

## ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE SALE PROCESS: THE SUCCESSFUL SALESMAN BETWEEN MYTH AND REALITY

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**Abstract.** *Focusing on the impact of several techniques and methods upon the efficiency of a sales representative, the present paper proposes to analyze the way in which applying such techniques and methods might lead the sales representative to success. In order to clarify the importance of such an impact, the paper presents the applying of a questionnaire with specific questions meant to conclude the role of such techniques in reaching success. The questionnaire was structured within the following five research dimensions with the purpose of obtaining a series of key correlations between the terms of these dimensions: sales efficiency, efficient techniques of closing the sales act, techniques of overcoming difficult moments, the pre-sales process and post-sales process. The results of the applied questionnaire were interpreted and as a result of analyzing them, we came to the conclusion that specific techniques and methods are necessary for a salesman who wants to be more efficient, therefore to a salesman who wants to be successful.*

**Keywords:** *efficiency; techniques; success; process; sales; sales representative.*

### Introduction

Within the business environment, sales and the sales representative stand out as the main engines of a company's financial functioning. The more a company's sales representative succeeds in maintaining a positive relationship with the existing clients and succeeds in attracting new ones, the more sales will increase and the company will prosper. The present paper explores several possible elements that might influence a salesman's performance.

From this point of view, aspect such as the relationship between the client and the salesman, the way they communicate, details of the meeting (such as environment, means of establishing and maintaining contact) can be considered one of the elements that should be taken into consideration when analyzing the salesman's efficiency and

success. The sales process implies that the salesman makes the effort to obtain a face-to-face meeting with the client, whether at the client's office or in an environment, that can be controlled, becoming suitable for completing the sales endeavor (Dan, 2014).

Mandino (2008) states that there are four ways in which one can be in contact with other; hence, people are evaluated and labeled according to what they do, how they look, what they say and how they say it. We may consider that these are aspects that a salesman should always keep in mind as being determinants of the quality of the relationship that is established with the client. The client – salesman relationship also includes the emotional state that is triggered between the two; from this point of view, Curcă (2009a) emphasizes that positivity and enthusiasm both might have beneficial effects upon both the salesman and the act of sale itself. The author also brings to attention that the counter-effect might also be present, in which the enthusiasm turns to negative connotations making the salesman skip from sight the needs of the client, lose focus from the sale and leaving more and more room for the client to negotiate, even in disadvantageous ways.

Over the years several authors (Hopkins, 2014; Pink, 2013; Ziglar, 2002) emphasized different techniques and methods that should be used in order to seize a deal. Having knowledge of the product that is being sold and its qualities is the main factor of succeeding to sale. The successful salesman should always be capable of offering any type of information regarding the product or should have the possibility of doing so; otherwise, the difficult situation might arise on the behalf of the client. Such situation usually has serious implications, as the client can observe the salesman's insecurities, further becoming uncertain that he or she should proceed in buying the product.

Several myths popularized within the sales domain have been proven to promote ineffective ideas. For instance, a harmful myth is considered aggressiveness, the salesman's desire of succeeding by any means, losing sight of the fact that a sales process should be based on the client's needs. Another less beneficial myth is that a successful salesman talks a lot. This method consists in the salesman's attempt to convince without allowing the client to express their objections, in other words, without listening. Pink (2013) considered that sales are a domain which does not request intelligence, that such activities are destined to "dodgers". We consider that such lines of thought could themselves be harmful to an activity that is basically essential from an economic point of view, and limit the possibility of coming to an in-depth understanding of the sales process.

Tom Hopkins (2014a, p.225) considered that the sales process is "the act which assures valuing production, respectively making up for fabrication costs and preparing the product in order to be sold, and including the element of profit".

Several ideas have been proposed by literature in order to explain sales success. For instance, Cioroianu (2015) considered that success in such activity is related to the salesman's ability to sell anything to anybody, no matter the product. In addition, Carton (2008) suggested that the way of building one's portfolio might represent an advantage – techniques such visits and phone calls being insufficient for obtaining such portfolio. Zbucea et al. (2015, pp.228-234) argue that controlling the behavior of sales representatives is more effective than result control and they give a series of guidelines to be considered for the successful approach of customers.

Hopkins (2014a) brings to attention the consultation interview, destined to diagnose and investigate potential clients' expectations. The salesman, therefore, decides whether further sale possibilities should be discussed if one detects a lack of interest of the client. Also, a successful salesman should be focused on obtaining face to face meetings with the client (Dan, 2014) and on using the ability to listen (Baia, 2011), using one's intuition in order to identify the client's need so that a suitable offer can be made. From this point of view, Hopkins (2014a) emphasizes the need of showing authentic interest towards the client, addressing questions regarding one's need, guiding one to the best solution; according to the author, in this context a positive reaction of the client should be reinforced, in order to establish positive feelings within the process.

