The Emotional Intelligence/Sales Performance Relationship

by

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Approved:

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Advisor/Research Coordinator                  Date

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Second Reader                                 Date
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Introduction

Ever since Daniel Goleman published "Emotional Intelligence" in 1995, experts in numerous fields have adopted his notion of E.Q. - emotional intelligence - as opposed to I.Q. - intellectual intelligence. Through his work, we have explored the positive psychological, physical and intellectual effects of healthy Emotional Intelligence as well as the detriments. Thankfully, EQ as compared to IQ is not fixed at birth. Emotional Intelligence, as defined by Salovey is “a type of social intelligence which involves the ability to monitor ones’ own and others’ emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (Mayer & Salovey, 1993, p. 433).

Although E.Q. is most commonly applied in the fields of management and leadership, its strongest natural link may be to sales. Based on preliminary research, there is understandably a strong causal relationship between ones’ emotions and success in the sales industry. This project is based on the premise that one’s ability to be Emotionally Intelligent affects how people relate to and with each other. Therefore since sales people positions require them to relate to their customers it is understood sales professionals have the ability to effectively communicate, empathize and respect their clients’ needs. Yet EQ has yet to be fully researched in the sales field. Bryant (in his quantitative research), has shown us Emotional Intelligence affects sales relationships and states more ongoing research needs to be conducted (Bryant, 2005).

The purpose of this thesis is to define this relationship within a qualitative framework by looking specifically at the areas of emotional intelligence and sales performance. Questions based on Mayer’s emotional intelligence components (empathy, perceiving others’ emotions,
self-awareness, self-regulation and self-motivation) will be posed to six successful salespeople during one on one interviews via the grounded theory method.
Literature Review

This literature review covers topics which pertain to emotional intelligence and sales performance as seen within the framework of Mayer’s four assessment components (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). The literature and studies were chosen for their relevance to the topics and to provide a comprehensive understanding of the work that has been published in this area.

Emotional Intelligence

The need for Emotional Intelligence skills is growing, specifically in the corporate setting as Boyless and Bellamy discovered in their work, Emotional Intelligence: Today’s Sales and Hiring Advantage (2005). “Self awareness, empathy, social awareness and emotion management, the key elements of emotional intelligence are critical skills for executives and sales professionals in the emerging service oriented firm of the 21’st century” (p.70). Though emotional intelligence is logical, Boyless and Bellamy believe everyone hasn’t ‘jumped on the bandwagon’ because the EQ philosophy isn’t ‘tangible’ in addition to requiring “top executives to look ‘inside’ themselves which many aren’t willing to do” (p.70).

Social Intelligence studies by Howard Gardner (1983) created the first construct from which emotional intelligence’s popularity grew. This construct distinguished two types of intelligence: Interpersonal intelligence and Intrapersonal intelligence. Interpersonal intelligence refers to an individual’s ability to react to others’ emotions, and includes both the ability to perceive other’s emotions, and to empathize (or sense what people feel without their saying so since others rarely tell us in words what they feel; instead they tell us in their tone of voice, facial expression, or other nonverbal ways (Goleman, D., 1998, 1995). Intrapersonal intelligence relates to the ability to perceive one’s own emotions, and comprises self-awareness, self-
regulation, and self-motivation. (Deeter-Schmelz & Sojka, 2003). With self-awareness, one is able to monitor one’s thoughts, feelings, behaviors, intentions, senses and thereby influencing one’s actions to one’s own benefit. Accordingly, self-regulation refers to the ability to appropriately manage one’s own emotions to deal with situations productively. Self-motivation can be described as the ability to begin a task, stay engaged and move the process ahead to completion (Weisinger, 1998).

This relationship between Social Intelligence and Emotional Intelligence serves as the foundation for Salovey and Mayer’s published work (1990). They were the first to define EQ (Emotional Intelligence) as “knowing and handling one’s own and other’s emotions”. Mayer and Salovey’s (1997) created four components of emotional intelligence.

Self Awareness refers to the cognitive ability to accurately appraise one's own emotions, feelings and behaviors. It also pertains to expressing one's feelings. In short, this dimension relates to an individual's ability to self reflect and understand their emotions.

Empathy refers to appraising the emotions of others. This interpersonal skill is critical to the salesperson's ability to establish a type of interpersonal relationship with clients.

Social Awareness is the ability to perceive and understand the emotions and behaviors of others and to modify one's own emotional response to such an understanding.

Emotion Management refers to the ability to regulate emotions and behaviors according to their situational appropriateness. This requires cognitive reflection on the potential way in which an emotional behavior will affect and be affected within a specific situation. (p. 24)

In addition, authors state their research shows a positive correlation between the development of Emotional intelligence skills in sales people and an increase in profits. (Mayer & Salovey, 1997)
Almost ten years later, in an effort to create an integrated EQ framework, Boyatzis and Goleman (1999) contributed the following definition: “emotional intelligence is observed when a person demonstrates the competencies that constitute self-awareness, social awareness, and social skills at appropriate times and ways in sufficient frequency to be effective in the situation” (pp. 26-27). Daniel Goleman (1998) created an emotional intelligence model, the Emotional Intelligence Competency Framework with five specific groupings:

- Self awareness - includes emotional awareness, accurate self assessment and self confidence;
- Self regulation - includes self control, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability and innovation;
- Motivation - includes achievement drive, commitment, initiative and optimism;
- Empathy - includes understanding others, developing others, service orientation, leveraging diversity, and political awareness;
- Social skills – includes the ability to influence, communicate, manage conflict, exercise leadership, be a change catalyst, build bonds, collaborate and cooperate and operate well on a team.

Developing the ability to empathize and perceive others’ emotions, in addition to one’s own, through self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation are examples of the role emotional intelligence plays in relationships.

To summarize, the Mayer et al. (2000) study suggested emotional intelligence encompasses three primary factors and a higher order. They called the ‘higher order’ (which combines three components of perception, understanding and managing emotion) ‘general intelligence’ and their 1997 model includes these factors. The first component, perception
includes the assimilation and understanding factors as well thus creating the managing factor in their scale. Their research data was used to create the three primary components of perception, understanding and management. The global factor or ‘general emotional intelligence’ therefore dictates the use of a single, unified emotional intelligence and a single emotional intelligence score when using the ability model of emotional intelligence introduced by Mayer and Salovey (1997).

Sales

“The advantage of personal selling over other marketing communication methods is the ability to adapt the message content or style to the particular situation, making personal selling the most effect method of communication industrial marketing (Churchill, Ford, & Hartley, 1997, pp. 103-118). Personal selling prioritizes the customer’s needs and the process of combining products and/or services to provide solutions whereas transactional selling typifies the traditional buyer-seller arrangement. The underlying assumption is that value is maximized by an adversarial stance within the relationship, where the buyer pits the suppliers against one another to extract a price or concession. (Bryant, 2005) These relationships are executed under market conditions with price being one of the most important variables (Wilson, 2000, p. 59).

In the mid 1990s the traditional buyer-seller sales style began shifting to a consultative relationship based model. “Relationship selling is a vast improvement over product selling: that which we would normal call ‘traditional’ selling (Franke, 1988, p.10). In relationship selling the emphasis is on satisfying the customers’ needs not “trading goods” for money, therefore good sales people are “educating, consulting, solving problems, providing answers and helping”
An important personality trait to help and consult with customers (required by consultative sales people) is authenticity. In Schaefer and Pettijohn’s study, researchers strove to “evaluate salesperson’s authenticity and its relationship to performance, professional commitment, and intent to stay in the profession” (2006, p.25). They found through their empirical findings, “authenticity is significantly related to performance …and greater levels of affective commitment toward personal selling” (2006, p.25).

Bryan Tracy, author of Advanced Selling Strategies: The Proven System of Sales Ideas, Methods and Techniques Used by Top Sales People Everywhere (1995) believes there are three universal characteristics of successful sales people. First, the ability to “work hard”; he believes sales is very difficult profession. Being an “action” person, who is a “doer rather than a talker” is second. Third, Tracy observed successful sales people are committed to personal and professional development. He states “selling is more psychological than anything else” (p. 25). Through his research, “and I (Tracy) have done sales consulting and designed sales training programs for dozens of industries, from A to Z, from airlines to zoological supplies, (and almost everything in between)”(p. 19), Tracy has found these characteristics and sales techniques consistent and constant through his 40 years of sales experience. Based on these criteria Tracy notes there are seven ways top salespeople think of themselves and respond to their prospects and customers. Additionally, he suggests by improving skills with these sales techniques, financial rewards will follow:
1. “See yourself as self employed”. Relating specifically to one’s attitude with regard to the way a sales person approaches their work, their company, their products and services, prospects and customers basically everything they do.

2. “Consulting Versus Selling”. Top sales people see themselves as consultants rather than sales people. Referring to one’s ability to be a resource for their customers: problem solving, listening, understanding their customer’s motivation and making realistic recommendations (which conveniently requires the purchase or use of the sales person’s product or service).

3. “Becoming a Doctor of Selling”. By following a three-part sequence of examination, diagnosis and prescription (bound by a high code of ethics), the sales person can appropriately act on their “patient’s” behalf.

4. “Become a Strategic Thinker in Sales”. As previously noted above, sales people “plan their work and work their plan”. Tracy states it is essential for top sales people to develop organized plans of action to attain their goals.

5. “Getting the Job Done”. Tracy notes top sales people have two important qualities: empathy and ambition. A top sales person is results oriented and able to handle rejection accordingly.

6. “Being the Best”. This component directly relates to a sales person’s high self esteem which is critical to being the very best in their field.

7. “Practice the Gold Rule Selling”. Tracy observed top sales people “do unto other’s as they would have do unto you” or “sell unto others as you would have them sell unto you”. Top sales people take the time to thoroughly understand their customers and their issues, reflecting back their situations and making appropriate recommendations. (42-50)

Though Tracy is not alone in creating a “working” sales model, his research and experience validates the framework for which this research study is based.

Sales & EQ

On the basis of his dissertation, Bryant (2005) believed a positive correlation would be found between all of the components of emotional intelligence and sales performance. Bryant defines (adaptive) selling as “the altering of sales behaviors during a customer interaction or across customer interactions based on perceived information about the nature of the selling situation” (Weitz & Rosann, 1990). Bryant relates this to emotional intelligence and reports an
individual who has high levels of emotional intelligence will have a higher level of performance in sales than someone who does not. Therefore Bryant based his study on this main research question: Is there a relationship between the competencies of emotional intelligence – as defined by Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso (2000), that is, being able to identify, use, understand and manage emotions - and success as a salesperson - measured by sales performance or specifically sales volume” (Bryant, 2005, p.31).

Selling is a multifaceted process comprised of multiple skill sets (Churchill, Ford, & Hartley, 1997). Anthony says “emotional intelligence in selling begins with the recognition that one must meet emotional agendas beyond the buy-and-sell transaction for a buyer to be satisfied with the transaction” (Anthony, 2003). He believes two critical questions must be met with emotional intelligence in order for the sales process to be a success for the customer: Do you know me? Do you know how to approach me? Awareness, on many levels, is a crucial component for meeting customer’s agendas. Awareness in the sales process includes three basic rules as described by Anthony:

1. You must constantly prove and reprove yourself. Customers tend to be cautious and untrusting of the sales process, therefore continually proving the worth of product and validity of the sales representative is essential.

2. People expect you to figure them out. Anthony believes people have “hidden emotional agendas” and it’s the responsibility of the sales person to decipher these agendas and approach customers on their terms.

3. This is not about you. Customers want to have their problems solved, needs and wants met and “wishes” granted and it’s the salespersons obligation to comply (Anthony, 2003).

Furthermore given the success of Goleman’s book, *Emotional Intelligence* (1995), a surprising amount of limited research on emotional intelligence and sales exists. A study was conducted by Manna and Smith (2004) to determine if: 1. emotional intelligence and awareness
training should be included in sales training programs and 2. if emotional intelligence training is necessary for success in the sale profession. Sales representatives were asked to respond to a number of questions concerning sales training and related sales experience. They concluded that skills such as communication skills, negotiating skills, emotional intelligence, presentation skills, and the capacity to differentiate among personality type were found to be very important to sales people. Additionally, Deeter-Schmelz and Sojka (2003) explored in their qualitative study preliminary evidence of a relationship between sales performance and EQ. When combined with Cooper (1997) and Goleman’s (1998) work, results suggest EQ might be an important characteristic for sales success.

For three years, MOHR a research-based sales training and consulting firm surveyed, observed and interviewed nationwide more than 1,000 salespeople, thousands of their customers, as well as their support colleagues, to study how companies across industries are redesigning their sales models to succeed in the future “business consulting” environment (PR Newswire, 1988). They found the best performing sales people are using seven emerging sales competencies: establishing a vision of committed customer/supplier relationships; listening beyond product needs; aligning customer/supplier strategic objectives; understanding the financial impact of decisions; orchestrating organizational resources; consultative problem solving; engaging in self appraisal, and continuous learning (PR Newswire, 1988).

"The study shows clearly and dramatically that in all industries there is a growing gap between existing sales practices and what is now required for current and future success. The concept of sales people armed with a bag full of product who use their convincing and closing skills to get customers to buy, is now obsolete. Companies must help their salespeople adapt to an environment in which they are now no longer simply selling product, but facilitating a strategic partnership between their organization and its customers." (PR Newswire, pg. 1)
Current research shows a causal relationship between components of emotional intelligence and sales performance through qualitative findings. No specific empirical studies were discovered; therefore this study has no basis in literature review to draw external correlations. This gap is an opportunity for additional research in this area. As Chapain (2003) noticed in his dissertation research, there is link between emotional intelligence and individual advancement yet “little empirical work has examined the usefulness of personality traits and individual characteristics in evaluating marketing employees, especially those in selling jobs” (Jolson and Comer, 1997 p.30); therefore literature regarding sales success is fragmented and disjointed. While two bodies of research have evolved in relationship to emotional intelligence and sales success predictors, little research has been done to link these two concepts together. This study seeks to fill the void in literature by uniting these two concepts and developing a common thread which has been hypothesized and as of yet to be realized.

Research has been done on the emotional effects of marketing on consumers, a related field but researchers are just starting to learn about the role of emotions in sales people. “Most research on selling has largely ignored the emotional aspects of personal selling. In comparison to knowledge gained from information processing and behavioral decision research, little is known about the role of emotions in selling behavior…much of what is known is confined to consumer behavior, as opposed to the behavior of salespeople or managers” (Bogozzi, p. 99).

