

Sales and business development managers

Management & Leadership framework · Management & leadership level · 5 competencies · approx. 75 minutes

How to use this guide

- Focus on these 5 competencies — the behaviours that matter most for this role — not a chronological career history.
- Ask every candidate the same core questions, then probe. Allow around 15 minutes per competency.
- Ask for real examples and use STAR — the Situation, the Task, the Action they took, and the Result.
- Stay neutral, capture what they say, and judge later. Gather evidence on one competency at a time.
- Rate each competency 1–5 against the positive and negative indicators, and note the evidence.

5 Outstanding 4 Good 3 Acceptable 2 Marginal 1 Poor

1. Thriving in a Performance Environment

Consistently sets high standards and drives performance. Monitors progress, proactively overcoming barriers to success and quickly addressing underperformance

Why this matters for Sales and business development managers: Sales is the most performance-environment-driven of the management functions. APS UK Sales Capability Framework names 'managing performance to target' explicitly. ISMM legacy framework centres performance management. Quotas, pipeline, monthly/quarterly targets are universal. Position 1 reflects the defining feature of the role.

Describe your biggest achievement in your current role.

- Why do you feel it is such a big achievement/strong performance?
- What did this achievement require from you?
- What were the barriers to success? How did you overcome them?
- Why didn't you give up or take an easier option/path?

Describe a situation where you have had to sustain your energy over period of time to achieve.

- How did you organise yourself (planning, targeting, monitoring)?
- Why was it so important to achieve?
- How did you cope with the time pressures/flagging motivation/barriers?
- How did you monitor progress? What was the quality of the output?

Describe the standards that you use to monitor your work.

- What difficulties do you encounter in maintaining these standards?
- How do you measure your performance against these?
- How do you encourage a sense of standards in others?
- How do you ensure that you keep raising the bar on performance?
- What have you done when things have not been done to your satisfaction?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Gives up easily or fails to proactively find ways to deal with issues/barriers to goals achievement		Proactively overcomes barriers to success/achieving goals

Is not able to clearly articulate standards and success measures they set for themselves/for others		Sets high standards for self and others
Delivers results by taking easier/more obvious paths – may not achieve excellence but delivers performance		Takes the path that will deliver the best results rather than accepting the easier option/mediocre performance
Puts in less effort rather than really pulling out the stops and making (personal) sacrifices to make things happen		Consistently achieves goals. Pulls out all of the stops to make things happen
Fails to sustain energy/struggles to keep self focused and motivated to deliver results		Demonstrates the ability to sustain personal energy and motivation over a period of time to deliver results
Is laid back. May not instil a sense of urgency		Exhibits a sense of urgency to get things done
Fails to instil the energy and commitment to maintain the motivation of others through tough and challenging times		Builds responsibility and commitment from others so they sustain their energy and motivation over time
Is rather ad hoc in approach – No disciplines and checks to drive out performance/increase the chances of success		Plans to succeed – takes a structured approach to planning and monitoring to increase chances of success
Tolerates mediocre performance from self and others		Raises the bar on performance everyday
Fails to deal with underperformance in a timely manner		Quickly addresses underperformance in others
Allows others to get away with unacceptable performance/behaviour		Holds others accountable for performance and behaviour. Provides robust feedback to others on performance
Fails to see/help others appreciate the importance of their work and the contribution that they can make		Speaks with conviction about the purpose of the team's work and the contribution that the team can make

Summary of evidence: _____ Rating (1-5): _____

2. Building Positive Working Alliances

Proactively builds a wide network of internal and external stakeholders. Encourages cooperation between different groups, whilst being comfortable expressing disagreement and handling conflict. Ensures the needs of key stakeholders are met

Why this matters for Sales and business development managers: APS 'stakeholder management' + CMI 'managing relationships'. Sales is fundamentally network-driven — internal champions (legal, product, finance, customer success), external client relationships at multiple levels, partner and channel ecosystems. The senior sales manager builds and orchestrates a wider network than they personally control.

Sometimes it is necessary to enlist the help of others in our network to solve an issue. Describe a time when it has been necessary for you to do this?

- How did you establish who was best placed to help? How approach them?
- How do you go about building/maintaining your network?
- What feedback have you received on your networking skills?

Sometimes stakeholders don't really understand what they want, or present us with requests that will not meet their need. Describe a time when you had to ascertain the exact nature of a stakeholder's need.

- How did you help the stakeholder to articulate the real need?

- How did they respond?
- What would have been the impact of you not acting in this way?

Give me an example of a time when you had to deal with conflict/frustrations working with a key stakeholder or another team/department?

