

Expert Insights on a Career in Sales

Many new graduates will find themselves fielding offers for sales or sales related positions. While a large number of students may not consider sales as their first option, it can provide extremely valuable experience and a level of autonomy that many entry level positions cannot.

To help fill in the blanks of what a sales position has to offer a new graduate, we asked several of the top sales bloggers and [sales training](#) experts (all honored among the [top 100 professional sales bloggers](#)) a few questions on the benefits of a position, or a career in sales. Their answers are below.

Q: What is the most rewarding aspect of a career in sales?

“Really, three things: 1. You have the opportunity to earn a better-than-average living. 2. You have more freedom and responsibility. 3. The people skills that you learn and the confidence that you gain spill over and help you in every aspect of your life.” **-Dave Kahle**

“First, providing solutions to challenges and alternatives for leveraging opportunities. Secondly, being paid for your performance with no limit on your earning potential. Highly successful salespeople can earn 300,000 to 500,000 per year, and many well into the millions!” **-Dave Stein**

“The most rewarding aspects are selling something you believe in and it helps others, changes others lives for the better or solves problems that others did not know how to solve.” **-Eric Darmstetter**

“Freedom. You are free to do what you want if you are good with selling. And you create your own paystubs no matter whom you work for.” **-Alan Majer**

“In international sales it is definitely the people you meet and the relationships you create. I'm not sure if this is always the case with all domestic sales positions, but I do think this is often the case with an international sales role. It's because it takes more personal effort to establish the connections... and so you do create deeper relationships. The down side, which you did not ask for, is the travel - some companies expect you to travel a lot. In the beginning it is fun, but after a certain age travel can disrupt your home life. Lots of travel means very short hours to sleep and many, many lost weekends. I was lucky, I learned how to get a lot done over the phone (and had more control over my sleep time and my weekends) - but not many people know how to really build relationships over the phone.” **-Cindy King**

“The most rewarding aspect of a career in sales is the freedom: freedom to earn what you want, freedom to schedule your time for appointments, calls, paperwork when it fits

best for you and not to sit at a desk all day, and lastly, the freedom to choose your own career path.” **-Carajane Moore**

“The ability to connect and give. Working with clients or employees to connect them in a way that is mutually helpful for each person. I have found that helping others will always come back many times over.” **-Steve Riat**

“Personally the most rewarding aspect was being the fireman that stoked the fire that drove the company's--and by extension the country's--engine. Knowing that every person's job in the company was dependent upon me and my team's performance was a tremendous motivator and knowing that we were putting food on the table for thousands provided tremendous satisfaction--not to mention the satisfaction of beating out highly qualified competitors. The rewards of being extremely well paid and having considerable control over one's actions, time, and work hours didn't hurt either.” **-Paul McCord**

“For me, the most rewarding aspect of a career in sales is the opportunity to grow socially, financially and emotionally while contributing to others in a positive way.” **-Jeff Blackwell**

“The ease at which you realize a reward for your efforts. Bust your butt, work well, your numbers go up and you make more money. It's the only job where success or failure is black and white.” **-Kevin Sasser**

Q: If a student is considering an entry level job in sales but not a long term career, what are the most important skills they will learn that will help them succeed elsewhere?

“You gain people skills and confidence, both of which will serve you very well in whatever position you find yourself.” **-Dave Kahle**

“How to build and maintain business relationships, persuasion skills and business knowledge.” **-Dave Stein**

“I believe that you either sell or un-sell in life. Sometimes you are in the grey area but most of the time it is one way or the other. I like to keep the skills simple: Do what you love and love what you do. Don't be afraid to try anything just measure how it worked and how it felt. If you do not feel fulfilled and the time passes fast chances are you should not be doing it. Just because you are good at something does not mean that is your new career. I am great at licking stamps and shredding paper but that is not why I am on earth. The best sales people I have ever seen do not consider themselves a sales person. Instead, they have a passion for the BlackBerry, Baseball or restaurant business and they just happen to love to share that passion with others which inspires and persuades others to purchase, refer, and become an advocate.” **-Eric Darmstetter**

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“Communication. How to communicate with the different kind of people. Listening skills – how to really listen to what other people are saying to you. Asking questions – how to ask the right questions to understand other people’s needs and wants.” **-Alan Majer**

“I would say it is the basic business skills. What is business? What role do I play in this business? What is it that will get clients to buy my products? It's a business-oriented thought process that you can only really get from sales. And of course you learn a lot about the market you are in. So I would choose a market you want to learn about, or one that "translates" well into another one you are interested in... and open your ears, learn as much as you possibly can about that market. That intimate market knowledge is probably where your next pay raise will come from. Even if your sales experience proves disastrous, the market expertise you pick up will be valuable to someone somewhere if you find where to apply it.” **-Cindy King**

“Some of the most important skills one can learn in a career in sales are: listening, problem solving, perseverance, time management.” **-Carajane Moore**

“The only way you can protect your career is by selling. You might not be selling to external customers but you will always be selling your ideas internally. If you can't sell, no matter what you do, you will not get far. Nothing happens until someone sells something.” **-Ben Bradley**

