



A career in sales can be a challenging but very rewarding field for former military leaders. A successful salesperson should be driven, able to work autonomously, an achiever, and somebody with outstanding communication and presentation skills. You should be goal oriented. Companies want driven individuals to be the “face” of their organization. A sales career can be very rewarding financially. Typically, a top performing individual in sales can make more than his or her counterpart in the Operations or Management fields. Sales is a pay-for-performance field. The better you perform, the more you earn.

Sales is a very autonomous career. You may work for a company as part of a sales team, but getting the job done on a daily basis is strictly up to you. Research, cold calls, scheduling, presentations, follow-up, and closing a deal are ultimately driven by you alone. An individual’s success in sales is primarily defined by his or her personality, drive, ability to influence people, and time management skills.

## Why Sales?

Sales is not a career field most military leaders immediately consider as an option during their transition from the military to civilian life. As military leaders, we tend to gravitate naturally towards operations, management and project management - because that is what we are comfortable with. But, those things that made you a great military leader are exactly what make a good sales representative: your intelligence, drive, your goal-oriented and competitive nature, great communication skills, strong interpersonal skills, a desire to be the best, and a desire to be challenged. Why not sales? We strongly recommend that you at least explore the option. Here are the facts:

### Compensation

You are almost certain to make more money in sales than in most management or operations positions. Companies need to sell products or services to survive, and reward successful sales people extremely well. The compensation is designed to reward and retain performers. The better you do, the more you earn. Professional level sales roles are paid a base salary + commission and usually include benefits like car and cell allowances and an expense account.

### Route Into Executive Leadership

85% of chief executives and senior managers either started their career, or at least have spent some time in their career in sales and felt that their roles in sales were critical to their professional development and career progression. It gives you an appreciation of what happens at the ‘tip of the spear’—at the customer interface. As a military officer, you have already developed leadership skills and have solid leadership experiences. After performing well in a sales role, former military officers are routinely selected for promotion into leadership positions faster than their peers. Not all great sales people are good leaders; this can be a great advantage to you starting a new career.

### Personal Control

In general, you are in control of your schedule. You make your own appointments, and run your own day the way you think is best. As long as you are producing positive results and meeting or exceeding your established goals, you have the freedom to set your own schedule.

### Job Security

Companies know that *successful* sales people are not expendable. If you were to lose your job, or choose to leave it, it's relatively easy to get a new job if you can demonstrate a 'track record' of success in sales. A successful sales person should always be able to get a job and make a living. Sales is also a great way to build your reputation inside your company. The CEO will know who the top sales representatives are within the company.

### Helping Others

Sales is mainly about relationships between business professionals. Sales is about assisting others in achieving their goals and solving their problems by introducing your company's products and services. It is not about forcing others to buy goods and services that they do not want. Sales is about working diligently to discover areas where your company's products and services will add value, having a clear understanding of the needs and desires of the other party, and then working to fill that need. When done properly, problem solving in this way will earn their respect, gratitude (and their business).

## Typical Positions

Listed below are some of the most common positions available to transitioning military officers in the Sales field:

**Industrial/Technical Sales:** Industrial or Technical Sales is a specialized business-to-business sale of generally high cost technical products (machinery, specialized equipment, etc). Candidates should possess a strong sales profile and typically have some technical experience. The technical experience required can vary greatly from some technical aptitude to an engineering degree and hands on experience. Compensation generally consists of a base salary with commission or a bonus plan.

**Pharmaceutical/Medical Sales:** Pharmaceutical and Medical Sales are client focused sales careers with the primary end user being doctors and medical professionals. Candidates must possess a strong sales profile and outstanding communication and presentation skills. A strong technical or medical background is usually preferred.

Candidates traditionally start in Pharmaceuticals because that industry is more open to transitioning military officers with a good sales profile, but who may not have previous sales experience. The Medical device field typically requires sales experience with a history of good performance. Compensation for both fields generally consists of a base with commission or bonus plus a company car or car allowance.

**Financial Services:** The financial services field includes business-to-business sales and personal services. The areas include banking, investing (stock brokers), and financial advising. Candidates must possess a strong sales profile and typically possess a BS Business (or related discipline) and/or an MBA. Compensation generally consists of a base salary with commission or a bonus plan. These positions typically have no upside earning limit and allow for tremendous earning growth after several years of experience.

**Outside Sales Rep/Account Manager:** Most sales positions not mentioned above are generally classified as an outside sales representative. These positions are available across a broad swath of industries and while the products you represent vary widely, the position requirements don't – represent your company and products to clients in a professional manner through direct contact with potential clients. Strong communication skills and customer service skills are a must.



## Career Progression

A position in sales can also open up a lot of doors for you in the future within an organization. An individual with a successful sales background and strong leadership experience from the military can successfully move into a wide range of roles in other areas of the company such as training, brand management, marketing or operations. Some JMOs that enter a sales career when leaving the military choose to spend their entire career selling or in a sales manager role due to the great work/life balance that can come with a sales career as well as the fairly unlimited earning potential.

## Challenges

There is always a place for a sharp and enthusiastic sales person, and given the correct training and support, most bright people who are willing to work hard and learn will succeed in sales and make a better than average living. However, as in all things, every silver lining has a cloud or two.

### Hard Work

A successful career in sales requires hard work and a strong overall work ethic. If it were easy, more people would be doing it. It is commonly said that for every one person who says 'Yes!', there are nine who say 'No!'. If you need to find five people a day to say 'Yes', you will have to talk to fifty people a day. If you aren't extremely motivated and have a great work ethic, a career in sales is likely not for you.

### Results Matter

Sales is a profession where you are judged almost exclusively by your results. Being a 'nice guy' doesn't cut it, on its own. You'll be expected to achieve certain levels of performance, and if you don't do this, you'll be as visible as a sore thumb. And you'll probably lose your job. You must be goal oriented, organized and self-motivated. If that doesn't describe you, you should not consider a career in sales.

### Disappointment

As mentioned above, a lot of people will say 'No!' and will not be interested in the wonderful products/services you are offering them. If you are the sort of person who will take these disappointments to heart, then don't consider a career in sales.

### On Call

In many cases, as the Sales Person, you'll be the smiling face of the company you represent. In fact, apart from the driver who delivers the products you've sold, you may be the only person from your company that your customer knows in person. So when things go wrong, as they inevitably do, it will be you that the customer calls, demanding satisfaction (even if it is eleven o'clock at night!).

But remember, no matter what job you hold in business, you spend a lot of your time selling: selling ideas to your bosses, your colleagues, your juniors, your suppliers and your customers. Spending time in sales prepares you to communicate effectively, and to 'win friends and influence people' (Dale Carnegie).

## Keys to a Successful Interview

As you move through the interview process for sales, remember that the companies are looking for the next generation of professionals to grow their business. They need superior talent and are willing to search long and hard to find the right “fit.”

Focus on the following points:

- ✓ During an interview, you must convince an interviewer that you have a record of performance and success, are competitive, outstanding drive and motivation, and the ability to work autonomously.
- ✓ Convince the interviewer that you are a goal focused problem solver, with the ability to think on your feet.
- ✓ You must show that you possess strong presentation skills.
- ✓ Be able to answer why you are interested in sales.
- ✓ Let them know you are focused on sales.
- ✓ Put together a brag book. Learn more about creating a brag book.
- ✓ Review our prep module for sales interviews and practice your questions.



**For more information on Sales, please view our [Sales Prep Webinar](#) online**

Username: iprep / Password: video