

Interviewing Questions

It's hiring season, therefore it's the time when sales managers interview prospective reps.

I've put together a list of interviewing questions to pose to candidates who sell into the C&I market.

They cover these areas:

1. Real-world C&I selling experience
2. Pipeline Management
3. Technical Literacy
4. Sales Strategy
5. Account Management
6. Personal Tenacity
7. Account Insights
8. Coachability
9. Sales Strategy
10. Commercial Math

Real-world C&I selling experience

No. Question

- 1 "Walk me through the time you closed a C&I deal. What made it hard?"
- 2 "What's the longest sales cycle you've had; how did you keep the deal alive?"
- 3 "Tell me about a time when a buyer pushed back on pricing. How did you defend your value?"
- 4 "What's the biggest contract you've lost? Why did you lose it, and what did you learn?"
- 5 "How do you qualify whether a C&I prospect is worth your time?"

Pipeline Management

- 6 "Where do you find your best C&I leads, and why?"
- 7 "What's your approach to breaking into a vertical you've never sold into?"
- 8 "Tell me about a time you created an opportunity from a dead or cold account."
- 9 "What's your personal prospecting rhythm — daily, weekly, monthly?"

Technical Literacy

- 10 “How do you explain basis risk to a customer who has never heard the term?”
- 11 What’s the most common mistake C&I customers make when evaluating energy proposals?”
- 12 "Describe a time you had to educate a customer on market timing or forward curves.”
- 13 “How do you handle a customer who wants to ‘wait for the market to drop’?”

Sales Strategy

- 14 “How do you approach a plant manager vs. a CFO vs. a sustainability director?”
- 15 “What’s your strategy for selling into multi-site industrial accounts?”
- 16 “Tell me when ops and finance disagreed during your sales. How did you navigate it?”
- 17 “What KPIs matter most to industrial buyers when evaluating energy solutions?”

Account Management

- 18 How do you keep customers engaged between contract cycles?”
- 19 “Describe a time you turned a small account into a major one.”
- 20 “What’s your strategy for preventing churn when a competitor undercuts you?”
- 21 “How do you handle a customer who only calls when something goes wrong?”

Personal Tenacity

- 22 “Tell me about a time market volatility blew up a deal. What did you do next?”
- 23 “What’s the toughest objection you’ve ever handled in energy sales?”
- 24 “Describe a time you had to rebuild your pipeline from zero.”
- 25 “How do you stay motivated when deals stall for months?”

Account Insights

- 26 “How do you position yourself as an advisor rather than a commodity seller?”
- 27 “What’s your approach to multi-year account planning?”
- 28 “How do you identify cross-sell opportunities across supply, efficiency, and DER?”
- 29 “What’s one insight about C&I energy buyers that most reps miss?”

Coachability

- 30 “What’s the best piece of sales coaching you’ve ever received?”
- 31 “Describe a time you changed your approach because the market changed.”

- 32 “What’s your philosophy on transparency with customers?”
33 “What do you need from a manager to perform at your best?”

Sales Strategy

- 34 “What’s the one thing you believe about C&I energy sales that most reps get wrong?”
35 “If I gave you a list of 100 industrial accounts, how would you prioritize them?”
36 “What’s the hardest part of selling energy — and why?”

Commercial Math

- 37 How do you calculate your own gross margin on a deal?”
38 “What’s the most complex pricing scenario you’ve had to explain to a customer?”
39 “Describe a time you caught an error in a pricing sheet or contract.”
40 “How do you forecast your pipeline when deal sizes vary widely?”

If you have favorite interview questions and want to share them, please pass along. I’ll create another mailing with those featured.