

How to Hire AI-Native Sales Talent

A role-by-role breakdown for how to identify AI-Curious, AI-Active, and AI-Native Sales talent



The Three Tiers

We've organized AI fluency into three tiers, adapted from our original GTM AI Fluency Rubric for sales-specific behaviors:

AI-CURIOUS

Has experimented with AI tools but uses them at a surface level. Might use ChatGPT to polish an email, but workflows haven't fundamentally changed. This isn't automatically disqualifying, especially at well-resourced companies where AI tooling is built into the stack.

AI-ACTIVE

Has integrated AI into daily workflow in meaningful ways. Can walk through specific use cases, explain what changed in their process, and share before-and-after results. They're not just using AI. They're iterating on how they use it.

AI-NATIVE

Has fundamentally redesigned how they work around AI capabilities. They build systems and workflows (not just prompts), they think about scale and production quality, and they can articulate the compounding impact of their approach.

FOR SDRS AND BDRS

	AI-CURIOUS	AI-ACTIVE	AI-NATIVE
WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	Uses ChatGPT to draft outbound emails. Relies on default sequences. Prospect research is mostly manual or LinkedIn-based.	Uses AI to personalize outreach at scale. Researches accounts in depth with AI before outreach. Has specific prompts or custom GPTs for prospecting workflows.	Has built a repeatable AI-powered prospecting engine. Uses tools like Agency.ai, Clay, or custom workflows to automate research, enrichment, and personalization end to end.
GREEN FLAGS	Can explain specific things they've used Gemini, ChatGPT, or Claude for, at work or in their personal life. Curious about what's out there.	Has built reusable assets (custom GPTs, Claude Projects, prompt templates) they use over and over, not just one-off prompts. Can share before/after on a workflow. Experiments and iterates.	Pays for their own Pro license. Has built or contributed to something the team uses, not just personal hacks. Can walk through a working system, not just a single prompt.
RED FLAGS	Hasn't used AI for anything, personal or professional. No curiosity about what's out there.	Describes AI use that's basically "Googling in ChatGPT." Mentions tools without outcomes. Stuck on "it helps me write faster."	Over-indexes on AI tooling at the expense of basic outbound discipline. Can't hold a real discovery conversation on the phone.

Interview questions to ask SDR/BDR candidates about their AI fluency:

1. Walk me through your outbound process end to end. Where does AI fit in?
2. Show me an outbound email you're proud of that was AI-assisted. What was your process?
3. If I gave you a new market segment and asked you to build a list of 500 prospects with personalized first touches in 48 hours, how would you approach it?
4. What non-mainstream AI tool are you using right now?
5. What AI tool have you tried and stopped using, and why?

FOR AES

	AI-CURIOUS	AI-ACTIVE	AI-NATIVE
WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	Uses ChatGPT to polish emails and prep for calls. Relies on CRM defaults. Uses AI for call summaries but doesn't analyze patterns across conversations.	Automates prospect research. Uses call recording analysis to identify win/loss patterns. Has specific workflows for deal stages (mutual action plans, competitive battlecards, stakeholder mapping).	Uses AI as a thinking partner across the deal cycle. Stress-tests deal strategy, models competitive positioning, and preps for stakeholder-specific conversations. Drives adoption across peers and shares learnings proactively.
GREEN FLAGS	Can name specific ways AI has changed how they prep. Open to learning. Curious about how others on the team use it.	Can walk through a real AI-powered workflow with before/after on a specific deal. Has a clear point of view on which tool fits which task.	Brings real artifacts and walks through them from memory. Knows where AI helps in a deal and where human judgment is non-negotiable, like in-the-moment discovery or a final committee presentation.
RED FLAGS	AI use is limited to email drafting and meeting summaries. Says they "know how to sell" and doesn't see the point of changing how they work.	Mentions tools without outcomes. Can't articulate the "why" behind tool choices. Generic, AI-sounding emails reaching prospects.	Brings a polished AI-generated brief but can't walk through it from memory. Has the AI vocabulary but the fundamentals (champion, business case, forecast rigor) fall apart under pressure.

Interview questions to ask AE candidates about their AI fluency:

1. Tell me about your most complex deal in the last six months. Where did AI play a role in how you managed it?
2. Walk me through your actual prep process for a first discovery call.
3. Have you built any tools, workflows, or systems that make you more productive? Show me.
4. If you had no inbound for 30 days, walk me through the math and the plan for hitting your number.
5. Bring a redacted artifact from a real deal. Walk me through the key moments and how you navigated them.

FOR SALES LEADERS

	AI-CURIOUS	AI-ACTIVE	AI-NATIVE
WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	Talks about AI in broad terms but can't articulate a specific vision. Delegates AI decisions entirely. Can't spot specific opportunities to apply AI in the business.	Has implemented AI tools across the team and can speak to results. Makes informed build-vs-buy decisions. Has started restructuring workflows around AI capabilities.	Has a clear, opinionated vision for an AI-first sales org. Has personally built or piloted tools. Has a point of view on centralized vs. decentralized AI and can defend it for your stage. Brings systems thinking and data literacy alongside traditional sales leadership skills.
GREEN FLAGS	Curious. Willing to get in the tools themselves. Asks good questions about how peers are using AI.	Can point to specific team-level results from AI adoption they drove. Has shaped a hire, killed a tool, or centralized a workflow because of AI.	Can name specific tools, approaches, and reasons. Understands the difference between a cool prototype and something production-grade. Has a point of view on what to centralize (applied AI, RevOps) versus where to push individual contributors to build.
RED FLAGS	Buzzwords without substance. No personal hands-on experience. Outsources all AI thinking to a junior person or RevOps.	Surface-level fluency. Can't articulate where they've actually changed how the team operates because of AI. Mistakes "we have Gong" for AI strategy.	Talks a big AI game but can't describe a single system they've built or commissioned that actually moved a number. Or the opposite problem: talks like a data scientist but can't recruit, coach, or manage reps.

Interview questions to ask Sales Leader candidates about their AI fluency:

1. How do you think about building an AI-forward sales organization? What's your vision?
2. Should AI capability be centralized in a dedicated team or distributed across the org? What's your experience, and what would you do here?
3. Tell me about a build-vs-buy decision you made on AI tooling. What happened?
4. How do you evaluate whether an AI investment is actually working? What metrics?
5. Walk me through how you'd restructure our sales process around AI capabilities in your first 90 days.

What's next?

If you're ready to make the hire and want a thought partner, reach out. We love talking through this stuff. And if you just want to keep learning, we've got more guides and resources waiting for you at captivatetalent.com/resources.