Empirical research has attempted to uncover sales behaviors that have a common thread throughout a wide range of selling situations and the results were equivocal and contradictory (Weitz & Rosann, 1990). “There is no one way to sell” (Thompson, 1973, p. 47) so EQ would be a useful tool in a selling situation.
In Bryant’s dissertation “The components of Emotional Intelligence and the Relationship to Sales Performance” (2005), he found no studies conducted on emotional intelligence and adaptive selling. In addition, in his own quantitative study in which he hypothesized a strong link between the construct of emotional intelligence and sales behavior (due to the capability of sales people to distinguish emotional meaning, to reason and to problem-solve on the basis of them), his hypothesis of a strong link between the construct of emotional intelligence and sales behavior was found not to be true. He then rejected all his hypotheses and determined: no significant relationship was found between emotional intelligence and sales performance (and scores on the MSCEIT were unrelated to sale performance) and recommends further study and research into the area of EQ and the relationship to sales performance. This framework of emotional intelligence (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000) is best viewed as a point of departure for both theory testing and theory building. Many factors of sales success are consistent with EQ theory yet no organizing framework has specifically linked EQ and success in sales (Bryant, 2005).

It is suggested sales and work performance may be better predicted with the use of validated measurements of personality, cognitive ability and historical sales performance. EQ’s definition needs to be refocused, researchers should use a broader performance model or “evaluate the nature of this construct at the definitional stage. Salespeople whom are are financially successful may not be necessarily good at identifying, using, understanding, and managing emotions” (Bryant, 2005, p. 62). In addition, Emotional Intelligence tests might not be a quick way to determine whether someone will be good in sales” (Bryant, 2005, p.62). Other than dissertations and a small number of journal articles, the construct of emotional intelligence and its impact on work performance have yet to receive rigorous scientific scrutiny. He believes this is true for two reasons: 1. If EQ is predictive of work performance, up to now, no research
or analysis of data has attempted to measure that relationship or the predictive qualities of emotional intelligence for work performance and in particular sales. 2. No firm operational definition of the construct of emotional intelligence exists and therefore it is difficult to develop a measurement instrument to test the validity and reliability of the construct. Bryant further suggests sales and work performance may be better predicted with the use of validated measurements of personality, cognitive ability and historical sales performance. Previous quantitative measurement tools have been found to be psychometrically inadequate (Davies, Stankov, & Roberts, 1998). Based on his own research, Bryant asserts it is premature to develop training programs to increase emotional intelligence since none of the factors in his research had shown a significant correlation with sales performance.

As of the writing of this proposal, limited research directly relating, confirming or denying the effects of emotional intelligence on sales people has been found. Many books, articles and dissertations have been written on the subject of Emotional Intelligence (Bryant, 2005; Goleman, 1995, 1998; Cherniss & Goleman, 2001; Bar-On & Parker, 2000; Sojka & Deeter-Schmelz, 2002 and Frattini, 2002), yet unfortunately existing quantitative measurement tools (for EQ) have been found to be psychometrically inadequate (Davies, Stankov, & Roberts, 1998). Therefore, this grounded theory study strives to qualitatively explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and sales performance.
METHODOLOGY

Emotional intelligence and its relationship with sales performance has been studied quantitatively with inconclusive results. Empirical research has attempted to uncover sales behaviors that have a common thread throughout a wide range of selling situations and the results were equivocal and contradictory (Weitz & Rosann, 1990). In addition, existing quantitative measurement tools have been found to be psychometrically inadequate (Davies, Stankov, & Roberts, 1998). Therefore the Emotional Intelligence – Sales Performance relationship is studied from a grounded theory approach (a qualitative method of research, Creswell, 1998). This method is appropriate for this study which focuses on gaining an understanding of the subjective experience salespeople, an area in which little research has been done. Grounded theory allows the researcher structural flexibility to obtain additional data or clarification as new ideas, concepts, and themes emerge (Creswell, 1998).

Sample

The sample will consist of six sales representatives from a variety of sales organizations. The sample will include three men and three women, who rate themselves as successful sales people. In addition, they have over ten years of sales experience. The researcher’s professional network will be the source of participants and they will be approached and selected on the basis of their ability to meet the above study criteria. Those who do not meet the criteria will be advised accordingly and thanked for their consideration.

Data Collection

The qualitative research data will be generated from a three part interview with six participants (three female and three male) consultative sales people. The researcher will capture the verbal response to a series of pre-defined questions from MacCann, Mattews, Zeidner and
Robert’s study in the 2003 International Journal of Organizational Analysis through note taking and on a cassette recording. Additionally, while all participants will be asked the same initial set of questions, additional possible follow-up and clarifying questions may be asked which arise as a result of the interview to further the data gathering process.

**Interviews**

Participants will be interviewed individually face-to-face or over the phone. Each interview will be recorded in its entirety, with the permission of the participant and it will be transcribed by the researcher. The researcher will review the data, develop codes, and define emerging themes and relevant categories. Data will be compared, contrasted and conclusions may be drawn. A hypothesis may be formed for later evaluation.

Each participant will be interviewed once, with the possibility of a follow up phone call for clarification or expansion of a thought or view expressed by the participant. The interview will begin with a self-graded questionnaire from Daniel’s Self-Scoring emotional intelligence Tests booklet. The questionnaire will have no contextual basis in the interview and it will simply be used as a self-grading, self-rating tool for possible future discussion with the participant. All interview questions will be open-ended and will be asked in a non-leading, neutral manner that allows the participants to express themselves in their own words. Participant questions are listed below.

**Interview Questions**

Additional questions may be asked, depending on the sales person’s own story and responses.

**Sales Performance**

Defining the salesperson’s role
- Do you consider yourself a successful sales person?
- How do you define success?
How does your boss define success?
Is success measured the same way (between who??)
If not, how is it different?

Accomplishments
What sales awards, bonuses or rewards have you earned?
How did it feel to achieve these accomplishments?
Does it motivate you to achieve more success?

Emotional Dimension

Empathy
When dealing with a customer, do you feel like you know what that customer is thinking/feeling?
If yes, what cues do you use or how do you do that?
How important is it for a successful sales representative to be able to empathize with his or her customers?

Perceiving Others’ Emotions
Can you read your customer’s moods? If so, how?
How does understanding your customer’s mood influence your sales call?
How important is it for a successful sales representative to be able to perceive his or her customer’s?

Self-Awareness
Do you think you need to present your desired image to customers?
How do you know you are projecting your desired image?
How important is it for a successful sales representative to be aware of the image he or she projects?

Self-Regulation
What do you do when a customer says something that makes you really angry?
How do you control your emotions during a sales call?
How important is it for successful representatives to control their emotions during a sales call?

Self-Motivation
Do you consider yourself to be self-motivated?
What motivates you to do a good job?
How important is self-motivation for a sales representative?
(MacCann, Mattews, Zeidner, & Roberts, 2003)

The research will be open to all possibilities of responses in order to discover the participant’s perspective of Emotional Intelligence and its relationship to sales performance. Each interview
will be recorded and transcribed by the researcher or a third party transcriber. Field notes will be recorded at the end of each interview.

**Site**

The site for this study will be at a location suitable for the participant, possibly their office or the office of the researcher, or alternatively by telephone, with the participant and the researcher in their respective offices or homes.

**Data Analysis**

This is an exploratory study. Data from interview transcriptions and field notes will be categorized and coded. Interviews will be transcribed and field notes maintained. The researcher will pay particular attention to patterns that may develop, and apply additional codes and categories accordingly, if applicable.

To begin, six interviews will be conducted. They will then be analyzed to discover whether or not additional questions are necessary to improve the data and to determine what questions should be added or revised for the remaining six interviewees.

Each interview will be analyzed separately. Upon completion of all six interviews, the data will be cross-analyzed. Similarities and differences will be noted. Patterns will be coded (using open coding) to identify common themes and categories. When information is in response to probing questions outside the standard questions, the researcher will indicate that in the analysis.

Each of the participants will be described and quotes taken from their interviews will be applied to illustrate common themes and responses.
Participant Introduction to Project/Invitation to Participate

Participants will be selected from the list of interested individuals who meet the criteria during the confirmation process. If more than six people qualify, priority will be given to those who are willing to talk openly about their experiences when making requests. Participants will be invited to participate in the proposed study via email invitation:

1. After identifying the potential list of participants, an individual email will be sent to each potential participant (see Appendix A). Candidates will be invited to respond to me directly, via email or telephone, if they choose to participate.

2. Participants who respond affirmatively to the invitation to participate will be contacted by the researcher directly, via phone or email, to confirm that they meet the criteria for participants, and if so, to schedule an interview date, time, and location. If a phone interview is to be conducted, the researcher will confirm the preferred phone number where the participant can be reached. If an in-person interview is to be conducted, the location for the interview will be determined and agreed upon.

Informed Consent

Human participants will be protected in accordance with the ethical standards taken from the APA Code of Conduct (1992). A consent form (see Appendix B) emphasizing confidentiality will be forwarded to the participant for their review, prior to the scheduled date of the interview and will be discussed in detail prior to the interview. The consent form includes a clause explaining that participation in the study is voluntary and that participants are free to change their mind at any time, even after signing and submitting the consent form. The form confirms that the information provided during participation in the study will be confidential and anonymous.
Participants who will be interviewed by phone will be asked to sign and submit the consent form, via confidential fax or U.S. mail, prior to the scheduled date of the interview. Those who will be interviewed in person will be given a copy on site, and asked to sign it prior to our proceeding to the interview. The researcher will verify that the participant understands the documents and the process. Participants will be given time to read and sign the consent forms. The researcher will assign participant numbers to each participant to insure confidentiality and anonymity. All coded notes and participant identifications will remain anonymous. Data will be stored in a secured, confidential location, accessible only by the researcher and a third-party subscriber. All data and notes will be kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s home office for the duration of the research process. All tapes of interviews will be destroyed upon completion of the final paper.

Debriefing Procedures

Each participant will be given time at the end of his or her interview session to ask questions or express any concerns s/he may have. The researcher will respond to any questions and concerns at that time. If, at any time after the interview, session participants wish to address any outstanding issues or questions regarding the interview or final report, they will be invited to call or email the researcher directly to schedule a follow up session. A summary of findings will be made available to them, upon request.

Participants will be invited to contact the JFK University Project Advisor if they have questions or requests for additional information regarding this study and the interview process: Sharon Mulgrew, M.P.H. – Organizational Psychology Research Coordinator/JFK University, Email: SAMulgrew@aol.com Telephone: 510-450-0378
Researcher Bias

The researcher conducting this study has a bias toward the concept of emotional intelligence. The researcher is herself, a past sales professional and has personally experienced the impact of emotional intelligence on sales performance. The researcher recognizes it is in her best interest to remain neutral in order to learn more from other perspectives and will remain open to all data as it is presented. Due to the criteria of the research method, bias awareness is particularly important, and an awareness of that bias will be maintained by the researcher.

Limitations

The findings of this study will be tentative. The sample size and procedures for participant selection are appropriate for qualitative research. They will not, however, due to the small scope of this study, support generalization to a larger population of sales professionals.
Results

**Purpose of Research:** A sales representative’s livelihood depends on his or her ability to effectively communicate, empathize and respect their clients’ needs. Yet, Emotional Intelligence has yet to be fully researched in the sales field. This study used a qualitative grounded theory approach to interview 6 sales professionals to identify the level of emotional intelligence held and applied by successful sales professionals.

**Participants:** All six participants met the following criteria:

- Veteran Sales Professionals
- based in the SF Bay Area
- with 10+ years of high level sales experience
- hold/have held the title of Regional Mgr or Sales VP
- each perceived as successful senior level sales professionals by peers and/or colleagues

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Age</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Regional Manager - Software</td>
<td>40-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Owner – Maintenance Auto Supply</td>
<td>40-50</td>
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<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Regional Manager-Food Manufacturing</td>
<td>40-50</td>
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<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Past Director of Sales – Software</td>
<td>40-50</td>
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<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Owner – Advertising</td>
<td>40-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Vice President – Business Development</td>
<td>40-50</td>
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Participant Responses to Questions

Q1 Do you consider yourself a successful sales person?/Q2 How do you define success?

All participants answered that they did consider themselves a successful sales person. P3 was the only one who seemed to consider the idea that it was not always possible to be successful, specifically if external conditions were not right, such as “sometimes if you are not placed in the right situation in the right market with the right product then I don’t think you can be successful.”

Participants defined success in three ways: either objectively, subjectively, or they used a blend of objective and subjective criteria.

Objective Criteria

Two participants (P4 & P6) defined success strictly in objective terms (such as making sales goals, closing sales and generating sales leads). P4 feels that she has been both successful & unsuccessful, but appears to believe her lack of success was due to a variety of external conditions such as the wrong market, the wrong product, etc. When asked Q2, her response was “Making your numbers. Making your quota. So um, you know it’s pretty cut and dry in sales. Either you get the deal or you don’t. Either you make your goals or you don’t”.

P6 based her objective criteria on her performance (number of sales leads generated) and she considered herself a successful sales person.
Subjective Criteria

Happiness, integrity, dependability, partnership or the ability to manage one’s own feelings are examples of the subjective criteria used by two participants (P2 & P3), who believed they were successful sales representatives. Money is not an objective criterion for P2, instead he uses three subjective criteria (feeling happy in his profession, maintaining a high level of integrity and being dependable) to define his success. Former clients give him referrals and repeat business. He values and manifests good relationships with his clients by being available and responding to their calls (when they have questions & concerns). He says “I define successful sales in the fact that you have referral and repeat customers … having a good relationship with my customers; having them call me with questions or concerns and being available for them … being happy in what you do”.

Receiving a financial reward is not an objective criterion for P3 either, instead he uses two subjective criteria: living up to a set of values: trust, integrity and partnership, and consistently changing and evolving for the benefit of his clientele and his company. P3 believes by accomplishing both subjective criteria repeat business will result. He says “you create a relationship and there is positive trust and part of being a good sales rep is to consistently change and evolve to do so with the interest of the company and clientele.”

