

MANAGING SALES WORKFORCE DIVERSITY

Ms. Jyoti Kukreja**

Abstract

The relevance of sales personnel in any organization has forever been unquestioned as they deliver the ultimate quality of buying experience to the end consumer. Unfortunately though, their position is still devoid of respect that it on an average deserves. The low vocational esteem fructifies the need for developing the need for enhancing their self-concept. Salespeople who lack motivation deliver only sub-optimal performance.

The objective of this paper is to address the challenges in managing sales personnel. In a cross-cultural milieu, how employees are retained to serve consistent brand experience. In the end, the paper shall conclude with a synergistic suggestive model to be applied in the organizations for reaping the best out of the sales force of an organization.

The study is based on intensive research through secondary sources. Recent studies suggest that companies are largely dependent upon the intensity and efficiency of the sales staff for its development, profitability and growth. It is a complex art that requires objectives of both: customers and organizations to coincide. Cataloging of customers, products, and, communication though well structured still require rigorous research to be validated against the test of time and, thus, improved.

Keywords: Diversity, Training, Achiever, Ego, Vocational Esteem.

** Research Scholar, USMS, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Dwarka.

Introduction: Customer is considered 'king'. Subsequent to Theodore Levitt popularizing the concept of 'marketing myopia' led to a turbulent shift in the psychology in the marketplace. The products and even after-sales services aim at tailor-made solutions: customization.

Literature Review:

Zolthens et al. (2000) states that good sales territories enhance customer coverage, for sales, foster fair performance evaluation and reward systems, and lower travel costs. Contrastingly, territory allocation could be seen as a demotivator, if some territories are perceived to be more difficult than others.

An economy juxtaposed against mind and heart; where salespeople are encountering more and more ambiguous selling situations and need to partner with their customers to develop complex solutions (Weitz & Bradford, 1999), managers ought to actively motivate selling team reflexivity. Sales managers could stimulate reflexivity through developing behavior-based sales force control systems (Anderson & Oliver, 1987) which monitor, control and direct reflexivity in selling teams. For instance, evaluating the behavior of Salespeople during supervisor-led inter vision sessions (where salespeople comment on one another's strategies), or internal "presentations" within selling teams, where salespeople present cases where they failed to meet customer demands. Indeed, behavioral control systems have been shown to affect information transmission of salespeople to the selling firm (Cravens, Ingram, LaForge & Young, 1993). Under the condition of high age diversity, the team's intelligence (i.e., reflexivity) can be dysfunctional for salesperson performance as well. Further, while some of the sales staff is segregated on the basis of products or set of clientele. It is a common practice to consider the entire staff uniformly and follow the same pattern of interaction and behavior. But what the effective managers usually tend to ignore is that it is not that different groups have diverse needs but each group exists on multiple-needs format subjected to situations, changing relationships, etc. The Gallup Management Consulting Group has identified four general personality types: the Competitor, the Achiever, the Ego-Driven, and the Service-Oriented.

The Competitor: For this category of sales personnel, 'win/win' approach does not hold any meaning, the underlying implication remains on the basis of 'win/lose' only. But for

the lucid and ethical understanding of the connotation of 'winning' and 'competition' is significant. Organize contest to mark the level of competition in the organization and to inculcate the 'spirit of dare'. When the fight for being the best is fierce the awards should be in grandiose. IBM's main contest is its Golden Circle program, which recognizes the top ten percent of its sales force globally by sending reps, as a group, to a resort with their spouses. But managers beware: Hyper competitors are often moody. Just as they love the stimulation of battle, so, too, do they hate – hate- to lose? It is not easy to gulp down the defeat. Victory though luxuriously awarded, the defeat should be a stimulant to try better and harder the next time.