- What steps did you take to resolve the problem?
- What was the outcome?
- What feedback did you receive?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Limited networks or reactive approach to networking -doesn't commit time and effort to maintaining networks		Proactively develops and maintains a network of relationships with key stakeholders
Networks on a needs basis. No evidence of having strong enough sustainable networks		Draws on network when required and with minimum effort as relationships are strong/have been maintained
Tends to withhold information from colleagues or share it widely enough or in an untimely manner		Regularly/proactively shares knowledge and information with colleagues within their sphere of influence
Responds to wants rather than needs of stakeholders. Fails to question/challenge to establish needs and drivers		Questions/challenges in order to really understand the needs of stakeholders. Is focused on needs not wants
Fails to respond to requests/feedback from stakeholders		Responds promptly to stakeholder requests / feedback
Treats others as a resource rather than as a person (not as they would like to be treated themselves)		Demonstrates a clear personal code of conduct with respect to how they engage with others
Fails to surface/deal with conflict and disagreement with different stakeholders. Pursues the task without paying attention to issues of climate/relationship		Effectively manages conflict/disagreement between different stakeholders
Fails to establish a common goal or purpose to align differing stakeholder groups		Encourages cooperation across different stakeholders – helps to establish/ascertain a common goal or purpose
Expresses disagreement in a less tactful way		Expresses disagreement tactfully/assertively
No evidence of building lasting/sustainable relationships with key stakeholders/following up formally or informally		Keeps communication channels open. Follows up to maintain relationships with stakeholders
No evidence of seeking feedback from/following up with stakeholders to ensure their needs are met		Follows up to ensure that the needs of stakeholders (continue to be) met

Summary of evidence: _____ Rating (1–5): _____

3. Understanding the Commercial Context

Stays informed of trends and changes in the wider market place in which they operate. Identifies commercial business opportunities and takes action to realise these. Considers the longer-term implications of decisions

Why this matters for Sales and business development managers: CMI 'commercial drive' + APS 'business acumen and sector understanding'. The senior sales manager reads market trends, customer segment dynamics,

competitor moves, and translates them into commercial implication. Sales without commercial understanding is order-taking.

What do you do to ensure that you have all of the information you require to perform effectively in your role?

- Where do you get the information from? How does this assist you?
- How do you keep up to date with developments in/outside the business?
- Why is it important to do this?
- What do you see as the key challenges/changes in the industry over the next 5 years?

Describe a situation where you have had to balance strategic goals with short/medium term profit?

- How did you go about doing this? What was the outcome?
- Has there been a time where you have focused on a short term win to the detriment of the long term?

Describe a situation where you have spotted and pursued an opportunity you knew could add value to the business.

- How did you spot the opportunity? What value would it add? Why?
- How did you get support for your plans? Who did you engage?
- How did you quantify the return on investment?
- How did your proposal differentiate your business from the competition?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Limited understanding of the nature of the industry, the market and the competition		Understands the industry, the market and the competition
Fails to keep self up to date with the necessary knowledge to perform in role		Stays abreast of trends/changes in the market place and applies these to their role
Cannot articulate the key challenges/changes facing the business/industry		Demonstrates a sound appreciation of the medium/long term challenges facing the business
No strong profile/network/reputation in their field or in the industry – has not capitalised on wider networking opportunities		Has built a strong network and profile in the industry – seen as a thought leader
Takes a reactive approach to business issues. Fails to anticipate and take action to prevent these from occurring		Able to spot issues before they arise and presents solutions
Reacts to rather than anticipates and takes action to exceed customer needs and expectations		Able to anticipate and exceed customer expectations
Is overly focused on results at the expense of staff, customer at the expense of commercials etc. – fails to balance all aspects of organisational performance		Considers the impact of their actions on employees, the organisation and its customers/clients
No evidence of spotting new opportunities – ideas are more evolutionary than revolutionary and may not differentiate but rather keep up with the competition		Uses knowledge of the market/industry to spot new business opportunities
Focused on achieving results in the short term rather than longer-term sustainability/profitability		Prepared to sacrifice short term gains for longer term sustainability/profitability
Lacks entrepreneurial spirit/courage to pursue opportunities as a result of the potential cost of failure		Has the courage to pursue commercial opportunities where the potential benefits outweigh the cost of failure.
Narrow focus on improvement. This is limited to within own area, does not consider improvements across business units/areas		Appreciates how all parts of the organisation fit together and ensures activity is aligned

Does not demonstrate an appreciation of costs and profit		Is cost and profit conscious
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Summary of evidence: _____ Rating (1-5): _____

4. Leading the Way for Others

Creates a clear and compelling vision of the future, devolving accountability for delivery to the right level whilst offering appropriate levels of support. Drives performance through regular, honest feedback and by building a climate of openness and trust

Why this matters for Sales and business development managers: CMI + APS + Operations Manager Apprenticeship Standard all name leading sales teams as core. Vision, motivation, performance management, coaching individual sellers through their development. The sales team is one of the most performance-volatile teams in the organisation; leadership matters disproportionately.

How have you ensured that your team feel equipped to deliver the business plans in your area?

