



# EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, CAN IT BE TAUGHT? A LOOK AT SUCCESSFUL SALES CANDIDATES AND THEIR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

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## ABSTRACT

This paper helps to better explore emotional intelligence, training and sales. Sales is an important part of the entire marketing process. Much of the success of the sales person is tied into personality and ability to relate to others. Emotional intelligence plays a major role in these interpersonal relationships. The goal of the paper is to explore personality traits and training experiences amongst sales professionals. The objective of this study is to look into successful sales people to see how much of their success they attribute to training vs. personality traits. Ultimately to add to field of sales and marketing. Understanding the value of training verses natural personality is important in the selection process of a sales candidate. Furthermore, it is important in designing a training program for sale representatives. An emotional intelligence survey was given to 61 anonymous professionals who feel that they have excelled at sales, so that the researchers could understand the correlation between sales, training and personality better. The survey was administered electronically via social media and consisted of ten questions. These questions pertained to not just personality traits but also focused on training and their need for more or less sales training. The survey also focused on what they attribute to their successful sales careers. Some of the key findings in this paper are that most of the respondents did feel that their personality was the biggest influence in their success sales career. Furthermore the majority of the respondents identify with the adjective social over assertive, intelligent or patient. This shows that there are common personality themes of the successful sales professionals. This study helps to best explain why having candidates of high emotional intellect and similar personality traits can help to develop the best sales team. While training cannot typically produce these personality traits, training should not be overlooked as it can help with sales technique.

**Key words:** Emotional Intelligence, Training, Marketing, Sales

## INTRODUCTION

Marketing and sales are not the same thing; the job of a marketing professional is to inform and educate people on products or services. It often involves doing research as to how to best promote a product or service to the area. Marketing researchers spend countless hours working with both quantitative and qualitative research to recommend the best areas or regions to introduce products to, how to adapt the product to maximize its desire and how to promote it



to the population. Sales is personal, it is about building relationships and meeting the needs of the clients with the best product or service available. Sales does not look at a macro area but whatever the needs of the group or individual the sales representative is working with at the time. Because sales is based on relationships Sales Representatives must have certain qualities to be successful. These qualities or skill sets include but are not limited to: trustworthiness, extroverted, good written and verbal communication, personable, social adept, empathetic, self-aware, balanced and work well under pressure.

Being successful in the field of sales takes more than just knowledge but the ability to build relationships. There are traits often time's people will recognize at an early age and identify people as a "born salesman" these are early indicators of a high Emotional Intelligence. Emotional Intelligence is defined by Meyer et al (2002) as, "the capacity to reason about emotions and of emotions to enhance thinking" But what does that really mean? According *Psychology Today*: 410

1. The ability to accurately identify your own emotions, as well as those of others
2. The ability to utilize emotions and apply them to tasks, like thinking and problem-solving
3. The ability to manage emotions, including controlling your own, as well as the ability to cheer up or calm down another person (*Psychology Today*, 2011).

Emotional Intelligence is often referred to as EQ or EI has five aspects according to Gines (2015), "self-awareness, self-regulation/monitoring, empathy, motivation and social skills" (pg.2). The question of if individuals are born with these traits or if they learn them throughout life is an ongoing debate (very similar to ones you hear regarding leadership) and as is true in that situation the answer is both. Some people are born with personality traits that give them a higher level of EI other learn the soft skills through life, classes, and practice and some never achieve a high level of EI.

Working in a sales field a high level of interaction is required; often times sales representatives have to do cold calls (this is when they approach individuals or businesses without being invited to offer products or services). This is often met with a high level of rejection and requires the individual to have confidence, great interpersonal communication (to build rapport easily and quickly) and be able to take rejection without being discouraged. This is often one of the most difficult aspects of a sales person's job as many people are uncomfortable with the idea of being rejected. There are many training programs to help people develop some sales techniques such as how to approach people, close the deal, have the best attitude and in sales you must be able to adapt and be flexible.

Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer coined the term 'Emotional Intelligence' in 1990 describing it as "a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and action".

"The Six Seconds Model is focused on action — within the three action steps, or "pursuits," are eight learnable competencies" (Freedman, 2002). The concept is that with training one can learn how to increase their emotional intelligence. In the field of sales this would be a great advantage. In 2014 Goldstein published a study to determine if emotional intelligence is linked to retention and could be used as a tool for recruitment in the accounting field; the results



suggested that using EQ in the recruitment process could increase retention in that area (Goldstein, 2014). Sales however is a field that is often based off incentives such as commission which changes the foundation of the idea. People who are driven by success may succeed in sales even with a low EQ. Working in the field and knowing what is needed and required of them may also change their level of EQ.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Giorgi (2013) and Ang and Van Dyne (2008) suggest that a combination of cognitive and non-cognitive manifestations of socio-cultural intelligence provides organizational emotional intelligence as a competitive edge; in this competitive era where professionals "must skillfully interact with or manage others with diverse perspectives and cultural backgrounds" (P. 302). Goleman (1998) highlights the importance of self-efficacy which means that "skill alone is not enough to guarantee our best performance- we have to believe in our skills in order to use them at their best"(p. 70). An individual's success comprises multiple forms of social nonacademic intelligences with the common intelligent quotient (IQ) measurements (Naresh, Raduan & Subramaniam, 2008; Emmerling & Goleman, 2003).

