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Which Attributes Separate Top-Performing Outside Salespeople from the Rest?

Paul Niemann
MBA, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 1991
BBA, University of Kentucky, 1987

A Dissertation Submitted to The Graduate School at the University of Missouri–St. Louis
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Business
Administration
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Advisory Committee

Joseph Rottman, D.Sc.,
Chairperson

Bindu Arya, Ph.D.,
Committee Member

Jennifer Reynolds-Moehrle, Ph.D.,
Committee Member

Abstract

For decades, sales organizations have faced the ongoing challenge of attaining the maximum sales results from their salespeople. Whether a salesperson has plenty of skill but lacks the will to reach their potential or has the will to become a top salesperson but lacks the necessary skills to reach their potential, the failure of sales organizations to obtain maximum results from their salespeople is a problem. Some salespeople have plenty of skill but lack the will to reach their potential, while others have the will to become a top salesperson but have not yet acquired the necessary skills to reach their potential. In this paper, we discuss the skill and will attributes thoroughly as we utilize a qualitative approach involving interviews with 16 sales managers in a variety of B2B and B2C industries to gain a perspective from those who work in outside sales every day. We also delve into the role of inside salespeople with an in-depth discussion of how the salesforce structure is different for inside sales teams vs. outside sales teams. In particular, we discuss how the use of various technology tools (e.g., phone, email, face-to-face video calls, teleconference calls, etc.) that are used in inside sales has led to a significant growth in the importance, role, and number of inside salespeople throughout the past decade. This growth in inside sales has also led to an increase in efficiency for sales organizations. The focus of this research, though, is on outside sales as we seek to answer the question of which attributes separate top-performing outside salespeople from the rest.

Keywords: salespeople, outside salespeople, top salespeople, top outside salespeople, attributes, skill and will

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Personal selling is one of the most important elements of marketing, especially among business-to-business firms. In one of the earliest studies on sales performance, Vroom (1964) reveals that sales performance is a function of three basic factors: 1) level of motivation, 2) sales aptitude or ability, and 3) perceptions about how the sales role should be performed.

Rentz et al. (2002) developed a three-part model that focuses on: 1) interpersonal skills, 2) salesmanship skills, and 3) technical skills. The salesmanship skills portion of their model consists of: 1) prospecting for new customers, 2) qualifying prospects to determine which ones are likely to become customers, 3) beginning relationships with customers, 4) closing the sale, 5) making presentations, and 6) servicing the accounts.

Sales organizations face the ongoing challenge of attaining the maximum sales results from their salespeople. Having salespeople who possess the skills that are necessary for sales success - but who lack the will to work hard - means that sales organizations have plenty of untapped potential, which is a problem. Having salespeople with the will but not the skill is also a problem for a sales organization: some salespeople will require a high amount of training and will likely lose sales while going through the training process, while others may never achieve the skills required to become successful salespeople.

This ongoing challenge of sales organizations has spawned an industry of sales trainers and consultants. Sales trainers such as Brian Tracy – who has applied the Pareto Principle to sales results, meaning the top 20 percent of salespeople account for roughly 80 percent of the sales revenue – and the late Zig Ziglar have helped salespeople improve

their skills through their seminars and sales materials aimed at educating salespeople. Motivational speakers such as Tony Robbins and Jim Rohn, on the other hand, focus on helping salespeople develop and maintain the will to put in the hard work necessary to become top salespeople.

Sales managers, executives, and human resource managers use a few models that identify and explain the main personality types of the people they recruit for sales roles. For example, the DiSC ® model divides people into four main behavioral styles: Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Correctness. People are also identified as either people-oriented or task-oriented, depending on how they rank according to the DiSC ® model (salesconsultingandtraining.com/assessment/disc). Other models include the Myers - Briggs Type Indicator model, the Five Factor model, and the more recent *Navigate* model. Each of these models describes people according to their personality types.

Ironically, the *Navigate* model, which evolved from DiSC ®, is the newest of the four models despite being developed by a company that has been training salespeople since 1855, the Southwestern Company of Nashville, Tennessee. It categorizes and labels salespeople and customers with easy-to-remember labels and first letters: Counselor, Detective, Entertainer, and Fighter (C-D-E-F).

Models tend to evolve from and improve upon previous models. For example, the earliest precursor of what eventually led to the DiSC ® model was developed by Empedocles in 444 B.C. when he discovered that people act in four totally different ways (discinsights.com) in accordance with the four *external* elements of nature: earth, fire, air, and water. This model was eventually replaced with the DiSC ® model with the *internal*

elements of Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Conscientiousness and is still used today.

The fact that sales managers turn to personality models and outside trainers and speakers to get the maximum results from their salespeople indicates that the sales profession is complex and difficult to master. Human beings, by their very nature, are nuanced and complex. Salespeople, apart from their selling skills, come from different family, cultural, and educational backgrounds. There are many other factors that make them unique individuals, each with a distinct personality. Yet we found that, in a general sense, a salesperson's success can be traced to two broad categories of attributes: Skill and Will.

The Skill and Will components of the sales profession can be difficult for non-salespeople to understand at first. Unlike an accounting equation where $\text{Assets} = \text{Liabilities} + \text{Equity}$ every time, trying to analyze and motivate salespeople is a very complex task, as no two salespeople are identical. Walker, Churchill, and Ford (1977) created an early version of the Skill and Will equation which they call their "Determinants of Salesperson's Performance" model.

Problem Statement

For decades, sales organizations have faced the ongoing challenge of attaining the maximum sales results from their salespeople. Before they can do that, though, they need to know what makes a salesperson great. Firms face the challenge of recruiting, hiring, and leading salespeople that will maximize sales revenue, while battling the expense and lost revenue that are caused by attrition of salespeople and customers.

Research Question

In this paper, we set out to answer the following Research Question: “*Which attributes separate top-performing outside salespeople from the rest?*”

The sales profession is broad in scope. To narrow it down to a manageable level for our research, we will focus on the performance of salespeople who are involved in direct sales, or “outside” sales. By this, we are referring to salespeople who get their own leads and set their own appointments. They usually do this by phoning their prospects or walking in to see them at their places of business. Some salespeople also use email and social media such as LinkedIn and/or Facebook to find leads and set appointments. We exclude salespeople who work in retail stores, telemarketing (regardless of whether it is inbound or outbound), inside sales (which we will cover in-depth later in this paper), or dealerships (such as car dealerships), or have their companies set appointments for them. This means that the salespeople we will study are those who are responsible for prospecting and setting appointments, which are two of the most difficult aspects of selling. We focus on outside sales because of the high amounts of both Skill and Will needed in order to be successful.

Examples of outside salespeople include financial advisors, real estate agents, insurance agents, account managers, territory managers, business development reps, equipment salespeople, and anyone else whose role involves “hunting” or prospecting for new business.

Hunters, Farmers, and Ambidextrous

Salespeople are often categorized as either “*hunters*” or “*farmers*.” *Hunters* must constantly prospect, or hunt, for new customers. They usually do this with either cold

calls or warm referrals. They typically do not have the benefit of repeat business, either because their customers are one-time customers with little or no likelihood of repeat purchases, or because any future selling to their customers is conducted by an inside salesperson or a *farmer*. As stated by DeCarlo and Lam (2016), successfully prospecting for and attaining new customers involves more perceived uncertainty than selling to existing customers. As a result, the role of sales is considered more difficult for *hunters* than for *farmers* because *farmers* typically do not have to prospect for new customers. *Farmers*, on the other hand, focus on cultivating and growing relationships with existing customers.

Some salespeople perform both roles, which is known as being “*ambidextrous*.” *Ambidextrous* salespeople may have inherited some sold. *Ambidextrous* sales managers may have salespeople start out in the role of *hunter*, but as they provide ongoing service to their customers and go back to re-sell to them for additional business, they take on the role of *farmer*. In reality, they are neither strictly *hunters* nor *farmers*, but rather *ambidextrous*.

We cover both business-to-business (B2B) sales and business-to-consumer (B2C) sales in our research. Selling to businesses customers is different from selling to consumers, according to Lamb, Hair, and McDaniel (2019). Accordingly, we have classified the sales manager participants as either B2B or B2C. The main differences are:

- There are fewer business customers than consumers
- Business customers buy in larger quantities
- Business customers tend to be more geographically concentrated
- The process of selling to businesses is more formal and has a longer sales cycle than selling to consumers
- Business customers usually have multiple buyers or influencers - sometimes as many as six - while consumers have one or two (e.g., husband and/or wife).

The overwhelming majority of sales articles in the literature that focus on attributes of successful salespeople do not differentiate between outside sales and inside sales, but rather put all salespeople into one category: sales. In our literature review, we found no articles that sought to find the attributes that specifically define a top *outside* salesperson, and this is the research gap that we are beginning to fill. After reviewing more than 65 peer-reviewed journal articles, it appears that the sales literature does not define or quantify what makes a top outside salesperson. Despite the sales profession relying heavily on sales figures and statistics to define and measure success, most journal articles do not use sales figures or statistics to measure sales success. For the purpose of this paper, we define a top outside salesperson as one who is in the top 10 percent of their sales team. By definition, 90 percent of salespeople are not in the top 10 percent.

Having *outside* salespeople perform at a peak level can be difficult for any sales organization. Many sales professionals have searched for what they believe is the key to top sales performance. However, we believe there might not be a one-size-fits-all answer, but rather a set of answers - or attributes - that can address the diversity of salespeople. Thus, there is a need to continue searching for that elusive answer of what separates top performing outside salespeople from the rest.

Maximizing sales performance requires a better understanding of the human elements of selling that make up the *Will* component of salespeople – such as work ethic, motivation, assertiveness, and perseverance – while also possessing the *Skill* components of selling such as sales ability, sales knowledge, creativity, and being a lifelong learner, among others. Achieving and mastering both *Skill* and *Will* is difficult despite the fact that there are dozens of books written each year by sales practitioners and consultants - in

addition to peer-reviewed journal articles, as well as sales training courses that promise to help salespeople reach the top of the sales ladder. The literature is also sparse in its use of the terms of Skill and Will.

Expected Contributions:

We expect to contribute to the field of *outside* sales in the following ways:

- 1) We will provide insight and fresh data into the attributes that lead to being a top *outside* salesperson. While it's too early at this point in our research to know what some of these specific contributions will be since we found no articles that explain the attributes of a top *outside* salesperson, we will focus on this as our main contribution to the field. Doing so will allow us to further the sales literature.
- 2) We will present the differences of the structure of inside sales vs that of outside sales.
- 3) We will also contribute minor findings, such as whether gender matters in becoming a top outside salesperson and the role of new technology in outside sales.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In our search to determine which qualities separate top-performing *outside* salespeople from the rest, we start with the academic literature, and then follow it with the practitioner literature. We found that there are many different authors who have contributed their answers to the question of which attributes separate top-performing salespeople from the rest, but with no consensus. We begin by digging deeper into this topic, then we look at how the salesforce structure is different for outside sales teams versus inside sales teams. But the focal point is what makes for a top *outside* salesperson.

Churchill et al. (1985), in their seminal piece on sales effectiveness, found six predictive categories that explain the varying levels of sales performance. In the order of predictive validity, these six categories are: 1) role variables, 2) skill levels, 3) aptitude, 4) motivation, 5) personal characteristics, and 6) organizational/environmental variables. They also pointed out that the results of previous studies of the determining factors of sales performance have been inconsistent.

The Pareto Principle, also known as the 80/20 rule, states that “80 percent of the outcomes come from the top 20 percent of the inputs.” According to Sanders (1988), this principle can be applied to sales teams. While 80/20 is not always the exact ratio, the Pareto Principle when applied to sales means that approximately 80 percent of the sales comes from the top 20 percent of the salespeople. It can also be used to explain that approximately 80 percent of the problems within a sales team come from the lowest-performing 20 percent of the salespeople.

Another factor that can affect salesperson performance is job satisfaction. Conversely, employee dissatisfaction can lead to low sales production and increased

salesperson turnover. Dubas and Hershey (2007) claim that sales training positively influences both job performance and job satisfaction and could be used to reduce turnover. They found the average annual turnover rate among salespeople was 27 percent. In the case of companies who pay their salespeople on straight commission, the annual turnover rate can be as high as 50 percent.

When low-performing salespeople develop negative attitudes about their sales performance, it can have a negative effect on the culture of an entire salesforce. As Dugan et al. (2019) explain, salespeople must endure frequent rejection and operate in an environment that is characterized by considerable ambiguity. Employees in other departments, such as marketing, finance, accounting, operations, and human resources, do not face regular rejection from customers.

Weitz et al. (1986) discuss the effect that adaptive selling has on a salesperson's performance. Adaptive selling is defined as "altering sales behaviors." While some salespeople use a canned sales script when presenting to their prospects, the use of adaptive selling involves the salesperson adapting, or tailoring, their sales presentations to the wants or needs of each individual prospect. Weitz et al. (1986) also make two interesting comparisons to drive home their points: First, they relate the problem-solving approach of marketers to that of salespeople who take a problem-solving approach in selling to customers. Then they compare the playing of a game – such as chess, in which the participants anticipate and respond to an opponent's moves – to making a sales presentation in which the salesperson anticipates and adapts to a prospective customer's needs or behaviors.

Williams and Plouffe (2007) reviewed 1,012 sales articles in 15 journals that were published from 1983 to 2002. Their findings include:

- 1) a steady increase in the number of sales articles,
- 2) 50 percent of the sales articles they reviewed were not theoretical in nature, and
- 3) surveys were the most used method of data collection in empirical articles.

To achieve a top 10 percent sales ranking, one must continually improve their sales performance. A survey of 1,200 sales executives cited by Bachrach et al. (2017), which originally appeared in Accenture CSO Insights (2013), claims that to continually improve, salespeople should create internal accountability, support continuous improvement, and improve customer experiences.

There are additional attributes that separate the top outside salespeople from the rest. One such attribute is optimism. Martin (2015) claims that over 90 percent of salespeople describe themselves as optimists, but he clarifies by saying that nearly two-thirds of high-performers display pessimistic personality tendencies.

Bonney et al. (2016) explain a practice called opportunity management, where salespeople and sales managers evaluate sales opportunities to determine the amount of time and effort to spend on certain ones. Bonney et al. (2020) furthered the discussion of opportunity management by explaining that the salespeople they studied predicted more successful sales outcomes than their sales managers did, as well as the best way to approach these opportunities. The result is based on the salespeople having a more optimistic viewpoint than their sales managers.

Dixon and Schertzer (2005) make the claim that in failure situations, salespeople having higher optimism were able to bounce back more quickly than salespeople who are

less optimistic. Similarly, salespeople having higher self-efficacy had significantly more positive success than did those with lower self-efficacy.

Friend et al. (2016) also discuss the importance of optimism among salespeople. Optimism results in people taking responsibility for their decisions instead of blaming others when things do not turn out as well as planned. Relative to optimism, Friend et al. (2016) claim that efficacy is a possible predictor of work performance and satisfaction. Efficacy is part of the foundation of psychological capital (PsyCap), and salespeople who are higher in efficacy – the belief that they will produce a desirable result – tend to be more likely to become top salespeople because they believe they are capable of high performance.

Sojka and Deeter-Schmelz (2002) explain that emotional intelligence is a personal variable, which they break down into *interpersonal* and *intrapersonal* variables, both of which are related to necessary sales skills. They list emotional intelligence as an antecedent variable that influences a salesperson's motivation, aptitude, and role perceptions that are directly linked to salesperson performance. They found that the higher a salesperson scores on emotional intelligence:

- 1) the greater is that salesperson's motivation,
- 2) the greater is that salesperson's aptitude for sales, and
- 3) the more accurate is that salesperson's perceptions of the sales role.

As a result, a high level of emotional intelligence is likely to lead to an improved performance among salespeople.

Related to the concept of emotional intelligence is the concept of affective orientation, which is the degree to which people have awareness of their emotions and

perceive them as important, as well as the role that an emotional response plays in making judgments and interacting with others. The work by Nowlin et al. (2018) involved creating a model that used 5,000 bootstrapped samples. The authors found that affective orientation can increase salesperson performance through motivation to work during the salesperson's first year of their sales career. In subsequent career stages, there is a diminished effect from affective orientation's impact on sales performance.

The term of "will" refers to a salesperson's willpower to do whatever it takes to reach a level of greatness in sales. Friend et al. (2016) discuss how positive organizational behavior and psychological capital (PsyCap) can result in a salesperson's strengths, improving their performance. More specifically, PsyCap can improve employee attitudes, behaviors, and performance.

