

What makes a  
successful  
salesperson?



## **1. Introduction**

For the last 100 years, books and articles discussing why some people are successful in selling and others are not have flooded the market. After all of this research, no one has identified the profile of the “ perfect” salesperson because sales jobs are so different. Each customer is unique. Some like to interact with aggressive salespeople, whereas others are turned off by aggressive behavior. Some are all business and want formal relationships with salespeople, whereas others look forward to chatting with salespeople in an informal way. No magic selling formula works in all sales jobs or with all customers. Although no one personality profile exists for the ideal salesperson, successful salespeople are hard workers and smart workers. They are highly motivated, dependable, ethical, knowledgeable, good communicators, flexible, creative, confident, and emotionally intelligent. Salespeople have to stay on top of their markets. They have to be knowledgeable about their products and services. Moreover, they have to be honest and sincerely interested in helping their customers find value and derive satisfaction.

A successful salesperson has five attributes:

1. They have empathy – that means they really hear what the prospect is saying so they can uncover any hidden agendas or unspoken objections;
2. They are Success Driven – they’re motivated by, rather than intimidated by, the challenge of closing a sale;
3. They have a desire to help people – they crave the gratification that comes from hearing, “ Thanks! You really helped me!”;

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4. They have conscientiousness: this is a discipline from within that says, “I’ll do what it takes to do a good job.”;

5. They have resilience – they don’t take rejection personally – after identifying any lessons to be learned, they move right on to the next customer.

## **2. Characteristics Of Successful Salespeople**

One of main goals of the sale process is to build a very good rapport with customers. Customer may be introverts or extroverts. But salesperson needs to be an extrovert and an outgoing personality to move with the customers and influence them to make the purchasing decisions. He should also have good listening skills to hear the voices of the customers to understand their needs in a best way. The salesperson should listen the customers with lots of empathy. The ability to accurately sense the reactions of other people and to recognize the clues and cues they provide allows salesperson to relate effectively to them. If he/she can relate with them empathy, he/she can build trust and influence them with a personal touch. The way to achieve consistent sales success is all about the art of influence and persuasion. At times, selling can be very stressful, demanding and paved with many obstacles. Having motivation in sales will enable he/she to maintain a positive outlook when faces with such obstacles and ultimately overcome them. What is the one trait all successful, high achieving salespeople have in common? It is nothing but persistence. Persistence in sales requires a high level of motivation and is very challenging but the rewards can be great. Any sales role requires a very strong organizational skills. A successful sales

person needs to bounce the balls here and there and do this in a highly organized way.

### **Motivation**

Most salespeople work in the field without direct supervision. Under these conditions they may be tempted to get up late, take long lunch breaks, and stop work early. But successful salespeople do not succumb to these temptations. They are self-starters who do not need the fear inspired by a glaring supervisor to get them going in the morning or to keep them working hard all day. Spending long hours on the job is not enough. Salespeople must use their time efficiently. They need to maximize the time spent in contacting customers and minimize the time spent in traveling and waiting for customers. To do their job effectively, salespeople must organize and plan their work. Finally, successful salespeople are motivated to learn. They must continually work at improving their skills by analyzing their past performance and using their mistakes as learning opportunities.

### **Dependability And Trustworthiness**

In some types of selling, such as used-car sales, the salesperson rarely deals with the same customer twice. However, this article focuses on business-to-business selling situations in which the customer and salesperson often have a continuing relationship. Such salespeople are interested not just in what the customers will buy this time but also in getting orders in the years to come. Customers develop long-term relationships only with salespeople who are dependable and trustworthy. When salespeople say the equipment will perform in a certain way, they had better make sure the equipment performs that way. If it doesn't, the customer will not rely on them again.

**Ethical Sales Behavior**

Honesty and integrity are important components of dependability. Over the long run, customers will find out who can be trusted and who cannot. Good ethics are good business.

**Customer And Product Knowledge**

Effective salespeople need to know how businesses make purchase decisions and how individuals evaluate product alternatives. In addition, effective salespeople need product knowledge – how their products work and how the products' features are related to the benefits customers are seeking.

**Communication Skills**

The key to building strong long-term relationships is to be responsive to a customer's needs. To do that, the salesperson needs to be a good communicator. But talking is not enough; the salesperson must also listen to what the customer says, ask questions that uncover problems and needs, and pay attention to the responses. To compete in world markets, salespeople need to learn how to communicate in international markets. For example, business is conducted differently in Europe than in the United States. In the United States business transactions generally proceed at a rapid pace, whereas Europeans take more time reaching decisions. European customers place more emphasis on the rapport developed with a salesperson, whereas U. S. firms look more at the size and reputation of the salesperson's company. Because Europeans want to do business with salespeople they like and trust, the latter devote a lot of time to building close personal relationships with customers.

**Flexibility**

The successful salesperson realizes that the same sales approach does not work with all customers; it must be adapted to each selling situation. The salesperson must be sensitive to what is happening and flexible enough to make those adaptations during the sales presentation. Personal selling is the most costly marketing communication vehicle. The higher cost is justified by its greater effectiveness. Personal selling works better than any other communication vehicle because salespeople are able to develop a unique message for each customer. Salespeople can do “ market research” on each customer by asking questions and listening carefully. They then use this information to develop and deliver a sales presentation tailored to the needs and beliefs of each customer. In addition, salespeople can observe verbal and nonverbal behaviors (body language) in their customers and, in response, adjust their presentation. If the customer is uninterested in the contents of the presentation or turned off by the salesperson’s style, the salesperson can make changes quickly. In contrast, advertising messages are tailored to the typical customer in a segment and thus are not ideally suited to many of the customers who may see the ad. Advertisers are also limited in how fast they can make adjustments. Salespeople can adjust on the spot, but it may take months to determine that an advertisement is not working and then to develop a new one. Only personal selling provides the opportunity to be truly real-time adaptive in making presentations. Consequently, selling effectiveness hinges on the salesperson’s ability to practice adaptive selling and exploit this unique opportunity.

