



**Harvard
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Review**

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VISION STATEMENT

Do You Really Know Who Your Best Salespeople Are?

Data by Lynette Ryals and Iain Davies;
visualization by Open

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Do You Really Know Who Your Best Salespeople Are?

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CEOs are investing more than ever in their sales forces, but results aren't improving. To understand this disconnect, we observed 800 sales professionals in live sales meetings. We discovered eight sales types. The bad news is that only three of them—accounting for a mere 37% of salespeople—were consistently effective. What's more, some of the behaviors of the remaining 63% actually drove down performance. But there's good news, too: The eight types represent behavioral tendencies, not set-in-stone personalities. Managers can effect changes in their current salespeople and recruit better team members in the future if they understand the eight types.

ONLY

9.1%

OF SALES MEETINGS RESULT IN A SALE, AND JUST

1 out of 250 SALESPEOPLE EXCEED THEIR TARGETS.

\$1,760

OF PROFIT PER SALE IS NEEDED JUST TO COVER THE COST OF FAILED SALES MEETINGS, ASSUMING THAT THE MEETINGS COST, ON AVERAGE, \$160.

THE BEST

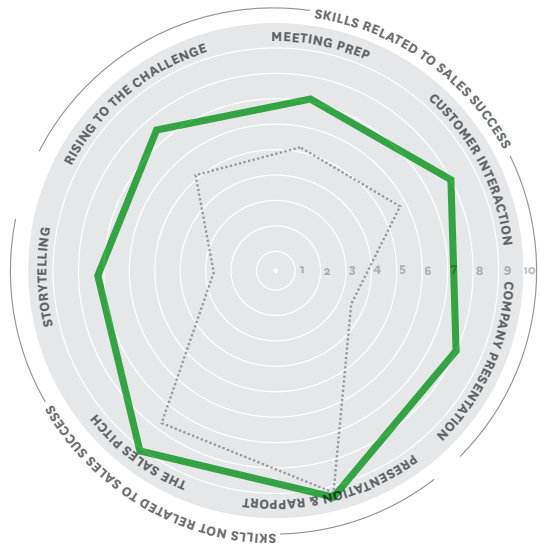
Experts

make selling seem effortless, keep customers happy, and consistently outperform their peers.

➤ Should mentor up-and-comers, help less effective sales staff, and spread best practices throughout the company.

9%

of the salespeople in our sample were in this group.

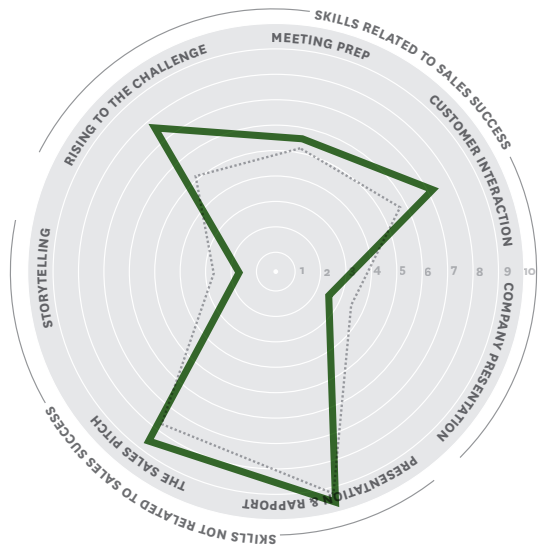


Closers

pull off some very big deals (typically in product sales rather than in service sales) and can effectively counter customer objections. But their smooth-talking style puts some customers off.

➤ Need light-touch mentoring to improve selling of services. A strong motivation and reward system must be in place to retain them.

13%

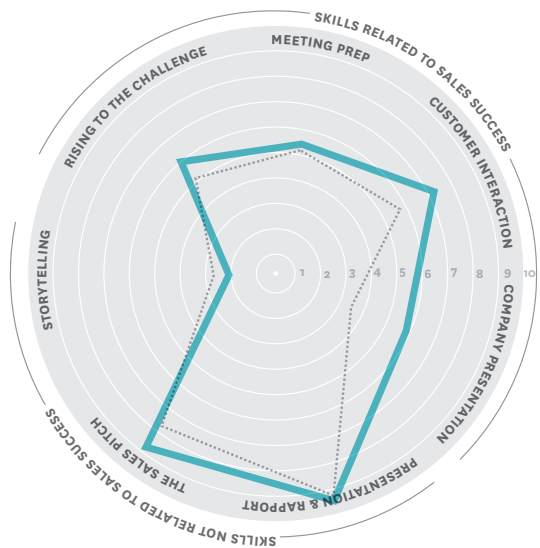


Consultants

listen well and are good problem solvers; they develop solutions that meet their customers' needs. But they tend to be one-dimensional and to forgo valuable case examples that could boost sales.