The Achiever: This set of people is purely self-motivated. They are dreamers, the ideal types. They set their own goals which are usually higher than those set for others. Though a team player, these don't mind as to who takes the credit, as long as the team wins. They are driven to accomplish their objectives and not to satisfy their egos. The question that next arises is how to motivate the self-driven? As these endeavor to be self-sufficient, their managers must design their development as identifying their deficiency zones and grey areas and suggest approaches to overcome them. They should appoint coach or a psychologist to help them maneuver on their emotional side as these are ruled more by the brain than by heart. The latent desire is to enjoy life but they often miss the bliss of 'relationships'. They highly idolize and are grateful to help them accelerate on the path of achievement. They experience a never-ending quest for search of self and to continuously search for something different and nevertheless to mention, being better. The manager must convey that the long-term growth is important, and that it is not just a thirty-day rat race for revenue. Since they are their own boss: responsible, with broad vision and spheres of influence. They usually possess what common people find difficult to ace. Close supervision and 'micro-management' can seriously turn them off.

The Ego-Driven: This variety of workforce considers itself to be the best regardless of the competition. Nothing motivates an ego-driven rep more than being asked for advice; the feeling of being significant is extremely inspiring for them. They like to offer their consultation. In some cases, doing so can prevent an ego-driven top performer from leaving the company. Therefore, the bottom-line is to include the ego people in decision-

making. Ego is common to all, and thus, it is easy for them to influence one and all. Thus to avoid, intra-personal and interpersonal conflicts give them exactly what they want.

The Service-Oriented: This type may be the most neglected of salespeople. Perhaps it's because they don't bring in the blockbuster accounts, like killer competitors do. Or they don't have egos that are larger than their territories. One can train a hyper competitor to service patrons, but it is implausible to train a service type to be competitive. In other words, it is easier to file down the claws of tigers than to teach sheep to attack. They are the lukewarm types. But they are equally essential. As they excel in building, entertaining and maintaining relations. Their contribution, though superficial, is relevant. But the drawback is that, as they can easily be marginalized due to competitor or achiever types who project their produce on the hard grounds of reality and are into proving their increased worth, the service-types can easily be eliminated or pushed-off the streamline. The managers, in such a case should not underestimate their contribution as emotions and relationship orientation is important for the grand success of an enterprise.

People's sense of self-worth, value and dignity is most often determined not only by the kind of support and encouragement they receive from others, but also from how willing they are to self-examine their negative behaviors and the same attributes in their cultural group. If the person himself or his group is practicing self-destructive action, all the external help will go for naught.

The burgeoning consumerism in emerging market economies has significant implications for both multinational and local companies. Cash will always be a major factor in motivating people and a solid compensation plan is critical to attracting and keeping key personnel. But the key is that additional cash is not always the only answer and in many cases not even the best answer.

With international culture being a norm today, diversity is an accepted challenge. Diversity as a phenomenon is ubiquitous. It is more than simply demographics; an assortment of the various perspectives that are brought to the table through unique experiences. Compatibility in the sales team is essential but how to gain and maintain it in a cross-cultural environment is a puzzle that seems to get murkier each passing day. Not

everything can be utilized, however, nor is of the same worth and value. But it does have value, even if for no other reason than the effort invested in bringing it forward. Such efforts must be encouraged, for who knows from where the next great idea may come—from a youth, from an elderly person, from an African American, from a single parent, from a lesbian, from a high school dropout, from a business executive, etc.?

The essence of multiculturalism, the undergirding concept of multicultural education, is the ability to *celebrate* with the other in a manner that transcends all barriers and brings about a unity in diversity. Multiculturalism enables us to look upon the other, especially the ‘Other’ that society has taught us to regard with distrust and suspicion, and to be taken advantage of, not as a “potential predator, but as a profitable partner.” The last part of this definition of multiculturalism—“within an inclusive cultural context”—is most important, because it is here where many people get off and refuse to go along with an inclusive approach to society or to education. Many people fear, multiculturalism will bring in “foreign” concepts and ideas which will astray the populace from its historic course and transform the nation into something different from what it has been. The word *enable* here is important, because what lies behind it is the concept of *empowerment*—the process of enabling people to be self-critical of their own biases so as to strengthen themselves and others to achieve and deploy their maximum potential.

Unmistakably, the culture of an organization manifests into customer experience. A huge number of high-performing sales teams hold a strong sense of organization’s goals and priorities with them, although, a considerable gap could be present amid the way the strategy is implemented in the company and the aspect and extent in which it affects sales. Typically, into that gap falls a huge portion of potential value.