Friend et al. (2016) also analyzed four possible predictors of work performance and satisfaction that form the foundation of psychological capital: hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism. They posit that these four factors are the most important factors in the positive organizational behavior literature. The authors claim that PsyCap plays a vital role in motivation, which results in improved performance in the workplace; for example, salespeople who are higher in PsyCap tend to be more energized than others and put in more effort because they have efficacy which leads them to believe they are capable of high performance. In the process, PsyCap improves the likelihood that they will become a top salesperson.

Friend et al. (2016) continue with the other three components of PsyCap (hope, resilience, and optimism) by explaining that salespeople who are high in PsyCap have more willpower and create multiple solutions to problems, which is due to the *hope*

component of PsyCap. Being an effective problem solver can also lead to higher sales. The *optimism* component of PsyCap results in people making what the authors call “internal attributions,” which means they use a personal reason as the cause of a particular result instead of blaming others. The *resilience* component of PsyCap results in people responding positively and with perseverance when hit with adversity and setbacks. The four components of PsyCap tend to raise employee performance by reinforcing additional effort from the salespeople, generate several solutions to problems, expand positive expectations of results, and bring about positive responses to setbacks. The main reason why PsyCap leads to high performance among salespeople, then, is that it causes them to be more motivated in their efforts. Another reason may be that the nature of being in sales means that salespeople often face rejection, failure, and adversity.

Shannahan et al. (2013) list salesperson coachability and salesperson competitiveness as being positively and significantly related to sales performance when they occurred at high levels, but not at low levels. They found the same is true for sales manager transformational leadership style.

Born or made?

There are additional issues related to the sales profession that can influence a salesperson’s performance and career, and some of these issues are beyond a salesperson’s control. One such issue that has caused much professional debate involves whether top salespeople are born or made. Loveland et al. (2015) investigated the relationship between personality traits, as well as both job satisfaction and career satisfaction among salespeople. Their goal was to determine if the essential components of sales can be learned, or if a salesperson needs to inherently have certain traits to be

successful. The team of researchers found that people are generally in one of two camps on this issue – that salespeople are either born or made.

People in the “born” camp believe that salesmanship is an inherent skill, with salespeople having a certain disposition to selling, and that their personalities allow them to sell different types of products, meaning that their skills can be transferred to sales roles at other companies (Loveland et al. 2015). As a result, companies may be hesitant to invest in training for their own salespeople because they believe they might leave for another company.

On the other hand, people in the “made” camp believe that salesmanship is a skill that can be learned. Leaders with this viewpoint are more likely to invest in resources to train and develop their salespeople. Either way, salespeople should receive professional development training just like accountants, analysts, and marketers.

Kahle (2008), a sales trainer and consultant, also weighs in on the long-held debate over whether top salespeople are born or made. He says that salespeople are born with four necessary qualities that put them on the right track to sales success: 1) a desire for success, 2) a willingness to learn, 3) resilience, and 4) an ability to focus. Yet he does not appear to be firmly on either side of the “born versus made” debate, as he goes on to say that companies should “train salespeople on the principles and practices that help them define the best way to perform their sales role, and they are likely to become a superstar.”

Bragg (1988), in a survey of 10,000 sales and marketing executives, commissioned by *Sales and Marketing Management*, claims that seven out of eight sales and marketing executives believe that good salespeople are made, not born. Experience,

education, and practice are the essentials to becoming a productive salesperson, and he says that most skills can be learned.

The issue of whether great salespeople are born or made is not exclusive to the United States, as Beh (1995) explained in the “born or made” debate with his research in Hong Kong. Beh also believes that being very sales-focused in sales calls is probably the biggest difference between top producers and average performers.

While it appears that the “born vs. made” debate is not settled, Moncrief & Marshall (2005) quote Frank Bettger, former shortstop of the 1910 St. Louis Cardinals and author of *How I Raised Myself from Failure to Success in Selling*. Bettger said, “I don't think anybody is cut out to be a salesperson ... I think we've got to cut ourselves out to be whatever we want to be.” While Bettger is probably not the definitive source on this issue, his comment indicates that the issue of “born vs. made” is related to the issue of “Skill and Will.”

Salesperson compensation

The way a salesperson is compensated is another factor that plays a role in sales success. Basu et al. (1985) researched the two main types of salesperson compensation plans, which are usually out of a salesperson's control:

- 1) Straight salary, which does not consider the salesperson's performance.
- 2) Compensation plans based at least in part on the salesperson's performance; these include commissions, bonuses, and a combination of a base salary with commissions and/or bonuses. Their research reveals that the type of compensation plan does play a role in sales productivity. For example, with reduced uncertainty, salespeople will work harder, which often leads to an increase in sales and profits.

Chung et al. (2014) also studied compensation, and in particular, the potential impact of incorporating bonuses into compensation plans. They found that the quota-bonus scheme used in their study increases the salesforce's performance by serving as an intermediary goal and pushing employees to meet targets. Different tactics, such as overachievement compensation, reduce the problems associated with salespeople slowing down once they get close to reaching their quota. Quarterly bonuses work as a continuous evaluation tactic that keeps salespeople within reach of their annual quotas. Chung et al. (2014) state that when salespeople do not have monthly or quarterly quotas, they may be more likely to fall behind when trying to reach their annual goals. Instead, a compensation plan that includes monthly and/or quarterly quotas helps salespeople stay on track to reach their goals. Lower-performing salespeople need this accountability more than top performers. In addition, overachievement commissions have increased performance among higher-performing salespeople.

Demographic effect on sales performance

Moncrief et al. (2000) discuss the important question of whether gender matters in a salesperson's level of success. The short answer is that it does not. They conducted a sample by mailing questionnaires to 350 salespeople at a US company in a male-dominated industry. They received 186 complete responses, which produced a usable response rate of 53 percent. Of this, there were 100 males (56 percent) and 86 females (44 percent). The authors found that there were more similarities than differences between male and female salespeople. With only a few exceptions, gender differences are not present, indicating that gender does not significantly affect sales success either positively or negatively.

Brashear et al. (1997) claim that salesperson behaviors are also influenced by age; gender; education; previous employment including prior sales experience; sales experience; marital status; whether a spouse works in the same industry; and both intrinsic and extrinsic reward orientation. This differs from other aspects of our research, as most of the factors that Brashear et al. (1997) mention are not attributes, but rather behaviors that indirectly affect salesperson performance. There are additional factors outside of a salesperson's control which can play an important role in a salesperson's level of success, yet they are neither an issue of Skill nor of Will. These include sales manager performance, desirability of the product line, and others. An in-depth discussion of such factors is beyond the scope of this paper, so we move on.

Impact of the sales manager

The role of sales managers in a salesperson's success has also been studied. Sales managers have five different power bases at their disposal to lead, motivate, incentivize, and hold their salespeople accountable (Mallin & Ragland, 2017). These are: reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, and expert power, and they each play a role in the salesperson motivation – performance dynamic as antecedents. In their work on the effects that the various power bases have on salesperson motivation and performance, the authors studied these power bases and found the results and findings to be significant. Mallin & Ragland (2017) go on to explain that sales managers can improve sales performance in extrinsically motivated salespeople by using *coercive* and *legitimate* power. For intrinsically motivated salespeople, sales managers can improve sales performance by using *coercive*, *legitimate*, and *referent* power. By having the knowledge of what drives each salesperson, a sales manager can customize their methods

and modify their leadership towards getting maximum productivity from their salespeople.

Attributes of great salespeople

Sales & Marketing Management commissioned human resources consulting company Caliper to conduct a study on the personality traits and attributes of great salespeople (Rasmusson, 1999). In order to find the ten main attributes of top performers, Caliper conducted a telephone survey of 209 salespeople spread out over 189 companies in 37 industries across the United States. Caliper's research is shown in Table 1 below. The study also provided several important insights into the hiring and leading of salespeople:

- 1) As the sales profession evolves, so must the people who are doing the selling. The way salespeople are recruited must also evolve. The Caliper survey shows managers what they need to look for when hiring or promoting, which does not include sales experience or such demographic factors as gender, race, and age.
- 2) Of the top salespeople, more than half were members of smaller sales teams with 10 or fewer salespeople, and 36 percent of the salespeople had been in their current position for less than two and a half years. They also found that 77 percent of the top performers came from another company, and 28 percent of the those surveyed were new to sales.
- 3) Almost 95 percent claim their sales style is relationship-oriented rather than transactional. Seventy-two percent say that building relationships is their top strength.

- 4) The 10 traits offer companies a major framework for hiring, since they must be inherent. This means that sales training cannot correct bad traits.

Martin (2015) asks, “What separates high-performing salespeople who exceed their quota from underperformers who miss their quotas by more than 25 percent?” He points out four attributes of salespeople that are within the salesperson’s control (verbal acuity, situational dominance, achievement-oriented personality, and inward pessimism), and two outside elements that are often beyond the salesperson’s control: sales management impact and sales organization influence. Like all the other number of authors cited in this paper, he does not differentiate between outside salespeople and inside salespeople.

In an earlier article by Martin (2011), he lists seven personality traits that make top salespeople different from average salespeople: 1. Modesty, 2. Conscientiousness, 3. Achievement orientation, 4. Curiosity, 5. Lack of gregariousness, 6. Lack of discouragement, and 7. Lack of self-consciousness. His work is the result of interviewing thousands of top B2B salespeople who sell for some of the world’s leading companies, and it is the achievement orientation attribute that stands out in his list because 84 percent of the salespeople he interviewed listed it as an important attribute that results in top performance. This is because they fixate on achieving their goals and they constantly measure their performance in comparison to their goals. Since these are personality traits, they lean more to the issue of Will than Skill. In his later article, Martin (2015) also states that, on average, high-performing salespeople communicate between the 11th and 13th grade level when scored by the Flesch-Kincaid test. Contrast this with the 8th and 9th

grade level of communication that is more common of salespeople who are not top performers.

Long-time sales trainer Brian Tracy, who has been training salespeople for more than 30 years through his live seminars, claims ten attributes as the main reasons why salespeople are successful. These are: they are doing what they love to do; they decide exactly what they want; they back their sales goals with perseverance; they know that character is everything; and they pay the price of success; they commit to lifelong learning; they use their time well; they follow the leaders; they use their inborn creativity; and they practice the golden rule. Table 1 summarizes the literature on salesperson performance and lists the factors that contribute to salesperson performance.

Table 1. Factors that influence salesperson performance

Article	Factors
Vroom. <i>Work and Motivation</i> . (1964). New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.	1) Level of motivation, 2) Sales aptitude or ability, and 3) Perceptions about how their role should be performed.
Churchill, Jr. G., Ford, N., Hartley, S., and Walker, Jr., O. (1985). The Determinants of Salesperson Performance: A Meta-Analysis. <i>Journal of Marketing Research</i> , Vol. 22, No. 2 (May), pp. 103-118.	1) Personal factors, 2) Skill, 3) Role variables, 4) Aptitude, 5) Motivation, and 6) Organizational / environmental factors.
Basu, A., Lal, R., Srinivasan, V., and Staelin, R. (1985). Salesforce Compensation Plans: An Agency Theoretic Perspective. <i>Marketing Science</i> , Vol. 4, No. 4 (Autumn, 1985), pp. 267-291.	The type of compensation plan.
Weitz, Barton A; Sujan, Harish; Sujan, Mita (1986). Knowledge, Motivation, and Adaptive Behavior: A Framework for Improving Selling Effectiveness. <i>Journal of Marketing</i> ; Chicago Vol. 50, Iss. 4, (Oct 1986): 174-191.	A problem-solving approach in selling to customers.
Beh, H. (1995). Good salespeople are made, not born. <i>Asian Business</i> ; Hong Kong Vol. 31, Iss. 1, (Jan): 68.	Very sales-focused in their sales calls.
Rasmusson, E. (1999). The 10 traits of top salespeople. <i>Sales and Marketing Management</i> , 151(8), 34-37.	1) Ego strength, 2) A sense of urgency, 3) Ego drive, 4) Assertiveness, 5) A willingness to take risks, 6) Sociable, 7) Abstract reasoning, 8) A healthy sense of skepticism, 9) Creativity, 10) Empathy.
Tracy, Brian (2001). The Brian Tracy Blog. 10 Reasons Why Top Salespeople Are Successful: Boost Your Sales Career.	1) They are doing what they love to do, 2) They decide exactly what they want, 3) They back their sales goals with perseverance, 4) They commit to lifelong learning, 5) They use their time well, 6) They follow the leaders, 7) They know that character is everything, 8) They use their inborn creativity, 9) They practice the golden rule, 10) They pay the price of success.
Sojka, J. Z., and Deeter-Schmelz, D. (2002). Enhancing the emotional intelligence of salespeople. <i>Mid-American Journal of Business</i> , 17(1), 43-50.	Interpersonal (empathy and perceiving others' emotions) and intrapersonal (self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation).
Dixon, A.L. and Schertzer, S.M. (2005), "Bouncing back: How salesperson optimism and self-efficacy influence attributions and behaviors following failure," <i>Journal of Personal Selling & Sales</i>	Optimism and self-efficacy.

<i>Management</i> , Vol.25 No.4, 361-369.	
Verbeke, W., Dietz, B., & Verwaal, E. (2011). Drivers of sales performance: a contemporary meta-analysis. Have salespeople become knowledge brokers? <i>Journal of The Academy of Marketing Science</i> . (2011) 39:407–428	1) Selling-related knowledge, 2) Degree of adaptiveness, 3) Role ambiguity, 4) Cognitive aptitude, 5) Work engagement.
Kahle, D. (2008). The Four Characteristics of Successful Salespeople. <i>The American Salesman</i> ; Burlington, Vol. 53, Iss. 4, (Apr): 3-6.	1) Desire for success, 2) Willingness to learn, 3) Resilience, 4) Ability to focus.
Article	Factors
Martin, S. (2011) Seven Personality Traits of Top Salespeople, <i>Harvard Business Review</i> . June 27, 2011.	1) Modesty, 2) Conscientiousness, 3) Achievement orientation, 4) Curiosity, 5) Lack of gregariousness, 6) Lack of discouragement, 7) Lack of self-consciousness.
Shannahan, K. L., J., Bush, A. J., & Shannahan, R. J. (2013). Are your salespeople coachable? How salesperson coachability, trait competitiveness, and transformational leadership enhance sales performance. <i>Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science</i> , 41(1), 40-54.	1) Salesperson coachability, 2) Salesperson trait competitiveness, 3) Sales manager transformational leadership style.
Chung, D.J., Steenburgh, T., Sudhir, K. (2014). Do Bonuses Enhance Sales Productivity? A Dynamic Structural Analysis of Bonus-Based Compensation Plans. <i>Marketing Science</i> , 03/2014, Volume 33, Issue 2.	The type of compensation plan.
Chapin, J. (2015). What Makes the Top Salespeople the Top Salespeople? <i>Agency Sales</i> ; Sep 2015; 45, 9; pg. 38	1) Laser focus on what is important, 2) Work ethic, 3) Overcoming fear and stepping out of one's comfort zone, 4) Integrity and character, 5) Focusing on people and relationships, 6) Preparation, 7) Confidence, and 8) Accepting 100 percent responsibility for success or failure.
Martin, S. (2015) What Separates the Strongest Salespeople from the Weakest? <i>Harvard Business Review</i> . March 18, 2015.	1) Verbal acuity, 2) Achievement oriented personality, 3) Situational dominance, 4) Inward Pessimism, 5) Sales management impact, 6) Sales organization influence.
Friend, S.B., Johnson, J.S., Luthans, F., & Sohi, R.S. (2016). Positive Psychology in Sales: Integrating Psychological Capital. <i>Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice</i> ; Vol. 24, Iss. 3 (Summer). 306-327.	1) Hope, 2) Resilience, 3) Optimism, 4) Efficacy.
Bachrach, D., Mullins, R., & Rapp, A. (2017). Intangible sales team resources: Investing in team social capital and transactive memory for market-	1) Create internal accountability, 2) Support continuous improvement, 3) Improve customer experiences.

driven behaviors, norms and performance. <i>Industrial Marketing Management</i> , Vol. 62, April, Pages 88-99.	
Nowlin, Edward; Walker, Doug; Deeter-Schmelz, Dawn R; Haas, Alexander (2018). Emotion in sales performance: affective orientation and need for cognition and the mediating role of motivation to work. <i>The Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing</i> ; Santa Barbara, Vol. 33, Iss. 1 (2018): 107-116.	1) Emotion, 2) Cognition, 3) Motivation.
Bonney, L., Plouffe, C., Hochstein, B., & Beeler, L. (2020). Examining salesperson versus sales manager evaluation of customer opportunities: A psychological momentum perspective on optimism, confidence, and overconfidence. <i>Industrial Marketing Management</i> . 88 (2020) 339-351	Optimism.