Duncan (2014) also supports this point of view by stating that a trustful relationship is only formed if the client sense that the salesman is an honest, upright person, who keeps one's promise and disposes of the means of doing so. According to Tracy (2014), it is important to reach a point of understanding the way people think, the reasons behind their buying behavior and the importance of identifying the most creative techniques that can be used in order to convince them to buy, as such elements support a significant increase of incomes in a relatively short period of time.

Perhaps one of the most well-appreciated techniques that can apply by a successful salesman is persuasion, according to Rujoiu (2011), who points out that this element is found in many domains of activity, being considered of high necessity, along with negotiation. The successful salesman manages to transmit a clear message to be well interpreted by the client, leading to conclude the sale; results are to appear even faster with such a message is personalized according to the needs and requests of the client (Schmidt & Adamson, 2015, p.4). Ziglar (2004) points out that in order to become a successful salesman one need to engage in a process of ongoing learning, even if success has been reached.

As for factors that might interfere with a sales process' success, Hopkins (2014a) emphasized the salesman's reaction to a client's stimuli; what is said or done during the sales process can be defining for concluding the sale and can make the difference between a mediocre and a successful salesman. Hopkins (2014b) also created a five-step model that facilitates sales even in periods of crisis – when there are no more buyers. The model implies the exploitation of the clients' list in order to generate new and potential clients; applying innovative techniques of ending the sale, involving low costs; reducing resistance through psychological techniques of diminishing fear; keeping and rewarding clients to that they remain loyal; attracting competition's clients through specific strategies.

Another important contribution brought by Hopkins (2014a) in the field of sales is his analysis of the theory of stimuli, pause, and reaction. We may consider that this approach could be the criteria that make the difference between success and failure in the process of sales. According to the author, a behavioral response can be most easily described through the stimuli – reaction relationship. The human mind is constructed, as opposed to an animal's in such manner that it allows us the analyze stimuli once it is received in order to make a pause (not respond immediately) and try to find the best, most suitable type of reaction.

The reaction in such pauses can be adjusted, in order to reach effectiveness, through practice, training, and repetition. The reaction is considered by Hopkins (2014a) to be decisive during the act of sale, referring to the salesman's reaction, what one intends and is about to say or do as a response to the client's stimuli (what is triggered from their behalf in the form of verbal or nonverbal acts). Managing such a dynamic is according to the mentioned author, the element that might make the difference between a successful and mediocre salesman. „The most difficult is to teach the young salesmen that, if they are not sure about what they are about to say and do before facing the client, then they can consider the deal to be already lost” (Hopkins, 2014a, p.89).

The mentioned theoretical aspects regarding the process of sales are meant to offer a general guideline for the proposed study. In other words, we have intended to describe several aspects which are considered by the professional literature to be of importance from the point of view of the successful salesman. Further, these elements contribute to the construction of an instrument destined to be completed by sales professionals in order to validate the mentioned lines of thought and to verify if they are indeed worthy of further explorations from a scientific point of view.

## **Study regarding success in sales**

### ***Objective and hypotheses***

The main objective of the present paper is to identify the best abilities and methods that a successful salesman should apply in order to conclude the sale process and increase effectiveness.

Our main presumption is that a successful salesman should own a series of abilities which should be continuously developed so that he would be capable of offering complete sales services to the clients, understanding their needs and offering services which satisfy such needs, therefore proving to be a successful salesman. The following hypotheses have been proposed:

- Successfully applying sale techniques is the method through which the salesman becomes more effective;
- Both pre-sale and post-sale processes can significantly increase the salesman's effectiveness;
- It is presumed that using methods and techniques specific to concluding the sale represents the starting point of becoming a successful salesman.
- We assume that a salesman's crisis can be overcome through techniques of solving difficult moments.

### ***Instruments***

The applied instrument consists in a closed-ended questionnaire addressed to managers and employees of some of the most successful Romanian sales companies. Items were constructed based on criteria extracted from professional literature (Hopkins, 2014; Ziglar, 2002; Ziglar, 2012; Pink, 2013). The items were designed according to five main domains, respectively: salesman's effectiveness, efficient techniques of closing the sales process; techniques of overcoming difficult moments;

pre-sale process and post-sale process. The instrument was applied online, via e-mail, during April and May 10, 2016.

The questionnaire was built so that it included three dimensions, which will be further described. The first dimension refers to the salesman's efficiency and it included items such as: "How often do you succeed in closing a sale?", "How often do you succeed in reaching you target?", "How often do you deliver services and products which are needed by the patient?"; the section has the purpose of identifying the salesman's efficiency depending on the degree of concluding the sale, the frequency of reaching the imposed target and the salesman's ability to satisfy a real need.

