

Understanding Successful Sales Performance: The Sales Success Triad

By

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Thought Leadership for the High Performance Sales Professional



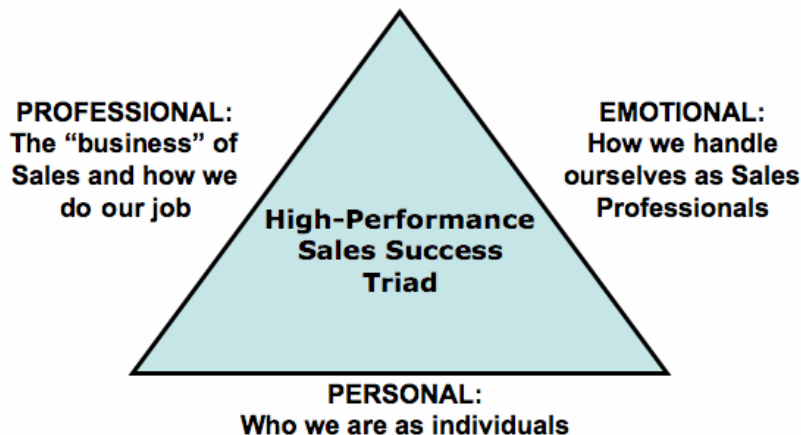
The Measure of Greatness

What separates the successful salesperson from the other members of the sales community? Ask a dozen salespeople and you'll most likely get back a dozen different responses. Is it the ability to create great leads that makes you successful, or is it a winning personality? If you're looking at things like your charm or the size of your client lists, you're barking up the wrong tree. Look at the basics – the simple stuff that sales professionals overlook from time to time. Things like your ability to listen carefully, respond correctly and approach clients not as a sale but as people you want to know and help solve problems. These are the things you need to focus on in order to bring more value and visibility to your career – and while they're common sense, the common-sense methods are often the first ones we forget to use.

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Over the years, I've observed hundreds of great sales professionals and have been mentored by dozens more. These are inspiring qualities that I have worked hard to emulate, learn and integrate into my selling skills—and now share with you.

This is not an exhaustive list by any means, but it includes what I consider to be the top qualities that need to be present in the *highly* successful sales professional. I'm suggesting that highly successful salespeople, who repeatedly create their own success, have tangible and visible traits that fall into three main categories: **Personal**, **Emotional** and **Professional**. I refer to these groupings of characteristics as the three sides of the **Sales Success Triad**.



The High-Performance Sales Success Triad, illustrating the three main categories of attributes for Sales Success



The Personal Side of the Sales Success Triad: These traits are about the intersection of who we are as people and sales professionals, and how that “wiring” contributes to our ability to create success.

Innate Desire to Sell

To be a great sales professional, you must *want* to sell. The best salespeople I know love to sell, and it's evident to everyone around them, especially their clients! There are salespeople who sell because it serves a purpose or are in some kind of career transition. Would you want to go to a doctor who does not love medicine or use a home contractor that does not take pride in their work? People know when you don't love what you do, and they'll be less likely to buy from you. Simply put – do you love to sell?

Passion

You have to be passionate about your work and feel very strongly about it in order to be successful. You can have the innate desire to sell, but not have the passion! Passion is the genuine enthusiasm that drives the desire to sell. Passion is palpable, and it can be seen and felt by colleagues, clients and prospects. A salesperson who isn't passionate will come across as rote and uninterested in earning the business. I have seen more sales closed because the clients are caught up and energized in the salesperson's passion, and this passion gives life to the Personal Side of the Sales Success Triad.

“Passion is the genuine enthusiasm that drives the desire to sell.”

Energy

When sales are lagging or client lists aren't producing, do you have enough energy to continue? While I cannot definitively say that a high energy level will guarantee sales success, I *can* say that a low energy level will *not* lead to success. A high energy level does not mean leaping across a table and yelling at your client to sign the deal, but rather means that you bring the right energy (and intensity) to work with you, and you try to instill that same energy into those around you. Energy is part of how we are wired, and that is a key part of the Personal Side of the Sales Success Triad. Sales people possess high positive energy – success in the sales profession demands it.

Self-Motivation

No secret here – great salespeople are self-motivated to succeed and close business. We make things happen, proactively handling obstacles in our way, while we keep pressing forward toward the goal. There is no other way to be successful. Being self-motivated for a salesperson means knowing what actually motivates us. I have never worked with a single *successful* salesperson who, when asked the question “What

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motivates you to sell?” had no answer. There may not be one right answer, but knowing what drives you is important to create success. I have observed that if you don’t know why you are in sales, your customers aren’t going to know why they need to buy from you. If you do know why you’re in sales, you become energetic and passionate, and you

begin to display all the other characteristics of a good salesperson. Remember that your reason for being in sales is your personal mission statement and reflects in your value proposition.