The very first instrument to measure social intelligent behavior, was published by Edgar Doll (1935) and it was designed for young children. While the first studies comparing the relation between EI and IQ were designed focusing on the comparison between emotional intelligence and academic performance (Cote & Miners, 2006; Petrides, Frederickson, & Furnham, 2004). These studies found a positive relation between EI and the academic achievements of the participants, but was difficult to apply to workforce performance analysis (Landy, 2005; Matthews, Zeidner & Roberts, 2004; 2002; Emmerling & Goleman, 2003). Goleman (2006) considers that at business level, only those who seek out performance feedback and set goals get better results, increased sales and increased the number of employees; where EI represents an important measurement tool.

Joseph and Newman (2010) identified a better correlation between EI and performance prediction, but only in specific jobs requiring high levels of emotional involvement and permanent positive attitude (Emmerling & Goleman, 2003) and depending on the context (Newman, Joseph & MacCann, 2010). Other studies have found similarities and differences between EI models, but difficulties validating the measurement instruments selected for each specific job performance and professional attitude and correspondence (Relojo, Pilao, & Dela Rosa, 2015; Ahmetoglu, Leutner, & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2011; Conte, 2005; Landy, 2005; Emmerling & Goleman, 2003). Meanwhile, a negative relation was found when teamwork was the main focus at work, or the study was directed to lower level management (Farh, Seo & Tesluk, 2012).

## **RESEARCH METHODS USED**

The researchers in this study used both primary and secondary research to best explain the relationship between personality and sales. The literature review was collected from numerous journals on the subject matters of emotional intelligence, training and sales. In addition to secondary research, primary research was conducted using a ten question survey administered



electronically. This survey collected information from individual who have had successful sales careers. It examines the training they received, personality traits and what they deem to be the success of their sales career.

## **FINDINGS**

To best understand how much sales is influenced by training vs. personality the researchers conducted an online survey via SurveyMonkey.com. Using social media platforms and requesting that only people who have had successful sales careers take the survey, they asked 10 questions on the individual's sales experience. There is a total of 61 respondents. The first two questions are to help get a better understanding of the respondent's demographics and years working in sales. The first question asked the respondent's age and the second question asks the respondents years work in sales.

Of the 61 people who responded to the survey, 39.3% of the surveyed were between the ages of 30 and 39, followed by 27.8% being between the ages of 40-49. Given the choices of less than 5 years, 5-10 years and 10 years plus, the 45.9% of the respondents had 10 years plus.

The third question of the survey dives into what adjectives the sale professional feels would best describe them, given the following choices: assertive, intelligent, social, and patient. 45% of the respondents chose social as their best describing adjective while 8% chose patient. Assertive and intelligent came in low as well at 22.9% and 24.5% respectively.

Question four and five relate to the respondents training in sales. Question four asks how much sales training they have had. Given the choices: A great deal of training, A moderate amount of training, A little training and no training at all, 52% reported receiving a moderate amount of training. Question 5 delves further into the training the received asking "How effective is the training you received from your supervisor, in relation to your success in sales". Given the choices extremely effective, very effective, moderately effective, slightly effective, and not effective at all, the highest percentage of respondents, 31.67%, responded that it was very effective. The next highest respondent category at 28.33% was moderately effective.

Question 6 asks "How much of your success in sales do you attribute to your personality vs training?" 58% of the respondents agreed that their success is mostly based off their personality, but training has helped.

Question 7 asks "Do you feel you could benefit from more training". 51% selected "absolutely, the more training the better" followed by 43% who responded "Sure, some would help but most of what I learn is on the job."

Question 8 asks: Using any number from 0 to 10, where 0 is no personal attributes and 10 is completely based off personal attributes how much of a successful sales career is based on personality. The weighted average answer to this question is 8.48. Research indicates that "up to 80 percent of a top performer's success is attributed to high emotional intelligence, while only 20 percent is attributed to high IQ" (Gines, 2015, p.4).

Question 9 and 10 ask open ended questions Have you noticed any personality changes since you have evolved in your sales career , if so how? And please share any additional thoughts on salespeople or this study with the researchers here. Some consistent patterns



noticed on this question include people noting that they feel personality can give a sales person a huge advantage, but companies also undervalue good training.

## DISCUSSION

A few conclusions can be drawn and noted from the 61 respondents. First it is clear from the first two questions that the responding sample has a good bit of sales experience and are qualified to take the survey. Focusing on the personality questions a weighted average of 8.48 from the respondents on a scale from 0-10 shows that they feel that much of their success has come from their personality. If we changed the weight into percentage that would be 84.8% of their success is based on their personality. Furthermore the major of the respondents identify with the adjective social over assertive, intelligent and patient. This again shows a common theme in personality. The training questions reveal that the majority of the respondents did receive a moderate amount of training and most found it to be very effective. However, most believed that they could benefit from more training.

## CONCLUSION

What does this all mean for hiring successful sales people? It is clear from this survey and research that there is a certain level of emotion intelligence and personality traits that contribute to a successful sales person. With this said, this does not mean that training is not necessary. Using personality assessments and looking at prior sales record is a great start to hiring a successful candidate. But, if more firms are willing to look into better training programs in addition to the personality traits it would be a winning combination.

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