The second dimension refers to techniques and methods considered to be effective in closing the act of sale, which the salesman should own in order to succeed. This dimension includes items such as: "On a 1 to 5 scale (1 meaning "unimportant" and 5 "important"), please rate how important is the moment of the salesman's reaction"; "How important do you consider intuition to be, in unexpected situations?", "How important do you consider experience to be, in an unexpected situation?", "Out of your own experience, do you consider there is a need to permanently be updated with new tendencies and techniques of the domain?" – the section having the purpose of identifying the importance of specific techniques of concluding a sale and the potential effect they might have upon efficiency, from the point of view of successful salesmen.

The third dimension refers to techniques applied by successful salesmen in order to overcome difficult moments of one's career. Examples of items: "In a moment of crisis, is adaptability a way of overcoming difficulties?", "On a 1 to 5 scale, how would you rate returning to basic techniques as a way of overcoming difficulty?". The section has the purpose of identifying the necessity, importance and effectiveness of several techniques (practicing, returning to basics, innovation, adaptability, and ability development) in relation to using them in crisis situations which interfere with one's career. The questionnaire included a total of 13 items and obtained data was analyzed using SPSS.

### ***Participants***

The questionnaire was sent to a total number of 120 people, out of with 108 responded. The sample included 79.6% male participants and 20.4% female participants, aged between 25 and 55 years old. As for their occupations, 58.3% were salesmen, 29.6% were sales team coordinators and 12% were sales managers. Based on the questionnaire responses we concluded that the participants are effective salesmen who manage to often or very often close a sale, to reach the target imposed by the company, or to be effective while promoting a product or service to their client.

### **Results**

The first hypothesis, stating that successfully applying sales techniques is the way in which the salesman becomes more affective, is supported by our data. Hence the importance of the salesman's reaction is positively correlated both with closing the sale ( $r = 0.60, p < 0.000, N = 108$ ), and also with the frequency of reaching the proposed sales target ( $r = 0.56, p < 0.000, N = 108$ ). Another positive correlation was obtained

between the technique and the frequency with which the salesman delivers products and services which correspond to the client's needs ( $r=0.49$ ,  $p<0.000$ ,  $N=108$ ).

An important element of this research dimension is represented by the need of applying the following techniques: persuasion, using intuition, understanding the client's needs, adjusting reaction, innovation, being adaptable. Such techniques obtained significant correlations with all reporting elements: frequency of closing a sale ( $r = 0.86$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ), reaching imposed target ( $r = 0.81$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ) and satisfying client's needs ( $r = 0.72$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ).

The second hypothesis referred to the pre-sale and post-sale processes and their impact on the salesman's efficiency and was supported by the obtained data. Specifically, the importance of the consulting interview correlated significantly to all criteria (success of sale:  $r = 0.83$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ,  $N=108$ ; frequency of reaching target:  $r = 0.90$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ,  $N=108$ , and satisfying the client's needs ( $r = 0.73$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ,  $N=108$ ).

The salesman's ability to obtain information regarding the client obtained significant correlations to all three criteria: closing the sale ( $r = 0.52$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ,  $N=108$ ), frequency of reaching target ( $r = 0.43$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ,  $N = 108$ ), satisfying the client's need ( $r = 0.65$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ,  $N=108$ ).

The importance of post-sale process and its impact upon the salesman's efficiency significantly correlated to all three criteria: closing the sale ( $r = 0.88$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ,  $N=108$ ), frequency of reaching the target ( $r=0.67$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ), satisfying the client's needs ( $r = 0.63$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ,  $N=108$ ). The frequency of maintaining the relationship with the client outside the sale act recorded a significant correlation with all criteria ( $p < 0.000$ ,  $N=108$ ): closing the sale ( $r=0.89$ ), the frequency of reaching the target ( $r=0.82$ ), satisfying the client's needs ( $r=0.76$ ).

Another hypothesis states that techniques and methods specific to closing the sale are factors for becoming a successful salesman, and was confirmed regarding the following elements, persuasion, using intuition, knowing the client's needs, adjusting one's reaction, being adaptable, innovation and forecasting ( $p < 0.000$ ,  $N=108$ ) with the following coefficients: first criteria ( $r=0.86$ ), second criteria ( $r=0.81$ ), third criteria ( $r=0.72$ ).

Our last hypothesis stated that a crisis moment can be easier to overcome by applying specific techniques and was also supported by our data ( $p < 0.000$ ,  $N=108$ ) with the following Spearman correlation scores: frequency of closing a sale ( $r=0.55$ ), satisfying the client's needs ( $r=0.52$ ). Being adaptable and using innovation to overcome crisis reported the following correlations ( $p < 0.000$ ,  $N=108$ ): frequency of closing a sale ( $r=0.80$ ), the frequency of reaching the target ( $r=0.68$ ), satisfying the client's needs ( $r=0.63$ ). Returning to basic techniques, as a manner of overcoming the crisis, obtained the following correlation scores ( $p < 0.000$ ,  $N=108$ ): closing sale ( $r=0.78$ ), the frequency of reaching the target ( $r=0.84$ ) and satisfying a client's need ( $r=0.71$ ).