Integrity

The best sales professionals are honest. They are punctual, dependable, reliable, respectful and caring. Being dishonest, once or over time, has a way of catching up to you and creating havoc for your credibility. Simply put, make sure you do what you say, say what you do and be painfully honest with your clients. You will get one chance; whether it be to sell a client or prospect, or influence an internal client or prospect. If you blow it, you rarely get a second chance to create success. A component of sales success is the integrity to acknowledge mistakes and apologize without blaming others.

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The Emotional Side of the Sales Success Triad: These traits are about how great sales professionals handle themselves to create success.

Humility

Humility is at the heart of lasting sales success. Genuine humility is not faked or insincere, and displaying humility is a not weakness, rather it is a strength in character that creates success. In fact, I have noticed since my early years in sales that people are attracted to salespeople with a sense of humility. Which would you rather buy from – a salesperson who is modest and real, or one who is arrogant and overconfident?

“Humility is at the heart of lasting sales success.”

Ego Control

Don't dwell on your own press. Remember that it takes a lot of hard work, time, skill and a little bit of luck to be a great salesperson. Should you attain long-term sales success, remember where you came from and don't let that success breed an oversized ego. Clients sense when a rep is full of themselves, as do coworkers, peers and management. Great salespeople understand the power of not alienating people.

Confidence

Great salespeople create success when they are comfortable in their skills and knowledge, while simultaneously understanding their limitations and leveraging their strengths. Confident sales professionals possess a natural comfort in dealing with clients and an ability to converse and interact with ease; clients want to work with confident and capable sales professionals and will place a higher level of trust in them. Being comfortable in yourself, your company, and the products and knowing how to handle rejection creates success and boosts your confidence level.

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Relationship-building Skills

Do you have the ability and patience to build long, sustaining, durable relationships? Clients buy from sales professionals who they trust. That typically comes from sales professionals investing time to build a relationship. You will close complex sales because you have built a relationship of trust, not because you have talked your client into it or pushed them to close the sale. If you create a bad client experience, you may still get the sale, but it will be your last sale to that client – as well as to anyone in his or her network. Selling is often less about products and solutions and more about the relationships and trust that have been established. Bottom line, you cannot be a great salesperson and create success without building great relationships. The solid relationships you build today will turn out to be your best support system tomorrow.

Collaborative Skills

Having confidence and building great relationships allows you to leverage those relationships to collaborate and network with your team to close business. As sales campaigns, opportunities, and products/services become more complex, you must be able to collaborate effectively (and often virtually) with internal and external customers. Collaboration means leveraging your resources to get the deal closed by building effective and motivated teams who collectively contribute to creating success. You have to be able to influence people so they're willing to do what you need them to do, even if they don't report to you, as well as motivating them to see the big picture. No sales professional is an island - with technology driving so much in sales today, no single salesperson should try to get it done alone. Great salespeople are inclusive, effective networkers, collaborative, open, and communicate well.

Listening Skills

As (someone's) Grandma used to say, you have two ears and one mouth for a reason. Clients want to be heard – they do not want to hear the salesperson talk more than they do. Clients and prospects have challenges, problems, issues, and pain points that need to be solved, and the only way they will be solved is when sales professionals listen intently, correctly, and with integrity. Let your customers finish their statements – don't finish for them. Stay in the moment and discipline yourself to be attentive to their needs, and don't get ahead of your client. Sometimes we get so excited and exuberant about what we can offer that we forget to listen to the whole problem. Slow down, take a breath, and listen to your customer. Let them guide you to creating success using this important Sales Success Triad skill.

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Patience

Patience is important to let deals develop, mature and close. Rushing a deal to closure can mean sacrificing business and long-term relationships. You have to be patient to create success. Every sales campaign, client and buying cycle is different which requires patience to understand and adapt. No sales cycle or client is created equal. You have to be patient and understand that great sales campaigns take time. If you're not patient, your client will sense that and put distance between you.

Personal Responsibility

Personal Responsibility is the aggregate of all the above points. You are responsible for your own success or failure. You are responsible for yourself and the image, power, and energy you project every day. You are responsible for how you treat your clients. You are responsible for controlling your own sales karma. Whatever happens is largely in your control. While some things are obviously out of your control – company bankruptcy, change – don't point the finger, don't blame, and don't begin by saying, "I lost this deal because of somebody else" or "it's that persons fault." You **create your success**.



The Professional Side of the Sales Success Triad: How great sales professionals use business skills to create success

Business Acumen

Are you able to put on a business hat, look at a client or a sales situation, and assess the actual business opportunity? Great salespeople see the sales opportunity as a *business decision for both parties* in addition to being a deal with commissions. It takes a dispassionate view for you to be able to accurately assess how and when to proceed with a sales campaign. Sometimes salespeople get so emotional, they lose their business "eye" and do not assess the situation from all angles: Is it the company liquid? Is this a profitable deal? Is the deal beyond today a good one? Don't let emotion rule your decision to pursue the business – listen to your business sense.