A blend of Objective and Subject Criteria

Two participants (P1 & P5) believed success in sales is measured by achieving the following objective criteria: percent of plan, making your numbers, (quota, deal and goals), making and closing sales and performance in addition to achieving subjective criteria as well. P1 uses the objective criteria (set by her company) and subjective criteria (such as how she performs
as a manager) to define success. Because she feels she is successful as a manager (by helping others), she believes she is successful both on objective & subjective criteria. She says “I’m always at the top so objectively; absolutely. I meet those standards. But then I would say on some of the more subjective things in terms of the management that I do that piece is a little more subjective. I think I’m successful at helping other people on my team meet their goals as well.”

P5 defines success, as a sales person (by making and closing sales and having a good close ratio) and as a person (by feeling happy which he values for it allows him to have more control over his emotions and not being the victim of them). He says “Well, by making sales, closing sales. It is not how I define personal success, but I define as a successful sales person; I’ve got a pretty good close ratio”. When the researcher asked again, “How do you define success as a person?” He responded “If I am happy, I am successful.”

Summary

Though all participants considered themselves successful sales people, there was a variety of criteria with which they evaluated themselves and three groupings (of how success was defined) were observed in the data: objectively and subjectively, objectively and subjectively.

- Two of the participants evaluated their performance on a variety of objective criteria: their ability to achieve their sales targets which they defined as: percent of plan, making your numbers, (quota, deal and goals), making sales, closing sales and performance.
- Two of the participants evaluated their performance on a variety of subjective criteria (happiness, integrity, dependability, partnership and the ability to manage one’s own feelings).
Two participants blended Objective and subjective criteria in their definition of success.

Q3: How does your boss define success? Q4: Is success measured the same way (between yourself and your boss)? Q5: If not, how is it different?

Participants’ seemed to be either in agreement or disagreement with their boss’ definition of success and it is defined in a variety of ways. Some bosses look strictly at the objective criteria such as increased revenue or whether the rep “made her numbers or not”. Others evaluated their reps subjectively (in addition to objectively). Others look at a rep’s sales activities (which drive performance), the rep’s knowledge of their customers and the industry, and their ability to maintain their client relationships. The participant group was divided evenly.

Agreement with Boss’s definitions

The participants who were in agreement with their boss’ definitions of success tended to have measurable expectations for their productivity. For P1 the major criteria her boss uses to define success is objective; how much revenue she brings in. Next he looks at the subjective criteria; what specific activities she has accomplished to produce more sales (and drive performance) in addition to her customer and industry knowledge. She said “70% is based on the objective criterion which is percent of plan … how much revenue you are bringing in. I would say 30-40% is based on the specific activities that you’re doing, your specific level of knowledge about your customers, your level of knowledge about the industry, and the types of things you’re trying and doing to drive performance”. “Making (her) numbers” is P4’s boss’s definition of success. She states that even if she has a good work ethic and her boss likes her, if she’s “not successful” then there is a chain of potential reprimand she and her boss will receive if
she doesn’t “make her numbers”. She states “He may really like you as a person, and you might have a great work ethic and everything else might be in play, but if you’re not closing the deals, and you’re not successful, and he can’t make his numbers (then) he’ll get called on the rug as well.” P5 agrees with her boss’s definition of success which is based on her performance.

**Disagreement with Boss’s definitions**

The participants who disagreed with their boss’s definition of success, tended to do so because of a difference of opinion and values. For P3 contributing to the “bottom-line” is his boss’s definition of success whereas he is motivated by his relationship with his client, maintaining his integrity and he believes in “doing your best effort”. P3 wants success to be defined as “whether you can walk up, shake their hand, look them in the eye and know you’ve done your best”. So he says he and his boss, “we have a difference of opinion”.

P2’s boss defines success as money brought into the organization (an objective criterion) where as he values “making a friend” by “following up” (which is a subjective criterion) because this effort eventually contributes to further sales or getting a referral to another sale. His boss wants to know “How much business P3 took in and his boss didn’t care about the follow up or anything like that. I was more interested in making a friend so that I can get more….you sell one person”.

P5 says his clients (who are his bosses) all have different definitions for success. He is evaluated on whether the job he’s doing for them generates “leads” (which hopefully result in increased sales). He personally defines success differently. He seemed frustrated when he said “They don’t care how many pages I sell - they want to know if I am out doing their job for them – generating leads for maximum exposure”.

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Summary

Bosses define success in a variety of ways as well and participants seem to either agree or disagree with their bosses’ criteria. The participant group was divided evenly.

- There tended to be measurable expectations for the participants productivity in the group that agreed.
- The participants who disagreed with their boss’s definition of success, tended to do so when they differed on objective or subjective criteria.

Q6: What sales awards, bonuses or rewards have you earned?

All participants have earned sales awards, bonuses or rewards as the result of being a successful sales person. The type award, bonus or reward participants described differed two ways: external and internal.

- Sales awards, reward trips and higher commissions are examples of external rewards, participants have earned.
- Internal rewards were described as acknowledgement, recognition and the joy of “doing a good job for his customer”.

External Rewards

External rewards come in many forms. Some participants discussed receiving sales awards, reward trips and higher commissions as the result of their sales efforts. P1 earned the “Circle of Excellence” award, a reward trip and a higher commission (six times in the last 10 years). She explains in detail her compensation. “We have something called “Circle of
Excellence” which goes to the top 5% of the sales force and that’s for all positions up through the reps through VP level and I’ve earned that at least six times in the last 10 years. And that’s how I went to Hawaii last year!

P3 listed many awards, bonuses and rewards he has received. He states “We were distinguished and recognized both individually and NorPac (Northern Pacific) for all 6 of 6 years in 3 different categories. P4 is the top sales person in her organization; she has earned commissions and awards as well. “I’ve earned some great commission, I’ve won some great awards trips…. I’ve been the top sales person in the organization.” P6 also listed the awards she achieved.

Internal Rewards

Though (as stated above) all participants earned sales awards, rewards and bonuses, two participants talked about “feeling good”, being acknowledged and recognized as their “reward” for being a successful sales person. P2 achieved many bonuses and Sales Person of the Month (award). When he feels good about the job he does, he feels rewarded. He states “Rewards is just feeling good about the job you do. You have to feel good about it in order to do it good.”

P5 receives reward by being acknowledged for successful programs or strategies and tends not to reward himself. When he is rewarded, it comes in the form of receiving positive feedback; testimonial; a “pat on the back”; or hearing an “ata boy”. While he values his monetary reward, he says “Anytime I get a pat on the back from a client or I receive feedback that my program or strategy is working for them, that is a reward”.

Summary
When a person is a successful sales person, they often earn sales awards, rewards and bonuses as a result of their efforts in the field. Four out of six participants listed their external accomplishments while two others (in addition to their external rewards) described feelings of joy when acknowledged, recognized and given positive feedback. Therefore the type of award, bonus or reward was described by participants in different two ways: external and internal.

- External rewards were awards, reward trips and higher commissions.
- Acknowledgement, recognition and the joy of “doing a good job for his customer” were examples of internal rewards.

**Q7: How did it feel to achieve these accomplishments?**

Four out of six participants described the feeling as “great” when they achieved these accomplishments. Of the remaining two, one stated his surprise and the other did not express a feeling. Interestingly, in addition to joy, many participants expressed wants and needs in relationship to their customers, their bosses and their companies.

- “Wants” were described generally as: a monetary reward, acknowledgment, recognition and a “happy” customer.
- Participants’ “needs” were more personal for example, one talked about the need to feel valued for having professional integrity and another needed to feel the benefits of being conscientious.
**Sales persons’ “wants”**

In addition to feeling pleased that they achieved these accomplishments, four participants wanted additional external rewards. P1 feels good when she achieved these accomplishments and wishes her company offered a variety of rewards because she would prefer a bonus rather than a trip. She believes people want the “energy” of being rewarded “up on the stage” and the reward trip. Being on the trip with other trip winners and recognition within her company is not as important (for her) as direct feedback (from her boss). She says “I like getting the direct feedback from my boss but it’s not as important to me that I’m recognized throughout the company. The rankings are posted, people know who I am, it’s on our website…that’s enough for me.” Even though it felt good for P4 when she achieved these accomplishments, she finds the most rewarding part is being seen as an influential person in her organization’s success. She says “the thing at the end of the day that, I think that is most rewarding is being viewed by the rest of the organization as a success and a key contributor to the success of the organization”.

Kim, these two comments seem to contradict each other… one that she does not want to be recognized throughout the company and two that she does… what do you make of this?

P5 felt great when he achieved these accomplishments and wants his customers to have a good experience with his service. He says “It feels great. I would liken it to the feeling that would be similar to what a professional football players feels when they score the winning touchdown. Because at the end of the day, that is how their success is gauged too.”

With P6 no feeling was expressed; she stated that she preferred getting feedback from a happy customer. “It was a nice recognition – but not as important as a customer saying they are happy with the solution we provide.”
Sales persons’ “needs”

One participant needed to feel the benefits of being conscientious and another needed to feel valued for having professional integrity. P2 felt good when he achieves these accomplishments. He said “It feels great. Sleep at night. Feels great.” For P3 a lot of times, achieving these rewards were surprises. He believes by working hard, doing your job and playing the best that he can, his effort will be recognized. He says “In some cases it’s very rewarding knowing you’re recognized and that you’re valued.”

Summary

Feeling as “great” (or good) was the overriding emotion; successful sales people expressed when they achieved these accomplishments. One participant (of the remaining two) stated his surprise and the other did not express a feeling. Many participants expressed wants and needs (in addition to external rewards) in relationship to their customers, their bosses and their companies.

- Participants’ “wants” were described generally as: a monetary reward, acknowledgment, recognition and a “happy” customer.

- One participant needed to feel valued for having professional integrity and another needed to feel the benefits of being conscientious which were more personal.

Q8: Does achieving these accomplishments motivate you to achieve more success?

Overall, five out of six sales people were motivated to strive for more success as the result of achieving these accomplishments. The remaining one participant (P6) said “External
awards don’t really motivate me.” Beyond acknowledging these accomplishments motivated them, each participant added their own caveats to their responses.

P1 says the reward (of the trip) & commission motivates her to achieve more success and in the converse, not receiving award also motivates her to do better the next year. She says “it’s definitely motivating; when you have a year you don’t get it ‘cause you didn’t do as well; you definitely want to do better the next year, it’s motivating and certainly the commission is motivating.”

P2 by achieving these accomplishments, he is motivated though not at the sacrifice of his ethics and integrity. He quotes “I always want more but I’m not going to do it the wrong way. I’m going to keep treating people the same way I am. The ways I’ve always have.” In P3’s house, his important awards are displayed to motivate him to continue to sell. He believes it gives him a positive “frame of mind”. He describes it as “I have three or four awards of note that I’ve achieved (whether awards or achievements in life) that are very important to me”.

Rewards motivate P4 to achieve more success and an insufficient compensation package undermines her motivation. She wants her company to value her efforts by rewarding her appropriately. She says “Yes. Now on the other hand that if I feel if I have a compensation package that I feel like isn’t it or isn’t appropriate, I’m not going to be very motivated but then it’s more of a situation where you have to make a call. Do I want to stay with an organization that doesn’t value my efforts the way I feel they should be valued?” P5’s accomplishments motivate him to achieve more success in addition to wanting his customers to have a good experience with his service. His response was noted in the previous question. For P6, accomplishments do not drive her to achieve more success. Other external criteria (happy
customers, referrals, commissions and equity in the company) do. She states “External awards don’t really motivate me. Delighted customers, referrals to other prospects, high commissions, and equity in the company to which I am contributing motivate me to achieve more success”.

**Summary**

Five out of six sales people said they were motivated to achieve more success after they were rewarded for their accomplishments. The remaining one participant was not motivated by external rewards. The summary can be simpler, like this.

**Q9:** When dealing with a customer, do you feel like you know what that customer is thinking/feeling? **Q10:** If yes, what cues do you use or how do you do that?

Knowing what their customers’ think and feel, the majority of the time is instrumental in the sales process. When representatives lack this awareness, it can make sales more challenging (as P1 says: “knowing what they are thinking and feeling for me is a critical success factor. So I think if you don’t or you have no idea, it’s a much harder sales call”). To understanding what their customers think and feel, representatives use two different types of cues:

- Active cues which include: verbal communication, being prepared and personalizing the sales call and asking questions and listening to their customers responses.

- Passive cues include: observing their customers’ nonverbal communication and his/her work environment and noticing whether their customer is paying attention and listening to the sales representative’s presentation.
Active Cues

Sales representatives use active cues to understand what their customer is thinking and feeling. This awareness helps them proceed with the sales process. When a customer and sales representative have a conversation (whether it is a casual call or a formal presentation), verbal cues are observed most often by sales representatives (which they describe as “clicking with a customer” or building rapport quickly). P2 believes it’s important to know what his customer is thinking and feeling in the first 30 seconds (because it’s the most important time of the sales call). He states he is able to build a good rapport and therefore feels like he knows what his customer is thinking and feeling 70% of the time. He says “The first 30 seconds is the most important time of the whole conversation with the customer…either they’re on or off… so in that first 30 seconds you better get a rapport built”.

P4 lets her customers talk so she can understand key information such as their goals and how they would measure the success of a project. She believes being aware of her customers’ signals is valuable and if need be, she will remove herself from the lead sales role if she doesn’t click with a customer in order to “antagonize them as little as possible”. When responding to how her customer views success, she relates how her product or service helps her customer achieve their goals. She says “You have to shut up and let the customer talk. You know and that’s the key thing. You have to be keen on the signals a customer is sending you”.

The next active cue sale representatives discussed was how being prepared and personalizing the sales call by understanding their customers’ business, industry, interests and hobbies is an important factor in understanding what their customers are thinking and feeling. P1 believes being prepared, demonstrating a good understanding of their business (and industry)
and by asking intelligent, well-thought out, “open-ended” questions she is able to understand her customers’ underlying thoughts and feelings. The technique or cue she uses is “by bringing it out of them and I think the best way to bring it out of them is to be really well prepared in advance, so you can ask the right questions to get to those underlying thoughts and feelings and really get to the crux of what their issues are”. P3 makes external connections to personalize the sale which provide him with another reason to meet with his customer. He believes the benefit the customer receives from a personalized interaction is the reduction of stress during the sales process. “Making those connections allows the client to personalize the sale a little bit” and can change the sales atmosphere from busy to calm.