Dan Moore, President of the 167-year-old Southwestern Company of Nashville, Tennessee, is often asked what the key is to being a top salesperson. His company defines a top salesperson as being in the top 10 percent and sets its award system on being in the top 10 percent. His answer is always the same: “There isn’t a key. It’s a combination lock.” In the interest of total disclosure, this author worked for Southwestern for the first eight years of his sales career. Altogether, the author has 16 years of hands-on outside sales experience, plus two years of sales management experience. This background and perspective will help bring clarity to the complex issues of sales performance.

Throughout the Southwestern Company’s history, the company has developed a track record of successfully taking more than 1,500 college students - the majority of whom have no prior sales experience - and turning them into successful salespeople every summer.

Prospecting is a fundamental step in the outside sales process, as Jolson & Wotruba (1992) explain. They note that there is a wide variety of prospecting methods among sales organizations, and that there is much disagreement in the terminology used

to describe prospecting and all that it entails. Although prospecting happens prior to everything else in outside sales, it is hard to find two sales managers whose prospecting methods, philosophies, techniques, and language are identical.

Inside sales structure vs outside sales structure

Along with the need to determine the main attributes that separate top salespeople from the rest, there is another topic that needs further investigation. The field of inside sales is growing, both in the number of inside salespeople and in its importance. In this section we discuss the importance of inside sales, along with the main differences in structure between inside sales teams and outside sales teams.

Over the past decade, inside salespeople have become much more involved in selling-related activities. This contrasts with their previous role of primarily providing support for their firm's outside salespeople. Ohiomah et al. (2016) define inside sales as being performed using different communication technologies, remotely, which makes the role of inside salespeople different from that of outside salespeople, who rely mainly on face-to-face and telephone communication.

The definition of inside sales by Ohiomah et al. (2016) evolved from the simple definition of Seley & Holloway (2008), who explain that inside sales is a "sales method that uses one or more IT tools (i.e., over the phone, e-mail, Web, and other Internet-based technologies) to execute routine sales tasks remotely without face-to-face interaction with customers." Inside sales are fundamentally metrics-, process-, and technology-driven. Outside salespeople, on the other hand, rely on regularly meeting face-to-face with their prospects and customers to build and maintain good customer relationships. The

structural differentiators between inside and outside salesforces mean that inside and outside salespeople should not all be lumped together as one big homogenous group.

Zoltners et al. (2013) assert that the number of inside sales positions has increased dramatically in recent years, far outpacing the growth in jobs for “field” salespeople, which is what we label as outside salespeople. The three main drivers of change in sales structure that contribute to the growing use of inside salespeople are: costs; changes in buyers’ behaviors; and easy-to-use technology.

Zoltners et al. (2013) also explain that inside sales positions are performed remotely from headquarters, without face-to-face meetings with prospects or customers. As a result, prospects and customers/clients may never meet their salesperson. This is an important differentiator between the structures of inside and outside sales. The terms of “customers” “clients” are determined by whether they purchase tangible products or services from salespeople regardless of whether the salesperson is an inside or outside salesperson. Customers purchase tangible products, while clients purchase services. We mainly use the term of customers in this paper.

Zoltners et al. (2013) also state that most B2B selling models now include both inside sales and field sales. They explain that, as the growth in the number of inside sales jobs has been greater than the growth in the number of outside sales jobs, it is important to determine how inside sales fits into a firm’s overall sales strategy. Firms split up the sales role among inside and outside salespeople by either market segment, the stages of the sales process, by product lines, or by geography. In an earlier article, Zoltners (2006) claimed a different set of four factors that companies must consider when they design their sales strategy. These are: the salesforce roles and the roles of their selling partners;

salesforce size; the degree of specialization; and the way salespeople allocate their selling efforts.

One important difference between inside and outside sales structures is that outside salespeople do most of their own prospecting to get new customers (Walsh, 2004). They also must learn how to ask for and receive referrals from customers and prospects. On the other hand, inside salespeople often have the opportunity to sell to and serve prospects and customers who initiate the contact, meaning they do not have to make that initial cold call or visit on an everyday basis like outside salespeople do. Outside salespeople must also overcome “call reluctance,” which is a high level of apprehension that causes salespeople to hesitate or procrastinate making calls on their prospects, sometimes to the point that it renders a salesperson incapable of working. Both the academic and practitioner sales literature refers to call reluctance as a common experience. Walsh (2004) says that new salespeople, professionals, and even sales managers all must overcome call reluctance.

Boyle (1996), who refers to outside salespeople as “field” salespeople, revealed through his surveys that customers demanded more listening and speaking skills from the inside salespeople than from their outside salesperson counterparts. This is because their research indicated that most customer orders from inside salespeople are taken over the phone, which was prior to the common use of email. They also found that:

- 1) Effective inside sales performance can be an important competitive advantage.
- 2) A high level of professionalism is key for inside salespeople. This is likely due in part to the fact that inside salespeople rarely, if ever, have face-to-face contact with customers.

- 3) In some cases, the field salesforce is not necessarily the most important determinant of satisfaction among industrial customers.

As Rutherford et al. (2014) states, other differentiators between inside and outside sales structures include the types of sales interactions, the selling tasks, the sales environment, and the organizational contexts, both internally and externally to the firm. As a result, the factors that improve the performance of outside salespeople are different from the factors that improve the performance of inside salespeople. Additional differentiators include the industry, the product lines, and/or the organizational philosophies, according to (Singh & Koshy, 2010) and (Marshall, Moncrief, & Lassk, 1999). Churchill et al. (1985) stressed how such differences can result in inconsistencies in research outcomes, while Rutherford et al. (2014) suggested that inside salespeople may see different types of conflict between work and family when compared to outside salespeople, who must travel away from home more often.

Boyle (1996) also indicated that a high percentage of firms fail to establish clear performance standards for inside salespeople. This likely originates from the historical view of the inside sales rep as merely an “order taker” who may be focused on the higher goal of becoming an outside salesperson. Boyle claims that the sales literature on inside salespeople does not contain many - if any - studies that focus on the desired attributes of inside salespeople.

Gessner and Scott (2009) found that telemarketing, which is not uncommon among inside salesforces, was for “order taking, supplying product information, generating leads and qualifying them, as well as managing low-profit accounts and supporting the outside salespeople.” Common activities of outside salespeople, on the

other hand, include making cold calls, prospecting, building relationships, presenting, and asking for referrals. In addition, there are a considerable number of non-selling activities performed by outside salespeople (Anderson, 2008). Gessner and Scott (2009) also claim that an external salesforce meeting with prospects and customers face-to-face has an advantage when it comes to building stronger rapport. As a result, outside salespeople have a greater chance of closing them than would an inside sales team.

Marshall & Vredenburg (1991) noted a constant increase in the number of sales-related tasks being conducted by inside salespeople that were previously conducted by outside salespeople. This increased workload may ultimately cause inside salespeople to be less willing to conduct some of their previous tasks that supported outside salespeople. While that might not affect the actual ability or performance of outside salespeople, it would likely affect their sales results. One example is the use of telemarketing, which is often conducted by the inside salesforce. Inside salespeople who are effective at telemarketing can have a positive impact on outside salespeople by providing them with more leads and more time to sell, because it lowers the amount of time the outside salespeople previously had to spend on prospecting and setting their own appointments.

Marshall & Vredenburg (1991) also discuss how telemarketing grew rapidly in business-to-business selling during the previous decade and altered industrial selling practices. Inside and outside salespeople can attain increased profits by working together, but tensions between the two groups may result. The duo found that the use of telemarketing changes the work roles of outside salespeople. Furthermore, success in telemarketing led to even greater changes in the work of outside salespeople. Their

research also found that support from both management and the outside salesforce is important in achieving telemarketing success.

It was evident that there was a need for investments and advances in technology as far back as the 1990's. Barker (1999) realized the need to invest in technology and to be able to calculate its return on the investing in the inside salesforce. Barker (1999) points out that the efforts of management have resulted in improvements in four important areas: account management practices, lead generation attempts, computer-assisted sales programs, and telemarketing.

Rapp et al. (2012) speculate that there will be major changes in the sales structure with an increase in the number of inside salespeople, at the expense of outside salespeople. They also expect that the role of inside salespeople will continue to shift more to selling-related activities and away from support activities for the outside salespeople that they work with. Rapp et al. (2012) believe that many of the support activities will be carried out by others in the firm. Structuring the salesforce in this manner may result in the sales teams becoming less focused on the same goals. An increase in innovation in telecommunications technology and the need to decrease costs may drive this change in salesforce structure.

Zoltners et al. (2013) report that more and more companies, including large companies such as IBM and SAP, have begun to replace their outside salesforce on certain product lines with an inside salesforce as one way to reduce costs. One major pharmaceutical firm has even replaced nearly all of its field salesforce support for one of its mature brands with a 300-person inside salesforce. The inside sales team can provide for most of their doctor-customers' basic needs and requests for samples at a much lower

expense than in the past when it relied on outside salespeople to accomplish the same tasks.

Zoltners et al. (2013) claim that there are three major reasons for the growth in inside sales, often at the expense of outside sales:

- 1) B2B companies are under pressure to cut costs, and inside sales is more cost-efficient than outside sales.
- 2) Researching products and making purchases online is becoming more common among B2B customers. So is communicating with salespeople via email, social media, and conference calls. In many cases, these tasks are more efficient and cost-effective for customers to do it themselves rather than taking the time to set up a face-to-face meeting with their salesperson.
- 3) The acceptance of easy-to-use videoconferencing technologies such as webinars enable inside salespeople to communicate with customers with the benefit of visuals, thus reducing – or even eliminating – the need for more costly and time-consuming face-to-face meetings.

Ohiomah et al. (2019) furthered the discussion of lead generation for outside salespeople in their work on Lead Management Systems (LMS), explaining that marketing efforts in lead generation are worthless if leads are not properly managed. They also identified implications that “lead management systems affect the performance of inside salespeople by improving their adaptive selling, their lead follow-up intensity, their technical skills and their sales skills. Taken as a whole, these variables explain 55 percent of the performance variance of inside salespeople.” Ohiomah et al. (2019) say it is imperative to understand how the use of IT influences the performance of inside

salespeople. There is, unfortunately, a lack of research in this area. Ohiomah also believes that it is important to verify differences between the determinants of B2B sales success in inside sales versus outside sales.

After conducting an exhaustive search, we list the main ways in which the structure for inside salesforces differs from the structure of outside salesforces next in Table 2.

Table 2. Differences in inside salesforce structure and outside salesforce structure

Article	Important findings	Defining differences between inside/outside salesforce structure
<p>Marshall, J. & Vredenburg, V. (1991). The roles of outside and inside sales representatives: Conflict or cooperation? <i>Journal of Direct Marketing</i>, Vol. 5, Issue 4, 1991, Pages 8-17.</p>	<p>There has been a constant increase in the number of sales-related tasks now being conducted by inside salespeople that were previously conducted by outside salespeople, such as the use of telemarketing.</p> <p>The use of telemarketing causes a relationship to exist between inside salesforces and outside salesforces, as it changes the work roles of outside salespeople. Support from both sales management and the outside salesforce is important in achieving success in telemarketing.</p>	<p>Inside salespeople who are effective at telemarketing can have a positive impact on outside salespeople by providing them with more leads and more time to sell, because it lowers the amount of time they (the outside salespeople) previously had to spend on prospecting and setting their own appointments.</p> <p>However, tensions sometimes develop between the two groups, and the increased workload may ultimately cause inside salespeople to be less willing to conduct tasks that support outside salespeople.</p>
<p>Barker, A. T. (1999). Benchmarks of Successful Salesforce Performance. <i>Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences</i>, 16(12), 95-104.</p>	<p>There is a need to invest in technology and to be able to calculate the return on salesforce investment. There is a need to apply new technologies to improve salesforce productivity. This can include improving account management practices, lead generation attempts, computer-assisted sales programs, and telemarketing.</p>	<p>The need for an increase in technology is more pronounced in inside salesforces than in outside salesforces.</p>
<p>Walsh, S. (2004). Call Reluctance: The Dark Side of Professional Selling? <i>Southern Business Review</i>; Statesboro. Vol. 29, Iss. 2, (Spring): 23-32.</p>	<p>Outside sales involves salespeople having to do their own prospecting. Call reluctance is an issue for many outside salespeople that must be overcome; for some outside salespeople, this is a constant, daily battle of emotions. All levels of salespeople - meaning rookies, experienced professionals, and even sales managers - must deal with call reluctance.</p>	<p>Outside salespeople must do three things constantly:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Learn how to ask for and receive referrals from customers and prospects 2) Prospect 3) Overcome “call reluctance”

<p>Seley & Holloway (2008). <i>Sales 2.0: Improve Business Results Using Innovative Sales Practices and Technology</i>. Wiley. ISBN-13: 9780470482803</p>	<p>Inside sales uses one or more IT tools for routine sales tasks remotely (i.e. phone, email, web, and other Internet-based technologies), as opposed to face-to-face customer interaction.</p> <p>Inside sales are driven by metrics, processes, and technology, using IT tools to engage and develop relationships with prospects and customers.</p>	<p>Inside sales are fundamentally metrics-, process-, and technology-driven, and they rely on innovative IT tools (i.e., over the phone, e-mail, Web, and other Internet-based technologies) to engage and develop relationships with prospects and customers. Outside sales, on the other hand, benefit from being more relationship- driven and having face-to-face contact with prospects and customers.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Article</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Important findings</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Defining differences between inside/outside salesforce structure</p>
<p>Gessner, G. and Scott, R., Jr. (2009). Using Business Intelligence Tools to Help Manage Costs and Effectiveness of Business-to-Business Inside-Sales Program. <i>Information Systems Management</i>, 26: 199–208.</p>	<p>Telemarketing is more common among inside salesforces than outside salesforces. The most common uses of telemarketing have been “order taking, providing product information, generating and qualifying sales leads, managing marginal accounts, and supporting the outside sales representatives.”</p>	<p>Telemarketing is more common among inside salesforces than outside salesforces.</p>
<p>Rapp, A., Beitelspacher, L.S., Schillewaert, N., & Baker, T.L. (2012). The differing effects of technology on inside vs. outside salesforces to facilitate enhanced customer orientation and inter-functional coordination. <i>Journal of Business Research</i>, 65 (p. 929–936)</p>	<p>The industry is likely to see major changes in the structure of the sales function. One consequence of structuring the salesforce in this manner (i.e., having both inside and outside salespeople focused on maximizing individual sales) may be a reduction in the extent to which the sales teams remain focused on the same goals.</p>	<p>There will be a greater reliance on outside salespeople, and inside salespeople will become engaged in selling-related activities more than in support activities for their firm’s outside salespeople.</p> <p>Innovations in telecommunications technology happen more with the inside salesforce than with the outside salesforce.</p> <p>The need for companies to decrease costs as the drivers of change in salesforce structure also differs in the way it affects inside salesforces (positively) and outside salesforce (negatively or not at all).</p>