“Many things, people skills, sales processes, business skills (sales people must be able to communicate with the C-Level people of a company), time management, ability to present, ability to manage change, work / life balance, pay that is relative to performance and respect others and treat them as individuals.” **-Steve Riat**

“If one is seeking to enter sales in order to become more well rounded with the intent of moving into sales, marketing, or general management, then we have something to talk about. Many in marketing and general management have little real understanding of sales, selling processes, real world sales challenges, and where the sales team fits within the corporate structure. Just look at some of the top management publications, they have sections on HR, Marketing, Operations, Finance, Procurement, Manufacturing, and others, but virtually none have a section on Sales. Yet sales is the single most important department in the company from a revenue standpoint (yep, more important than Marketing—sorry Marketing). Why no section on sales? Few in upper management understand sales—and most don’t want to.

A tour of sales should be mandatory for any executive. Misunderstanding what sales does and what they are capable of creates more problems for companies than anything else. Companies tend to cater to Marketing and dictate to Sales because they can understand an advertisement, a flier, a brochure, the statistics of how many response cards were returned. They don’t understand how to connect with a prospect in a manner the prospect will respect and respond to or how to turn sales into a consultative relationship with a client.

Get into sales and learn everything you cannot about sales theory but about the actual

doing of sales—what works, what doesn't; what's realistic, what isn't; how management deals with sales vs. how they should; how marketing and sales interact vs. how they should. Trying to run a company with only sales theory as a reference isn't going to get you far—you gotta have real world experience and really know what works.” **-Paul McCord**

“The most important skills a person can learn in sales that will help them succeed elsewhere is how to engage others in open, honest two-way communication.” **-Jeff Blackwell**

Q: What types of positions and responsibilities should a new graduate expect in a sales position?

“There are as many types of positions as there are companies. I always compare sales positions to running your own company. You can be the best paid employee in the company or the worst; it all depends on your performance. Many times management does not care how you succeed as long as you do. The company gives you training, a process and pay structure. The rest is up to you.” **-Steve Riat**

“This one is also difficult because there are so many depending on one's minor. If one has a business major and science minor, a job in pharm sales would be a natural; or a minor in engineering, something in construction or technology would be prime. Each of these would have different starting places, different responsibilities, and different pay expectations. In general, the more technical the sales, the quicker the income accrues.

However, as an entry level position, a new grad will probably start somewhere between \$40-65k as an outside salesperson and have a fair amount of freedom within a short period of time.” **-Paul McCord**

“I believe a new graduate could expect to be offered entry-level sales positions and in some situations mid-level sales positions which will likely include the responsibilities of generating new business in addition to handling company provided leads.” **-Jeff Blackwell**

“In the beginning it will be a lot of cold calling. The rule of thumb in certain sales jobs like real estate or insurance is that for the first two years you almost go broke because you are building a book of business of recurring revenue. In the third year, you start reaping the rewards. Sadly the average tenure for a sales person is 18 months.” **-Kevin Sasser**

Q: Please tell us a bit more about your background and experience:

“I've been a sales person since I was 17 years old. As a sales person, I was the number one sales person in the nation for two different companies in two totally distinct industries. Since 1988, I have been training sales people to be more effective, and helping companies increase their sales and develop their people.” **-Dave Kahle**

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“I come out of first a technical, then a sales career in high-tech sales. I moved on to management then assorted executive positions. I ran a successful sales consulting and coaching firm for 10 years. I wrote a best-selling book, How Winners Sell, in 2004. In 2005 I founded the first research and advisory company that covers the sales performance improvement (sales training) market. We provide independent analysis and comparisons of sales training programs and the companies that provide them.”

-Dave Stein

“I did not know I was a natural sales person till I was about 27 years old. I just did not think about it. I got my skills trying to sell my Dad on buying me stuff and he rarely if ever did. When he did, I paid attention to what I did right.” **-Eric Darmstetter**

“I have over 25 years of experience in international sales & marketing. I first started off in PR and marketing roles, but directed my path towards sales, because I was told that a sales experience would help my career - I didn't expect to stay so long in sales though. After entering sales I spent several years just in sales, with high level negotiations part of my daily activities. But then moved into positions where marketing skills were also needed. Since then I've held roles that needed both sales and marketing skills. In international sales you do often need some marketing skills when you are in one country and your company is in another one. They lack the marketing insights and your field exposure means that you often have information you need to share with all departments in your company.” **-Cindy King**

“My background starts off in telemarketing at 15 years of age (learning early the skill of persuasion). I spent most of my career in large account sales, existing client growth or new client acquisition in the industries of medical, pharmaceutical, direct marketing, technology and real estate. Becoming an expert at problem solving whether for the client or operationally to make what I sold happen is the key to my success!” **-Carajane Moore**

“While going to college I worked at Radio Shack in Sales. I had great success selling and was taught basic sales skills through their training process. After graduation I was offered a job managing a store. I spent a total of 8 years with that organization (Some in college some after), during that time I got married and needed out of the retail sales (long hours, holidays were VERY busy and would be difficult to do with a family). I took a position within my current company Nex-Tech, which I've been with for 10 years.”