Asking questions and active listening to their customers is another cue. P5 relates what his customers are thinking and feeling to their expectations and if there is a “disconnect” he might need to realign their expectations. He listens to his customer to understand their expectations (of his work) and creates a dialog to “reset” the expectation. He provides an opportunity for his customer to “dialog” with old and potentially new clients through the advertising he does with P5. He says “If what they are thinking or feeling in terms of what their expectations are, then I need to address that with them and bring their expectations and feelings closer aligned with reality”. P6 says if she is curious about their behavior she actively asks her customer (which prevents her from making assumptions) what they are thinking and feeling. She succinctly says “Then if I sense they are thinking something, I check it out by asking”.
Passive Cues

Being aware of their customer’s “body language” (and their surroundings) and determining whether their customer is paying attention and listening are important passive cues to help the sales representative understand what their customer is thinking and feeling. Awareness of their customer’s nonverbal communication and their surroundings is the first passive cue, four out of six sales representatives use to understand what their customers are thinking and feeling. P2 explains what he observes when interacting with his customers; “The look on their face. If they’ve got time, outside distractions; everything has to do with it”. P3 expects his customer to tell him what they are thinking and feeling. P3 believes if by noticing the customer’s surroundings and recognizing their “stress points”, “what the customer is thinking is obvious”. He is able to be empathetic, professional, react to his customers’ behavior and pay attention to how their responses are worded (which affects how he does his sales presentations.) He says “I think what you want to do when dealing with a customer is be cognizant with the surroundings going on. They have schedules like everyone else. You can be empathetic and therefore change your sales approach by how many times the phone rings, by how many times they’ve been interrupted, knowing they may be leaving on vacation or there’s something coming up.” He also says “Another way is just visual. Look at their desk, at the wall, look at their kids”.

P4 observes her customers nonverbal communication, surroundings and tries to figure out what kind of person the customer is and how they want information presented to them. She strives to be the kind of person customer would like. She says “You want them to like you and so in order to get them to like you. You have to be the kind of person that they like”. P6 explains how she reads her customer’s passive cues: “I watch their body language, listen to their tone of voice, and watch their eyes.”
The second passive cue sales representatives’ use is noticing whether their customers’ are paying attention and listening to them. When P2 was asked whether listening is important, he responded “Yes, having them listen. Having their attention.” P3 needs his customers to have the ability to pay attention and not be distracted. He patiently confirms with the customer his time is flexible and is willing to accommodate his customer’s priorities. If he observes his customer needs time to do certain tasks without his presence in the room, he will remove himself during sales call. He then returns when his customer is able to focus their attention on his presentation.

**Summary**

“A critical success factor” is the use of cues by sales representatives to understand their customers. Whether the sales interaction is a casual “call” or a formal presentation, determining how their customers are thinking and feeling is vital component to the sales process. Participants used active and passive cues to receive feedback from their customers:

- **Active cues** which include: verbal communication, being prepared and personalizing the sales call and asking questions and listening to their customers responses.

- **Passive cues** include: observing their customers’ nonverbal communication and his/her work environment and noticing whether their customer is paying attention and listening to the sales representative’s presentation.
All participants feel they know what their customer is thinking and feeling and through the use of cues, they were be aware of themselves, their customers and their place in the sales process.

**Q11: How important is it for a successful sales representative to be able to empathize with his or her customers?**

Per the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, empathy is defined as: “the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner.” In this study, all participants agreed the ability to empathize with their customers is important and interestingly (when asked the question stated above) the participants’ immediate response ranged from “important” to “crucial” to “monstrously” important. It was also observed participants described many different ways they showed their customers (through their actions) their empathy. Even though all participants said the ability to empathize was important, only P1 went a step further and quantified her statement. She felt her level of empathy varies with her customers’ “external pressures” and its affect on the outcome of a sale or the “bottom-line” is minimal. She said “I can empathize all I want… it’s not going to make a difference in the bottom line so I would say it’s important but I think its importance sort of varies depending on what all of other external pressures on the customer are”. P4 was concerned about the term empathy. Though she agreed it was important, she stated “I don’t know if I’d just call it an empathy thing but it’s more understand how you’re going to have a relationship with that person.” The ability for a sales representative to empathize benefits their customers in two ways:
Tangible: by showing their customers through the representatives’ actions.

Intangible: by “humanizing” the relationship.

Tangible

There are several observable and measurable ways sales representatives exhibit their ability to empathize with their customers. Participants show their empathy by demonstrating: an understanding their customers’ issues, problem solving, being reliable and partnering with their customers (which includes verbally communicating). P1 thinks it is important to show her empathy with her customers (which her company talks about a lot). She says “I definitely think it’s important. I think it’s important to demonstrate it”. P2 sees problem solving with his customers (when they are upset) and reliability as being empathetic. He says “If you’re able to overcome that problem (with the product) when they’re just stuck…You better be there when they call”. P3 agrees with P2 and he believes problem solving and partnering with customers (when they are worried) is his way of showing his empathy. He says “You can’t solve a problem unless you understand what it is and actually, let me preface it, you can’t solve an issue. One of the things you need to make sure is that your products are on time and on schedule and full. So when you pay attention to those things, you’re become a partner with them and therefore they recognize it’s not just about you flooding them with something”. P5 is aware his customers may not tell him (or even know themselves) how they are feeling (for example, unhappy), feels communicating (talking and asking) is important in addition to problem solving by “realigning his customer’s expectations.” He states: “Unhappiness is often the result of unrealistic or misguided expectations”, feels it’s important to be cognizant of his customers’ feelings and be ready to address it. P5 also shows himself to be “pro-active” in his problem solving. He states “Often times, their (his customer’s) unhappiness creates an opportunity to turn them into a loyal
customer by the way you handle it. First I need to be able to determine if they are happy or unhappy. That comes through communication; talking to them and asking them.”

**Intangible**

The ability for sales representatives to be empathetic with their customers benefits all the “stakeholders” by improving personal relationships, clarifying the dynamics between the representative and their customers, providing an opportunity to been seen as competent (and to be liked). P1 thinks the ability to empathize with her customers makes a difference in her interactions with her customers. She says “I think it makes a difference to them in terms of your personal relationship.” P3 feels that showing empathy for his customers benefits not only them but “you’re there for the good of everyone, the client, the manager, yourself”. P4 feels the need to be aware and define the dynamics of her relationship with her customer. She says “You need to figure out the kind of relationship they feel comfortable having with you. Bottom line is you have to show that you’re competent and that you’re not going waste their time. And you that you potentially have something of value that they need to explore further. Beyond that, then it’s a matter of how do I communicate with this person”? P6 believes the ability to empathize with her customers is “one of the most important aspects of building a successful sales relationship – or any relationship for that matter.”

In response to this question, all participants agreed the ability to empathize with their customers is important and interestingly each participant described different ways they showed their customers (through their actions) their empathy. The ability for a sales representative to empathize benefits their customers in two ways:
• Tangible: Participants show their empathy in a variety of observable ways: understanding their customers’ issues, problem solving, being reliable and partnering with their customers.

• Intangible: Improving personal relationships, clarifying the dynamics between the representative and their customers, provides an opportunity to been seen as competent (and to be liked) is the second way sales representatives showed their ability to empathize with their customers.

Q12: Can you read your customer’s moods? If so, how?

For a “close-ended” question, the answers from the six participants were vague. Some participants described how they used their “soft skills” while others used their “hard skills” (to not necessarily read their customers’ moods as) to gain information. Participants read their customers’ moods in two ways:

• Soft Skills: Being attentive, intuitive, sensitive and observing nonverbal communication (body language, tone of voice, how they spoke or if they spoke and their customers’ work environment)

• Hard Skills: Practicing “detachment” from their customers’ moods, acting professional, addressing issues and problem solving.

Interestingly (though it was beyond the scope of the question), only P1 described how she alters her behavior as a result of reading her customer’s mood. The other participants seemed unaffected. She said “I think it’s so important to pick it up (reading the customer’s mood) in the
beginning and be aware of it and adjust how you’re going to interact with them”. Additionally, P4 was the only one who felt it was important to address the question (above) by rephrasing it: “I don’t know if I would say moods” yet didn’t go further in her definition.

**Soft Skills**

All six participants described how being intuitive, sensitive and paying attention (to their customers’ body language, tone of voice and manner of speech) are the most effective “tools” they use to read their customers’ moods. P1 uses intuition; paying attention to nonverbal cues; observing her customer’s environment; tone of their voice; what they say makes it easier to read customer’s moods; and sets the tone of the meeting. She says “I think the more intuitive you are and I think I’m pretty intuitive the easier it is to read them. I think if you pay attention you can pick it up in like the first minute or two in a meeting. You can look at their body language, how they said hello, the tone of their voice, you know all those subtle clues and particularly you know if you’re at crucial stage in a negotiation, I mean how they are carrying their stuff, how they put it down on the table, where they sit…I think all those things are really important and I like picking up on those clues”. Though she also says the more junior sales people tend to lack these skills. P2 agrees with P1; he says “That goes back to the first one. Body English. The look on their face. You can feel the tension in a room. You can tell if they have the walls built up and don’t want to talk to anybody.” P3 observes his customer’s nonverbal communication, recognizes and labels their emotions. He says “Well, when the stapler goes crying across the room, there’s definitely there’s anger. Laughter’s laughter. Tears of joy are just absent. Those are pretty solid.” For P4, being sensitive and respectful is important in reading her customers’ moods. She says “there are times you have to be respectful of if there’s a lot of crap coming
down. Just being sensitive to those kinds of things.” P5’s customers’ tell him if they are unhappy; he is sensitive to their voice and the content of their questions. He says “I am sensitive to their voice and to the questions they are asking for.” Reading her customers’ nonverbal communication helps P6 determine their mood, she also confirms it by asking questions. She clearly states “I listen to what they are saying, their tone of voice, watch their body language, hands, eyes. Then I check it out by asking, and validating my observations.”

**Hard skills**

The act of emotional detachment, being professional, addressing issues and helping their customer’s by assisting in problem solving, is the second way two of the six participants described how the read their customer’s moods. Two participants explain how they are able to maintain “detachment” from their customers allowing them to be professional when they actively addressed their customers’ issues (which caused their customer’s mood). P3 accepts it’s not him which created his customer’s feelings, attempts to address the issue and helps solve it depending on the customer’s response. He says “generally you can (read your customers’ mood) and what you need to do is not whether you read the mood correctly but disenfranchise yourself. Disconnect that it’s not you. Even if it is, you need to be in the situation where you do your business correctly, upfront and at what time if it’s something that it’s there…you address it and help solve it”. If his customer’s mood is not the result of an issue with P3, then P3 does not inquire about his customer’s mood and leaves he/she alone. P4 believes her customer’s “moods” do not interfere with their ability (unless it’s really serious) to be professional and for P4, professionalism means “compartmentalizing”. She explains “I think most people are professional enough to compartmentalize stuff so that it’s not going to roll over. I have never dealt with somebody where I thought like they were just in a bad (mood)...if they allowed that
get in the way, I would see that as not being very professional and it’s not the kind of thing I would usually see especially in an upper executive.” Additionally she felt her customers’ issue would interfere with the work agenda, she would “call them and say “is it still a good day for a meeting or would you like to move it back?”

**Summary**

All participants thought they could read their customers’ moods and explained their process. Additionally, all participants used some form of “soft skills” to observe their customers. Two out of six participants described their use of “detachment” to promote professionalism and problem solving.

- **Soft Skills**: Being attentive, intuitive, sensitive and observing nonverbal communication (body language, tone of voice, how they spoke or if they spoke and their customers’ work environment)
- **Hard Skills**: Practicing “detachment” from their customers’ moods, acting professional, addressing issues and problem solving.

**Q13: How does understanding your customer’s mood influence your sales call?**

Five out of six participants agreed understanding their customers’ mood influences the sales call. Once all five participants received feedback from their customers (through nonverbal communication such as tone of voice and body language), they acted on this information and adjusted their sales call accordingly. This is a useful skill for the entire spectrum of sales professionals, as P1 said “Top sales people quickly pick up mood cues and are able to adjust the overall call accordingly.”
P1 states her customer’s mood can and does set the tone for the entire meeting. She has noticed top sales people have the ability to quickly “pick up” on their customer’s mood cues, are able to adjust the call (length, delivery, content) in accordance to this information. She noticed lack of this ability reduces the sales call’s effectiveness. Therefore, “Their (her customer’s) mood can and often does set the tone for the entire meeting and if the sales rep is not successful in picking up clues about the customer’s mood, the sales call will not be nearly as effective as it could/should be”. P2 is in agreement with P1. He notices when his customers are receptive and if they are, he sits and talks with them. If they are not (and are distracted by outside influences), he respects their moods (proactively as to not incite them further), leaves his business card and promises to return (on a specific day and time). Being sensitive to P2’s customer’s cues is crucial; he says “You’re not going to do anything except upset them and they’re never going to talk to you again” if there is lack of consideration for his customers’ moods. Customers’ moods influence the sales call for P3, as well. He suggests paying attention to the customer’s surroundings, unspoken needs (such as being concise and direct) and recommends if his customer is short on time to adjust the call accordingly. With his customers, he tries to “pay attention to what’s in place. Get it done. Don’t just drag it out. Usually by paying attention to them, they’re happy”. For P5, his customer’s mood influences the sales call. Initially, he determines whether his customer is receptive or unreceptive to the call. If their body language and contradictory responses (to statements of fact, for example) show his customer to be unreceptive, he probes to uncover the resistance. If he continues to experience resistance he “moves on to someone who is more receptive”. As he says, “the emotional mood of a prospect definitely influences how I perceive a sales call or whether at sometimes, it’s time just to say, this person is so unreceptive and that nothing I say is going to change their mind and it is better
to move onto someone more receptive.” P6 listens for clues (in the tone of her customer’s voice) to assess their mood when understanding how their mood influences her sales call. If she hears irritation, she then asks if there would be a better time to talk (when her customer is more receptive). She might say “(for example) I hear irritation in their voice, I can say something like, It sounds like I caught you in the middle of something – is there a better time to talk?” She finds her customers appreciate her sensitivity and ability to adjust her agenda according to her customer’s mood and needs.

P4 was the only participant who didn’t agree with the question; her customer’s mood does not influence P4’s sales calls. Instead, she tries to “type” the person and determine how they want information communicated so she can further explore their key concerns and buying criteria. She believes “People just need information presented in different ways and then it’s your job to figure out how you know, and the type of information they want; what are their key concerns; identifying buying criteria and speaking to that.”