Sales personnel need to be the ‘best psychologists’. They must empathize with clients and while assuming full responsibility for the mutual needs (selling: critical need of sales personnel & product: a similar need to customer) should comprehend what people do and then helping them do it better without any hassles.

Sales person can perform effectively only when the company has the correct marketing strategy in place and the various marketing mix elements support the sales function. For example, advertising fructifies particular function in evoking emotions and feelings through promise of pleasure connected to the purchase or possession of a product.¹

Secondly, what would keep them motivated and productive? Selling is a behavioral transaction that may generate consistent customer database. Understanding consumer decision process is crucial. Though needs are ubiquitous but not satisfaction. Varied degrees of satiation may be perceived and realized.

We all are similar yet unique and this unknown or unstated component must be understood by the sales people. The best way to comprehend your customers and extract true impression of our products or services acting as a salesperson would aid more than as a market researcher. This is because, when we intentionally respond, we alter and give calculated answers often molded to please the listener. But, once, the prospects are caught unaware surprisingly true information is unearthed.

The sales staff aids in building an extremely durable memory. Once the relationship between advertisement and information passed to memory is similar its strength of association decays very slowly. The number and type of external retrieval cues affect memory accessibility. That is, information may be available in memory, but consumers may not be able to access it without the proper retrieval cues or reminders. Thus, the particular associations for a brand that are salient and come to mind depend on the context in which the brand is considered. The more cues linked to a piece of information, the greater the likelihood that we can recall the information.

Primarily, convincing is rated over and above persuasion; but buyers usually doubt the intentions of the seller when they are being convinced for. The customers dislike being coaxed and this further leads to post-purchase dissonance. Secondly, answering to the queries that are initiated by the customers themselves is rather more influential than the

¹ Source: 'The Persuasive Nature of Advertising', India Infoline, <http://www.indiaonline.com/bisc/topi.html>

persuasion as today's customers are more informed. The challenge that mounts is that, with an increasing quantum of informed buyers, the role of sales staff in convincing is shrinking and diverse roles have now become an integral part of the sales personnel. The general consumer usually records the information off-handed. He may memorize a word for his reference to that brand.

The organization workforce as well as customers is increasingly a populace of Generation Y. This age cohort comprise about seventy million of the populace in the U.S. and about 220 million in India, born between 1977-1994; this generation is usually characterized as most future oriented, confident and optimistically opportunity driven. Ignorance of this demographic pool would invite perils by default.

Most of India's high potential employee (64%) and middle level managers (55%) are Gen Y-ers. One generation influences the other through parenting, mentoring & other influences. This enables the bridges of understanding across generations and strengthens parent-child, boss-employee bonding through being 'differently similar'.

Millennials are well-educated, collaborative, sociable, talent and achievement-oriented. They've always felt sought after, needed, and are arriving in the workplace with higher expectations than any generation before them and are so well connected that if an employer does not meet their expectations, they can tell thousands of their cohorts with a click of a mouse.

In a highly competitive business environment- talent is clearly the differentiator and those organizations that want to emerge as winners in the war of talent must have their fingers on the pulse of this generation. Thus, employers must be pensive about recurring questions demanding stencil answers, such as: How must one communicate with and motivate them? The nadir being coagulating multi-generations at work and keeping them engaged in the context of challenges.

The best salespeople are those who can work well with others, and with whom other people want to work. More often than not, the sales professionals indulge into low 'peer-group-contact' viz-a-viz other vocations. This loophole calls for addressing the motivational programs rather more sensitively. Two major aspects must be looked at with grave consideration:

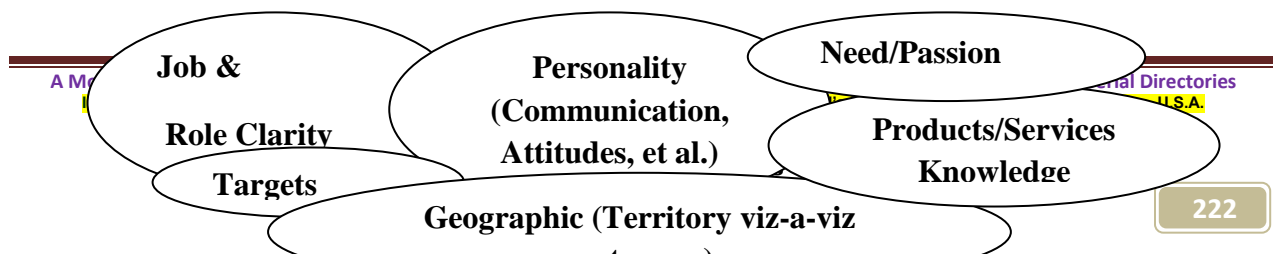
- Behavioral dynamics
- Styles of Selling

