



Ariel
Australia

A High-Performing Sales Team Is Right In Front of You

Arm Your Team with the Essentials to Sales Success

Coffee Is For Closers, and Closers Are All Around You

> Create a picture in your mind of the archetypal successful salesperson. Maybe you see someone with impeccable hair, wearing a tailored suit. Perhaps you see the famous Glengarry Glen Ross character portrayed by Alec Baldwin, admonishing his minions, “Coffee’s for closers only.” This and other powerful cultural stories have molded our image of the classic, bringing-home-the-bacon salesperson.



The truth is far different. The truth is that when it comes to sales success, the impact of behavioral and other sciences on sales training have far outstripped the cultural myths and stereotypes. Mounting evidence demonstrates that sales success is not at all a function of being pre-wired from birth with the gift of gab or a type-A personality, and that it can be taught.

Sales takes all kinds of personalities. Introverts make great salespeople, too. In fact, in settings where you need your prospects to open up and do some of the talking, the advantage goes to salespeople who are predisposed to listening and seeking to understand, as the author Stephen Covey counseled.

This eBook will show that, regardless of personality attributes, people can learn the behaviors and skills that are essential to sales success: listening, questioning, and emotionally intelligent communication.

CHAPTER 1: Where It Matters Most in Selling, People Can Improve

CHAPTER 2: Your Organisation’s Success Depends On the Mighty Middle of Your Sales Force

CHAPTER 3: Fundamental Sales Skills Trump Narrow Technical Knowledge

CHAPTER 4: Three Practical Knowledge Skills Are the Most Critical to Learn and Practice
For Sales Success: Questioning, Listening, and Emotionally Intelligent
Communication.

Where It Matters Most In Selling, People Can Improve

When it comes to sales success, research has found four incredibly important facts:

1. Having the highest IQ is neither a predictor nor an indicator of top performance.
2. Personality is enduring, even though aspects of our personality may change during our lives.
3. Having emotional intelligence—a set of skills that drives the way we manage behavior, navigate social complexities, and make personal decisions that achieve positive results—is far more likely than high IQ to lead to sales success.
4. Emotional intelligence can be improved with practice; IQ can't.

In fact, research has shown that people with big brains but low social competencies or emotional awareness are the worst sales performers. Like IQ, personality is similarly enduring and, again, not an indicator of sales success. Whether your team consists of introverts or extroverts—or whatever label they were given from whatever personality test they took—they are always going to be influenced by a certain set of individual differences that will affect the development of their values, attitudes, personal memories, social relationships, habits, and skills.

> “90% of top performers have high emotional intelligence.”

TalentSmart

Emotional intelligence, however, is neither fixed nor enduring. It can be improved with practice. And it's the key ingredient in creating sales success, regardless of IQ or personality. And emotional intelligence can be taught, learned, and strengthened.

But the competencies and skills that define emotional intelligence matter as much or more than IQ or personality when it comes to sales success, not only because they can be learned. They also matter because, as Steven J. Stein and Howard E. Book write in their book *The EQ Edge*, EQ has to do with the ability to read the social environment and adjust to it, “to intuitively grasp what others want and need, what their strengths and weaknesses are; to remain unruffled by stress; and to be engaging. The kind of person others want to be around and will follow.”

Focus On the Mighty Middle Of Your Sales Force

“The reality is that 20% of salespeople consistently deliver just over 60% of sales revenues.”

Chuck Schaeffer

CSO Insights' Sales Performance Optimization research studies

Doesn't it make sense to focus your recruitment and training dollars on people who are already top salespeople? The answer is no, for many reasons.

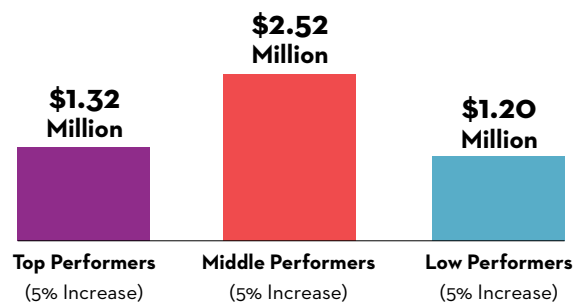
For starters, statistics show that almost any sales team, no matter how high-performing it is as a whole, is going to reflect a bell curve—a normal statistical distribution—of individual performance. A smattering of top performers will be at one end, an almost equal share of low performers will be at the other end, and the big belly of the curve will consist of average performers.