All participants seem to be aware of their customers’ moods. Some believed their customers’ moods dramatically influence the call whereas P4 was the only one who (seemed) to deem it irrelevant. The common theme amongst the five “yes” participants was interesting; they express awareness of their customers’ moods, made assumptions on their observations, and yet the participants don’t state as to whether they inquire if their assumptions (or observations) are accurate. Lastly, the participants seemingly try to manage their customers’ behaviors (by adjusting the sales call according to the representative’s assumptions of their moods). P2 gives us a clear example “If they’re wound up tight, you just leave your business card and say “I’ll
come back when you’re not so busy. Let them unwind and let them deal with what they have going on right there ‘cause it’s better to give them space than piss them off.”

**Q14: How important is it for a successful sales representative to be able to perceive his or her customer’s emotions?**

Five of the six participants’ answers ranged from “crucial” to “very important” while P4 felt her ability to perceive her customers emotions was“ just a part of EQ” and “the whole emotion thing is a maybe a little off track”. There were three noticeable themes in the participants’ responses:

- **Reading the Customer**
  
  This includes: exploring their communication preferences (structure and level of detail the customer requires) and creates an opportunity for the sales representative to be proactive in sales process and information to offer empathy and help.

- **Self Re-assessment**

  P1, P4 and P5 recommend sales representatives consistently evaluate their strengths and weaknesses (or limitations) so they can obtain the appropriate resources to “mitigate weaknesses and accentuate strengths. It’s important to customize their sales pitch for each customer so the customer and sales representative are both understanding the problem and entertaining available solutions. P4 also recommends “second guess yourself” if the sales representative feels “cognitive dissonance” within the relationship and to “play the Devil’s advocate” because one person’s perception does not take into account all the variables of issues.
• **Successful relationship**

As the result being able to perceive his or her customer’s emotions, a successful sales relationship (between representative and customer) has the following characteristics:

- The customer feels like their sales representative is: their best friend, helpful, trustworthy, open, shares information easily and provides confidence (to the customer) with good information and has honorable intentions.

- The ability to reassess their customers’ signals and cues (especially during a sales presentation) without rationalization; asking questions like “Are they still engaged? Is the sale progressing?” results in a higher probability of a sales commitment.

Additionally, a lack of perception creates unresponsive customers and changes the tone of the meeting.

P1 believes the ability to perceive his or her customer’s emotions is very important and sees it as the biggest mistake junior sales people make in their learning curve. P1 notices when an inexperienced or unintuitive sales person is presenting (and they are not aware of their customers’ cues) the customer becomes unresponsive. This lack of perception (of the customers’ emotions) can dramatically affect the tone of the meeting. She has observed “when you see somebody who’s not that experienced or not that intuitive, present, it’s like they could be talking to a wall. They’re not picking up any of the cues.” By perceiving his customer’s emotions, P2 is able to understand his customers’ mood and demeanor and be “one step ahead of them”. He says “I go into a bunch of different businesses every day and I have an idea of the moods, the demeanor of each customer.” P5 is aware of his customer’s emotions and realizes he might not be directly responsible. If his customer is upset, he offers empathy, asks to how he can help
and/or reschedules the call. If his customer is in a great mood and feel in “alignment” with the universe, he might “go for” the commitment (sales). He observed in previous weeks, people felt anxious and scared. Now, he believes people are happier, more comfortable and are able to move forward with their daily routines. He says “I think it is crucial. Sometimes you might be talking to a client and they’re upset but it doesn’t have anything to do what you’re doing. It just people have lives and sometimes they are upset about things and sometimes it’s better to say “hey you know what I got you at a bad time. Can I call you later? Or is there anything I can do?” You know, empathize and follow up at a later time.” P6 says “it is very important” for a successful sales representative to be able to perceive his or her customer’s emotions since she believes “people buy on emotion and justify with price”. She also noticed when her customers are feeling enthusiastic; she has a higher probability of closing a sale.”

P4 believes reading what kind of person her customers are, how they want to be communicated to, how they want information disseminated and at what detail level is more important than being able to perceive his or her customer’s moods or reactions. She says reading people’s moods or reactions are just part of it. She states sometimes egotistical sales representatives think they are responsible for their customer’s personal or professional issues, when in fact they are often not. P4 recommends the sales representatives realize and accept “it’s not about them”. Additionally, being aware of your own strengths and weaknesses, bringing in appropriate resources and mitigating your strengths and accentuating your weaknesses are essential for a successful sales representative. Through being friendly, trustworthy and helping her customers feel confidant (with her and her company), she is able to move along the sale. P4 suggests sales representatives constantly reassess themselves (during a call) and the signals they
receive from the customer. When sales representatives don’t see their customers’ cues and signals, they need to stop deceiving themselves and observe their actions more objectively. Sometimes over confidence can be challenging and therefore representatives need to be willing to question themselves and their effectiveness. P4 found by asking questions (based on observations) during a sales presentation is an especially important time. She suggests providing an environment where her customers feel safe to share their problems and are open to accepting her understanding and ability to help.

All participants believed having an awareness of their customer receptivity whether through perceiving his or her customer’s emotions or by “reading what kind of person they are” is an important quality for a successful sales person. There are three common themes within the participants’ responses:

- Reading the Customer (through communication preferences, information, empathy and expressing an ability to help),
- Self Re-assessment (awareness of their own personal strengths and weaknesses, getting the appropriate resources to customize the sales, “second guessing” oneself by playing “the Devil’s advocate”).
- Fostering a successful relationship, where the customer feels like his/her sales representative is: their best friend, helpful, trustworthy, open, shares information easily and provides confidence (to the customer) with good information and has honorable intentions.

The ability to reassess their customers’ signals and cues, in addition to their own, not only results in a higher probability of a sales commitment but the ability perceive his or her customer’s emotions is a very important characteristic.
**Q15: Do you think you need to present your desired image to customers?**

All six participants stated in various ways, they believe they need to present their desired image to their customers. Interestingly, five participants spoke of presenting their own internal values as their “desired image” whereas the other two participants presented their desired image as a reflection (of what they believed their customers needed or needed to see).

**Internal**

Five of the participants described their personal values when they discussed presenting their desired image to their customers. These values comprised of: authenticity, professionalism, reliability, dependability, responsiveness, ability to be a good listener and helpful. P1 said (for her) even with reading her customers cues to her projected image, it was hard to ascertain her effectiveness.

P1 thinks it’s important to present her desired image to her customers; she “picks up” on her customer’s cues to check her “projection” yet says it’s sometimes difficult to ascertain if she is accurate. It is challenging and a frequent occurrence even for senior people. She says “I guess it’s hard to know for sure but I think that comes along with picking up the cues you can kind of see how well you’re doing if what you’re trying to project is getting across, I think you can judge for the most part from the cues that you are getting.” P2 agrees with P1. He believes sales representatives need to be professional, “follow through” on their agreements, answer their questions appropriately and states: “You have to be business-like and be able to present you will be there for them when they need you.” P3 thinks by presenting the best image one can, allowing customers to see it and not falsifying yourself is the way he considers presenting his desired image. P5 says yes, he is presenting his desired image as long as it is authentic. He
takes special care to look professional (on his sales calls) to show his commitment to his work and his customers. He says “I think that as long as that image is reflective of who I really I am, I present my genuineness to my clients.” P6 agrees as well. She believes she is projecting herself as a responsive person, good listener, helpful presenter who helps them achieve their goals. She believes (if asked) her customers would respond “Sally is responsive, listens to our needs, meets agreements and does whatever it takes to delight us.”

**External**

The other two participants spoke of “reflecting back” the image of whom their customers envisioned. P4 presents the “desired image” her customers’ want to see (of her) and said “I need to present their desired image to them. It’s not about me, it’s about them and I need to be who they need me to be.” P5 takes special care to look professional (on his sales calls) to show his commitment to his work and his customers: “When I go on a sales appointment, and I dress up, it is to show them that I take what I do seriously and I take them seriously.”

**Summary**

All participants stated the importance of presenting their desired image; their definitions and motivations just differed. Five of the participants felt internally motivated to share their personal values (such as authenticity, professionalism, reliability, dependability, responsiveness, ability to be a good listener and being helpful) through their desired image. Two participants spoke of external motivations (of “reflecting back” the image of whom their customers envisioned).
Q16: How do you know you are projecting your desired image?

Of the six participants, only one (P3) felt he didn’t need to be aware of what image he’s projecting. (“I don’t think that’s something you really sit back and look at”) whereas the other five participants said they knew they were projecting their desired. The question above can be separated into three separate types of questions:

1. Do the sales representatives know what their desired image is and did they describe it?
2. What cues did they receive from their customers verifying they were projecting their desired image?
3. What did the sales representatives do as the result of this customer feedback?

Desired Image:

Two participants (P3, P5) described their “desired image”: P3 as being dependable, producing to the best of his ability and providing good service to his customers and P5 as being understanding (of his customers’ goals and needs). P3 believes if he shows his diligence in meeting his client’s needs, they will have a stronger and truer relationship. He says “If you do what you say you’re going to do to the best of your ability and that’s always the biggest thing; to the best of your ability. You do the best you can. You stand by the consequences.” P5 concurs: “P5 says if he meets his sales goals and his customers know how much he cares about being of service to them, (aside from his appearance), then that is his goal. He says “My desired image (apart from appearance) is people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care. So the image that I want them to understand is that I am genuinely concerned with generating results and being of benefit, adding value to their business. That is my goal, is to serve them.”
Customers’ Cues

Customers’ cues can be observed in a variety of ways: visual observation, whether the customer seems receptive, responsive, engaged and is willing to progress in the sales process, their appearance and actual measurable results. P1 feels it’s hard to know 100% whether she’s projecting her desired image to her customers. Sometimes she can observe her customers cues to assess how well she’s doing and other times she misreads them. Additionally, she said reading her customers’ signals can be challenging even for the most senior representatives. She supports this perspective by saying “I guess it’s hard to know for sure, but I think that comes along with picking up the cues. You see how well you’re doing, if what you’re trying to project is getting across, I think you can judge for the most part from the cues that you are getting.”

P2 is able to read his customers cues by the way they react to him. Flexibility, responsiveness and creativity (like an actor) is important for P2. He says “You have to be an actor.” P4 knows she is projecting her desired image when her customers are more receptive, engaged, and responsive to furthering the sales process. She questions herself and her customers if she reads signals to the contrary. She knows she’s projecting her desired image “By how receptive they are and if I feel like we’re continuing to move to the next step. If I’m still in the game”, and they are still responsive to her and engaged with her.

For P5 meeting sales goals and his appearance are good indicators as to whether he is projecting his desired image. He says “I guess if I meet the sales, I guess if it is working, my desired image. My desired image apart from appearance is that people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care. If they understand that, then they buy.” P6 knows
“when my customers buy and when they refer my company to others,” that she has accurately projected her desired image.

Results of Customer Feedback on Sales Representative

Interestingly, three thought about their behavior after they received their customers’ cues. P2 changes himself to the way he believes his customers want him to be and says “You have to be an actor. You have to fill the slot. You have to be able to change ‘cause things change.” Whereas P3 doesn’t change himself at all during a sales call and as the result of his customers’ cues. He thinks people should do they best they can, “stand by the consequences” and if he shows his diligence in meeting his client’s needs, they will have a stronger and truer relationship. Basically, he says “I’m not fake”.

P5 was the only participant who asked questions of herself in response to her customers’ feedback. She knows she is projecting her desired image when her customers are more receptive, engaged, and responsive to furthering the sales process. She questions herself and her customers if she reads signals to the contrary. As she states: You know if they’re not engaged and somebody’s checked out…why is that? Is it because they have made up their mind and they want somebody else? Or is it because I’m not addressing their questions?”

Summary

The participants’ responses were broken up into three subset questions.

1. Do the sales representatives know what their desired image is and did they describe it?
2. What cues did they receive from their customers verifying they were projecting their desired image?
3. What did the sales representatives do as the result of this customer feedback?

Four out of six participants didn’t identify what comprised their own desired image and yet when they received cues and signals from their customers (of responsiveness, indications of the sales’ progression and understanding), the five participants believed they were projecting their desired image. As a result of these cues, three participants responded. One with changing himself in accordance to his perceived customers’ needs, one didn’t change himself at all and the last participant chose to ask questions (bringing her more in alignment with her own desired image and that of her customers.

Q17: How important is it for a successful sales representative to be aware of the image he or she projects?

All six participants agreed being aware of the image a successful sales representative projects is important. Responses from the participants were clustered in three areas of awareness: cognitive, empathy (emotional) and appearance. Only in P1’s observation was Emotional Intelligence (EQ) and the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) intertwined. She suggests awareness is not just about a sales person’s agenda or presentation skills but about their ability to pick up on emotional cues and making adjustments to ensure their behavior is in alignment with the values of themselves and their company. P1 says “I think it’s sort of entwined with what they have in their head…X, Y and Z, what they need to accomplish and maybe they have even scripted it out and they have practiced it but they might as well be reading it off a sheet of paper. So I think it kind of goes hand in hand with making sure you are picking up the cues and adjusting as you need to.”

Cognitive
Intelligence, organizational ability and presentation skills are important aspects of a salesperson’s profession and are a component of the image a successful salesperson projects. Additionally, the consistency between the way the participants view themselves and their values needs to be in alignment as well. P2 reacts to his customers by “thinking on his feet”. He attributes 90% of lost sales to lack of knowledge (about the customer and their needs) and therefore asks questions as “why do you think that?” to help him understand their perspective. He says “You have to be able to think quick on your feet, just be able to react to customers in the way they react. You have to figure out where they are coming from. You have to ask them, why do you think that?”

P3 believes a sales representative needs to be aware of how they present themselves (preferably with a comfortable manner and professionalism). He explains there is a fine line between being “the clown” and being the “know it all” and says “Professionalism is the fact you strive to do it in the correct manner not necessarily you have to be professional. So to answer your question, you should be cognizant of how you present yourself.” P4 agrees with the previous statements; she needs to be very cognizant of the image she projects. She asks herself “am I presenting information in the way this customer needs it presented. Am I successfully getting across my message for it to get maximum receptivity?”