➤ Need mentoring to integrate more dimensions into their approach and enrich customer interactions. Have the potential to become experts.

15%

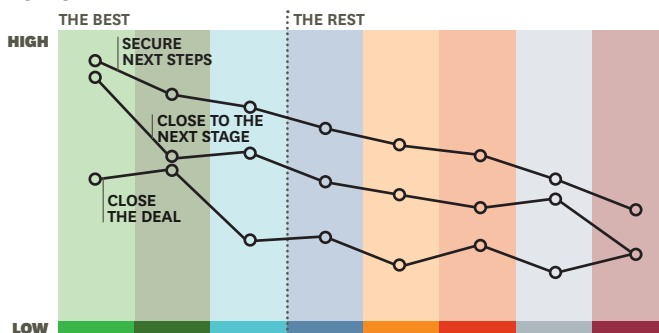


How to Read the Performance Charts

Each circle has seven components of a sales meeting around its circumference. We rated salespeople on 23 selling skills related to these components and plotted their scores inside the circles, with 1 (worst) being closest to the center and 10 (best) the farthest out. (As it happened, not all of the skills affected success.) The larger the polygon connecting the scores, the more skilled the salesperson. The gray dotted polygon in each circle represents the average performance scores of all the salespeople in our sample.

How the Eight Types Perform

After categorizing the eight types of salespeople, we measured their performance in three important sales activities: securing next steps from customers, closing to the next stage of a deal, and closing the deal.



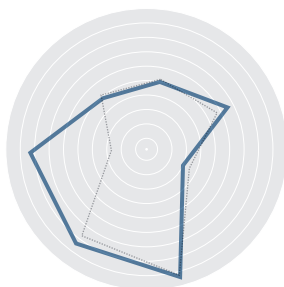
THE REST

Storytellers

are customer focused and love to provide case studies, but they often “talk through the sale” and waste time in long meetings that don’t yield results.

- Need training to focus meetings (for example, setting clear agendas and targets), to “read” meetings, and to become more aware of their behavior.

7%

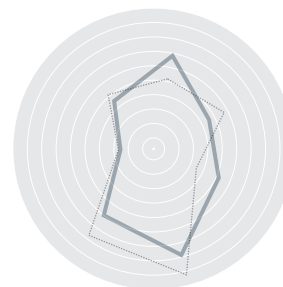


Aggressors

approach sales meetings purely as price negotiations. They can score big wins, and they rarely concede too much; however, some customers dislike their combative approach.

- Need a broader repertoire of skills; should improve their market knowledge. May benefit from self-awareness training.

7%

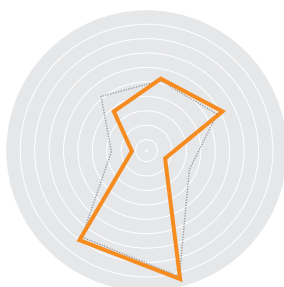


Focusers

know their products cold and believe deeply in them, but they lack confidence. They often insist on detailing every product feature and may not hear customers’ needs.

- Need training in listening skills and must learn to use their technical savvy to meet customers’ needs.

19%

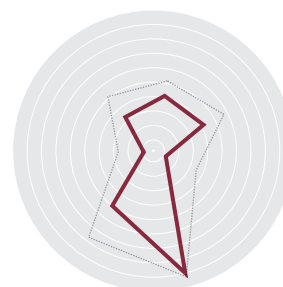


Socializers

may initially impress customers with their friendly chat about such things as children and cars. But they usually don’t get past this, and close few deals.

- Need training in transitioning to selling mode sooner; should have clear short-term targets. Must be closely managed.

15%

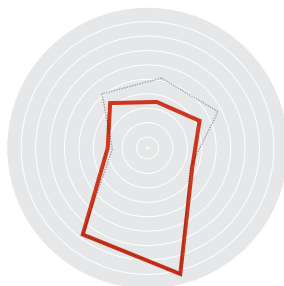


Narrators

know their offerings and the market but are overly dependent on scripts. They cling desperately to marketing materials and fail to respond adequately to challenging questions.

- Need basic instruction in questioning techniques and improvisation. Should shift their focus from PowerPoint and brochures to customers themselves.

15%



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