Build your Business Plan and Define Required Activity

Your business plan and definition of required activity is business acumen in practice. Are you looking at your territory as your own business? You should be – it is. Have you built a focused and definitive plan to deliver the business? For that reason, you need a business plan. It is essential that all sales professionals understand the activities that are required to becoming successful and how to build a robust pipeline! How many calls, proposals, and demos, are needed? What developmental activities do you have to perform in order to manage your sales campaign and to open up new accounts? Focusing on the metrics and become metric-driven creates success. Great sales professionals know that a sale in its most basic form is about activity. You can't make a successful plan without activity – picking up the phone to make a call or making an appointment to see a client. You can't make your goals if you don't plan and follow up. Organize yourself and build a scalable and fluid business plan that says exactly how you will create success.

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Ask for the Order

It sounds like a no-brainer, but you'd be surprised how many times salespeople forget this critical step. You've done the work, you've brought the client to the point where he or she should buy, but they haven't. Look at your approach again – have you asked for the order? Have you assessed your client's needs, knowledge of your products or services, and interest level to the point you're ready to close the deal? There are times when asking for the order means asking early in your sales campaign. If your client knows your products, already expresses interest, what's stopping you from asking? It's not acceptable to extend a sales campaign for fear of hearing “no”! Sometimes “no” is an invitation to understand the reason behind the client's response. What's motivating that client to back away? Can you address those issues? Asking for the order reveals hidden objections and undiscovered challenges – for great sales professionals, that is a natural part of the sales conversation.

Intelligence

Simply put, salespeople are intelligent. By that, I don't mean possessing an advanced degree, a Ph.D. or a high GPA. Intelligent salespeople possess people and street smarts. They understand the components of a sales cycle and have the ability to read all the signs during a sales campaign, as well as understanding the competition, the industry and the economy. Intelligence is the vital combination of common sense with a healthy quantity of knowledge to make solid business decisions.

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See the Big Picture

Sure, the impending sale today is exciting, but are you seeing the opportunity six months, a year, two years down the road? Don't look at your customers as one-time clients; use your business maturity to gauge long-term impact and view them as accounts with future potential. Every client has the chance to be that star client who will continue to engage you for products and solutions. As a salesperson, you need to see beyond the deal at hand. View the clients as multiple opportunities and the building blocks of the long-term sales strategy.

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Become a Thought Leader

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Take a dive in the cerebral pool. Someone who takes the time to know what's going on in their industry will often become the go-to person for knowledge and information. These Sales Professionals are the kind of people who get a reputation for being a thought leader. As a salesperson, you should be able to talk intelligently with customers on the

products or services, what's going on in the industry, and be able to give a worthwhile opinion. You can't just sell – you need to have a perspective on your industry. A customer of mine once said, “I didn't buy from that guy – he didn't know anything about my company.” Can you talk intelligently about where your client's industry is going? If you're selling a web-based service, can you talk about the developments in the internet and how that's going to change what you do? Thought leaders create value in their relationships and long term success with their knowledge of the industry.

Desire to Educate Your Clients

Along with being a thought leader, you have to be in a position to educate your clients and prospects about your products, concepts, and services. You must be a teacher to your clients and create a compelling story and compelling reason for them to buy.

Sales reps often forget not every client or prospect understands what you do, so educating with patience, courtesy, and respect creates success. Speak to them at their level and don't alienate your clients because they don't understand. You'll find that educating your clients properly is a powerful step toward building strong relationships.

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Commitment to Career Learning

Finally, never think you've learned it all! Always be open, willing, and able to learn new things, develop new skills, and volunteer to teach peers by sharing your experiences. Every profession has a continuing education component – some

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required and some voluntary. It's just as important for salespeople to continue their education as any other profession. The business of selling is constantly evolving. You must keep abreast of changes and trends in order to remain a competitive and compelling sales professional. Remember also that career learning for a salesperson is a 360-degree process: you learn and you give back. Share with peers what you've learned and generously mentor – you will continue to learn as well! You'll help the industry remain strong and avoid personal stagnation.

Creating Your Success

The **Sales Success Triad** is a framework for you to create success: a simple checklist of complex concepts for you to understand and embrace. The three elements of the triad are essential to utilize so that you can close more business. The components of each side are not revelations found in some archival site nor are they new ideas, or unique to one industry or

another. Perhaps you possess other traits that have helped you in your sales career. If so, great! Use them. Nevertheless, don't overlook the importance of the most basic set of traits of the Sales Success Triad. It all comes down to respect for yourself and your clients and the time-honored process of selling.



Your call to action is straightforward – consider and espouse the elements of the Sales Success Triad every day you are being a great salesperson. At the conclusion of every deal you close, think about the qualities of the Triad you exhibited and how you made use of them to create your success; you can make a journal of the elements you used and how it helped you close business. In it, you can note where you need to improve and focus on that in your next sales call. This constant reminder will help you develop into an expert in making the Sales Success Triad work for you in **Creating Your Success!**

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Good Selling!

Todd Cohen is a proven high-performance sales leader who has delivered significant revenue for leading equipment, education, e-learning and information companies, including Xerox, Gartner Group, Pensare, Thomson, and LexisNexis. His sales methods and approach to team building have been utilized by some of the largest corporations in America. For more information, visit. www.toddcohen.com. Todd may be reached via email: todd@toddcohen.com.