- How do you keep the team focused on the business goals/ensure they understand the link between their work and the wider company goals?
- How do you ensure your team feel empowered but not overloaded?
- How do you keep the vision real so it resonates with the team?

Give me an example of a time when you had to lead a de-motivated team or a team who were less enthusiastic/ committed to the task in hand.

- What did you do to keep spirits up and people focused on objectives?
- How were you sure that you had overcome the difficulties?
- What factors did you consider? What lessons did you learn?

Can you give me an example where, with the power of hindsight, you feel you may have pushed an individual or team too hard?

- What feedback did you receive from the individual/team at the time?
- What was the outcome? What might you have done differently?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Fails to engage others in the "why" or the longer term goal and get buy in and commitment		Communicates a compelling vision/picture of the future to generate motivation/enthusiasm in others
No clear mechanisms for monitoring and reporting to track progress to goals		Keeps the team focused on the goals through establishing clear mechanisms for monitoring and reporting
Keeps hold of too much themselves (fails to empower the team) and/or micromanages the process		Devolves accountability to the right level and offers appropriate levels of support without micromanaging
Rewards and recognises others in the same way, irrespective of their personal performance/contribution		Provides differential recognition to others on the basis of objective measures of performance
No evidence of checking that the team see personal relevance of the change/direction and their contribution		Ensures the team understand the need for change/the direction and that this resonates personally with them
Fails to provide the right balance of support and challenge		Provides an appropriate balance of support and challenge

No evidence of seeking feedback from the team re the suitability/effectiveness of their management/ leadership		Checks with the team to ensure that they are feeling appropriately supported and challenged
Provides only developmental feedback rather than praise and motivation to build confidence		Recognises and rewards good behaviour and performance
Has less flexibility in leadership style (e.g. struggles to take a directive stance or to collaborate/facilitate)		Adapts leadership style to suit the needs of the team and the circumstances
Fails to coach – does the job for others. As such may not get (sustainable) performance improvements from others		Coaches others to help them perform. Raises awareness and generates responsibility for action in others
Creates a command/fear climate where teams are less comfortable expressing their views or trying new things		Builds a climate of trust and openness where people are comfortable expressing their views and trying new things

Summary of evidence: _____ Rating (1–5): _____

5. Handling Pressure

Remains calm and in control under pressure, staying focused on delivering results. Stands their ground when challenged and maintains a positive outlook when faced with setbacks.

Why this matters for Sales and business development managers: Sales involves rejection at every level — opportunity, deal, account, year. Deal volatility is constant; period-end pressure is real; customer escalations are unavoidable. The sales manager who cannot maintain steady performance under this pressure does not last.

Describe a situation where you felt that unreasonable pressures/demands were being placed on you/your team.

- What did you do to help manage the pressure and demands?
- How successful were you? How do you know (feedback)?
- How did you minimise negative impact on performance?
- With hindsight what have you done differently when faced with demanding/pressurised situations?

Tell me about a crisis (at work) you have handled recently.

- What caused it? What did you do to resolve it?
- How were you feeling at the time? How did you manage your emotions?
- How did you ensure yourself/others coped through it?
- How did you know they were coping?

Sometimes our values and beliefs can be called into question by business decisions and we need to take a stand. Describe a time when this has happened to you.

- Why was it important for you to take a stand and stand your ground?
- How comfortable did you feel doing this? How successful were you?
- What made you successful? What got in the way of success?
- What have you learned about yourself from this experience?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Becomes ruffled or emotional when under pressure – loses control when under stress		Remains calm and collected in difficult circumstances. Keeps control in stressful situations
Takes eye off the ball and becomes distracted/ preoccupied when under pressure		Maintains performance under pressure

Uses a limited range of coping strategies or maladaptive coping strategies when under pressure (e.g. diet, exercise, sleep)		Adopts a range of effective coping strategies to deal with pressure (e.g. manages symptoms, re-frames, tackles the source)
Fails to spot signs of pressure in self and others		Recognises signs of stress/pressure in self and others
Focuses on self when under pressure. Does not consider how to support others through pressure situations		Looks to ensure that others are equipped to deal with and supported through pressurised situations
Responds disproportionately/inappropriately to challenge or when values and beliefs are called into question		Responds constructively to challenge or when beliefs and values are called into questions
Does not stand ground or fails to challenge constructively		Prepared to stand ground in the face of opposition
Gives up easily – lacks tenacity when faced with setbacks		Persists with a course of action despite setbacks – shows tenacity in the pursuit of goals
Tends to dwell on disappointments or setbacks which can interfere with focus and performance		Remains a positive outlook in the face of setbacks and disappointments – sees them as an inevitable part of the process but learns and moves on
Loses focus when under pressure		Maintains focus when under pressure
Focuses on the wrong things – gets caught up in distractions and loses focus/attention		Manages distractions in the working environment and keeps self focused on performance goals

Summary of evidence: _____ **Rating (1–5):** _____