Sales Manager interview questions

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What to expect

Sales manager interviews focus on how you lead a team, read the numbers, and handle the pressure of a missed quarter. Expect a mix of behavioural questions about coaching and performance management, scenario questions about strategy resets, and technical questions on CRM and forecasting.

- **Process and planning:** How you set targets, allocate territories and run a sales cadence.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of coaching, recruiting, or turning around underperformance.
- **Scenario:** How you would respond to a missed quarter, a lost key account, or a sudden budget change.
- **Technical:** Comfort with CRM tools, pipeline data and financial modelling.
- **Client-facing:** How you handle a difficult negotiation or a major account relationship.
- **Commercial:** How you link sales activity to margin and business strategy.

Typically two to three stages: a recruiter screen, a hiring manager interview that mixes behavioural and scenario questions, and a final panel with senior sales or general management. Some employers include a short case exercise on forecasting or territory planning.

1. Walk me through how you set sales targets for a team at the start of a quarter.

Why they ask

Interviewers want to see that targets are built from pipeline reality, not just a top down number, and that you can explain the method to your team.

How to structure your answer

A walk-through is best: start with the data you review, then how you divide targets, then how you communicate them and build buy in.

Example answer

"I start with the previous two quarters of CRM data, looking at conversion rates by stage, average deal size and the seasonal pattern for each product line. Then I look at the pipeline already in play and what marketing or product changes are coming. I set a territory level target that adds up to the business number, but I leave room for a stretch component so the team is not set up to miss. I meet each salesperson to walk through their number, agree on the activity that will get them there, and document it in the CRM. Finally I review weekly and adjust the forecast if the early weeks show we are off track, rather than waiting until the end of the quarter."

2. Tell me about a time you coached an underperforming salesperson.

Why they ask

This tests whether you can diagnose performance issues and have a difficult conversation without simply moving the person on.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result. Keep the result concrete, including what changed in their numbers or behaviour.

Example answer

"One salesperson had been a strong performer but had dropped below target for two months. In our one on one I asked what had changed, and it turned out they had stopped qualifying early and were

spending too long on small accounts. I sat in on their calls for a week, then we rebuilt their account list together and set a rule that they would only pursue deals above a certain size. I also paired them with a senior colleague for negotiation practice. Within six weeks their pipeline had more qualified opportunities and they closed a deal that had been stalled for months, finishing the quarter above target."

3. You take over a team that has missed its target two quarters in a row. What do you do in your first month?

Why they ask

Tests how you judge a situation under pressure, where you look first, and whether you act or blame.

How to structure your answer

A judgement under pressure structure: first stabilise and diagnose, then prioritise quick wins, then set a plan with the team. Avoid jumping straight to restructuring.

Example answer

"In the first week I would meet each salesperson individually and ask what is blocking deals, then review the CRM to see where opportunities are stalling. I would also check whether the target itself was realistic given the market. From there I would pick two or three deals that are close to closing and work them alongside the team to get some early wins and rebuild confidence. At the same time I would set a simple weekly cadence with clear activity metrics so people know what good looks like. By the end of the month I would have a revised forecast and a coaching plan for anyone who needs support, and I would communicate that plan to senior management."

4. How do you use CRM data to decide where your team is losing deals?

Why they ask

Sales managers are expected to be fluent in pipeline analytics, not just relationship builders.

How to structure your answer

Describe your method, then give a specific example of a change you made because of the data.

Example answer

"I look at conversion rates by stage and by salesperson, and I compare average time in each stage against our benchmark. If a lot of deals are stalling after the proposal stage, that usually points to pricing or a weak business case, so I would review those calls. In one case the data showed most losses happened after the second meeting, and when I listened to recordings it was clear the team was not identifying the decision maker early. We added a qualification checklist to the CRM and built a report on it, and within a quarter the stage conversion improved. I also use dashboards to spot which reps need coaching on which part of the process."

5. Describe a time you negotiated a major contract or pricing change that protected margin.

Why they ask

Tests negotiation skill and commercial judgement, especially whether you can hold price without damaging the relationship.

How to structure your answer

STAR, but make sure you explain the trade offs and what you did when the client pushed back.

Example answer

"A long standing client wanted a ten per cent reduction on a renewal because they had received a cheaper quote elsewhere. I asked for a meeting and we went through their usage data together, which showed they were using more of our support than the contract covered. I offered to hold the current price if they committed to a two year term and agreed to a small increase in volume, and I brought in a service review to show the value they were getting. They signed the two year deal at the

existing price, and the margin held because we were not discounting the core product. I kept the relationship intact and they referred another division to us."

6. How do you keep a sales strategy current when budgets, stock or market conditions shift mid quarter?

Why they ask

Tests adaptability and whether you can re plan without losing the team's focus.

How to structure your answer

A scenario and process structure: explain how you gather signals, how you decide what to change, and how you communicate it.

Example answer

"I keep a monthly review in the calendar, but I also watch leading indicators like enquiry volume and stock cover so I can act sooner. If stock is short, I would shift the team's focus to products we can deliver, and I would work with marketing to adjust the campaigns. If the budget changes, I would reprioritise the largest opportunities and be honest with the team about what that means for targets. I would bring them into the conversation rather than just handing down a new number. Then I would update the forecast and tell senior management what has changed and why, so there are no surprises."