<p>Zoltners et al. (2013). The Growing Power of Inside Sales. <i>Harvard Business Review</i>.</p>	<p>Three main factors contribute to the continual growth in the use of inside salespeople, compared to using outside salespeople: Costs, changes in buyers' behaviors, and easy-to-use technology are the three main drivers of changes in sales structures toward inside sales. In detail:</p> <p>1) B2B companies are under pressure to cut costs, and inside sales is more cost-efficient than outside sales.</p> <p>2) B2B customers are becoming more comfortable using the Internet to research products and to purchase online, to communicate with salespeople via email, social media, and conference calls and, in many cases, prefer this over face-to-face meetings for some tasks.</p> <p>3) The use of easy-to-use videoconferencing technologies such as webinars enable inside salespeople to communicate with customers with the benefit of visuals, thus reducing or eliminating the need to meet face-to-face.</p>	<p>Inside sales positions are performed remotely from headquarters, without face-to-face meetings with customers. As a result, customers may never meet their sales rep.</p> <p>There are benefits to firms (lower cost, higher efficiency) and to customers (less time spent with outside salespeople when an inside sales rep is sufficient) that result from the use of inside salespeople.</p> <p>The use of videoconferencing technologies is often sufficient in communicating with customers, thus allowing inside salespeople to fill many of the tasks.</p>
<p>Article</p>	<p>Important findings</p>	<p>Defining differences between inside/outside salesforce structure</p>
<p>Rutherford, B., Marshall, G., & Park, J. (2014). The moderating effects of gender and inside versus outside sales role in multifaceted job satisfaction. <i>Journal of Business Research</i>, 67 (2014) 1850 - 1856.</p>	<p>The type of conflict between work and family that inside salespeople experience is sometimes different than what outside salespeople experience, in part because they who typically travel away from home more often</p>	<p>Outside salespeople may experience more work/family conflict than outside salespeople, due to frequent travel. Inside salespeople typically do not travel.</p>
<p>Thaichon, P., Surachartkumtonkun, J., Quach, S., Weaven, S., & Palmatier, R. (2018). Hybrid sales structures</p>	<p>Outside salespeople engage in face-to-face interactions with customers, including complex buying-center settings in non-routine, relational, customized</p>	<p>Outside sales salespeople face complex buying-center settings. Their expertise or problem-solving skills cannot always be replaced by the work of inside salespeople, thus</p>

<p>in the age of e-commerce. <i>Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management</i>.</p>	<p>sales efforts and require the salesperson’s expertise or problem-solving skills. Inside salespeople augment the successful operations of online channels, among other responsibilities.</p>	<p>making face-to-face meetings necessary in certain situations.</p>
<p>Chapman, Garrett, “Inside Sales versus Outside Sales and the Evolving Art of Communication” (2018). <i>University Honors Program Thesis</i>. 340.</p>	<p>The current sales industry is seeing a rise in IT technology, towards an increase in inside sales in the early 1990s. Many companies have turned their sales operation into a strictly inside sales method.</p> <p>Due to their higher perceived skill sets, outside salespeople earn higher salaries. They also incur costs due to travel and other customer-related expenses. Not all inside salesforces close sales, though, as some prospect for potential clients via phone or email, with the intended result being to set up a face-to-face meeting with an outside salesperson.</p>	<p>Outside salespeople rely on body language from the perspective of the buyer, while inside salespeople use the tone of voice and other non-visual methods. Inside sales is also more cost-effective for many businesses.</p> <p>Outside sales often involves selling larger, costlier orders, with longer, more complex sales processes. As a result, a more diverse skillset is often required.</p> <p>Thanks to technology such as the phone, internet, and email, inside sales allows companies to do business all over the world when their customer base is very spread out and sparse. Outside sales, on the other hand, cannot be justified for some firms due to the extent of travel involved.</p>
<p>Ohiomah, A., Andreev, P., Benyoucef, M., & Hood, D. (2019). The role of lead management systems in inside sales performance. <i>Journal of Business Research</i>, Volume 102, Pages 163-177, ISSN 0148-2963.</p>	<p>Lead management systems (LMSs) are IT tools and are the most deployed technology by inside sales organizations (Ostrow, 2009).</p>	<p>IT advances have forced most organizations to restructure their sales functions by rapidly growing the number of inside salespeople.</p>

When analyzing both the successful salesperson attributes and the salesforce structure literature, two gaps have been identified. First, we found no peer-reviewed articles that focus on the sales performance of *outside* salespeople. Only when we looked at salesforce structure did we begin to uncover the difference in the structure of outside salesforces versus the structure of inside salesforces. Studies that discussed salesforce structure *did* mention outside salespeople.

Second, when the literature differentiates between the *salesforce structure* of outside salesforces versus inside salesforces, it does not address the attributes that contribute to *outside salesperson performance*.

Chapter 3: Method

To explore these issues further, and to begin addressing the major gap that exists in the literature on the sales performance of *outside* salespeople, we will employ a qualitative approach to provide us with data from sales managers in a wide variety of both B2B and B2C industries. Conducting interviews with sales managers will provide us with a clear and thorough perspective of outside sales performance.

By bringing together the wide knowledge base of sales managers - some of whom have managed as many as 100 outside salespeople throughout their careers - the end result is expected to consist of insights that are both unique and important, as this brings us closer to answering our Research Question: Which attributes separate top-performing outside salespeople from the rest?

Sales managers and hiring managers will benefit by gaining a clearer understanding of the criteria they should use when hiring salespeople. As a result, they should be able to reduce the number of expensive hiring mistakes that often lead to an increase in turnover. Scholars will benefit through the additional knowledge that our research will bring.

Another gap, although minor, exists in the sales literature in that there is no consensus of what defines, quantifies, or measures a top-performing outside salesperson. We found this to be surprising because the sales industry relies heavily on statistics and various KPFs (Key Performance Indicators), such as sales volume, to define and measure sales results. While Barker (1999) believes that salespeople should be evaluated based on their output and on behaviors that they can control, he does not offer any specific

benchmarks or evaluative measures but says they should exist in a sales/sales management environment.

Participants

To investigate the question of which attributes separate top-performing outside salespeople from the rest, we will conduct semi-structured interviews with 16 sales managers. We have already identified numerous sales managers as potential candidates to interview for our study. Having extra candidates allows us the flexibility to account for someone who might decline to be interviewed or is not a good fit for our study. We chose the sales managers from a variety of both B2C and B2C industries to create a diverse sample, and this should provide us with a robust source of knowledge and experiences. Table 3 contains our list of prospective companies from which to choose enough sales managers to interview.

Table 3. List of potential sales manager participants

B2B Sales Managers:	B2C Sales Managers:
Southwestern Consulting	AFLAC
Gardner-Denver	Schack Insurance
Charles Hawkins Real Estate	Strano Realty
Sinclair Media	Doors 'n' More
iHeart Media	Pella Windows
RevLocal	The St. Louis <i>Post-Dispatch</i>
Power of Clean Energy	All-State Insurance Agency
Larson Juhl	The Tom James Clothing Company
Razorback Concrete Co.	Central Bank Mortgage
Heartland Payment Systems	Kendall Todd Financial
Mohr Advantage	Southwestern Advantage
NBC-TV affiliate	Thinking Ahead HR
	Zeal Financial Group

Measures

While there are a number of measures a firm can use to determine what makes a top salesperson, for the purpose of this paper we define a top outside salesperson as one who ranks in the top 10 percent of their firm by overall sales volume. By definition, those who are in the top 10 percent of their firm's sales ranking perform better than 90 percent of their peers and are worthy of a top salesperson designation. Sales can be measured either in dollar volume or in the number of units sold.

Procedures

In considering the various research methods available to use, we considered what other scholars have used. One popular research instrument that we considered was the Psychological Capital Questionnaire 24 (PCQ-24), which consists of four scales with six items each, all related to the psychological capital scales of self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism.

Evidence links PsyCap to a better psychological and physical well-being by reducing stress (Lorenz et al. 2016). This in turn leads to an improvement in both job satisfaction and life satisfaction, both of which may lead to an increase in performance for salespeople. But this is all a very *indirect* connection to salesperson performance, so we chose not to use the PSQ-24 because it focuses on employees in general rather than being specifically geared towards salespeople. As a result, the measurement of the attributes of top salespeople would not be included. By contrast, each of the attributes of top sales performance that we have uncovered in our research has a *direct* effect on sales performance.

We chose to interview sales managers rather than salespeople for two reasons: 1) most sales managers on our list have worked with at least 10 to 20 salespeople throughout their careers, which gives them a wide variety of salesperson perspectives upon which to draw, and 2) asking people to discuss in great detail their own perceptions of themselves would likely lead to self-bias. Asking sales managers about their salespeople will eliminate this potential problem.

As Yin (2018) states, interviews are an essential source of case study evidence because most case studies are about human affairs or actions. Since our interviewees will be highly informed about their salespeople, this should provide us with an abundance of rich data. Yin also points out that, since interviews should generally be considered only as verbal reports, it is a good idea to corroborate interview data with information from other sources; however, we expect to take a relativist path, where we rely on the interviewees' comments, opinions, and perspectives drawn from their own experiences.

The case study approach will provide us with the opportunity to have two-way conversations and ask probing questions to dig deep, as well as ask follow-up questions. The comments from the sales managers who each train, lead, coach, and oversee multiple salespeople on a regular basis should provide us with plenty of rich, valuable data.

We will use the same questions in each sales manager interview to have a uniform method of gathering the data. We decided to use open-ended questions because this method is expected to allow us to gain as much valuable data as possible without restricting our interviewees. Since we do not want to control or limit any of the interviewees' responses, we will encourage each interviewee to speak freely and expand

on any topics during the interview process. As Rubin and Rubin (2011) stated, case study interviews resemble guided conversations rather than structured questions. The questions are more likely to be fluid than rigid, which will be beneficial in our study because it will allow the interviewees to speak freely and expand on the topics while sharing their broad amount of knowledge and their wide range of experiences.

We also believe that a case study approach is best because it will provide in-depth answers that probably could not be provided with any other method. The primary instrument in the data gathering process will be the sales manager interviews. A key component of the interviews is to have all participants identify attributes which contribute to the success of top salespeople. Table 4 shows the list of salesperson attributes that are included with the interview questions, and this list of attributes will be ranked from 1 - 20 by each participant.

We chose these attributes for a couple reasons. First, they resonated the most with the main author of this study and his 19 years of sales and sales management experience. Second was the conviction in which the journal scholars made their case for these attributes. For example, for Martin (2011) it was the “achievement-oriented personality” that stood out in his article because 84 percent of the salespeople he interviewed listed it as an important attribute that results in top sales performance. Overall, there were originally 34 attributes, and each one was first listed in Table 1. We then whittled the number of attributes in Table 1 down to what we believe are the 20 most important and relevant attributes of outside salespeople. This list of 20 attributes is shown in Table 4, and then again in Table 5 with their sources. In summary, this research is expected to

help us answer our Research Question: Which attributes separate top-performing outside salespeople from the rest?

Table 4. List of the 20 salesperson attributes

<input type="checkbox"/> Laser focus on what's important	<input type="checkbox"/> Sales aptitude or ability
<input type="checkbox"/> Good work ethic	<input type="checkbox"/> Paying the price of success
<input type="checkbox"/> Focus on relationships	<input type="checkbox"/> Motivation
<input type="checkbox"/> Confidence	<input type="checkbox"/> Optimism
<input type="checkbox"/> Assertiveness	<input type="checkbox"/> Achievement-oriented personality
<input type="checkbox"/> Focus on continuous improvement	<input type="checkbox"/> Problem-solving attitude
<input type="checkbox"/> Character	<input type="checkbox"/> Sales knowledge
<input type="checkbox"/> Creativity	<input type="checkbox"/> Coachability
<input type="checkbox"/> Empathy	<input type="checkbox"/> Integrity
<input type="checkbox"/> Perseverance	<input type="checkbox"/> Being a lifelong learner

Table 5. List of the 20 salesperson attributes, with their sources

Salesperson attributes	Sources
Sales aptitude or ability	Vroom (1964). <i>Work and Motivation</i> . John Wiley and Sons, Inc.
Laser focus on what's important Good work ethic Focus is on relationships Confidence	Chapin, J. (2015). What Makes the Top Salespeople the Top Salespeople? <i>Agency Sales</i> ; Sep 2015; 45, 9; pg. 38
Assertiveness Creativity Empathy	Rasmusson, E. (1999). The 10 traits of top salespeople. <i>Sales and Marketing Management</i> , 151(8), 34-37.
Character Perseverance Paying the price of success Being a lifelong learner	Tracy, Brian (2001). The Brian Tracy Blog. 10 Reasons Why Top Salespeople Are Successful: Boost Your Sales Career.
Achievement-oriented personality	Martin, S. (2011) Seven Personality Traits of Top Salespeople, <i>Harvard Business Review</i> . June 27, 2011. Martin, S. (2015) What Separates the Strongest Salespeople from the Weakest? <i>Harvard Business Review</i> . March 18, 2015.
Motivation	Vroom (1964). <i>Work and Motivation</i> . New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc. Walker, O. C., Jr., Churchill, G. A., Jr., & Ford, N. M. (1977). Motivation and performance in industrial selling: present knowledge and needed research. <i>Journal of Marketing Research</i> . Churchill, Jr. G., Ford, N., Hartley, S., and Walker, Jr., O. (1985). The Determinants of Salesperson Performance: A Meta-Analysis. <i>Journal of Marketing Research</i> , Vol. 22, No. 2 (May), pp. 103-118.
Optimism	Dixon, A.L. and Schertzer, S.M. (2005), "Bouncing back: How salesperson optimism and self-efficacy influence attributions and behaviors following failure," <i>Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management</i> , Vol. 25 No. 4, pp. 361 - 369.

	Friend, S.B., Johnson, J.S., Luthans, F., & Sohi, R.S. (2016). Positive Psychology in Sales: Integrating Psychological Capital. <i>Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice</i> ; Vol. 24, Iss. 3 (Summer). 306-327.
Problem-solving attitude	Weitz, Barton A; Sujan, Harish; Sujan, Mita (1986). Knowledge, Motivation, and Adaptive Behavior: A Framework for Improving Selling Effectiveness. <i>Journal of Marketing</i> ; Chicago Vol. 50, Iss. 4, (Oct 1986): 174-191.
Sales knowledge	Williams and Plouffe (2007). Assessing the evolution of sales knowledge: A 20-year content analysis. <i>Industrial Marketing Management</i> , 36 (4), 408-419. Verbeke, W., Dietz, B., & Verwaal, E. (2011). Drivers of sales performance: a contemporary meta-analysis. Have salespeople become knowledge brokers? <i>Journal of The Academy of Marketing Science</i> . (2011) 39:407-428.
Coachability	Shannahan, K. L., J., Bush, A. J., & Shannahan, R. J. (2013). Are your salespeople coachable? How salesperson coachability, trait competitiveness, and transformational leadership enhance sales performance. <i>Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science</i> , 41(1), 40-54.
Focus on continuous improvement	Bachrach, D., Mullins, R., and Rapp, A. (2017). Intangible sales team resources: Investing in team social capital and transactive memory for market-driven behaviors, norms, and performance. <i>Industrial Marketing Management</i> , Vol. 62, April, Pages 88-99.
Integrity	Chapin, J. (2015). What Makes the Top Salespeople the Top Salespeople? <i>Agency Sales</i> ; Sep 2015; 45, 9; pg. 38

Each interviewee will receive an email one week in advance of their interview date that contains the list of 20 attributes, along with our request to rank them in importance from 1 - 20, with 1 being the attribute they believe is the most important and 20 being the least important.

When we finish conducting the interviews and gathering the data, we will then transcribe and code each of the 20 interviews. Using NVivo, we will then comb through

the transcripts in our search for information that might help us answer our Research Question. The goal is to find new and groundbreaking data that will offer a major contribution to scholars and practitioners.

Interviewing sales managers from a wide variety of industries should provide us with a rich, diverse set of data. Demographic data, such as age, gender, and highest level of education will be collected at the end of each interview and will be included in our paper. The expected result is that we will gain much insight into which attributes separate top-performing outside salespeople from the rest.

Our study will also provide a perspective that is relevant, as the sales managers will provide data on what they believe makes top salespeople successful. We believe that our author's 18 years of sales and sales management experience will help him overcome any potential issues that may arise, such as a possible bias in talking about their own salespeople. For example, Dugan et al. (2019), incorporated "self-reported data" by the salesperson in their paper on the effect of grit on salesperson performance. They realized that "self-reported personality measures may be affected by attributions one makes concerning their own performance," but stated that having objective - rather than subjective - performance data that was provided by management can help make it better (Barker 1999).

Chapter 4: Results

In the previous chapters, we described the purpose of the research, the scope of the research, and the literature that shows prior research to date. We have focused on the performance of *outside* salespeople in their direct sales role. By this, we are referring to salespeople who create their own leads and set their own appointments, and that is why we intentionally focused on *outside* salespeople instead of inside salespeople and retail salespeople for this paper.

We conducted qualitative interviews with 16 sales managers in a variety of industries, both B2B and B2C, as we attempted to answer the question of which attributes separate top-performing outside salespeople from the rest. We present our findings in this section.

We also provided much insight into the role of inside salespeople in order to differentiate between the structure of an inside salesforce and that of an outside salesforce. We discussed how the use of various technology tools has led to a significant growth in the importance, role, and number of inside salespeople over the past decade. This data was shown in Table 2.