P6 says being aware of one’s self projecting is very important too. She strives to be consistent (her values with her customer’s perceptions of herself”. She says “If I perceive myself as supportive, committed, responsive and friendly, and my customers perceive me as pushy, arrogant, and terse – I have a problem. It is always important to validate that my perceptions of myself match others perceptions.”
Appearance

P5 believes being aware of the image a sales representative presents is very important. Though he doesn’t say it directly, he believes in presenting himself in professional attire, good hygiene and in a genuine manner. He says his customers would “see through” artificiality and avoid meeting with the representative. He says “There is a lot of superficial stuff. No one will give you face time…. If your breathe stinks. If you are walking around with big mustard stain on your shirt and sweats they will not take you seriously unless you are selling hotdogs. And if you come across as fake and phony, they see right through it.”

Summary

All six participants agreed; whether it’s their professional appearance (and grooming) or the way they conduct themselves, being aware of the image a successful sales person projects is an important part of the sales process.

Q18: What do you do when a customer says something that makes you really angry?

All participants experienced a situation when their customer has said something that makes them angry; how they managed this interaction varied. P1 was the only one who commented on the physical reactions (“start to sweat or shake or get visibly really railed up”), she’s observed in junior “less experienced” representatives. Each participant discussed what they do when confronted with an angry comment. Four out of the six participants manage this interaction by “not taking it personally” (in other words, to not see the customers’ angry comments as a result of their (representative’s) behavior but accept that it is only how their customer feels at the time). They then ask their customers questions; to help their customers
share their feelings and give the sales representative an opportunity to empathize and/or apologize. Though their customers rarely say something that makes them angry, P3 believed his customer’s ability to get angry in front of him help him build a stronger relationship with his customers.

For P1, she reminds herself to not take it personally because if she does, she believes it will lead to a negative personal interaction with her customer. She tries to continue with the sales call and attempt to positively “reconnect” with the customer. She says “I think the first thing I try to do is to remind myself not to take it personally because once you take it personally, you’re dead. Then you’re going to have some kind of personal interaction and you know; you can’t take it as a personal affront.” P5 agrees when a customer says something that makes him angry (which is rare) his first response is to not “take it personally”. He tries to empathize and determine (through questioning) if their behavior is a result of his performance or completely unrelated. His preference would be to work with positive people and be a part of the solution. He says “I want to be part of the solution and if someone makes me angry, I have got to first remind myself that no one can make me angry except me. I try to empathize what they are feeling. Because if they are making me angry, it is probably a good indication they are angry about something. And so I need to determine: Is it something I did or something I’ve done or something that’s totally unrelated?” P2 agrees; “You have to figure out where they are coming from. You have to ask them, “why do you think that?”

P4 remembers two situations where her customer was angry, needed to “vent” yet it was very rare. In the situation, she was prompted by her customer’s nonverbal communication to ask questions regarding their perception of their relationship. This provided the opportunity for the customer to share his thoughts, “vent” and have his feelings validated before they could proceed
with the sales call. She explains “I said, “you folks have been a customer of ours for a long time, I said I’d be interested in getting your perspective on how you perceive the relationship at this point” and he just let loose. And he needed to do that and we needed to let him do that, and hear that and validate the things he felt were justified before the relationship could continue to move forward.” In the second situation, there was a miscommunication between the P4 and her customer. In this case, P4 apologized. She believes it doesn’t matter how she (herself) feels only how the customer feels. P4’s usual method when a customer says something that makes her angry is to allow the customer ample time to share their feelings and then for her to apologize. She believes this is all she can do in these situations. She states “It doesn’t matter when you’re a sales person, the only thing that matters is how the customer feels and then you have to let them talk and let them fully get it out how upset they are and then you apologize. And say “I’m so sorry. I’m clearly mistaken. Please know I meant no disrespect. It was just a miscommunication. I’m so sorry that you were inconvenienced”. It’s all you can do.” If P6 is feeling defensive, she keeps quiet, listens and asks questions of her customer to understand their feelings.

P3 was the only participant who felt by “not taking it personally”, asking questions, empathizing and apologizing built a stronger relationship for him and his customers. For P3, breathing, practicing restraint and listening are the keys to managing himself when a customer says something which makes him mad. He acknowledges it might be a difference of opinion or something irrespective of the sales representative and he might have to “stand his ground”. He says due to his customers’ trust, his confidentiality, their comfort level and his ability to empathize, he has been the target of his customers’ frustrations. This ability, (he believes) allows him to build a stronger relationship with his customers. He says “I can say I’ve had a
number of clients in the past take out their frustration on me because they knew me and knew that it didn’t leave the office. They apologized for it but they were also comfortable with the fact that I was empathetic to what was going on and they couldn’t do that to anyone else. And the weird thing is, it made a stronger relationship. So you know, the biggest thing is take a deep breathe and recognize what I did is okay to stand your ground. But there is a time when belligerence is never accepted.”

**Summary**

All participants have experienced a situation when their customer has said something that makes them angry and each participant discussed what they do when confronted with an angry comment and the way they managed this situation varied. Four out of the six participants chose to remind themselves to “not take it personally” and proceeded to ask their customers questions; to help their customers share their feelings and give the sales representative an opportunity to empathize and/or apologize. P3 believes these types of emotional interactions help him build a stronger relationship with his customers.

**Q19: How do you control your emotions during a sales call?**

When answering this question, all participants’ responses seem to fall somewhere within an “emotional” spectrum. On one side is P6 who is aware she is emotional and consciously tries to control her behavior accordingly. On the other side of the spectrum is P4 who believes, if one were to feel an emotion, it would be anger and emotions are denied when the goal is “winning” during a sales call. Additionally five out of six participants talked about “detaching” from their
customers and creating a “space”; taking a moment; being quiet; breathing or physically leaving when they are trying to control their emotions.

At one end of the spectrum is P6, who is a passionate, energetic, opinionated person who works to control her emotions. She has realized to achieve a lasting relationship, she needs to listen, ask her customer if they would like to hear her feedback. She says “In a sales situation, I listen, and then ask if they would like me to offer a possible solution.” Next is P5. In the last 6 months, P5 has experienced anger and frustration when a customer was inauthentic and ignored him. He felt insulted and realized their behavior was a reflection of their inability to discuss issues with him. When he’s angry, he tries to remain calm and professional. Yet when he’s happy; he chooses to emote those feelings and receives the sale. He enjoys meeting and speaking with genuine, nice people with whom he hopes to have a business relationship in the future. If there isn’t a sale, his goal is to keep his emotions positive. He says “my business is about relationships. And so, if it is someone who I’ve enjoyed speaking with, and they’re a genuine, nice person then it’s my pleasure to meet them and someday we’ll do business together hopefully. My goal if I don’t make the sale, my emotions or mood doesn’t turn sour.”

Relying on her sales experience, reminding herself that she’s a paid representative of her company, and frequent practice, P1 says she is able to keep her emotions level. Yet with long time customers, whom she likes and knows well, she says it’s harder to not get emotional. She creates “space” for herself by remembering her purpose for the call, her role with her customer and that allows her to control her emotions. For P3 since his sales calls are relatively short, he manages his emotions by keeping his ego in check, taking a breath and not letting them show in the office. He says “You don’t let it show on the sales call and that’s just practice.” P2 removes
himself from his customer if he feels a need to control his emotions. He says “If need be, I excuse myself, and say I have to go to the bathroom, eliminate myself from the situation.”

P4 represents the opposite end of the “emotional” spectrum from P6. In order for P4 to “win”, she remembers she is representing herself and her company. She says “How does your organization ultimately win? Not by pissing anybody off?”

Summary

Five out of six participants felt in order to control their emotions, they needed to “detach” from their customers and create a “space”; taking a moment; being quiet; breathing or physically leaving when they are trying to control their emotions. Additionally, all participants’ responses ranged from P6 who is aware she is emotional and consciously tries to control her behavior accordingly to P4 who believes, anger is the only acceptable emotion and emotions need to be compartmentalized when the goal is “winning” during a sales call.

Q20: How important is it for successful representatives to control their emotions during a sales call?

The participants’ answers ranged from essential to very important in response to the level of importance of controlling sales representatives’ emotions.

- Two participants, P3 and P5 believed the type of emotion (positive or negative) determined which emotion needed to be controlled.
- P1 and P2 felt “losing control” of a sales representative’s emotions (undefined) was unacceptable.
A sales representative’s ability to “read” their customers’ cues instead of “controlling” their emotions was what P4 and P6 suggested.

The importance of successful representatives controlling their emotions depends on the emotion is P3 and P5’s belief. When P3 hears something funny, he says he just has to laugh unless it’s “absolute nightmare” and then “take the deep breath but control the emotion…ah, you’re fine. You don’t ever want to lash out. You don’t ever want the negative emotions; positive emotions are great.” P5 enjoys making sales calls when he is in a great mood. When he’s anxious or depressed, he listens and says “sometimes it is better not to control my emotions. Sometimes it’s better to call it a day, go home, and come back at it the next day when I am feeling better. You don’t want to be out there trying to make a good first impression and giving off negative energy.”

P1 and P2 felt losing control of their emotions (positive or negative) during a sales call was unacceptable. P1 has observed that when a sales representative has a misunderstanding with a customer; the sales representative can show signs of losing control of their emotions (by becoming visibly shaken, start sweating and having shaking hands). This behavior derails the meeting and possibly the whole relationship. She says “I think it’s really important to control your emotions. I’ve been on calls like that when the person leaves and they are just spinning out of control for the next four hours because they let this customer get to them and it’s so hard for them to go in the next time now because they are mad at the person. It can totally derail not just the meeting but the whole relationship and you know in my business these are really long term long standing relationships where the reps need to see the customers a lot.” P2 believes it is
important to keep his emotions under control. He says “if you cannot control your emotions you are losing the battle; (trying to get the sale).

Having the ability for a sales representative to control their emotions is not the issue for P4 and P6. Instead they suggested sales representatives need to “read” their customers (by their signals) and simultaneously understand where they, themselves are in sales process & their “positioning” in relationship to their competitors. .

For P4 it’s not the issue of being able to control your emotions but about reading people, understanding where you are in the sales process, and reading her customers’ signals. She says “I don’t think that aspect of it is that much of an issue. What’s more of an issue is reading people and understanding where you are in the sales process and how you are positioned compared to your competition based on the signals you are getting back from people.”

P6 observed an interested and excited customer get “turned off” by two sales representatives when they talked nonstop and ignored the customer’s nonverbal cues. She learned listening (to her customers) is more important than talking. She described this incident as “The prospect started out interested and excited. Half way through the meeting, after my unaware sales colleagues talked non-stop, the prospect’s body language “screamed irritation” – he could not get out of their fast enough.”

Summary

The experience of positive or negative emotions determines whether the sales representative can allow this emotion or need to control it. Allowing a negative emotion to be expressed or emoted was unacceptable in the sales environment. Additionally, a sales representative’s ability to “read” their customers’ cues was important.
Q21: Do you consider yourself to be self-motivated? Q22: What motivates you to do a good job?

All participants unanimously agreed that they consider themselves to be self motivated though interestingly, two participants added caveats to their responses. P1 said she was self motivated but not a “self-starter” and P5 said he was self motivated and a procrastinator.

Personal values and other people’s perception of their work performance are the two main motivations for which the participants strove to do a good job. Only P1 said these two motivators were more influential to her than money (such as a pay raise, bonuses or commissions) or accolades. None of the other participants included the concept of money or “fame” (such as awards, praise or notoriety) in their responses. She stated “I have a lot of personal stake in it and that to me I think is more motivating than even the money piece of it. So again not in the sense I need to be on the stage and I need to have everyone applauding me but I definitely want everyone who comes into contact with me at my company to think good things about me and know that I am a quality worker.”

Five out of six participants declared (some form of) their personal values motivated them to do a good job. P1 says she has a personal stake (in her productivity) due to valuing high quality work standards and her work needs to meet her own personal expectations. She says “I think I have a lot of my own personal standards for myself in terms of work, because even in school I was this way, have always been very high.” For P2 “seeing a satisfied customer, trying to be a people pleaser, trying to please everyone” is what motivates him to do a good job. P3 values reciprocity (treating people the way he wants to be treated) and hard work. He says “I want to treat people the way I want to be treated. So if I’m going to work for you I’m going to
work hard for you.” Getting and keeping happy clients is what P5 values. He believes it’s easier to keep happy clients than prospect for new ones as he explains: “If you do an easy or a good job, you have happy clients and you have repeat business, and my funnel stays full. And I don’t have to field calls from unhappy people and have difficult discussions with them. If I do a crappy job I have unhappy people and have to field unhappy phone calls. And I have to go out and replace that person with someone else. It is a lot easier to keep a client, than it is to go out and find a new one.” P6 values making a positive contribution to her company; she likes “knowing that I made a positive difference.”

In addition to values, other people’s perception of the participants’ work performance is another influential motivator. For P1, she needs her professional network to think she produces quality work. She says “I am definitely motivated by I don’t want to send out an email that is not good quality, I don’t want anything going out that’s coming from me or giving any perception of not high quality and not what I know what I can do. I want everyone who comes into contact with me at my company to think good things about me and know that I am a quality worker.” Her company’s perception of P4’s success is what motivates her: “being perceived by the organization as being successful”.

Summary

Personal values and other people’s perception of their work performance are the two main motivations for which the participants strove to do a good job and all six participants considered themselves to be self motivated. Personal values included hard work, professionalism, reciprocity, people pleasing and high quality work standards. Additionally, other people’s perception of their work performance motivated two participants as well.
Interestingly, none of the participants included the concept of money or “fame” (such as awards, praise or notoriety) in their responses.

**Q23: How important is self-motivation for a sales representative?**

All participants stated in various ways that self-motivation was very important for a sales representative. Three of the six participants commented on the importance of “getting out of bed in the morning” as an example of self motivation in addition to emphasizing there are other professions for people to consider if they lack this quality. P5 stated “That is why there are accountants, lawyers, doctors, and people who work the counter at Hollywood Video. If you are not motivated to sell, then don’t.” P6 was the only one that talked about the long term effects of being self motivated when she said “I believe that all successful sales people are self-motivated. It is the only way to be truly successful long-term.”

P1 thinks the combination of self-motivation and work ethic is very important for a sales representative. She believes a lot of people are in sales because of this flexibility (deciding when to get up in the morning and the ability to set their own appointments). Motivation and smarts prevent people from falling into a trap of irresponsibility. When sales reps are being smart and realistic about what needs to be done, how much time it takes and what specific activities are needed, they can make a lot of money. She suggests “you definitely need not just the motivation but a really good sense of what you need to be doing to get things done; how much time that takes and what the specific activities are. So I think it’s a combination of the work ethic (almost) and self-motivation.”