> Next, research debunks the longstanding myth that your top 20% of salespeople deliver 80% of your sales revenue.

More to the point, a 5% gain in the middle 60% of your sales performers can deliver over 91% greater sales than a 5% shift in your top 20%. It's simple math.



Here are revenue gains with a 5% improvement for top and middle performers and a 10% improvement for low performers.



Fundamental Skills Trump Narrow Technical Knowledge



“Superstar sales managers move the middle because the money is in the middle.”

Jeb Blount

Leadership and Coaching Expert

When thinking about what’s most important to successful sales over the long term—and what makes the most sense to invest your training dollars in—research and the experts say fundamental sales skills trump narrow technical or product knowledge. Take travel marketing, for example.

Carol Parsons, a 30-year travel industry professional and sales consultant to suppliers and travel agent organisations, argues that of course, being good in the business starts with knowing the products you’re selling. But being great demands what Parsons calls “sales skills.” And these skills really have next to nothing to do with booking a family ski trip or an annual corporate meeting in an exotic location. It’s really about controlling the conversation and building a relationship in every single interaction. In other words, it’s about listening, questioning, and conducting emotionally intelligent communication.

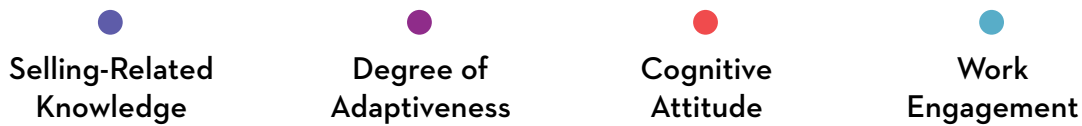
More academically, an exhaustive 2016 review of research and academic literature looked at the role that sales skills and knowledge play in customer satisfaction and organisational performance. The results, published in the *American Journal of Economics*, validated three distinct and equally important components of overall selling skill:

- sales acumen (e.g., sales presentation abilities)
- technical knowledge skills (e.g., product knowledge)
- interpersonal skills.

Note that having technical knowledge is only one of three skill sets identified, and that the other two—sales acumen and interpersonal skills—rely heavily on listening, questioning, and having emotionally intelligent communication skills for successful execution time after time, year after year, sales pitch after sales pitch.

A meta-analysis of research on the drivers of sales performance that was published in the Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science similarly concluded that what it labeled “selling-related knowledge” (followed closely by adaptiveness) was a higher determinant of sales success than any of the four other variables the study identified. Selling-related knowledge—in addition to product expertise and sales presentation skills—embodies a deep empathy and understanding of your customers and how to communicate with them, to be able to present and “co-create” solutions for them, the authors wrote.

Drivers of Sales Performance



The bottom line is that these types of enduring skills—skills like those that come from having sales-related knowledge and being adaptable in various situations—matter. And they matter regardless of the product knowledge or other expertise your salespeople have. Enduring skills can overcome gaps in narrow knowledge. They can be applied across lines of business, product categories, customer demographics and psychographics, and even across industries. They boost confidence.

And sales, after all, is a game of confidence and quick-on-your-feet adaptability. Confidence and adaptability, in turn, are fundamental outcomes of developing emotional intelligence.

Here’s what this means for the bottom line:

L’Oréal—Salespeople with high emotional intelligence brought in \$2.5 million more in sales.

Sheraton—Its emotional intelligence initiative resulted in a 24% increase in market share.

Coca-Cola—Participants in emotional intelligence training exceeded their performance targets by 15%; nonparticipants missed their performance targets by 15%.

Joshua Freedman

The Business Case for Emotional Intelligence

Three Practical-Knowledge Skills Are the Most Critical to Learn and Practice

If you take a step back and think about it for a minute, you only need to develop three practical-knowledge skills to lay the bedrock for great sales performance:

- listening (e.g., *presence*)
- questioning (e.g., *curiosity*)
- emotionally intelligent communication (e.g., *storytelling, focusing your writing, being mindful of tone*).

These three skills apply to the trio of skills published in 2016 in the *American Journal of Economics* and discussed in the previous section of this paper: sales acumen, technical knowledge, and interpersonal skills. They are also at the core of the five determinants of sales performance identified by the authors of the exhaustive meta-study in the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* in 2011.

> Listening

Of course, you want your salespeople to lead prospects to sign on the dotted line. That's a given. But getting there happens faster and more often when salespeople enter conversations from an entirely different perspective than aiming to persuade or cajole someone into a sale.