The primary instrument in the data gathering process for outside sales was the qualitative interview. We conducted in-depth interviews via Zoom with 16 sales managers from a variety of industries who lead teams made up exclusively of outside salespeople. Next, we had the interviews transcribed and uploaded to NVivo to begin the process of axial coding so we could organize our data through the use of codes.

From our extensive review of the literature, we selected 20 attributes of top salespeople. We then gave each of our outside sales managers this list of 20 attributes and

asked them to rank them from most important to least important, with number one being the most important attribute and number twenty being the least important.

Next, we described the research methodology as it pertains to the participants, the measures, the procedures, and the interview protocol. Our research up to this point focused mostly on the findings by academic scholars who discussed what they found to be the most important attributes of top salespeople, while they never distinguished between inside or outside sales.

We concluded the interview process after the 16th interview because we had reached saturation at that point. We also gained insight on important issues such as: Skill and Will; whether top outside salespeople are born or made; and whether gender matters in becoming a top outside salesperson.

We now turn our attention to analyzing and discussing the results of those interviews. The sales managers' perspectives from having led, trained, and managed outside salespeople throughout their careers provided a rich trove of valuable data, especially on the study of outside sales excellence. While some of our beliefs about sales excellence were confirmed in these interviews, we found some new and important information about what causes outside salespeople to excel.

In our efforts to answer the Research Question of "*Which attributes separate top-performing outside salespeople from the rest?*" we found there to be no single attribute that answers this question. Our research shows that becoming a top salesperson requires a *combination* of attributes, which we group according to Skill or Will. When analyzing the sales managers' rankings of the 20 attributes, we also found that no two sales managers

had the exact same rankings. This turned out as we expected, and we present our findings next, starting with the key findings and concluding with the secondary findings.

Key Findings

Hunters, Farmers, and Ambidextrous

In order to determine how to categorize the sales managers, we analyzed each manager's type of business and their interview comments. We also relied on our own knowledge of their type of selling. For example, we interviewed a sales manager whose sales team sells cancer insurance door-to-door using a one-call sales approach, to earn a one-time sale from each new customer. This sales manager's team is clearly classified as *hunters* because they must constantly prospect for new customers. They also do not *farm* any accounts for repeat business. We interviewed a sales manager whose sales team sells educational products directly to families, again with no opportunities for repeat business. This sales manager's team also consisted entirely of *hunters*, so we classified the sales manager as a *hunter*.

Throughout the process, we found that the rankings from four sales managers, along with their transcribed interviews, left some doubt as to whether they were *hunters* or *farmers*. So we read their comments again, looking for clues that would solve this dilemma. Asking the sales managers whether their salespeople are *hunters*, *farmers*, or *ambidextrous* during the interviews was not an option because we had not considered using this approach at that point. In follow-up questions, however, we clarified the sales managers' views.

There was one sales manager who turned out to be an anomaly, as her team's role was to *farm* their existing customer base exclusively, 100% of the time. Since the focus

of this research is on outside salespeople - who must prospect for new customers, which is something that farmers generally do not do - we had to exclude her data from the analysis.

The four *ambidextrous* sales managers mentioned earlier have one thing in common - that their salespeople started out in the role of *hunter*. They then moved - or morphed - into the role of *farmer*, as they go back and re-sell to their customers repeatedly for additional business.

The concept of promotion and prevention foci also have a place in the sales world. A promotion focus is aligned with working to attain something good, while a prevention focus is aligned with avoiding something bad. Taken in a broader context, prevention and promotion foci are the main - if not the only - motivations of human behavior.

Lanaj et al. (2012) stated that promotion and prevention are strategies that are independent of each other. Extending this strategy to the sales profession, then, is relevant in that *hunters* must continually work to attain something good - such as winning new customers - while *farmers* must continually work to avoid something bad - such as losing existing customers. *Ambidextrous* salespeople must continually work to win new customers while also working to avoid losing existing customers.

This, according to Förster et al. (2003), makes it possible for the same person - whether *hunter* or *farmer* - to have either high or low levels of both promotion and prevention orientations. This explains why salespeople can be *ambidextrous*.

Ambidextrous salespeople, though, have a more difficult role to perform compared to

hunters and *farmers* since they must perform two roles at the same time that are diametrically opposed to each other.

Table 6a reveals the data that helped us determine which sales managers fall into the *hunter* category.

Table 6a. Determination of *hunter* sales managers. Author questions are in (parenthesis).

Sales Manager	Determining Comments	Type of Selling
Carlene	<p>“Through the direct market, if you will, where our agents would cold call.”</p> <p>“... if I don't build a relationship with you first, you're probably not going to buy something. It can be a 10-second relationship.”</p> <p>“I would have a 50% attrition within the first six months.”</p>	Prospecting for new customers for sales of insurance products, with very little opportunity for repeat business
Tom	<p>“So much of what we do is about prospecting.”</p> <p>“So we found that in our business, the best type of prospectors, people who are best at closing deals, educating prospects are those that are problem-solvers or lone wolfs.”</p>	Corporate recruiting, beginning with prospecting for new customers
Geoff	<p>“Show your product to 30 prospects, and you'll sell five. If you sell five, you make X amount in income.”</p> <p>“We are definitely less about walk up to a cold door and knock, and we're starting to move towards lead generation.”</p>	Prospecting for new customers for sales of specialty insurance products, with very little opportunity for repeat business
Autumn	<p>(And you sold door-to-door, right?)</p> <p>“Yeah. Absolutely.”</p>	Door-to-door selling of educational products to families, 100% new customer prospecting. No repeat business.

	<p>“And at the end of the day, a great salesperson, I truly, truly believe just works the numbers. When you work a lot of numbers, you hear a lot of no’s.”</p> <p>“If I put my body in front of enough humans, the rest is going to work out. She just worked the numbers. And the law of averages just heavily weighed in her favor.”</p>	
R C	<p>“It could be such a grind. They’ve got to be the type of person that wants to win. There’s this competitiveness, whether it’s against other people or whether it’s their own competitiveness against themselves.”</p>	Direct sales of Digital Marketing products (SEO, SEM, etc.) to local businesses. Mostly new customer prospecting, with automatic monthly renewals.
Kylie	<p>“We had two different kinds of sales reps. We had SDRs, a Sales Development Rep, who set appointments for more senior people. So we probably at any given time had somewhere between four to six SDRs and probably six to eight account executives. So probably about 12.”</p> <p>(Did the account executives get their own leads?)</p> <p>“They were required to source their own leads for the pipeline. So we had three tiers, we had the SDRs and then we had Junior AEs, who had to fish for themselves. They didn’t get an SDR. So as an SDR, you prove that you could get enough appointments to sustain yourself.</p>	SaaS (software as a service) sales. Mostly new customer prospecting.
Caylee	<p>“... it’s all been heavily prospect-focused. So, I think it’s the hardest part of the sales cycle. It takes incredible Perseverance. In fact, I think if you were to poll every salesperson in the world that has done door-to-door sales,</p>	Sales of software to universities and colleges. Salespeople spend most of their time on the prospecting by phone and then following up.

	or just that first part of the sales cycle, prospecting, and it's the core of what they do ...”	
Mick	“And then I would say another thing is their people skills, not so much with customers, but with internal associates to get the leads. If I'm trying to build relationships with account managers to get me into an account, I have to have some soft skills to get me in there, not, “Hey, Paul, you need to get me in there, because I got a quota to hit, and you just need to get me in there.”	Selling tax consulting services.

Table 6b reveals the data that helped us determine which sales managers fall into the *ambidextrous* category.

Table 6b. Determination of *ambidextrous* sales managers. Author questions are in (parenthesis).

Sales Manager	Determining Comments	Type of Selling
Johnny	<p>“Once they’re a sold account, we have the easiest sale to make, is the one that you’ve already made.”</p>	<p>Sales of radio and digital advertising in which salespeople focus more on managing and cultivating their inherited customers for repeat sales. They must also prospect for new customers.</p>
Arnie	<p>(What are a couple of the metrics that you have?)</p> <p>“Number of new prospects seen, new prospects to proposals issued, proposals issued to accepted, and accepted proposals to funded clients are really the key ones.”</p> <p>“So we spend our time cultivating referral relationships that are in that space, understand our profile, can identify those, already have those relationships, and then we just need to get an introduction.”</p> <p>“I talked to you about referral source development, and that’s where our deal flow comes from.”</p> <p>“It requires relationship development and building.”</p> <p>“And you’ve got to be willing to Persevere the time it takes to develop that kind of relationship.”</p>	<p>Sales of working capital financing for small- and mid-sized companies, mainly through relationships established with referral sources. They also prospect for new customers.</p>
Randall	<p>“I’ve learned to get comfortable dealing with, calling on those people, serving those people and taking care of them.”</p> <p>“... if you form the habit of just calling on the right people all the time ...”</p> <p>“... It just doesn’t sustain and booking like five to seven appointments every day.”</p>	<p>Direct sales of custom-made, high-end clothing, mainly for businesspeople, lawyers, and doctors. Salespeople prospect for new customers, then cultivate those relationships for repeat business, which is where the majority of their sales comes from.</p>

	<p>“The biggest problem to overcome is the fit. You know, making clothes that will fit them. Once we do that, the repeat business is really high. Like 80% of our business nationwide is repeat business because we’ve solved those problems for customers.”</p>	
Lil	<p>“Organic revenue growth goal is usually 50-60% of the net new revenue growth goal.”</p> <p>“Because when you’re talking to a potential prospect, they’re talking to you because they need a solution for something.”</p> <p>“And so for us to be able to increase and grow our client base, not only with new logos (new B2B clients), but also growing a \$1 million account to a \$5 million account, you’ve got to bring them something that they don’t already have.”</p>	<p>Sales of employee engagement services, using a consultative selling approach. They also prospect for new customers.</p>
Evan	<p>“You know where they’re going to figure out what it takes and how to do it and that’s part of becoming a good salesperson? As you know, do what’s necessary to build the relationship to get you to that point and know who those people are and be able to dig deep enough.”</p> <p>(Who did you sell to? Was it retail stores or B2B?)</p> <p>“Well, kind of a little bit of everything. I call on contractors, so I called on wholesale distributors. and then also I called on original equipment manufacturers.”</p> <p>(OK, so all these that you sold to, or your salespeople are selling to, that same types of customers, then?)</p> <p>“Yes. And they reported to me directly.”</p>	<p>Sales of controls, including thermostat controls, to refrigeration, heating, air conditioning industries.</p>
Katie	<p>“You have to know how to build a pipeline, which is not always the funnest part of the job.”</p> <p>“I primarily focused on new business and you really needed somebody that had some, I call it sales chops, already kind of built.”</p> <p>“... I would say more hunters, like 70% And 30% ambidextrous.”</p>	<p>Sales of television advertising in a large market in which salespeople focus more on gaining new customers, which they then manage and cultivate to become repeat customers. They have also inherited customers to manage and cultivate for repeat sales.</p>

Daniel	<p>“The one key I think is just the motivation. To make a lot of calls, I think that’s really what it what it boils down to.”</p> <p>“For me, perseverance is pretty much everything, everything we do. I know that even to get a meeting we usually have to have anywhere from seven to 12 touches with a potential client before we can even get a meeting.”</p> <p>“All new salespeople are forced to be hunters and those that make it and become a top salesperson are the ones who hunt continually and are actually prospecting for new clients daily, refining their sales skills and not just going through the prospecting motions. They do this for their first two to five years even if they dislike and are not good at prospecting and cold calling.”</p> <p>“The top sales people then transition into mainly farmers but realize that with an average of 30% churn they have to become big-game hunters and spend their time hunting only larger potential clients while growing their existing customers.”</p>	Sales of television advertising in several small- to medium-sized markets in which salespeople focus more on gaining new customers, which they then manage and cultivate to become repeat customers.
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Table 6c shows the individual and average attribute rankings and Standard Deviation for *hunters*.

Table 6c. Attribute rankings and Standard Deviation for *hunters* (using pseudonyms)

Attributes	Carlene	Tom	Geoff	Autumn	RC	Kylie	Caylee	Mick	Avg 8 Hunt	Std Dev
Problem-solving attitude	1	13	6	3	12	2	6	1	5.50	4.75
Good work ethic	4	8	3	2	7	6	10	5	5.63	2.67
Laser focus on what's important	5	3	5	1	4	7	9	13	5.88	3.76
Integrity	8	6	1	4	16	12	2	9	7.25	5.09
Perseverance	10	1	14	7	1	9	3	14	7.38	5.32
Coachability	2	18	8	5	6	13	5	6	7.88	5.17
Character	9	5	2	6	15	17	1	8	7.88	5.72
Focus is on relationships	6	4	13	10	17	4	13	3	8.75	5.23
Confidence	15	7	4	18	11	5	18	2	10.00	6.41
Being a lifelong learner	7	9	9	9	14	14	4	16	10.25	4.06
Motivation	3	16	10	14	5	10	19	7	10.50	5.53
Empathy	13	2	15	12	8	15	15	10	11.25	4.53
Achievement-oriented personality	16	12	17	17	3	1	14	15	11.88	6.33
Focus on continuous improvement	14	10	7	11	9	19	8	19	12.13	4.73
Optimism	17	14	12	16	13	11	11	12	13.25	2.25
Sales knowledge	18	11	18	15	19	8	7	11	13.38	4.75
Sales aptitude or ability	19	19	19	8	18	3	12	17	14.38	6.09
Paying the price of success	20	17	11	13	2	20	20	20	15.38	6.46
Creativity	11	15	20	20	20	18	16	4	15.50	5.61
Assertiveness	12	20	16	19	10	16	17	18	16.00	3.42

Next, Table 6d helps answer the Research Question of “*Which attributes separate top-performing outside salespeople from the rest?*” by revealing, in order, the five attributes that are the most important for *hunters*.

Table 6d. Top five most important attributes for *hunters*

Attribute:	Ranking	Standard Deviation
Problem-Solving Attitude	5.50	4.75
Good Work Ethic	5.63	2.67
Laser Focus on What's Important	5.88	3.76
Integrity	7.25	5.09
Perseverance	7.38	5.32

Table 6e shows the individual and average attribute rankings and Standard Deviation for *ambidextrous*.

Table 6e Attribute rankings and Standard Deviation for *ambidextrous* (using pseudonyms)

Attributes	Johnny	Arnie	Randall	Lil	Evan	Katie	Daniel	Avg 7 Ambi	Std Dev
Good work ethic	1	8	4	12	2	5	3	5.00	3.83
Motivation	2	1	11	14	11	2	4	6.43	5.38
Perseverance	7	3	8	7	18	8	1	7.43	5.38
Character	4	9	2	6	6	17	11	7.86	5.01
Coachability	12	12	9	13	4	4	2	8.00	4.58
Integrity	5	7	1	3	8	18	15	8.14	6.23
Confidence	8	10	5	10	10	9	6	8.29	2.06
Problem-solving attitude	6	6	19	1	3	16	19	10.00	7.75
Sales aptitude or ability	11	16	12	16	7	1	9	10.29	5.28
Being a lifelong learner	17	20	13	4	17	6	7	12.00	6.32
Focus is on relationships	19	2	15	11	5	14	10	10.86	5.87
Focus on continuous improvement	16	14	16	5	14	7	5	11.00	5.10
Laser focus on what's important	18	4	3	17	16	3	17	11.14	7.34
Achievement-oriented personality	14	15	6	2	15	15	14	11.57	5.32
Assertiveness	3	13	14	18	13	12	13	12.29	4.54
Optimism	13	17	10	15	12	13	8	12.57	2.99
Sales knowledge	10	18	20	19	1	10	12	12.86	6.74
Creativity	15	5	17	8	9	19	18	13.00	5.57
Empathy	9	19	18	9	19	11	16	14.43	4.61
Paying the price of success	20	11	7	20	20	20	20	16.86	5.49

Table 6f further helps answer the Research Question of “Which attributes separate top-performing outside salespeople from the rest?” by revealing the five attributes that are the most important for *ambidextrous*.

Table 6f. Top five most important attributes for *ambidextrous*

Attribute	Ranking	Standard Deviation
Good Work Ethic	5.00	3.83
Motivation	6.43	5.38
Perseverance	7.43	5.38
Character	7.86	5.01
Coachability	8.00	4.58

Next, we looked for attributes that ranked in the top five for both *hunters* and *ambidextrous*. There were two such attributes: Good Work Ethic (5.63 for *hunters* and 5.00 for *ambidextrous*) and Perseverance (7.38 for *hunters* and 7.43 for *ambidextrous*).