The management styles have been evolved as follows:

From	To
Sympathizing	Empathizing
Focus on Objective Discussions	Concerns for emotional upheaval
Considering as means to an end	Ends in itself (profound contemplations on talent retention)
Evolution of Management Styles	

The discussions that had initially been oriented towards monetary now must be inclusive of emotional component of the human resources. This is essential as once the strategy to sell is mastered, and, one learns to manage oneself in the turbulent waters, changing tides then seems to be facile. Therefore, to engender employee loyalty, creation and sustenance of not only emotional connection but emotional dependence is crucial. Frequent recruiting and exiting at this level is a known phenomenon but how to seize this demands permanent solutions. The puzzle of how to convert the most competent employee to an achiever; and what would motivate an achiever to super-achiever: requires HR honchos to think vertically. Nothing could be more effective, if the employees consider organization as a family which would make it difficult for them to abandon the job. Quitting is an easy escape but not sustaining within the same boundaries and constraints. Job-hopping is an oft-witnessed phenomenon in sales executive function than in any other. The basic rationale being that the age of sales personnel is comparatively less and the instability is, therefore, high. Money acts as sweet bait and coaxes one to momentum. This being a universal fact but how to minimize its effect on our organization and its work processes and results demand profound contemplation and clear solutions.

Factors that propel sales performance



Job is comprehended once but multiplicity of roles often creates confusion. Targets motivate and keep the employees focused on the track of selling. Motivation added to need becomes passion. A successful personality is characterized by not only changing our own perceptions and attitudes but energizing others too. New features are continually added. Thus, a sales person must be an expert guide on that and must be able to analyze competitors' offerings with complete cost-benefit analysis. Central point among all being the geographic acquaintance and study of lifestyle and demographics; customer-conversion is hard and earning customer loyalty even harder. Sales personnel usually complain if their clients are transferred to their colleagues.

Recommendations:

Following are the suggestions to be implemented by managers for harnessing latent potential from their sales workforce:

The Art of Distinguishing: Self-esteem is inevitably adversely impacted when refusal to appointment for demonstration or rejection after display is encountered. Usually, the sales-personnel lack on the preparation or fail to scheme upcoming reactions. It is crucial to draw out cause to refusal than withdraw due to it. Moreover, the refusal is not meant to beget frustration or depression but a warning call to be better prepared and empathizes with the prospective buyer. Experts point to the considerable ego strength, or reserves of self-esteem, that the job demands.

TNA: [Training Needs Analysis]: Skills set and need for training differs from one individual to another. Neither all customers would repeat purchase nor can all prospects be customers. But the knack of justifying their role and convincing for the purchase is very essential. Recognizing territory and then segmenting it on certain criteria would endow

better preparation for targeting. Making them innovative in their approach and empathizing while in contact is essential. Training and development sessions on being economic with words are essential as scarcity of time prevails across all levels. Innovation in presenting skills of a product or service is crucial to hone competitive edges. The TNA when implemented ensconces as DNA of the organization.

The hard skills of achieving sales have shifted towards soft skills of relationship management with the clients. The gamut of **soft skills** include: persistence, courage, sociability, empathy, and most importantly job commitment to drive results and generate assurance.

