps, only one involves selling.

These four steps are:

STEP 1

Prospecting & Qualifying

STEP 2

Information Gathering and Sharing

STEP 3

Sales Presentation

STEP 4

Follow-up

The objective of **Step 1—Prospecting and Qualifying**, is to get an employer to agree to speak to you or meet with you. This step does not involve selling; it is the prelude to selling. The objective is simply to get an appointment with the employer.

The job developer identifies employers who can potentially use the agency's candidates and determines if they are worthwhile pursuing. Are they hiring? Are they hiring immediately or at some later date? Do they hire for positions you can fill? Do they have an interest in your program? Focus prospecting and placement energy on those employers with an immediate need and who have the greatest likelihood of hiring.

Once a prospective employer has been identified, ask for a convenient time to meet in order to discuss the employer's needs and your program.

Staff often try to sell the employer during this initial contact, because the employer asks a lot of questions and the job developer, sensing an interest, tries to capitalize on the momentum. Most often this is a false impression. The employer is really just checking you out. A job developer has little control in this type of situation. Should you push for a sale at this point, it is easy to lose the employer's interest because you lack knowledge of the employer's needs so you can't know how to address them.



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Until you have an appointment with the employer, do not try to sell them or give detailed answers to their questions. In Step 1, you want some of the employer's time, that is all. Success in prospecting is getting appointments; sales will happen later.

Identify a prospective employer, get an appointment and move to Step 2.

The objective of **Step 2—Information Gathering and Sharing**, is to uncover the employer's needs and to explain your services. You get to know the employer and they get to know you.

Again, do not sell yet. You must know that employer's needs in order to be able to sell. Concentrate on probing to understand the employer's needs and respond to them with general information about your services. Provide the employer with a reason to take you seriously.

Rule of thumb in Step 2: You be the questioner. If you ask most of the questions, the employer will do most of the talking and you will learn the employer's needs. If the employer asks most of the question and you do all the talking, you won't learn anything. The employer may have a sense for your program, but you will not know how the employer is connecting what you offer to their needs. Again, if you try to sell without knowing this information, it is easy to lose the employer.

Find out the employers needs, tell the employer about your services and move to Step 3.

The objective of **Step 3—Sales Presentation**, is to get a hiring decision. This is the only point at which you sell in this process.

Explain to the employer how your candidates and your services can solve the employer's problems in a way that is mutually beneficial. If the employer is receptive to your offer, ask for a hiring decision. Step 3 is completed when the employer agrees to hire.

If the employer is not receptive or does not agree to hire, it may mean the employer does not perceive the benefits you offer as effective solutions. If this occurs, return to Step 2 and re-evaluate the employer's needs and your solutions to them. Once your re-evaluation is complete and acceptable to the employer, return to Step 3.

Get the employer to agree to hire and move to Step 4.

The objective of **Step 4—Follow-up**, is to arrange delivery of what has been promised. This is where you negotiate the terms of delivery. When does the candidate start? Who does he/she report to? What paperwork needs to be done? How will your support to the employer and/or candidate be delivered, etc.

There is no predictable timeframe for the completion of these four steps. They can take place over a series of meetings or during one 20-minute meeting.

Your ultimate goal is to get a candidate hired. Remember to push this goal from your mind and concentrate instead on achieving the simpler objectives of each of the four steps that will lead you towards successfully placing your candidate. It is important to recognize what step you are at in order to know what objective you are pursuing so



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that you can determine the sequence of activities you should undertake.

Too often employers are asked to make a decision that is far beyond their ability at the moment, given the information they must comprehend in order to make a decision. When

you try to sell too soon, you inevitably force the employer to turn you down.

Encourage the employer to make a series of positive smaller decisions in the right sequence and you will get the job.