Table 6g shows the attributes that ranked in the top five for both *hunters* and *ambidextrous*.

Table 6g. Attributes that ranked in the top five for both *hunters* and *ambidextrous*

Attribute:	Hunters:	Ambidextrous:
Good Work Ethic	5.63	5.00
Perseverance	7.38	7.43

In addition to finding out which attributes separate top-performing outside salespeople from the rest, we also wanted to see which of the 20 attributes had the largest differences between *hunters* and *ambidextrous*. Some of the attributes, though, do not show a large difference, and we believe this is because *hunters* and *ambidextrous* are similar in some ways, including the fact that both groups must prospect for new customers. Table 6h shows the attributes which had the largest differences between *hunters* and *ambidextrous*.

Table 6h. Attributes with the largest differences

Attribute	Hunters	Ambidextrous	Difference
Laser Focus on What's Important	5.88	11.14	5.26
Problem-Solving Attitude	5.50	10.00	4.50
Sales Aptitude or Ability (-)	14.38	10.29	- 4.09
Motivation (-)	10.50	6.43	- 4.07
Assertiveness (-)	16.00	12.29	- 3.71

The attribute with the largest difference, Laser Focus on What's Important (5.88 for *hunters* vs 11.14 for *ambidextrous*), was ranked almost twice as low (meaning almost twice as important) for *hunters* than for *ambidextrous*. (A lower score means that the attribute is considered more important than a higher score.) The reason why there was such a large difference in absolute value for Laser Focus on What's Important is because there were four *ambidextrous* sales managers who ranked it in double figures (16, 17, 17, and 18), while only one *hunter* sales manager ranked it in double figures (13). These

rankings skewed the differences, while the rankings for the other sales managers were below 10.00.

Likewise, we were curious to see which attributes had the most similar rankings between *hunters* and *ambidextrous*, and the reason why. We set a benchmark of a difference in absolute value between *hunter* and *ambidextrous* to be no larger than 1.00 and found there were five such pairs of attributes that fell in either the Skill or Will categories, which we will cover in the next section. There were also three attributes that were neither Skill nor Will, so we did not analyze these because they were not an important part of the story. Table 6i shows the results.

Table 6i. Attribute pairs with the most similar rankings, with standard deviation differences

Attribute	Hunters	Ambidextrous	a - b	Diff. (Std Dev)
Coachability	7.88	8.00	.12	.59
Achievement-oriented Personality	11.88	11.57	.31	1.01
Perseverance	7.38	7.43	.05	.06
Good Work Ethic	5.63	5.00	.63	1.16
Sales Knowledge	13.38	12.86	.52	1.99

We thought there might be a small amount of variability in each of the above attributes, so we ran the standard deviations on each one. Using our same benchmark of the difference in absolute value between *hunter* and *ambidextrous* being no larger than 1.00 in each attribute, we found that only two (Coachability and Perseverance) of the five met this benchmark.

Table 7a shows the differences with the largest absolute values which were ranked as more important by *hunters* than by *ambidextrous*.

Table 7a. Differences in attribute rankings between *hunters* and *ambidextrous*

Attribute	Hunters	Ambidextrous	Difference
Laser Focus on What's Important	5.88	11.14	5.26
Problem-Solving Attitude	5.50	10.00	4.50
Empathy	11.25	14.43	3.18
Focus is on Relationships	8.75	10.86	2.11

Of the four attributes shown in Table 7a, there were three (Laser Focus on What's Important, Problem-Solving Attitude, and Focus is on Relationships) that ranked in the lower half (1-10) of the attributes for *hunters*. Attributes that ranked in the lower half are more important than attributes that ranked in the higher half (11-20).

Table 7b shows the differences with the largest absolute values which were ranked as more important by *ambidextrous* than by *hunters*, as signified by the negative sign in front of the values.

Table 7b. Differences in attribute rankings with the largest absolute value between *ambidextrous* and *hunters*

Attribute	Hunters	Ambidextrous	Difference
Sales Aptitude or Ability	14.38	10.29	- 4.09
Motivation	10.50	6.43	- 4.07
Assertiveness	16.00	12.29	- 3.71
Creativity	15.50	13.00	- 2.50

Of the four attributes in Table 7b above, only one (Motivation) ranked in the lower half (1-10). Analyzing this on a more micro level, we found that there can be a correlation between some of the answers to our interview questions - as well as the sales managers' rankings of the attribute - to their type of selling, e.g., the level of prospecting necessary for sales effectiveness.

The feedback from one *ambidextrous* sales manager, who manages a team of salespeople who must both prospect for new customers and maintain and grow their

existing customers, shows that she views Motivation much differently. She ranked Motivation at #2, and perspective is somewhat typical of *ambidextrous*:

“I think for sales I’ve always said it’s not for the faint of heart. You have to want to do this job and you have to want to do it every day. So I think you have to be really, really Motivated and disciplined. I think for sales you have people that the top performers are more entrepreneurs in spirit. And I think those people are just highly, highly Motivated people, you have to kind of take the reins and own your own destiny. And I think sales gives you the ability to do that so I think you have to be Motivated.”

-- *ambidextrous* sales manager whose salespeople sell television advertising

Johnson et al. (2000) stated that there is a higher level of turnover among salespeople than in other professions. As Loveland et al. (2015) state, this turnover is costly. According to Hunter et al. (1990), there is often a larger variation in the performance level among salespeople than there is in other fields.

There were also some surprises in our research. One of these came from the sales managers’ rankings of Motivation, which was ranked as much less important by the sales managers of *hunters* (10.50) than by the sales managers of *ambidextrous* (6.43). This unusual ranking can be explained in part by the comments of a sales manager whose *hunters* sell door-to-door. She ranked it at #14, and she said this:

“Motivation is a myth. I guess I just kind of looked at it as where does Motivation actually come from? And it comes from being Laser-Focused on what’s important and having the Problem-Solving skills. If you’re a Problem Solver, I would rather have a Problem Solver than someone who’s super Motivated because a Problem Solver is going

to work through challenges. Someone who's Motivated is going to go up or down based on their circumstance and based on their situation."

-- *hunter* sales manager whose salespeople sell educational products to consumers

We expected Good Work Ethic to rank more importantly (lower) for *hunters* than *ambidextrous* because the daily grind of prospecting for new customers is more difficult than managing existing accounts. The rankings, however, showed that *ambidextrous* ranked Good Work Ethic more than a half point (5.00) lower than did the *hunters* (5.63). The sales manager whose *ambidextrous* salespeople sell thermostat controls for the heating and air conditioning industry ranked Good Work Ethic as #2. He explained his ranking this way:

"If you don't have a good work ethic you're going to (goof) off because you're not really being monitored that much. You have a heck of a lot of freedom when you're in outside sales. You're not going to be successful. It's really that simple.

-- *ambidextrous* sales manager whose salespeople sell to the HVAC industry

Conversely, the attribute of Integrity was ranked more importantly (lower) for *hunters* than for *ambidextrous* (7.25 vs 8.14). The sales manager whose *ambidextrous* salespeople sell television advertising ranked Integrity as #18. She explained why:

"You know, it's interesting because I have seen and worked with plenty of top performers that don't necessarily have a very, you know, north moral compass. It's good personally to have Character and Integrity, but it may not always be vital to being a top salesperson. And I think it depends on what they're selling, because across industries where it's a little more transactional and you don't have to build a relationship, you'll see some really top performers that don't necessarily have those characteristics."

-- *ambidextrous* sales manager whose people sell television advertising in a large midwestern city

Skill vs Will

Another topic for salespeople which caused a strong response from our sales manager interviews - and provided much useful data - was that of Skill vs Will. This is especially relevant for *hunters* because of their need to constantly prospect for new customers.

We originally had no plans to focus on the issue of Skill vs Will when we began our research, but it emerged as a major theme throughout the interview process, as shown by the sales managers placing a very high importance on this topic. We include it in our findings here.

We begin by defining Skill and Will. To do so, we looked at three different but somewhat similar definitions of both terms, created by individual consulting firms. Behavioral scientist Paul Hersey, along with business consultant Ken Blanchard, author of *The One-Minute Manager*, created the Skill Will matrix in the 1970s. The matrix assesses the skill level and willingness of an individual to perform a specific task. Three sets of definitions, along with their sources, include:

- 1) Hersey and Blanchard defined Skill as “any knowledge, talent, or ability enabling the employee to do something well.” Will is “the ability to perform a task despite difficulties.”
- 2) The Peak Performance Center defines Skill as: “An individual’s capabilities” based on his or her experience with the task, training, knowledge, and natural ability. It defines Will as: “An individual’s desire to complete a particular

task” based on attitude, incentives, confidence, and personal feelings about completing the task.

- 3) The Academy to Innovate Human Resources defines Skill as “competence” and Will as “what signifies the degree of motivation.”

Eklöf (2010) defines the terms of Skill and Will as *knowledge* and *motivation*.

McCombs and Marzano (1990) define Skill as *ability* and Will as *understanding and desire*. As this review shows there is no single definitive description of either term, we define Skill as “ability” and Will as “the degree of motivation.”

We then classified the rankings of the 20 attributes from both the *hunters* and the *ambidextrous* into three separate and mutually exclusive categories:

- 1) Skill,
- 2) Will, and
- 3) Neither Skill nor Will. Table 8 shows the average of each ranking, along with the total and average of the three categories.

Table 8. Attribute categories of Skill, Will, and Neither * as ranked by hunters and ambidextrous

Skill (competence) attributes:	Will (degree of motivation) attributes:	* Neither Skill nor Will:
11.07 Being a Lifelong Learner	5.33 Good Work Ethic	7.67 Integrity
11.60 Focus on Continuous Improvement	7.40 Perseverance	7.87 Character
12.47 Sales Aptitude or Ability	7.60 Problem-Solving Attitude	9.73 Focus is on Relationships
13.13 Sales Knowledge	7.93 Coachability	12.73 Empathy
14.33 Creativity	8.33 Laser Focus on What’s Important	12.93 Optimism
	8.60 Motivation	
	9.20 Confidence	
	11.73 Achievement-Oriented Personality	
	14.27 Assertiveness	
	16.07 Paying the Price of Success	
Average of Skill attributes = 12.52	Average of Will attributes = 9.65	Average of Neither Skill nor Will attributes = 10.19

* The attributes in the *Neither* column are mostly qualities, not attributes, so they belong in neither the Skill nor Will categories.

Skill and Will attributes are not mutually exclusive, as top outside salespeople need a combination of both Skill and Will. Next, in table 9a, which is the same as Table 6d, we revisit the five attributes that *hunters* ranked as most important.

Table 9a. The five most important attributes, as ranked by *hunters*

Attribute:	Ranking	Standard Deviation
Problem-Solving Attitude	5.50	4.75
Good Work Ethic	5.63	2.67
Laser Focus on What's Important	5.88	3.76
Integrity	7.25	5.09
Perseverance	7.38	5.32

Four of the five top attribute rankings (all except Integrity) fall into the Will category by *hunters*. This provides evidence that *hunters* need Will more than Skill to become top outside salespeople. Next, in table 9b, which is the same as Table 6f, we revisit the five attributes that *ambidextrous* ranked as most important.

Table 9b. The five most important attributes, as ranked by *ambidextrous*

Attribute:	Ranking	Standard Deviation
Good Work Ethic	5.00	3.83
Motivation	6.43	5.38
Perseverance	7.43	5.38
Character	7.86	5.01
Coachability	8.00	4.58

Again, four of the five top attribute rankings (all except Character) fall into the Will category, this time by *ambidextrous*. This provides evidence that *ambidextrous* also need Will more than Skill to become top outside salespeople.

Further supporting our findings on the issue of Skill vs Will are the comments made by the sales managers when we asked them, “Which do you think is more important to becoming a top salesperson: Skill or Will?” The answer was nearly

unanimous, with all but one sales manager claiming that Will is more important. Some went on to elaborate, while others gave just a one-word response, but the tone of most of the responses was adamant for Will. This also provides strong evidence that Will plays a larger role in sales excellence than Skill does. The only sales manager who said that Skill is more important than Will went on to allocate the percentage of Skill and Will as 50/50.

Below is a sample of comments from sales managers on this topic:

“I think the Skill can lead people to a certain degree of success but the one with the Will, who is continually getting better and sharpening that axe and so forth but the Will is there, that’s kind of the tortoise and the hare.”

-- sales manager of team of *hunters* selling digital marketing to local businesses

“I think sales is one of those things where you have to want it really bad, you have to want it more than any Skill you have. So I would take Will any day over Skill, because ... I can teach you a lot of the things you need to know.”

-- sales manager of team of *ambidextrous* selling TV advertising

“I think I would say Skill because you can have all the Will you want, but if you don't have the aptitude and the Skill ... it doesn't matter how long you try. You have to have some innate Skill to be in sales, I don't think you can just Will your way into sales. If I were to allocate (the Skill / Will ratio), the first answer that came to mind was 50, 50.”

-- sales manager of team of *hunters* selling employment tax consulting

“You have to have the Will to win because every day you’re going to be told “no” or have the phone hung up on you. Probably 55 Will / 45 Skill.”

-- sales manager of a team of *hunters* that sells SaaS (software)

“Hmm. Can I say both? I think Will will take you a long ways. But yeah, if you don't have the Skill with the Will, then you’re not going to get very far. If I had to allocate them in terms of a hundred percent, I guess ... 60 Will / 40 Skill.”

-- sales manager of a team of *hunters* of a software firm that sells data analytics

Secondary Findings:

While the main findings from our research revolved around our search for the attributes that contribute the most to being a top outside salesperson; the differences of

hunters and *ambidextrous*; and the importance and differences of Skill and Will attributes, we now move on to our secondary findings.

Technology

To a certain extent, the use of new technology gave us what the pandemic took away. New apps such as Zoom - and even old apps such as the phone - provided new opportunities for salespeople to reach new prospects and current customers face-to-face. The use of technology also forced salespeople to develop new skills. In some cases, sales managers saw an increase in their sales teams' volume and performance.

Adopting new technologies can also cause salespeople to learn a new method of selling. As the sales manager of a digital marketing reseller said:

“Ninety-five percent of what we did was face-to-face, in-person. We pivoted a year ago ... and I think it helped us exercise new muscles that we didn't even know that we had. And our company responded pretty effectively. We use Microsoft Teams, which is essentially Zoom. And we had to get people really good at selling on the phone and selling like this (via Teams) instead of being face-to-face. It helped us stay afloat.”

The sales manager of a large midwestern TV station spoke about the importance of being able to communicate in many different forms, which is customers want:

“I think, though, the way that the world is going, we just have to as salespeople, we have to get better at this type of interaction. So I think it's an opportunity for us to sharpen our skills. Because I definitely think this is a skill that you have to have now. You have to be able to present over some sort of video camera, you have to be able to do that now. It doesn't always have to be a phone call or an email or ... in person. I think it's important to try to mix in all the different kind of mediums into how you're communicating.”

For the sales manager of a medium-sized distributor of business manuals, using new technology isn't just a way to increase sales, but rather a game-changer, as she had this to say about using a CRM (Customer Relationship Management) tool:

“Here's the difference, again, between top 10 percenters to other people. Because if you talk to 30 people a month ... and 20 of them tell you to call them in two months, what are the chances you can be able to remember that conversation two months later?”

A sales manager of a local television station in the Midwest considers Zoom a lifesaver in his business:

“It's been able to keep us open I think that virtual meetings are to the point now where we can have a virtual meeting and never meet a person and make a sale, because they still trust you.

The sales manager of a specialty insurance company appreciates the new technology but warns not to let it replace the human element:

“I'd say probably, maybe 25% of our sales are done via Zoom. But at this point, 100% of our team meetings and trainings are done via Zoom I think it's impacted in a positive way. But I think that it's had some negative impact as well, because it makes it easy to create a Zoom meeting versus the energy it takes to coordinate an in-person meeting. And I think there's a lot of value in meeting in-person still.”

While the use of new technology gave salespeople new opportunities to reach new prospects and current customers in ways that are mutually beneficial, it has also forced salespeople to learn new technologies. Customers and salespeople can continue to use

these technologies and skills in a post-pandemic world, while still relying on old technologies such as the telephone and email.

Changes in the sales profession

When we asked our interviewees how the sales profession has changed lately, we found that there is another technology-related change that has affected sales. This one has occurred due to changes with the customers rather than the salespeople, though. Throughout the past decade in particular, customers now have more knowledge at their disposal than ever before.