## Conclusions

The present paper confirms that the successful salesman can be seen as an objective which can be reached by correctly managing pre and post-sale processes and by applying the most effective techniques of closing the sale and by overcoming crisis moments inherent to a salesman's activity. Our initiative was based on the observation that both on the common sense level and in some literature resources, as mentioned previously, the successful salesman is sometimes viewed as a shallow character; on the other hand we succeeded in proving that this is a profession requiring specific skills and strategies in order to obtain success, more than being characterized by advantageous personality traits. Responses obtained through responses of 108 participants validated our hypotheses and offered a general view upon the successful salesman.

As mentioned before, our respondents were represented by sales professionals who are characterized by high results in their domain, succeeding to complete most of their sales processes, reaching their targets and answering to the client's needs. This aspect along with the number of participants allows us to consider our results as representative and useful for further scientific initiatives regarding the sales problematic.

In order to be effective and successful, the salesman should apply a series of techniques and methods which are considered to be essential by our respondents. Such elements have the purpose of making the sale act more effective and supporting the salesman in reaching one's goals more easily. Maybe one of the most suggestive techniques of overcoming crisis is represented by returning to basic techniques, the ones who were proven by experience to assure the success of the salesman. This result can be considered as extremely useful especially for the younger representatives of the sales professionals. We may consider the result to be rather counterintuitive. Crisis situations are some of the most resource-requiring and challenging moment – no matter the professional activity which is conducted. We may, therefore, expect them to require original and highly intuitive solutions, while in sales, as demonstrated by the present demarche, classic methods come to offer the safety of overcoming the crisis.

Another valuable technique is represented by adjusting the salesman's reaction to different stimuli generated by the client – depending on the way in which the salesman succeeds in interpreting those stimuli in order to properly adjust. This element can be highly decisive as far as the sale results are concerned.

Practicing and training may be considered as keys of success – the more specific techniques are practiced the more the sales process will become simpler, implicitly facilitating the closure of a sale. In addition, the maximum efficiency point is proven to be very important in the pre-sale process, in which the salesman is preoccupied with information regarding the client, the environment where the sale process is being conducted and the client's specific needs. In addition, the post-sale process is dominated by the communication between the salesman and the client, with major impact upon the client's fidelity. Good communication from this point of view is based on the clients' portfolio – which every salesman should develop as much as possible in order to be successful.

The pre-sale process is the starting point of the sale, the moment in which the salesman accommodates to their client and their needs, keeping in mind the main objective of reaching those needs and satisfying them as effectively as possible. Once this process is started, the techniques and methods specific to the sale process allow the salesman to complete the deal.

The consultation interview stands as one of the most effective techniques of the pre-sale process; it is the context which allows the salesman to become familiar with the client's needs and proposing, accordingly, potential products and services, capable of satisfying such needs. In order to reach one's objectives, a salesman should treat accordingly the consultation interview, which allows gaining essential information regarding the client and their needs. Such interview can represent the basis of a long-term relationship between the client and the sales agent.

Persuasion, intuition, forecasting, having knowledge regarding the client's needs, adjusting one's reaction, being adaptable, using innovation can be considered as techniques which cannot lack from the repertory of a successful sales agent, making him or her more effective during the process of closing a sale. We consider that such techniques might facilitate the salesman's path to success.

The salesman's availability towards the client and his needs may represent an important point of connection between the two actors, facilitating the entire sales process. Another ability we can consider being necessary for the success of a salesman is the ability to listen to the client and using intuition in order to identify the actual need one is addressing as a client, in order to be able to properly respond to the respective need.

Based on the professional literature analyses we have conducted and on the present study, we recommend that a successful salesman should be involved in a continuous process of self-development and learning, to be always connected to the field's new tendencies and adapt to them, assimilate them so that they can be properly applied during the actual sales process.

Our premise consisted in the idea that the successful salesman is not a myth but a person who is able to apply a concrete series of techniques and methods which are seen by our respondents as mandatory in order to increase one's effectiveness. Our research supports further initiatives of exploring on in-depth levels the proposed techniques and methods (returning to basics during the crisis, adjusting one's reactions depending on the client's behavior, engaging in the consultation interview, to name just a few). In addition, we suggest that clients (whether existing or potential) should also be involved in future research regarding a salesman's effectiveness in order to obtain a complete understanding on the matter.



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