Praise lavishly: The concept of inspirational communication does wonders in all directions that is from 'inside to outside'. 'Love them or lose them', 'Criticize in private, praise in public' are maxims much popular but often inappropriately applied. The acknowledgement and its celebration raise the bar. The achievement of sales target once displayed on website increases the pressures on others to outperform. The question then escalates of survival of the fittest. This segment of the job adds a quotient of glamour to the otherwise lucre promising job. It must boost morale to win that extra inch as the process of conquering a milestone is usually far and wide. Sales people will always operate best when they know what is expected of them. Stalwart companies like McDonald's, Accenture

WLB [Work-Life Balance]: Implement contests that earn time off. People will compete for fifteen minutes or half an hour off just as hard as they will for a cash award. Allow early dismissals, late arrivals, and extended lunch periods or additional breaks. Work on vacations and weekends have become an established norm, a part of corporate culture.

Special training and development sessions should be held on ensuring the psychological well-being of the staff. The pressure of targets and deadline usually sparks-off the

employees and diminish the much-needed psychological energy. The same work can be motivating and the same leading to stress if handled improperly.

Act, not React: Serious and consistent efforts must be invested to create marketing materials and campaigns that help the best prospects to “self identify”. Nothing is more valuable to a sales person that a strong lead and nothing is more appreciated but the aid from management and not being a reporter of what has happened and why a deal was lost. The sales-staff want a whole-hearted acceptance, commitment, participation, and, trust from the honchos and not the fear of dismissal or rebuke for not meeting the deadlines.

Building a strong search marketing campaign combined with an email marketing campaign helps your sales team build trust and communicate the crucial messages to all prospects consistently. In addition, your website and your email marketing campaigns can alert the sales person when a customer takes action that indicates they’re ready to buy.

Conclusion: The companies worldwide are striving hard to retain their employees as over a period of time they accumulate intellect which is experiential. The psyche of sales personnel should follow the root-analysis of strengthening their morale and acknowledgement of their worth to the organization. The in- house staff should make them feel wanted and belonging to the organization.

- Their interests and contribution must be genuinely acknowledged to success of the enterprise.
- Much training is provided to them, but these help only indirectly. Core preparation should include in addition to highlighting features of product or service the ‘art of targeting the prospects’.
- Transfer and retention of lessons learnt should be affected. Nevertheless to mention 80/20 rule stands popular where 80 percent of the results come from 20 percent of the efforts.
- Recognition and feeling of being wanted and importance enhances the concept of self-worth. Thus righteous behavior should be encouraged.

Key References

1. Klein Craig, '4 Ways to Motivate Your Sales Team for High Performance', August, 2011.
2. 'Getting Gen Y-Ready' Column-'Talent Management' by Dr. Sujaya Banerjee, Human Capital Vol. 15, No.3, August 2011
3. Patel Kulin & Sriram Anuradha, 'Culture assessment in a Cross Country Deal: Exploring the role of organizational culture and cultural compatibility in an M&A transaction': Global HR, Human Capital, Vol.14 No.5 October 2010
4. Haroon Amara(Ms) & Ahmad Shakil(Mr), 'Assessing Relationship Among Performance, Managerial Practices, Salesforce Automation: A Study on Unilever & Dalda in Pakistan' International Review of Business Research Papers, Vol. 5 No. 4 June 2009 Pp. 73-90.
5. Dietz (Bart) H. M., 'Managing (Sales) People towards Performance: HR Strategy, Leadership & Teamwork' (2009)
6. Keller Lane Kevin, 'Strategic Brand Management: Building, Measuring and Managing Brand Equity', Third Edition, PHI Publishers (2008)
7. Mohamed Peeru H & Sagadevan: 'Customer Relationship Management: A Step-by-Step Approach' Vikas Publishers (2007)
8. Dave Worman, '20 ways to motivate your employees without raising their pay', HRmadeEasy e-Newsletter
9. Brewer Geoffrey, 'How to Motivate Sales Stars', October 2006
10. Venugopal P., 'Managing Your Sales Force: A Motivational Approach', (2006), Sage Publications
11. 'How to Manage Salespeople' accessed at: <http://www.charleswarner.us/articles/howmngsl.htm>
12. Eidson Carl, 'Escape the Numbers Trap: Four Steps to Target Prospecting for Increased Sales'
13. Michael P. Leimbach and Ed Emde, (2011), 'The 80/20 Rule for Learning Transfer'
14. Jensen Mark, (2009), 'Common Attributes of Professional Sales People'