**Creativity**

Successful salespeople use their creative juices to build bridges to their customers, gain long-term commitments, and effectively manage relationships. Creativity is the trait of having imagination and inventiveness and using it to come up with new solutions and ideas. Sometimes it takes creativity to get an appointment with a prospect. It may take creativity to develop a long – remembered presentation in the buyer’s mind. It may take creativity to solve a sticky installation problem after the product is sold. Some people don’t see themselves as creative because they’ve been told by family, friends, or teachers that they’re not creative. Others refuse to allow their natural creativity to flow, due to fears of being laughed at or fears of having the idea fail. Still other salespeople come up with creative ideas, but fail to act on them.

**Confidence**

Successful salespeople tend to be confident about themselves, their company, and their products. They believe that their efforts will lead to success. Truly confident people are willing to work hard to achieve their goals. They are open to criticism, seek advice from others, and learn from their mistakes. They expect good things to happen, but they take personal responsibility for their fate. People who lack confidence, according to these same studies, are not honest about their own limits, react defensively when criticized, and set unrealistic goals.

**Emotional Intelligence**

Salespeople span the boundary between their companies and the companies’ customers. At times the objectives of the company can differ

from those of the customers. The company wants the salesperson to make profits, and the customer wants to buy a product that meets his or her needs at the lowest price. Dealing with these conflicting objectives can be stressful for salespeople. To cope with conflicting company and customer objectives, rude customers, and indifferent support staff members, effective selling requires a high degree of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is the ability to effectively understand and use one's own emotions and the emotions of people with whom one interacts. Emotional intelligence has four aspects: (1) knowing one's own feelings and emotions as they are experienced, (2) controlling one's emotions to avoid acting impulsively, (3) recognizing customers' emotions (called empathy), and (4) using one's emotions to interact effectively with customers.

### **3. Are Salespeople Born Or Made?**

On the basis of the preceding discussion, we can see that the skills required to be a successful salesperson can be learned. People can learn to work hard, plan their time, and adapt their sales approach to their customers' needs. The skills of sales are teachable. Successful salespeople normally start with a set of attitudes and character traits that help them enjoy the sales process and become successful. Research has shown that innate characteristics such as personality traits, gender, and height are largely unrelated to sales performance. In fact, companies show their faith in their ability to teach sales skills by spending billions of dollars each year on training programs. A good salesperson has visions. They don't just think about today or tomorrow but years ahead. They stay in contact with their customers, follow-up appropriately and as a result receive genuine referrals



from satisfied customers who can see they go the extra mile. Sales is about talking to people and communicating ideas. Salesperson does not need fantastic oratory skills, but will need to clearly and concisely communicate. So that the buyer is able to understand and appreciate the benefits of the product or service on sale. Effective communication will tend to mean flexible communication. Buyers will have different personalities and effective communicator/salesperson will be able to adapt their medium to suit the situation and their target audience. Very few successful salespeople do so purely through their ability to talk. To complete most sales takes as much time listening, as it does talking. The buyer needs to be given a chance to communicate what they want and how they want it so that the salesperson can ensure how their product will meet those needs and wants. Great salespeople are naturally greater problem solvers. It is rare for sale situation between buyer and seller to have an exact match between the want and what the product can provide. It is therefore often the salesperson's job to demonstrate to an acceptable degree that the features and benefits would in many ways feel the need or want. This can take creativity and panache. Sales involves reaching targets. Targets are reached, day by day, hour by hour and minute by minute. Therefore a plan needs to be set and worked to. Being organized and enables the salesperson to make best use of their time and resources. It helps them focus their minds on the task at hand, and to take a logical path towards reaching those goals. Great salespeople are naturally interested in other people.

There are inquisitive, and therefore tends to ask questions that gain information that helps them to make the sale. By asking good questions the salesperson can hone in on the core of the issue.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The specific duties and responsibilities of salespeople depend on the type of selling position. However, most salespeople engage in various tasks in addition to influencing customers. These tasks include managing customer relations, serving as the account team manager for their firm, managing the relationships with vendor and channel members, and providing information to their firm. Sales jobs can be classified by the roles salespeople and their firms play in the channel of distribution. The nature of the selling job is affected by whom salespeople work for and whether they sell to manufacturers, distributors, or retailers. Other factors affecting the nature of selling jobs are the customer's relationship to the salesperson's firm, the salesperson's duties, the importance of the buying decision to the customer, where the selling occurs, the tangibility of the benefits considered by the customer, and the degree to which the salesperson seeks a commitment from customers.

There's a distinction between a person with a worker mentality and a person with a professional mentality. Workers tolerate their jobs as burdens to be endured for the sake of putting food on their tables and roofs over their heads. Professionals see their jobs as rewarding components of their lives. Their careers and their personal lives complement and support each other. Their jobs are part of who they are.

Workers wait to be told what to do. They don't reach out for new responsibility, because they don't want responsibility. They take care of their own immediate tasks without worrying about how their tasks affect others in the organization. In fact, they don't see themselves as part of the organization. They see the organization as an outside entity that may have a negative or positive impact on their lives. They refer to it in the third person: as "it" or "them," and not as "we." The organization is something they have to respond to, although they're not a part of it. Professionals see themselves as part of the organization. To them, the organization is "we." When it succeeds, they succeed. When it suffers reverses, they feel the reverses.

People look up to professionals because they recognize them as being good at what they do. They're good because they've walked the extra mile toward excellence. They absorb information about their chosen fields, and they share their knowledge with others.

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