P2 believes self motivation (defined as getting up, putting their clothes on and having fun) allows him to keep his customers and self motivation is important in life or life will
“pass them by”. He says “If you are not self-motivated, you will let your customers walk past you. You have to be willing to get up and put the clothes on in the morning in order to go out and have fun. If you are not willing to get out of bed, and just life pass you by. You have to be self motivating in life.”

P3 states that getting deals easily is a thing of the past. “In order to be successful, “a rep” must go out and work at it. Liking your job creates the foundation for success. To be “a rep” means you have to interact with people and follow through”. P3 states he came from the office on a Saturday because he had some business to finish up” therefore he defines self motivation as being responsible and completing his work. He states “Self motivation means I don’t want to deal with the weight of having something unfinished that I started.”

P4 believes self motivation is critical. There is so much to be responsible for and you must always be strategizing about the next step. She says in a remote office it’s especially important to be self motivated. She states “there is so much stuff you just have to take it upon yourself…you always have to be thinking what’s the next step? How can I move this along?” P5 believes that a sales rep must be motivated to sell. There are other professions to pursue if you aren’t motivated to sell. Basically “If you are not motivated to sell, then get out of sales.” P6 believes in order to be truly successful, long term, successful sales people must be self motivated. “I believe that all successful sales people are self-motivated. It is the only way to be truly successful long-term.”

**Summary**

Self motivation is a critical characteristic of being a successful sales person as all participants agreed. It is also a foundational component, on which the ability for a sales
representative to be: flexible, smart, realistic, responsible, active, dedicated, and be able to:
interact with people, enjoy their work, have fun and strategize the sales process is built.

People are individuals, dynamic and can be emotional as is the sales process. Therefore,
it is important to study the relationship between sales performance and EQ. Through one hour
interviews with six “seasoned” sales professional, I was able to come to some interesting
conclusions regarding their

DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this project was to explore Emotional Intelligence and its impact
(if any) on Sales Performance. Emotional Intelligence (EI) is defined as “knowing and handling
one’s own and other’s emotions” and is based on the premise that one’s ability to be Emotionally
Intelligent affects how people relate to and with each other. Therefore, I was curious as to
whether successful sales representatives showed Emotional Intelligence and to what degree (per
Goleman’s criteria). Through structured, in depth, one-on-one interviews with six senior level
sales professionals, qualitative data was collected, coded and common themes were found.

Salovey and Mayer’s published manuscript (Emotional Intelligence, 1990) was the first
to conceptualize the qualities of EI. Eight years later, Daniel Goleman expanded on their work
by adding a fifth component in his EI model: The Emotional Intelligence Competency
this model (by reducing the domains from five to four and associated clusters from 25 to 18) and
renamed their model: Emotional Intelligence Domains and Associated Competencies. Though
this study was based on Goleman’s original EI work, conclusions about sales representatives’ EI
states in relationship to their sales performance was subsequently revised to address the changes reflected in the newer Emotional Intelligence Domains and Associated Competencies model.

**Emotional Intelligence Domains and Associated Competencies**

**Personal Competence:** These capabilities determine how we manage ourselves

- **Self Awareness:**
  - Emotional self-awareness: Reading one’s own emotions and recognizing their impact; using “gut sense” to guide decisions
  - Accurate self-assessment: Knowing one’s strengths and limits
  - Self-Confidence: A sound sense of one’s self-worth and capabilities

- **Self Management:**
  - Emotional self-control: Managing disruptive emotions and impulses
  - Transparency: Displaying honesty and integrity; trustworthiness
  - Adaptability: Flexibility in adapting to changing situations or overcoming obstacles
  - Achievement: The drive to improve performance to meet inner standards of excellence
  - Initiative: Readiness to act and seize opportunities
  - Optimism: Seeing the upside of events

**Social Competence:** These capabilities determine how we manage relationships

- **Social Awareness:**
  - Empathy: Sensing others’ emotions, understanding their perspective, and taking active interest in their concerns
  - Organizational Awareness: Reading the currents, decision networks, and politics at the organizational level
  - Service: Recognizing and meeting follower, client or customer needs

- **Relationship Management:**
  - Inspirational leadership: Guiding and motivating with a compelling vision
  - Influence: Wielding a range of tactics for persuasion
  - Developing others: Bolstering others’ abilities through feedback and guidance
  - Change Catalyst: Initiating, managing, and leading in a new direction
  - Conflict Management: Resolving disagreements
  - Building Bonds: Cultivating and maintaining a web of relationships
  - Teamwork and Collaboration: Cooperation and team building
After reviewing this study’s results through the lens of an Organizational Psychology researcher and as an experienced sales representative myself, (within the two domains Personal Competence and Social Competence), I found the Self-Awareness cluster had the most directly related responses followed by Self Management then Social Awareness and lastly Relationship Management (both in the Social Competence) area. Self-Awareness was assessed by understanding whether the sales professional was presenting their “desired image” to the customer. Interestingly, the participants’ responses showed confusion. They asked for clarification of the question, believed the definition was ambiguous and thought it meant how they were dressed and acted. It is important to keep in mind, sales representatives have an enormous task to not only represent themselves in a professional manner but also portray the image of their company, product line and suppliers in a positive light. Therefore, they need to accurately know their strengths and weaknesses to help them overcome a customer’s objections (during the sales process). As one participant said “part of EQ in a person, I think is also reading what your own strengths and limitations are and assessing those in a certain sales situation and then bringing in the appropriate resources and mitigating your weaknesses and accentuate your strengths.” It is this cluster; Accurate Self-Assessment, which provided the second largest directly related participant responses of all competencies.

The two clusters (Self-Regulation and Self-Motivation) from Emotional Intelligence (Goleman, 1995) were combined in his latest book (written with Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee), Primal Leadership (2002) under the heading of Self-Management. The Self Management cluster refers to the ability to regulate emotions and behaviors according to their situational appropriateness. It is this cluster, Achievement (the drive to improve performance to meet inner standards of excellence), that received the most directly related responses of any
competency. All participants believed they were very self motivated and thus ambitious. As one participant stated “if you’re not motivated to sell, then (you should) get out of sales.”

The third cluster, Social Awareness, includes empathy, organizational awareness and service. Participants believed they were able to “read” their customers’ nonverbal cues and instead of making assumptions, they asked questions. They considered listening and apologizing as empathetic qualities and felt it was one of the most important aspect in building a successful sales relationship. Yet, it is interesting to note that it was service which ranked fourth in the largest number of directly related competencies among the sales representatives.

Relationship Management, (previously named Perceiving Others’ Emotions) is the last cluster. Building Bonds (defined as: cultivating and maintaining a web of relationships) falls in the cluster and ranked third among competencies with the greatest number of related participant responses. Also it is within the Relationship Management cluster, I found the fewest directly related responses in the Influence, Change Catalyst and Developing Others competencies.

The following discussion will be divided into two parts: first, a review of the consistent themes found as a result of the study, along with several realistic assumptions based on my personal experience (as a veteran sales representative) and supported by participant responses. Second, I will offer a detailed look at the top four competencies (ranked by the most directly related responses) and the bottom three competencies (with the least directly related responses).

**Motivation**

When sales representatives achieve their (intrinsic and extrinsic; objective and subjective) sales goals, they feel “great” about their accomplishments and become motivated to strive for additional success.
1. Intrinsic objective: valuing high quality work and productivity. “I have my own personal standards, even in school I was this way and they have always been very high.”

2. Intrinsic subjective: living up to a set of values: authenticity, professionalism, reliability, trust, integrity, responsiveness, partnership and the ability to be a good, helpful listener.

3. Extrinsic objective: Success in sales is measured by achieving “percent of plan, making your numbers (quota, deal and goal), making and closing sales and performance) and making a positive contribution to their company. “It’s pretty cut and dry in sales, either you get the deal or you don’t. Either you make your goals or you don’t.” Sales rewards come in many forms: awards, bonuses, reward trips and higher commissions.

4. Extrinsic subjective: This would be positive feedback: “Anytime I receive feedback that my program or strategy is working, that is a reward” as is “hearing an “at a boy” and a pat on the back from people that I am trying to serve”.

When evaluating sales performance, all the participants considered themselves successful sales people. They were motivated by accomplishing their sales goal and as a result received recognition and rewards for their achievements. They defined success as consistently high performance or making money (“meeting your numbers” by referrals, repeat business and high “close ratio”). As one participant stated, “it’s pretty cut and dry in sales, either you get the deal or you don’t. Either you make your goals or you don’t.” They also enjoyed their work and took great pleasure in making their customers happy. External recognition of their achievements was important yet each stated different motivations to achieve success. Some felt the importance
of customer validation as stated by one participant, “it’s very rewarding knowing you’re recognized and that you’re valued”. One participant said “when I receive a phone call from a client telling me about a great experience they’ve had…I get the feeling that I can only imagine would be similar to a professional football player feels when they score a touchdown”. While others were motivated by sales awards, bonuses and performance rewards. Additionally, all participants valued competence, professionalism and responsiveness which insured repeat business, referrals and resulted in achieving positive ongoing customer relationships.

I find it difficult and unrealistic to compartmentalize sales representatives’ motivations into the categories above. I believe they are motivated in different ways, at different times, in different proportions and also by different customers. There are many unique aspects to a sales position that aren’t found in other professions. Sales people must be able to be: flexible, smart, realistic, responsible, active, dedicated, and be able to: interact with people, enjoy their work, have fun and strategize the sales process. Self motivation is the critical foundation for these characteristics and qualities. When sales reps are being smart and realistic about what needs to be done, how much time it takes and what specific activities are needed, they can be successful in sales.

Empathy

The Social Awareness cluster presented challenges to code and measure due to its illusive nature. Sales Representatives spoke of being able to read their customers’ cues and met the criteria to be included in Goleman’s competency coding (specifically; understanding others: sensing others’ feelings and perspectives and taking an active interest in their concerns). Yet the essence of empathy (as defined by Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary: the action of understanding,
being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner) wasn’t observed. I found it disconcerting since my original concept for this paper hinged on how EI and sales performance were related. It seemed to me (based on Goleman’s book, Emotional Intelligence) empathy was a cornerstone competency. Yet for sales representatives, this doesn’t seem to be a factor in their success. Additionally, as senior level sales representatives; one could assume they partially achieved this status due to their level of service orientation and emotional maturity, yet there were examples where this wasn’t the case at all. For instance, one stated, “I think if you demonstrate a really good understanding (of their law firm), of the industry, who their clients are and you’re asking really intelligent, thought out questions you’re apt to get at the person’s underlying thoughts on something and their real feelings about something.” Another participant said, “You have to shut up and let the customer talk. You know and that’s the key thing. You are not going to be successful unless you figure out what their goals are and how they would measure a project as being successful so that is key information that you have and you have to have to address in order to win the business.” Though the sales representatives thought they were being empathetic, I wondered whether they were just practicing “adaptive selling” skills (receiving information, adjusting the call and re-assessing their progress based on their “read” from their customer) or genuinely “experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner”. It seems to me being empathetic, is mutually exclusive to having a “sales agenda.”
Yet, more importantly, since understanding their customers’ moods influences the sales call, sales representatives use “tools” (intuition, sensitivity and paying attention to their customers’ body language, environment, tone of voice and manner of speech) to actively and passively read their customers’ moods and cues which enables them to understand what their customer is thinking and feeling. “Reading” their customers involves exploring their communication preferences, asking questions, evaluating their personal strengths and weaknesses (or limitations), and making adjustments accordingly to create a basis of understanding, an opportunity to entertain available solutions which each progress the sale. As one sale representative said “Top sales people quickly pick up mood cues and are able to adjust the overall call accordingly,” which seems to be imperative to the success of the relationship between reading their customers and actually knowing what they are thinking and feeling.

**Awareness**

Sales representatives believed having an awareness of their customers’ receptivity whether through perceiving his or her customer’s emotions or by “reading what kind of person they are” is an important quality for a successful sales person. Fostering a successful relationship, where the customer feels like his/her sales representative is: their best friend, helpful, trustworthy, open, shares information easily and provides confidence (to the customer) with good information, and has honorable intentions, allows the sales representative to be able to “click with a customer” or build rapport quickly. One participant observed, “The first 30 seconds is the most important time of the whole conversation with the customer…either they’re on or off… so in that first 30 seconds you better get a rapport built”. Being prepared and personalizing the sales call by understanding their customers’ business, industry, interests and hobbies is another important factor in understanding what their customers are thinking and
feeling. In addition, actively asking questions and listening to their customers’ response (which helps when assumptions arise), observing their customers’ nonverbal communication, their work environment, and noticing whether their customer is paying attention and listening to the sales representative’s presentation. I believe the correct use of these tools help sales representatives “click” with their customers quickly, effectively and efficiently. When a customer says something to a representative that makes them angry, the common response was to “not take it personally” (in other words, to not see the customers’ angry comments as a result of their (representative’s) behavior but to accept it is only how their customer feels at the time). They then asked their customers questions; to help their customers share their feelings and give the sales representative an opportunity to empathize and/or apologize or they practiced detachment by creating a “space”; taking a moment; being quiet; breathing or physically leaving when they are trying to control their emotions. Through these techniques sales representatives were able to demonstrate empathy without actually having to feel it.

The next section takes a detailed look at the top four competencies and the bottom three competencies ranked by the number of directly related responses. Participant responses were analyzed, coded and assertions were made per the Emotional Intelligence Domains and Associated Competencies Model (Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R., & McKee, A., 2002). The competency, Achievement, had the largest number of related responses. When I reviewed the data closer, Goleman’s definition (the drive to improve performance to meet inner standards of excellence), I identified the following competencies of Accurate Self-Assessment, Building Bonds and Service, which had the highest number of related responses, as characteristics imbedded within the Achievement competency.
Why is Achievement #1? From a sales perspective, that question is an oxymoron. “It’s rare if the #2 sales representative “takes home the deal”,” one representative concurred and added and, “it’s pretty cut and dry in sales. Either you get the deal or you don’t. Either you make your goals or you don’t.” My belief is that successful sales representatives have strong work ethics, values of professionalism, trust, professional satisfaction, and integrity. Integrity is illuminated in the statement of one sales representative who said, “If you come across fake and phony, the customer sees right through it.” Driven by achievement, they also have high standards for themselves and high expectations of their performance which causes them to be driven or “Self Motivated” to continually improve their sales performance. Goleman states: “Leaders with strength in achievement have high personal standards that drive them to constantly seek performance improvements for themselves and those they lead. They are pragmatic, setting measurable but challenging goals, and are able to calculate risk so that their goals are worthy but attainable. A hallmark of achievement is in continually learning – and teaching – ways to do better.” (254)

Sales representatives enjoy their jobs for a variety of reasons, both intrinsically and extrinsically. Intrinsically, they are able to work independently, be accountable for their own “financial destiny” by “calling their own shots”. The sales environment is an excellent outlet for competitiveness and creativity which is required in all aspects of the job (from cold calling to “closing a sale”). As one sales representative said, “I don’t know anything else than commissions. You create your own income. If you want to make a certain amount of money one month you just have to work a little harder, then you can take the following month off.” Extrinsically, a high level of social interaction or “building bonds: cultivating and maintaining a web of relationships” also helps the sales representatives who work “remotely” have a sense of
connection with others, not only within their companies, but with their customers as well. One representative summed up this attitude bluntly declaring, “if you are not motivated to sell, then get out of sales.”