-Steve Riat

“Over thirty years experience in b2b sales, developing and leading top producing sales team, creating and selling successful business, and training thousands of sellers for some of the world's best known companies in how to find and connect with quality prospects.” **-Paul McCord**

“As a lifelong student of personal selling I decided to build an information center where anyone involved in the profession of sales could identify and access the resources needed to expand their selling skills, knowledge and expertise. To that end I built SalesPractice.com in 1999 with the mission of making quality sales education and

training resources freely accessible to everyone interested or engaged in the profession of sales.” **-Jeff Blackwell**

“I have been in sales/sales management for over 15 years. I have sold mostly software and professional services, with average ticket prices ranging from \$2,500 (1990s) to over \$1mil (2000s).” **-Kevin Sasser**

About the Interviewees:

Dave Kahle: Dave’s sales successes as the number one salesperson in the country for two separate industries led him into a career as a sales training consultant and author. Dave has presented in seven countries, 47 states and published seven sales related books which have been translated in eight languages. His weekly “Thinking about Sales” Ezine is read by over 30,000 subscribers.

www.davekahle.com

Dave Stein: After an early career as a professional trumpeter, Dave transitioned quickly to computer programming. In 1997 he founded the sales consultancy agency The Stein Advantage, Inc. and in 2005 Dave co-founded ES Research Group, Inc. Dave is a professional member of the National Speakers Association and a member of the Executive Advisory Board of the Fisher Institute for Professional Selling. In April 2008 he was appointed Visiting Professor of Sales and Sales Management at the Dublin Institute of Technology. Currently he sits on the ASTD’s Sales Training Committee.

www.davesteinsblog.wordpress.com

Erik Darmstetter: Erik has been building a successful track record of increasing sales for companies and events since 1986 as the Sales By 5 Chief Energy Officer & Founder. From Vice President of Sales & Marketing at one of the largest imprinted sportswear companies in the US, to his entrepreneurial success in building one of Texas’ largest advertising design firms, Erik has established himself as a rare commodity with a touch for increasing sales.

www.salesby5.com

Alen Majer: Alen consults and trains entrepreneurs and salespeople on how to harness their energy and use it for the success of selling. He is very passionate about motivating sales professionals to achieve their goals even faster than they would without his guidance. He is the founder and CEO of The Science and Art of Selling, a sales training, coaching and consulting company in Toronto, Canada. He is also co-founder of the Sales Academy of Croatia and the Sales Institute of Croatia. He trains salespeople on a variety of topics ranging from science to the art of selling.

www.alenmajer.com

Cindy King: Cindy has over 25 years in the field as an executive in sales and marketing for both large multinationals and start-ups. These dual sales and marketing skills together with strong cross-cultural competency explains her particular area of focus. She started her own company two years ago to help businesses create their best

sales strategies to enter new foreign markets. She offers a wide range of services for businesses developing their international markets or for businesses using social media tactics that require strong cross-cultural skills.

<http://cindyking.biz>

Carajane Moore: Carajane graduated from the University of Nebraska at Omaha with a BS in Business Administration and Marketing. Carajane is now the VP of Business Development at Hunt Big Sales. Hunt Big Sales offers businesses a sustainable process for achieving growth through large account sales with a nine phase process.

<http://www.huntbigsales.com>

Ben Bradley: Ben is currently a Managing Director at Macon Raine Inc. In his own words, he “helps companies solve big hairy problems at the intersection of marketing, sales and technology.” Macon Raine’s clients are B2B technology, services, manufacturing and distribution companies with relationship driven sales cycles. They help clients cost-effectively find new customers and leverage their relationships with existing customers.

<http://benbradley.net>

Steve Riat: Steve is a graduate of Washburn Law School with a BS in Political Science. He worked his way up within Nex-Tech in five years from an Inside Sales Representative to his current position of Sales Manager, which he’s been doing for five years.

<http://www.steveriat.com>

Paul McCord: Paul is the author of a book on referral selling, *Creating a Million Dollar a Year Sales Income: Sales Success through Client Referrals* (which is quickly becoming recognized as the authoritative work on referral selling.) His background includes over 28 years selling, building and managing top sales teams, and training and coaching sales professionals and managers. His background in sales has been predominately in the financial services industry, selling both direct to consumers and to banks, NASD firms, and insurance companies. His company, McCord Training, works in the areas of prospecting, referral selling, and personal marketing.

<http://salesandmanagementblog.com>

Jeff Blackwell: Jeff is the founder of SalesPractice.com a vibrant online sales training community that offers sales and marketing professionals free access to a comprehensive collection of quality sales training resources.

www.jeffblackwell.com

Kevin Sasser: Kevin is currently the VP of Company.com and has consistently been in the top 10% in overall sales performance for multiple organizations in the last 15 years. Kevin is also a writer on the blog “The Sales Wars” created to “capture some of the adventures, mishaps, and dumb luck that regularly occurs in the world of enterprise



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software sales and to let those new to the profession know that it's not just them, sales is not easy."

<http://thesaleswars.wordpress.com>