They use technology to access more information to the point that they educate themselves about their prospective vendors even before they agree to a meeting. This has allowed them to learn more about their options on which products to buy, which companies to buy from, and which salespeople they are willing to buy from.

While this appears to give customers the advantage at first glance, it actually makes it a win-win for customers and salespeople alike because salespeople are now calling on more informed customers. This, in turn, saves time for salespeople because they don't have to do as much research on prospects before calling on them, as the sales manager of a local TV station in central Illinois sums it up nicely:

“I think we have a lot more customers that don't necessarily want the face-to-face interaction. They're doing so much more research now before they buy. They have so much more information available before they purchase.”

Does gender matter?

We found that gender is irrelevant in becoming a top salesperson, as all 16 sales managers were unanimous on this topic -- with some saying it with a very emphatic “No.” But several sales managers did offer some caveats. The sales manager of a large midwestern TV station said it this way:

“(It) doesn’t matter. You know it’s interesting because in the industries that I’ve sold in it is more, especially now that I’m in tech sales, it is more male-dominant. But it’s also like less women, or our women, are less likely to raise their hand for our sales leadership role.”

But the sales manager of an employment tax consulting practice firm stated this:

“I think they’re equally successful, because each one has a different set of soft skills. I would say sometimes the male salesperson may not be as empathetic or as personable versus some of the female professionals I think they both are equally successful, and I think a successful sales team has a combination of both because if you have all testosterone, that’s too much. And if you have the other side, that’s too much. You got to have a balance of both.”

Then there was the sales manager of a medium-sized distributor of business manuals, who was adamant about the gender question:

“It does matter. It does matter. And again, they say women are better relationship sellers, but men get over things quicker. And that’s difficult. It stays with women a little bit longer. But women are a little more thoughtful. Guys are more, ‘fire, fire, fire, aim’ sometimes Women a little more, ‘aim, aim, fire.’ Women are natural nurturers. And so that relationship piece comes a lot easier. Now, people ask me this all the time and this is a big, big, big topic of conversation in our industry right now in the SaaS software world. About 4 or 5% of sales reps are women. It’s awful.”

While the sales managers seem to have formed a consensus that the issue of gender appears to be settled, they indicate that men are more prevalent than women in

certain industries or sectors. These sectors include industrial sales, software sales, and technical sales.

Born or made?

The debate of whether top salespeople are “born” or “made” has been going on for decades. Overwhelmingly, the sales managers told us that top outside salespeople are *made* rather than *born*. In fact, the verdict was nearly unanimous. We conclude this section with a sample of comments from sales managers on this topic in Table 10.

Table 10. Are top outside salespeople born or made?

Type of Product / Service Sold	Sales Manager's Comments
Digital Marketing products (SEO, SEM, etc.) to local businesses	“When we talk top producers in outside sales, I think they're made. I don't think those people are born. It just takes so much honing the craft and Will and desire and efficiencies to be top in outside sales.”
Advertising for a large midwestern TV station	“I think they're made. Why? I think everybody, when they get into sales, has their, I call it, their ‘getting their teeth kicked in’ stories. You find out it's really hard and you get a lot more no's than yesses and it's hard not to take it personally. And it's a lot that you go through in sales that you don't necessarily go through in other types of careers. There's a fair amount of rejection. So you really have to want it, to continue to do it.”
Employment tax consulting services	“I personally think, and I think I'm living proof of that, I certainly wasn't born for sales, but I acquired the skills I needed to, yeah for sales. So I would say salespeople are made.”
SaaS (software as a service)	“I think top salespeople have a certain number of traits that come into play, but then I think they are made.”
Software to universities and colleges	“I think they're made for sure. I don't think any... I mean, sure. I'm sure there are some that are born with innate qualities that position them well for sales roles. But I think even the most innately talented people don't always have the skills cultivated to do it consistently well, so they're all over the place in terms of their results.”
Sales of employee engagement services	“I would have to say made. I think everyone's born with certain characteristics, there's your basic DNA makeup I think, but it's really just the environment around you that helps form that and grow that.”
Corporate recruiting	“I don't believe they're born. I believe that a person can learn how to sell through experiences over time.”

Radio and digital advertising	“I think that is in that person that has to be brought out, but I think it's built in.”
Working capital financing for small- and mid-sized companies	“I kind of would say it kind of developed. I don't know that made is the right word. I think a lot of it's in their disposition and character. And probably I'd be more inclined to say made than born.”
Custom-made, high-end clothing, mainly for businesspeople, lawyers, and doctors	“I believe they're made. I think top salespeople are made. To be in the top, it's internal. They have an insatiable desire to win and be at the top. So, in my opinion, they're, you know, they become.”
Specialty insurance products	“I think salespeople specifically are made, but I think that the core competencies they were born with, but then if you bolt on training on sales ability in the psychology part of it and the how to sell, I think that's bolted on. So I think it's both. I think they're integrated. I think it's both, I don't think it's one or the other.”
Educational products sold to families door-to-door	“Made. Because sales can be taught, anybody can learn how to be a great salesperson. Anybody. If you had the desire and you wanted to, you absolutely could do it. When we talk top producers in outside sales, I think they're made. I don't think those people are born. It just takes so much honing the craft and Will and desire and efficiencies to be top in outside sales.”

Chapter 5: Discussion

For many years, sales managers and salespeople have tried to learn what makes an outside salesperson great. Firms face the challenge of recruiting, hiring, and leading salespeople that will maximize sales revenue, while battling the expense and lost revenue that are caused by attrition. In this paper, we set out to answer the Research Question: “*Which attributes separate top-performing outside salespeople from the rest?*”

While the topic of attributes that are required to become a top salesperson has been covered in the literature, we found nothing in the literature that covers the necessary attributes of becoming a top outside salesperson. Also, the twin topics of Skill and Will have been covered in the literature - sometimes as separate topics, and sometimes together as one topic. We took the topic of Skill and Will and combined it with our analysis of *hunters* and *ambidextrous*.

Some outside salespeople have plenty of Skill, but they lack the Will to reach their potential. Then there are those who have the Will to become a top outside salesperson, but do not have the necessary Skills. Either way, the failure of sales organizations to obtain maximum results from their salespeople hurts the firm.

We sought a definitive answer to our Research Question. If we could do that, then we would know the answer to this elusive question that sales managers and salespeople alike have been asking for decades. Our findings are based on the qualitative interviews we conducted with the sales managers who were asked to rank our list of 20 attributes of top salespeople. We chose these 20 attributes from our review of the literature.

While we realize that being a top outside salesperson requires a number of attributes instead of just one, we discovered the answer to our Research Question was

that there are two main groups of attributes of top outside salespeople, as well as two main individual attributes. Our work also provided insight on other sales-related topics.

Hunters, Farmers, and Ambidextrous

We discussed the three main types of outside salespeople: *hunters*, *farmers*, and *ambidextrous*. *Hunters* are those whose main job function is to prospect constantly to win new customers, as they usually do not have the luxury of repeat business. *Farmers*, on the other hand, do not have to prospect for new customers. Instead, they spend most of their time cultivating and growing relationships with existing customers. They can get customers who were initially sold by another salesperson, or they could get customers as a result of advertising combined with the work of an inside salesperson, and these customers need an outside salesperson for service and to place additional orders. The third type - *ambidextrous* - must *hunt*, or prospect, for new customers and then *farm* those customers by maintaining and growing those relationships as they become repeat customers. In this study, we analyzed *hunters* and *ambidextrous*.

While we were familiar with the roles of *hunters* and *farmers*, we were unaware of the roles of *ambidextrous*. Most of our information about *hunters*, *farmers*, and *ambidextrous* is from the seminal article by DeCarlo and Lam (2016). Through our work, we were able to extend the literature on this topic.

Since the sales manager is the unit of analysis, we refer to the sales manager rather than the salespeople when we use the terms *hunter* and *ambidextrous*. After we interviewed all the sales managers, we had originally decided to conduct our analysis on the attributes of *hunters* and *farmers*. As explained in Chapter 4, a detailed analysis of the transcripts revealed that all but one of the sales managers originally classified as *farmers*

actually engage in significant prospecting activities, so they were reclassified as *ambidextrous*.

The Most Important Attributes

We did not know which attributes result in becoming a top outside salesperson at that point, regardless of whether they are *hunters* or *ambidextrous*. This is where we made our most significant contribution to both research and practice. Our results, which came from our interviews with the sales managers and then cross-tabulating the results, indicated five attributes to be most important to *hunters*.

The average rankings of each attribute are shown in parentheses:

- 1) Problem-solving attitude (5.50)
- 2) Good work ethic (5.63)
- 3) Laser Focus on What's important (5.88)
- 4) Integrity (7.25)
- 5) Perseverance (7.38)

Next are the most important attributes of *ambidextrous*:

- 1) Good work ethic (5.00)
- 2) Motivation (6.43)
- 3) Perseverance (7.43)
- 4) Character (7.86)
- 5) Coachability (8.00)

The lower the score, the more important that attribute was ranked. The two most important attributes for outside salespeople are Good Work Ethic and Perseverance, as they were the only attributes that were ranked in the top five for both *hunters* and *ambidextrous*.

We also found a fairly large difference in the overall rankings between the Skill attributes and the Will attributes. This became apparent after we had first separated the 20 attributes into three categories: Skill, Will, and Neither. As we pointed out in Table 8 in

the previous section, the average of the Skill attributes is 12.52 out of 20, while the average of the Will attributes is 9.65 out of 20, a difference of nearly three points.

The reason for this is because the roles of *hunters* and *ambidextrous* are somewhat different. This is illustrated in part by the comments from two sales managers who differ strongly on the attribute of Motivation.

The first comment was from an *ambidextrous* sales manager, who ranked Motivation at #2 (the average ranking for *ambidextrous* sales managers was 6.43). Her perspective is somewhat typical of *ambidextrous*:

“I think for sales I’ve always said it’s not for the faint of heart. You have to want to do this job and you have to want to do it every day. So I think you have to be really, really Motivated and disciplined. I think for sales you have people that the top performers are more entrepreneurs in spirit. And I think those people are just highly, highly Motivated people, you have to kind of take the reins and own your own destiny. And I think sales gives you the ability to do that so I think you have to be Motivated.”

The second comment was from a *hunter* sales manager who ranked Motivation at #14 (the average ranking was 10.50). She has this to say:

“Motivation is a myth. I guess I just kind of looked at it as where does Motivation actually come from? And it comes from being Laser-Focused on what’s important and having the Problem-Solving skills. If you’re a Problem Solver, I would rather have a Problem Solver than someone who’s super Motivated because a Problem Solver is going to work through challenges. Someone who’s Motivated is going to go up or down based on their circumstance and based on their situation.”

Skill and Will

While finding that there is no one single attribute that determines an outside salesperson's level of success, we also found that the two attribute groups of Skill and Will are what really determine an outside salesperson's level of success. This is true for both types of outside salespeople that we analyzed - the *hunters* and the *ambidextrous*. This forms the basis of our second main contribution, which was our analysis of Skill and Will.

While we found multiple definitions of Skill and Will, we eventually defined Skill as "competence" and Will as "the degree of motivation." The findings related to Skill and Will also came from the sales manager interviews.

It is important to note that four out of the five most important attributes of *hunters* are Will attributes (Problem-Solving Attitude, Good Work Ethic, Laser Focus on What's Important, and Perseverance), and four out of the five most important attributes of *ambidextrous* are also Will attributes (Good Work Ethic, Motivation, Perseverance, and Coachability). In addition, both of the afore-mentioned attributes - Good Work Ethic and Perseverance - that are listed as top five attributes for both *hunters* and *ambidextrous* are Will attributes. Together, all of this data - including the average Skill ranking of 12.52 and the average Will ranking of 9.65 - provide strong evidence that Will is more important than Skill for both *hunters* and *ambidextrous*.

Implications for Research

There has also been plenty of scholarly research that addresses the profession of selling in general, but that body of research contains a large gap in that it does not

specifically address outside selling. Our research helps fill this gap. We made two main contributions, or advancements, to the field of outside sales that extend the literature.

Both of them benefit researchers as well as practitioners:

- 1) Identifying the main attributes of top outside salespeople, and the two that are key both to hunters and to ambidextrous (Good Work Ethic and Perseverance).
- 2) Our analysis of the two main types of attributes that determine outside sales success: Skill and Will.

Our work also adds to the small but growing body of knowledge that exists on the categories of *hunters* and *ambidextrous*, as both areas are still only lightly covered in the sales literature. Our two main contributions, or advancements, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, provide another contribution to research because we combined the topic of *hunters* and *ambidextrous* with the topic of Skill and Will. We have seen no other research that addresses this yet.

Implications for Practice

Getting salespeople to increase their productivity is a challenging and ongoing process. There are three main implications for practice:

- 1) Knowing which attributes to look for when recruiting / hiring outside salespeople
- 2) Knowing which attributes to focus on in the development of outside salespeople.
- 3) Incorporating the knowledge of the topics of *hunters* and *ambidextrous* as well as Skill and Will into the training and management of outside sales teams.

Limitations

By design, we did not focus on any particular industry. We also did not try to get an even balance of B2B and B2C industries. Both of these areas provide opportunities for further, more specialized research.

We chose not to interview salespeople for our study, although 15 out of the 16 sales managers we interviewed were salespeople until they moved into sales management. Had we focused on surveying or interviewing salespeople instead of (or in addition to) sales managers, we could have lost the “30,000-foot view” that the sales managers provided us. We also know that perspective changes when one moves from talking to the people who sell vs those who manage the people who sell.

Future Directions

As we help expand the literature on achieving excellence in outside sales, there remains much work to be done because this area has been very underserved. In particular, areas of further research on outside sales should include quantitative analysis, such as surveys, both with outside salespeople and outside sales managers.

Another area of future research should include the study of role of both Skill and Will in outside sales. While there are others who have written about skill, including Eklöf (2010), Kalra et al. (2017), McCombs and Marzano (1990), and Rentz et al. (2002), there is very sparse amount of literature on both Skill and Will. Given the contributions that we are making in this area, it is clear that both Skill and Will play a large role in outside sales, yet most of the literature on sales leave out the important role that both play.

While we focused our work on outside salesperson performance, there is also a need to conduct additional research into outside sales manager performance. We were

very surprised to learn that none of the sales managers we interviewed conducted regular one-to-one meetings with the salespeople, and that only two of the sales managers hold regularly scheduled sales meetings with their outside sales teams. We believe this is a highly important aspect for outside salespeople as they face a constant need to learn and improve their skills and knowledge, both of which can be improved through regular sales meetings.

Another area involves accountability because outside salespeople need accountability, as they are on their own most of the time, with no direct supervision most of the time. Contributing research that covers accountability would prove beneficial, especially to practitioners.

Two other areas among scholars and practitioners that can be further researched are the role that technology plays in the sales profession, and the effect of gender in certain fields where women are a minority. Two such fields in particular where women are a minority are software sales and industrial sales.

We did not find much discussion of the importance of having a consistent work schedule in neither our review of the literature nor in our interviews. In addition, the sales managers we interviewed placed very little importance on the role of a consistent work schedule with the use of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to track and measure their work habits. Such research would benefit the academic community as well as practitioners.

Finally, as our interviews with sales managers informed us, the profession of selling has changed much over the past 10 years. These changes include the adoption of

new technologies as well as the improved sales methods that have evolved over time. There is still work to be done in these two areas.

Conclusions

Sales managers have invested time, money, and human capital to train their outside salespeople in their efforts to increase their sales production. Yet achieving top sales performance is an ongoing challenge, and the cost of turnover remains high. Firms should focus some of their recruiting, hiring, and training of outside salespeople on reducing turnover, which Dubas and Hershey (2007) found to be 27 percent among salespeople.

While it is not necessary to excel in all 20 attributes, our findings show that certain attributes are more important than others. This provides a good starting point for firms. We have shown that in becoming a top outside salesperson, the group of Will attributes are more important than the group of Skill attributes.

We have helped fill several important gaps that exist in the field of outside sales. Our work in studying the attributes that lead to top outside sales performance, while combining two separate topics - the topic of *hunters* and *ambidextrous* and the topic of Skill and Will - provides a unique contribution to the field of outside sales by addressing these two topics together in one study.