Sales representatives need a healthy self esteem to reduce the affects of frequent rejection on their ego. Perato’s principle tells us that 80% of sales calls are met with rejection (or a “No, thank you” (Tracey, p. 24) and the top 20% of the sales people in any given industry make 80% of the money. Tracey finds that it doesn’t necessarily mean that there is anything wrong with the product, company or salesperson. It just means the customer for a variety of reasons does not need it, does not want it, cannot use it, or cannot afford it. So the fact is, Tracey finds “you are going to get a lot of rejections. As they say, it goes with the territory. So if you are in sales and you fear rejection; you’ve picked the wrong way to make a living.”(p. 24) It is therefore important for salespeople to remember: to believe in what they are selling or else it comes through to the customer; be competent; know your product and be able to efficiently describe the customer benefits; and be motivated to sell.

Narcissism also comes into play for some representatives. This notion is illustrated by the thought that it’s the hunter bringing a buck back to the tribe. Sales people can see themselves as “the Hero” and envision that the customer only wants to work with them, that they are the only one who brings in the big deals and only they can solve this problem… “I’m important”. This narcissism fuels the strong self esteem that is needed for this work.

“Delighting the customer” a mantra used by representatives is defined as providing excellent service by recognizing and meeting follower, client or customer needs. “It’s important that my customers know that I want to delight them by providing solutions that help them
achieve their business results,” continues this interviewee. Goleman agrees: “Leaders high in the service competence foster an emotional climate so that people directly in touch with the customer or client will keep the relationship on the right track. Such leaders monitor customer or client satisfaction carefully to ensure they are getting what they need. They also make themselves available as needed” (p. 256). Interestingly, the converse was also found to be true as another sale representative said “If I do a crappy job, I have unhappy people and have to field unhappy calls. If you do an easy or good job, you have happy clients, you have repeat business and my funnel stays full. It’s a lot easier to keep a client then it is to go out a find a new one.” Therefore, he is negatively motivated (by avoiding “finding new customers” to “delight his customers as well”. Having a healthy self esteem, can also offset the natural and very common deep seated psychological fears within the sales representative such as the fear of being unemployed or losing their job in tough economic times or perhaps the fear of not being “top dog”. Healthy self esteem is positive and assists in repressing sales representatives’ fears.

One of my most interesting conclusions from the study is: a deep level of empathy is unnecessary and viewed as unprofessional. Buying can be emotional, but selling should not be. As one sales representative said, “I think most people are professional enough to compartmentalize stuff so that it’s not going to roll over.” Therefore the psychological act of detachment is used to avoid the pain of fear of failure. Another said, “You know this is a business call, this is my job. I’m representing my company, I’m getting paid to be here and it makes it a lot easier to control any sort (of overflow) of emotion.” Another sales representative commented when questioned about feelings, he said, “you don’t let your feelings show in the office. You don’t let it show on the sales call; and that’s just good business practice.”
Extrinsically, sales performance is typically measurable, visible and often posted throughout the team and the company. Knowing which representatives are producing, how they are ranked and which are receiving rewards (such as trips, gifts, bonuses, and parties) and who is not. Sales representatives receive life style benefits from their positions as well, such as: great money, a flexible schedule, earning mileage awards while traveling for business and often companies finance “marketing events” (meals, sports, concerts, golf, trips) which sales representatives attend with their customers.

When sales representatives accurately self-assess their skills and know their strengths, limitations and their professional experience (as senior level sales representatives), they are able to realistically forecast and therefore achieve their performance goals. This then fuels the drive to improve performance to meet their internal and external standards of excellence. They are able to accurately know their strengths and limitations because they test, gauge and check themselves and their sales objectives with their customers’ goals in their work environment and consequently the sales process. Goleman supports this assertion: “Leaders with high self-awareness typically know their limitations and strengths, and exhibit a sense of humor about themselves. They exhibit a gracefulness in learning where they need to improve, and welcome constructive criticism and feedback. Accurate self-assessment lets a leader know when to ask for help and where to focus in cultivating new leadership strengths” (p. 254)

Within the cluster of Relationship Management, come the smallest responses related to the following competencies: The first is Influence described as: Wielding a range of tactics for persuasion. I’m not surprised this was the lowest. What this means to me is the senior level sales representatives (in this study) practice a more collaborative, consultative, adaptive sales style and therefore do not need to “wield a range of tactics” which can feel manipulative to their
buyers. Second, is Change Catalyst: Initiating, managing, and leading in a new direction. As a result of a new direction established by a customer, sales people provide a service or product to buyers which can help manage or lead the change. It is not the sales representatives’ job to initiate this and makes their relationship with the customer blurred.

Successful sales people might make suggestions and offer ideas which will ultimately initiate change within their own company, but I think they guard their own time and energy to focus on exclusively on sales and not management issues (unless it directly affects sales) as in the case of a sales manager. Lastly, Developing Others or bolstering others’ abilities through feedback and guidance can be a valuable competency for a sales representative except when it takes the representative’s time and energy away from the selling process and does not directly impact sales performance. As one sales representative said of her boss “he may really like you as a person, you might have a great work ethic, everything else might be in play but if you’re not closing deals, you’re not successful and he can’t make his numbers. He’ll get called on the rug as well.” Basically to reiterate, sales representatives are focused on progressing the sales process and improving performance not managing others (when it doesn’t directly related to their own bottom-line.”

Implications of Findings

The following are the two articles, published in the last two years, which have relevancy to the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Sales Performance. The first, a dissertation by Kauffman (2008), examined whether emotional intelligence is a factor among the high performing sales professionals. In her results she found that emotional intelligence plays no role in accounting for the high performers’ sales success. The second related article by Lopes, P., Grewal, D., Kadis, J., Gall, M. & Salovey, P., (2006) hypothesized that emotional intelligence is related to “company indicators of job
performance (salary, percent merit increase, company rank) as well as ratings of interpersonal facilitation (interpersonal sensitivity, sociability, positive interaction, negative interaction, contribution to positive work environment, and the liking) affects and attitudes at work (job satisfaction, mood, and stress tolerance). Data was collected from 44 analyst and clerical employees from the finance department of a Fortune 400 insurance company; the researchers found, based on preliminary evidence, that emotional intelligence, measured as a set of abilities, is associated with important positive work outcomes. These findings are contradictory and recommend further research be conducted. This is consistent with my literature review.

**Limitations**

The participant group of this study was small (six sales representatives). The participant group was fairly homogeneous and included sales representatives from different industries. I wonder whether interviewing participants from the same industry or even the same company would show strengths and weaknesses in different clusters than this study produced. Additionally, I wondered if the open-ended characteristic of the questions truly captured the depth of the participants EQ since their responses tended to be superficial. To organize this discussion, I added up the totals per question and divided by the number of sub-clusters per cluster. It is a basic mathematical relationship but added a quantitative aspect to working with the data to narrow my findings.
RECOMMENDATIONS

While this study was focused on the emotional intelligence – sales performance relationship, there are other factors which impact sales performance such as leadership styles, psychological empowerment and the psychological climate of the organization. Further studies in these areas would be useful for individual sales representatives, managers, companies and sales publications.

Sales performance is also affected by sales training, personal coaching, pre-hiring interviewing and the use of technological devices. There are other components which affect sales performance and job satisfaction such as compensation. Research in the areas of sales performance, job satisfaction and its relationship to Emotional Intelligence are deserving of further study. I also believe a fascinating study would be whether Empathy is mutually exclusive in the sales environment due to the “background agenda” of “getting a sale.” Additionally, a relationship needs to be explored between a sales representative’s EI skills and their industries EI requirements. The issue of trust (quantifying it and determining the correlation between financial risk and foundation of building trust with a customer) is another interesting area of study. I also believe in a more sophisticated and dynamic industry and product (or service), the more a sales representative’s EI skills need to match accordingly.

Summary

“Nothing happens until a sale takes place” said Tracey in the *Psychology of Sales.* Therefore salespeople are some of the most important people in our society. He also states: “Without sales, the biggest and most sophisticated companies shut down and our entire society would come to a grinding halt.”(p. 1) Additionally, “more CEOs of Fortune 500 companies have come up through the ranks from sales than from any other part of the company.”(3) Many parallels can be drawn between the characteristics shown by successful sales representatives
First, though a person can have a naturally high EI and salesmanship ability both can be learned skills. As Brian Tracy says in his book, *The Psychology of Selling*: “We know two things: First, no one is born with these qualities (characteristics that separate successful salespeople from average sales people). Second, all of these qualities are learnable through practice.” So “if you develop these psychological qualities, they then form the foundation for your own personal sales success.”(pp. 8-9) Daniel Goleman agrees believing that these EI competencies are not innate talents, but learned abilities, each of which has a unique contribution to making leaders more resonant and therefore more effective (Primal Leadership, 2002). All sales representatives have the ability to improve both their Emotional Intelligence and their salesmanship skills for themselves, their managers, their companies and their successful financial futures.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Sample e-mail invitation to identified participants:

SUBJ: Invitation to Participate in Study: Making Requests

I am a graduate student in Organizational Psychology at John F. Kennedy University. As part of the requirements for the completion of my Master’s degree, I am conducting a small qualitative research study on the relationship between emotional intelligence and sales performance. I am requesting your consideration to participate in this study.

The proposed study will focus on what impact, if any, Emotional Intelligence has on sales performance from the perspective of male and female successful sales professionals. The study will be conducted by the means of a self-graded questionnaire and series of individual interviews with successful sales professionals; each interview is expected to be of 45-60 minutes duration and will be tape recorded. Study participants will be questioned about their own experience with emotional intelligence and how (and if) it impacts their sales performance. The data gathered during the interview process will be analyzed and interpreted with the goal of clearly understanding the emotional intelligence sales performance relationship.

Participation is completely voluntary; you are free to change your mind at any time if you choose not to continue. Should you choose to participate, all information you give during the interview process will be confidential and used strictly for the purpose of this study only. All data collected during the process will be stored in a secured, confidential location accessible only by me. I will also make a copy of the summary project report available to you at your request.

Thank you for your consideration. I sincerely hope that you will choose to participate! If you have any questions or would like to talk with me please feel free to contact me at (925) 283-3484 or (510) 913-5555 (cell).

Kimberly Felton
APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

My name is Kimberly Felton. I am currently a graduate student in the Masters of Organizational Psychology program at John F. Kennedy University in Pleasant Hill, California. The research project is a requirement toward the completion of my Master’s degree. This research project is being conducted under the advisement of Sharon Mulgrew, M.P.H. – Organizational Psychology Research Coordinator. She can be reached at SAMulgrew@aol.com or 510-450-0378.

Project Summary: The proposed study will focus on the relationship, if any, between emotional intelligence and sales performance. The study will be conducted through a series of individual interviews with successful sales professionals; each interview is expected to be of 45-60 minutes duration and will be tape-recorded. Study participants will be asked to describe their own experience with aspects of emotional intelligence and whether it has influenced their sales performance. Data gathered in interviews will be analyzed and interpreted with the goal of enabling a more complete understanding of how Emotional Intelligence (if at all) impacts sales performance. You may also be contacted by phone at a later date for clarification or follow-up necessary to insure accuracy of the data.

Voluntary Participation: Participation is completely voluntary and participants are free to change their mind at any time and choose not to continue even after signing this consent form.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: All information given by study participants is confidential and individual contributions are anonymous. All data will be stored in a secured, confidential location accessible only by me. Each participant will be identified on the tape by first name and participant code only.

Availability of Results: A Summary of the results of this study will be available to participants upon request after completion of the study.

Consent: I hereby consent to participate in the above research project. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may change my mind or refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without consequence. I may refuse to answer any questions or I may stop the interview. I understand that some of the things I say may be directly quoted in the text of the final report, and subsequent publications, but that my name will not be associated with this study.

Participant Signature: ____________________________ Date: ____________
Name: (Please Print) ____________________________

Witness Signature: ____________________________ Date: ____________
Name: (Please Print) ____________________________
## Sample Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sales Performance</th>
<th>Related Question</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defining a sales person’s role:</td>
<td>• Do you consider yourself a successful sales person?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How do you define success?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How does your boss define success?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Is success measured the same way?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• If not, how is it different?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Accomplishments | • What sales awards, bonuses or rewards have you earned? |
|                 | • How did it feel to achieve these accomplishments? |
|                 | • Does it motivate you to achieve more success? |

| Emotional Dimension | • When dealing with a customer, do you feel like you know what that customer is thinking/feeling? |
| Empathy            | • If yes, what cues do you use or how do you do that? |
|                    | • How important is it for a successful sales representative to be able to empathize with his or her customers? |

| Perceiving Others’ Emotions | • Can you read your customer’s moods? If so, how? |
|                            | • How does understanding your customer’s mood influence your sales call? |
|                            |   How important is it for a successful sales representative to be able to perceive his or her customer’s emotions? |

| Self-Awareness | • Do you think you need to present your desired image to customers? |
|               | • How do you know you are projecting your desired image? |
|               | • How important is it for a successful sales representative to be aware of the image he or she projects? |

| Self-Regulation | • What do you do when a customer says something that makes you really angry? |
|                 | • How do you control your emotions during a sales call? |
|                 | • How important is it for successful representatives to control their emotions during a sales call? |

| Self-Motivation | • Do you consider yourself to be self-motivated? |
|                 | • What motivates you to do a good job? |
|                 | • How important is self-motivation for a successful sales representative? |