

WHICH IS A BETTER PATH TO THE TOP, SALES OR TECHNICAL WORK?



Question: I work for a major telecommunications company, where I spent five years as a software engineer after earning a BS in computer science. I then [returned to school for an MBA](#), and transferred out of my \$50,000/year job last year to become a sales rep to put my new degree to work. My base pay is now in the mid-\$30s, but the commissions are potentially lucrative. I believe the path to the top is through sales, and I'm trying to think long-term (I'm 32). I'm wondering if I made a good move financially given my technical background. Is sales a better path to the top than the technical side? And given my background, what should I be earning in South Florida? My wife and I are both fluent in Spanish and have considered relocation as an option.

— *Scott, Boca Raton, Fla.*

Scott: Hopefully, you investigated the sales potential in your new position before accepting the transfer. The best way would have been to ask the other reps what you should expect to earn in commissions. I don't think you should worry about your long-term potential. The combination of a technical background, an MBA, a fluency in Spanish and sales experience will keep you marketable for many years. And sales can be an excellent path to the top at companies that focus on marketing technical products and services, especially to Latin American markets. I think recruiters would agree that you should be earning more, but if your commissions add up to more than 100% of your base salary, you'll be well-compensated. You definitely could boost your earnings immediately by shopping your skills outside of South Florida, but the greatest interest likely will come from more expensive markets, such as Silicon Valley and New York. Then you'll have to spend those extra dollars on living costs, since Miami is a relatively inexpensive place to live.