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When numerous sales reps aren't meeting their target numbers, a company's puzzled leaders may go scrambling to figure out the cause.

But it could be the genesis of the problem dates back to when those sales people showed up for a job interview.

“One major reason sales goals aren’t met is pretty simple,” says Dave Stein, co-author

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One of the company’s board members heavily promoted a favored candidate.

“We had a hiring process in place, but the CEO felt compelled to short-cut it,” Stein says. “He asked me to interview the candidate. It took 15 minutes to determine that this candidate wasn’t qualified for the job. The CEO hired him anyway.”

Six months later, the new VP was gone, Stein says, but only after costing the company millions of dollars in lost opportunities and damaged relationships with customers and business partners.

Stein and Andersen say other reasons sales managers make hiring mistakes include:

- **They are behind their territory coverage plan and are in panic mode.** After a little staff turnover, they may find themselves down five reps out of a team of 20. “The instinct is to hire fast and furiously, and *that’s* the problem,” Stein says.
- **They hire based on gut feel.** Many experienced sales managers claim that they know a good sales rep when they see one, but unfortunately they don’t, Andersen says. Even the most intuitive sales managers who hire on a gut feeling get it wrong more often than less-experienced managers with a solid set of tools, he says.
- **They fall for candidates who sell them during the interview.** Salespeople who go from job to job end up gaining a lot of job-interview experience. It may take 10 to 20 interviews for them to land a job. If they change jobs every two years, then after 10 years they have been through 50 to 100 interviews and have become masters at selling themselves, Andersen says.
- **They don’t effectively check references.** The references listed on a job candidate’s resume aren’t necessarily the best people to talk with. Instead, Stein prefers to contact former managers, customers and peers who aren’t listed. Some companies’ HR departments may have policies that don’t allow blind-reference checks, though.

- **They don't use proven tools available to them.** Stein says those could include

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