As we have shown, the study of top outside salespeople is severely underserved. More research needs to take place in order to further expand this segment of sales research, for researchers and practitioners alike.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Form4

**Department of College of Business
Administration**

8001 Natural Bridge Road
St. Louis, Missouri 63121-4499
Telephone: 314-516-5888
E-mail: rottman@umsl.edu

Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

Attributes of Top Outside Salespeople

Participant: _____ HSC Approval Number _____

Principal Investigator: _____ Paul Niemann _____ P.I.'s Phone Number: (314) 637-7725

Summary of the Study

This project is for research purposes only and participation is voluntary. The purpose of this research is to examine which attributes of outside salespeople are responsible for top performance, with the measurement for top performance being a top 10 percent ranking within their sales organizations. We will achieve this by interviewing sales managers.

During this study, up to 20 sales managers will be interviewed. The interviews will be conducted and video-recorded via Zoom. They will also be transcribed. The interviews will be summarized and discussed as a whole, with the names of the participants and their employers will not be mentioned. We do not anticipate any risks or discomfort to the participants; however, there is a slight risk of loss of confidentiality.

The expected benefit of this research is that it begins to fill a major gap in the academic literature. Specifically, there are no peer-reviewed articles that we are aware of that focus on the sales performance of *outside* salespeople. We will begin to fill that gap. This research benefits the academic community as well as the practitioner community, which consists of sales managers and salespeople. There are no direct benefits to participants.

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Paul Niemann, a doctoral student at the University of Missouri-St. Louis and Dr. Joseph Rottman, Faculty Advisor and Professor of Information Systems at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. The purpose of this research is to examine which attributes of outside salespeople are most responsible for top performance.

2. Your participation will involve an interview with the Principal Investigator, Paul Niemann. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes and will be conducted remotely via Zoom. The interview will be audio and video recorded and the audio will be transcribed.
3. There is a risk of loss of confidentiality, and we are taking the following steps in order to minimize this risk:
 - Names, organizations and locations of participants will be replaced with pseudonyms.
 - Any names of salespeople mentioned in the interview will be replaced with pseudonyms.
 - The audio and video files will be stored in a password-protected cloud storage location.
 - The recordings will be destroyed as soon as they are no longer needed, which is expected to be as soon as the dissertation has been completed.
4. Your participation is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate in this research study or withdraw your consent at any time. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study.” You will not be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate, or to withdraw.
5. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication that may result from this study. In rare instances, a researcher's study must undergo an audit or program evaluation by an oversight agency (such as the Office for Human Research Protection) that would lead to disclosure of your data as well as any other information collected by the researcher.
6. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Principal Investigator, Paul Niemann, at (314) 637-7725 or the Faculty Advisor, Dr. Joseph Rottman, at (314) 368-7370. You may also ask questions or state concerns regarding your rights as a research participant to the Office of Research, at (314) 516-5899.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I have been given a copy of this consent form for my records. I hereby consent to my participation in the research described above.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

Appendix B: IRB Approval Letter

April 27, 2021

Principal Investigator: Paul Niemann (UMSL-Student)
 Department: Business DBA

Your IRB Application to project entitled Attributes of Top-Performing Outside Salespeople was reviewed and approved by the UMSL Institutional Review Board according to the terms and conditions described below:

IRB Project Number	2053764
IRB Review Number	309902
Funding Source	University of Missouri -- St. Louis
Initial Application Approval Date	April 27, 2021
IRB Expiration Date	April 27, 2022
Level of Review	Exempt
Project Status	Active - Exempt
Exempt Categories (Revised Common Rule)	45 CFR 46.104d(2)(iii) with limited IRB review
Risk Level	Minimal Risk
Approved Documents	Script for Recruitment using Email Updated Consent form 021221 Script for Recruitment using LinkedIn Script for Recruitment using the Phone Updated Interview Questions 041221

The principal investigator (PI) is responsible for all aspects and conduct of this study. The PI must comply with the following conditions of the approval:

1. Enrollment and study related procedures must remain in compliance with the University of Missouri regulations related to interaction with human participants following guidance at <http://www.umsl.edu/recd/compliance/umsl-guidance-covid19-restart-6.25.2020.pdf>.
2. No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date.
3. All changes must be IRB approved prior to implementation utilizing the Exempt Amendment Form.
4. The Annual Exempt Form must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval at least 30 days prior to the project expiration date to keep the study active or to close it.
5. Maintain all research records for a period of seven years from the project completion date.

Appendix C: Code of Ethics

Purpose

The purpose of this code of ethics is to establish a set of principles and procedures to guide the researchers to ethically achieve the goals and objectives of the research project. The code outlines the obligations of the research team members through each phase of the project, from the design of the research through the publication and communication of the findings. This code recognizes that research conducted should be meaningful and ensure that benefits outweigh any possible risks or harm.

Principles

Harm to Participants

No research undertaken will cause harm to participants, researchers, or other persons directly or indirectly involved in the research. The types of questions asked will be related to current and prior employment. Any cultural, religious, gender, or other differences in a research population will always be handled in a sensitive and appropriate manner. Relevant ethical standards of research practice will be adhered to at all times.

Certain populations are vulnerable in human subjects research, including people who cannot competently understand the information regarding a study and cannot give true consent. Such populations may include individuals with psychiatric, cognitive, or developmental disorders, and substance abusers. The topic of this research does not require engaging with vulnerable subjects and for that reason it will be avoided. Each of the researchers have committed to evaluate whether subjects may be vulnerable and whether they are competent to consent, or would need to be excused from the project.

Integrity & Confidentiality

Interviews will be conducted in a professional manner by the University of Missouri - St. Louis doctoral students listed above and under the supervision of Dr. Rottman. Deception of research participants will not occur, and researchers will be transparent with the goals of study and methods for data collection. All research results, analyses, and interpretations will first be reviewed by the researchers to ensure accuracy and avoid misunderstanding. Any conflicts of interest will be declared to the University of Missouri - St. Louis Institutional Review Board (IRB), to research participants, and in any dissemination of findings. Researchers will provide an accurate representation of all collected research data.

Procedures have been put in place to protect the confidentiality of participants. The researcher will only interview participants who he selected himself.

Informed Consent

The application for this Dissertation will be sent for approval to the IRB – Office of Research Administration at the University of Missouri – St. Louis. Participation in research is voluntary. Research participants will be free from coercion and not pressured to participate in any way and may leave the project at any time with no possibility of

penalty. In addition to the informed consent completion, participants will be verbally reminded of their consent and rights at the beginning of the interview.

The informed consent will specify the following: The purpose of the investigation; the procedures; the risks; any benefits, or absence of them, to the individual or to others in the future or to society; a statement that individuals may decline to participate and also will be free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason; the level of feedback to be offered; the time required and an invitation to ask questions. The informed consent will also provide University of Missouri - St. Louis contact details so that participants may report any possible concerns about the conduct of the study. Research participants will be given a minimum of 24 hours to review the informed consent and consult relevant parties where necessary.

Privacy and Confidentiality

The collection of personal information will be limited to what is deemed necessary to complete the related research. Researchers are committed to maintaining the security of Personal Identifiable Information (PII) and any other sensitive information. This includes the use of pseudonyms, appropriate physical security of records, and security safeguards for computer and network systems. Researchers have the responsibility to protect against unauthorized access and disclosure of PII. This responsibility includes ensuring that access or disclosure is only made to or by authorized individuals and reasonable measures are taken to prevent any unauthorized access, disclosure, loss, or theft of information. All information obtained in the course of research will be considered privileged information and should under no circumstances be publicly disclosed in a fashion that would identify any individual or organization except when required by law or with the express consent of the research participant.

Privacy and Confidentiality will be assured by storing redacted interview data on a secured Google Drive, with access limited to the Research members listed on Page 1.

- Password protection will be placed on individual documents used to ensure digital data is secured.
- Researchers will redact any PII (i.e. names, addresses, corporations, etc.) from the transcript as soon as it is received.
- Informed consent will be handled with care and stored in a secure physical location on the University of Missouri - St. Louis campus.

Communication with Participants

Potential research participants will receive clearly communicated information from the researchers in advance. Research will be explained in easy-to-understand language.

Risk Mitigation

IRB-approved research will be conducted by the four University of Missouri - St. Louis doctoral students mentioned above, under the direction of Dr. Joseph Rottman. All researchers listed on Page 1 have completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI (<https://about.citiprogram.org/en/homepage>) certifications pertaining to:

- Social and Behavioral Research
- Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research.

Dissemination of Research Findings

Researchers have a duty to disseminate their research findings. Research participants will be offered access to a summary of the research findings. Any reports to the public will protect the confidentiality of participants, will be clear and understandable, and will accurately reflect the outcome of the study.

Appendix D: Interview Request Script

Hi ____:

It's been a while since we last saw each other, and the reason for calling you is to ask for a small favor. Is this a good time to chat ..for a few minutes? _____. I am a Doctoral Candidate in the College of Business at the University of Missouri-St. Louis and would like to ask you to participate in research for my dissertation. My dissertation is titled, "*Which Attributes Separate Top-Performing Outside Salespeople from the Rest?*" It is a topic for which, based on your successful career in both sales and sales management, you would be an excellent source of information.

You would be one of up to 20 sales managers that I would interview, and this research will help expand the body of sales knowledge that currently exists. Your participation will only take approximately one hour, and it could be done either during the day or during an evening on a date that is convenient for you. Is that OK?

Good. Thanks, I appreciate it very much. Which works better for you: day or evening? _____. As for an exact date, I am scheduling the interviews to be on your choice of Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday. _____. OK, (day) it is. We can wrap this up by going over a few of the details, OK?

I will audio- and video-record our interview so that I can accurately transcribe it. Your name, company name, and city name will be redacted. The recording will only be reviewed by members of the research team: myself (Paul Niemann, as I am the Principal Investigator and Doctoral Candidate), and Dr. Joseph Rottman, Co-Principal Investigator and Professor of Information Systems Technology here at the university. Your participation is voluntary, and the interview recording will be stored in a password-protected cloud storage location, and then destroyed upon completion of the study. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed.

Do you have any questions about the study in advance? _____ You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Joseph Rottman, at (314) 368-7370 or by email at rottman@umsl.edu, and I'm going to put all this in an email to send you when we hang up.

There's one more thing: When we hang up, could you please send me either an email or a text, or regular mail so I can keep track of which sales managers are participating. I will then send you the interview questions in advance, so you would be able to think about your answers prior to the interview. Could I get your email address, please?

_____.

Thanks (name of participant). I look forward to talking with you during our interview.

Best Regards,
Paul Niemann, Doctoral Candidate
University of Missouri-St. Louis
8001 Natural Bridge Road
St. Louis, MO 63121
Mobile: (314) 637-7725
pdn89b@umsystem.edu

Appendix E: Interview Protocol and Questions

Introduction / Opening Statement – 3 minutes
Background Information / Their Role as Sales Manager – 10 minutes
Pre-Interview Questions – 5 minutes
Description of the Sales Teams – 10 minutes
Main Questions – 15 minutes
Summary Question – 2 minutes
Wrap-up – 1 minute
Demographic Questions – 1 minute

Introduction / Opening Statement – 3 minutes

First, thank you very much for taking the time to meet with me today. I am working toward a Doctorate in Business Administration at the University of Missouri – St Louis.

The goal of this research project is to identify which attributes make for a top outside salesperson, which we define as one who ranks in the Top 10 percent of your company's salesforce. I would like to know your perspective.

Before we start, I want to remind you that our conversation is for research purposes only. Your individual responses will not be shared with anyone in your company, nor will your name or the company's name be shared in any publications resulting from this study.

Our research is directed by Dr. Joseph Rottman. Dr. Rottman and I will have access to individual responses, which will have personal information redacted. Because I'm interested in gaining an accurate and comprehensive understanding of this topic, I want you to feel as comfortable as possible in sharing the richness of your experiences through details and examples. Where relevant, direct quotes (excluding identifying information such as names, locations, etc.) may be used to support assertions made in the paper. If there is anything you'd like to share but are hesitant because of confidentiality, just let me know, and I'll stop the recording so we can decide if it can be rephrased to be included in the data. If we can't get to a phrasing that you feel comfortable with, it will not be included or recorded.

And just so you are aware, the audio recording will be sent to a professional transcription company. You can opt-out of any interview questions asked and conclude the interview at any time, without any penalty. Do you have any questions for me pertaining to this interview before we begin recording?

****Turn on recorder****

Background Information / Their Role as Sales Manager – 10 minutes

First, I would like to get to know you and your background.

1. How many years have you been the sales manager here? How many total years have you been a sales manager?
2. What was your path to becoming the sales manager here? Did you get promoted from a sales position here, or did you come from a different company?
3. How many salespeople do you currently lead / manage?
4. In total, how many salespeople have you led / managed in your career?
5. What other sales or sales management positions have you held?

Thank you – that gives me some helpful background information. So, we're here to talk about sales performance and explore what causes a salesperson to become a top performer.

Interview Questions – 5 minutes

1. In your opinion, which attributes make for a top outside salesperson?
2. From the list that I emailed you, please select and rank in order these 20 important attributes that determine salesperson success, in order from 1 to 20, with 1 being the highest. Our research has shown these attributes to be common in top salespeople.

<input type="checkbox"/> Laser focus on what's important	<input type="checkbox"/> Sales aptitude or ability
<input type="checkbox"/> Good work ethic	<input type="checkbox"/> Paying the price of success
<input type="checkbox"/> Focus is on relationships	<input type="checkbox"/> Motivation
<input type="checkbox"/> Confidence	<input type="checkbox"/> Optimism
<input type="checkbox"/> Assertiveness	<input type="checkbox"/> Achievement-oriented personality
<input type="checkbox"/> Focus on continuous improvement	<input type="checkbox"/> Problem-solving attitude
<input type="checkbox"/> Character	<input type="checkbox"/> Sales knowledge
<input type="checkbox"/> Creativity	<input type="checkbox"/> Coachability
<input type="checkbox"/> Empathy	<input type="checkbox"/> Integrity
<input type="checkbox"/> Perseverance	<input type="checkbox"/> Being a lifelong learner

Description of the Sales Teams – 10 minutes

Now let's talk a little about your sales team, i.e., the number of salespeople, how long they have been in outside sales, both at your company and in total, and so on.

1. Without mentioning anyone by name, tell me a little about each of your top performers.
 - a. What causes them to be so good?
 - b. Of the top performers, how many are in sales for the first time? (For example, three out of seven are in their first sales role.)
2. Without mentioning them by name, tell me a little about each of your bottom performers.
 - a. What do you think is holding them back?
 - b. Of the bottom half, how many are in sales for the first time? (For example, three out of seven have no prior sales experience, etc.)

Main Questions – 15 minutes

1. Why is (_____) your most important of the 20 attributes?
2. In general, are top salespeople born or made?
3. Can their skills / results be duplicated among other salespeople? Why do you say that?
4. What do you think is more important to becoming a top salesperson: skill or will? Why do you choose skill over will (or vice versa)? How would you allocate will and skill? Give percentages adding up to 100%.
5. If you could change just ONE thing about any of your salespeople (such as your top salespeople, your bottom salespeople, or anyone in between), what would it be? Why?
6. How much as the use of Zoom/technology affected your sales team or their sales results?
7. How has the sales profession changed in the last 10 years?

8. Does your company use any of the personality profile tools to understand its customers/salespeople better?
9. Do you hold weekly sales meetings?
10. How are salespeople compensated at your company: Straight commission; Straight salary; or Combination of salary, commission & bonus?
11. How important is it for top salespeople to have a regular schedule that they can stick to?
12. Male or female as top salespeople -- does it matter?

Summary Question – 2 minutes

1. Last Question: Is there anything you can think of to add, clarify, or modify to your original responses based on our conversation?

Wrap-up – 1 minute

Thank you very much for your time today. Like I mentioned earlier, your participation greatly helps me complete my dissertation. If I need to ask you any additional questions for follow-up or to clarify anything, would it be OK if reached back out to you?

Demographic Questions – 1 minute

As you may be aware, researchers typically ask a few demographic questions at the end of an interview. These are standard practices that we use to describe our sample.

1. How many years have you been a sales manager? Please check one.
 Less than 1 year
 1 - 3 years
 3 - 5 years
 More than 5 years
2. What is your highest level of education? _____
If a college degree, is your degree in Business, or something else?

3. What is your age?
20 - 29 _____
30 - 39 _____
40 - 49 _____
50 - 59 _____
60 and over _____

4. What is your gender?
Female _____
Male _____

5. Other _____

Thank you very much for participating in our interview

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