It's more about listening to learn, to make a connection, to build trust and a relationship. It requires being present rather than thinking only of the endgame.

Practicing presence—being fully engaged, open, and willing to learn in a sales conversation—is even more important today, in a commoditised market where technology has driven much of the buying cycle to happen online. Today, the most successful sales professionals differentiate themselves and their companies through the quality of their personal relationships with clients.

Research by VoloMetrix, published in *Harvard Business Review*, found that top sales performers spend up to 33% more time with customers per week. Depending on the company, this means two to four additional hours. But customer engagement doesn't just mean spending time with more customers. VoloMetrix also found that top sellers actually focus on building deeper relationships with fewer customers, rather than casting a wider net of shallower engagement.



> Questioning

Questioning may not be the most exciting, glitziest, or sexiest selling skill in the sales process. But it is the most important. Good questioning drives everything else. The salesperson with more knowledge about their clients builds better relationships, makes better recommendations, reduces sales resistance, and closes more deals.

Getting more information demands controlling the sales conversation, which in turn requires the ability and desire to ask questions—the right questions, and lots of them.

“You need an arsenal of good questions: What was the best holiday you ever had? What didn’t you like about a recent trip? Then you really need to listen, take notes on what they’re telling you. The more you use the answers people give you, the more successful you’ll be.”

Carol Parsons
Sales Coach

Asking questions is a way to learn and a way for salespeople to endear themselves to the people they sell to. (A great byproduct is that your salespeople increase their broad knowledge.) The habit of good questioning comes from being curious—a trait that in turn is bolstered by being present and having an authentic conversation with prospects. Without curiosity, questions raised during sales conversations become rote and routine. They won’t resonate on a personal level, show authenticity, or build trust, no matter how technically smart or presentation-savvy your salesperson is.

> Emotionally Intelligent Communication

Even with strong listening skills and a high curiosity quotient, salespeople can benefit further with a third practical-knowledge skill: emotionally intelligent communication. It's actually the critical element that sets the stage for building relationships and trust through listening and asking questions.

Overall, emotionally intelligent communication is about developing presence—that intangible something that empowers experienced individuals to influence without authority—to lead a prospect to close by working together and engaging in a relationship.

Presence empowers salespeople to show up on-brand—with confidence and competence. Emotionally intelligent communication gives them the skills to communicate with clarity and brevity.

Emotionally intelligent communication is also very much at the heart of the highly successful approach of consultative selling—working with clients or prospects to solve their business issues and challenges, rather than approaching the conversation with a preconfigured solution and road map.

For starters, two tools of emotional intelligence that are vital to communication that builds trust and leads to stronger customer relationships can be taught and learned:

- expressiveness: the appropriate and compelling use of emotion, voice, body language, and narrative
- self-knowing: having self-awareness of your values, strengths, and challenges.

Another tool of emotionally intelligent communication is storytelling. Recent neurological research on the way we process information through stories has proved what the most effective leaders and communicators have known since the Stone Age: Storytelling is a powerful and effective way to infuse ideas into the hearts and minds of others for lasting impact.

The Bottom Line

Building a high-performing sales team that fires on all cylinders business cycle after business cycle, year after year, requires helping salespeople specifically hone their skills at listening, questioning, and having emotionally intelligent conversations.

Regardless of personality or what you think would make a great salesperson, people can learn the behaviors and skills necessary to succeed in sales. Ariel Australia can help.

> Ariel Australia's Solutions for Sales Performance

Ariel Australia offers customized, blended solutions designed to meet your unique goals and needs. We leverage cutting-edge technology and experiential learning to help your team write, speak, and sell with impact and emotional intelligence.

To see what solutions may be a good fit for your team—take a look at our services [here](#).



About Ariel Australia

Ariel Australia is a communication training company tackling current business challenges that organisations face. Whether you need to engage remote teams, or sell virtually, or enhance the 'presence' of your leaders, salespeople and high potentials, or communicate more powerfully through writing, Ariel Australia can be your partner.

Our purpose is to create better human workplaces – on premise or remote. We do this by inspiring the people we work with to connect with themselves and others in ways they haven't done before.

Our unique methodology is drawing on the techniques from the performing arts, insights from neuroscience, and years of business expertise. We deliver our solutions virtually, digitally and in-person.

Want to Learn More?

We've shared a bit about how we work. Now, we'd love to hear from you. If you're interesting in learning more about how Ariel's unique approach can help your organization drive sales results, reach out to our team today.

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