

Top Sellers: Characteristics of a Superior Salesperson¹

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Introduction

A “suit and hard sell tactics” do not define superior selling. There are many determinants impacting sales performance that distinguish superior salespeople from inferior salespeople (Sardar and Patton 2002). As a salesperson, you have hundreds of competitors, and customers will choose you on the basis of how well you present your product to them.

This document focuses on the benefits of being a top seller, the attributes of a top seller, the difference between tellers and sellers, and how to define a top seller. Also, this document will provide a better understanding of what really makes a great salesperson and the tools to help you obtain the characteristics needed to be a top seller.



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The Benefits of Being a Top Seller

A top salesperson clearly has the competitive edge over other salespeople because they have the characteristics needed to sell their products and create important business relationships. Twenty percent of all salespeople make 80% of all sales, which means 80% of a sales force fights over the remaining 20% of business (Greenberg and Greenberg 1983). This statistic reinforces how important it is to be in the top 20% of sellers. These top salespeople possess personalities and abilities that best fit selling as an occupation. It is also important to note that 55% of salespeople have no ability to sell, and 25% have sales ability but are selling the wrong product or service (Greenberg and Greenberg 1983).

Improving a salesperson’s performance will increase both the organization’s profitability and the salesperson’s income. When using personality profiling techniques, a peak performer will be recruited over mediocre and poor performers and will move up the promotional ladder quicker (Sardar and Patton 2002). The benefits of being a top seller are excellent incentives to learning the attributes of a successful salesperson. The good news is that top sellers are not born; anyone can become a top seller by studying, practicing, concentrating, and focusing on his own performance (Basis International 2002).

The Attributes of a Top Seller

Successful salespeople possess common attributes. Highly successful salespeople are intelligent; have above average ambition and determination; are intensely goal-oriented;

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and can easily approach strangers (BASIS International 2002). Successful salespeople also possess a high energy level, are self-confident, and can view obstacles as challenges (Sardar and Patton 2002). They have the ability to deal with complex ideas and concepts, make quick analyses and judgments, negotiate systematically and persistently, and manage/organize time. All of these are traits that can improve sales performance (Greenberg and Greenberg 1983).

Combining some of these qualities with those that you already possess may be the perfect fit for you in your sales situation. However, having these qualities do not automatically guarantee success.

The Difference between Tellers and Sellers

To be a top performer in the sales industry, you need to be an effective seller not an effective teller. Levine (2000) distinguishes tellers from sellers.

Tellers	Sellers
Give information	Solve problems
Leave decision to the prospect	Gain conviction
Present features	Translate features into benefits
Avoid rejection	Risk rejection
Try to win by showing knowledge	Win by closing sales
Use rational level	Use emotional and rational levels
Reactive	Proactive
Want structure and stability	Accept uncertainty as the norm
Identify needs	Intensify needs and wants
Everyone comes to your door	You go to everyone's door

How to Define a Top Seller

A survey conducted by Gitomer (2000) found that the following characteristics, if mastered, will make a salesperson rise above the rest. How do you measure up to these qualities?

- Unyielding belief in the company, the product, and yourself
- Creativity to differentiate yourself from the competition
- Sense of humor that builds deep rapport
- Ability to promote yourself

- Ability to maintain price integrity
- Unyielding personal values and ethics
- Reliability and dependability
- Passion and desire to excel and be the best
- Exciting presentation skills
- Ability to generate profit and loyal customers
- Selling for the love of helping others get what they want rather than for the love of money
- Perpetual positive attitude and enthusiasm

Conclusions

Now that you know the benefits of being a top seller, the attributes of a top seller, the difference between a teller and a seller, and how to define a top seller, you should be on your way to being the best of the best in sales. Sales is a strenuous, challenging, and demanding occupation, and being a top salesperson is not easy. Having an idea of the attributes needed to be a top salesperson will help you achieve top seller status.

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