

7 Qualities Only the Best Sales Reps Possess



Have you ever asked yourself what the top-performing reps on your team have in common? Their individual selling styles may vary, but it's no coincidence that their names are always at the top of the leaderboard.

To achieve similar results, you'll need to know what sets them apart. Check out the seven traits of salespeople who consistently outperform their peers.

1) They Keep a Level Head

You'll rarely see a top-performing rep speak too quickly or lose their cool. Staying composed is an automatic credibility booster. Plus, it helps salespeople avoid saying things they'll later regret.

Maybe your prospect asks for a customer reference or trial extension. Immediately answering -- rather than pausing for a beat -- makes you more likely to say, "Sure, we can do that!" instead of,

“Can you walk me through how that’ll help your decision-making process?”

Being even-keeled is crucial during negotiations as well, since getting flustered makes it hard to think strategically. Also, buyers may get more aggressive when they notice your composure slipping away.

2) They Don’t Get Self-Conscious

Do you have a hard time remembering the last time you got embarrassed? That’s a good sign.

A study of more than 1,000 successful salespeople found that fewer than 5% were self-conscious.

“The byproduct of a high level of self-consciousness is bashfulness and inhibition,” explains Steve W. Martin, author of the study and sales strategy professor at the University of Southern California Marshall School of Business.

Not being self-conscious means you’re not afraid to take risks and persistently pursue deals. It also means you’re more likely to bounce back from rejection or failure, since you’ll see these experiences as opportunities to learn and improve rather than signs you’re not cut out for selling. This resiliency will help you overcome the inevitable hard times.

Finally, self-assurance comes into play when you’re using the Challenger Sales methodology.

Pushing back on the prospect and focusing on the end goal rather than being liked takes a lot of confidence.

3) They're Deliberate with Their Time

For reps, time and energy are precious resources. That's why the most effective salespeople treat every task like an investment: *If I put X in, will I get at least Y in return?*

This test helps them distinguish between high-reward activities and low-reward ones. For example, a rep isn't going to spend time working with a prospect who's a bad fit -- it's a waste of time for both of them.

However, she'll definitely spend some time researching a prospect who fits her buyer persona to a tee, since this activity is much likelier to pay off in the long run.

Top reps also save time by automating repetitive tasks. After all, every hour they spend logging calls, copying and pasting emails, and scheduling follow-ups is an hour they could've spent selling.

The average salesperson spends just two hours per day on revenue-generating activities. Meanwhile, the highest performers spend six hours per day on these tasks.

4) They Understand the Entire Industry

Good reps are well-versed in their product, including its features, functions, and applications. Great reps take their knowledge one step further: They understand every aspect of their prospects' businesses, from the industry down to their daily responsibilities.

Having industry expertise makes salespeople much more valuable. They don't just teach their buyers about the product -- they can provide help and guidance with many aspects of the business.

Right now, being an expert in your space is a competitive advantage. But as Harvard Business School professor and former HubSpot CRO Mark Roberge points out, in the future it'll be necessary for survival.

Thanks to the internet, most people aren't reliant on salespeople for basic information. Your prospects must *want* to work with you -- which means providing unique value as a consultant is crucial.

5) They're Always Learning

If you're meeting quota, it's tempting to think your training days are over. But in fact, the best salespeople are the *most* focused on learning new things.

After all, you can't achieve meaningful career growth without honing your skills or acquiring new knowledge and techniques. And learning literally pays off: Employees produce 50% higher net sales when they work at companies with continuous sales training.

Plus, sales itself is evolving. Strategies that worked 10 years ago probably won't be effective today -- and strategies that worked 20 years ago will totally flop. You can't call people out of thin air and nurture prospects by taking them golfing: Only 1% of cold calls actually result in meetings, and prospects are now looking for unique insights into their business strategy rather than a couple free rounds.

If you don't change your pace to match the beat of the modern buyer's drum, you won't be able to work with them.

6) They Look On the Dark Side

Ask almost any salesperson if they're an optimist or a pessimist, and they'll say the former.

However, seeing the glass as half empty is actually a good thing: According to Martin's research, two-thirds of top-performing reps actually have pessimistic personalities.

"Inward pessimism drives a salesperson to question the viability of the deal and credibility of the buyer," Martin writes.

Since they're more skeptical, pessimistic reps will ask buyers tougher qualifying questions and seek out the true decision makers within an organization.

Not naturally pessimistic? Gabriele Oettingen, a professor of psychology at New York University who's spent 20 years studying how people think about the future, has developed a technique called W.O.O.P.:

- W: Think about your **wish**.
- O: Think about your ideal **outcome**.
- O: Think about the **obstacles** in your way.
- P: **Plan** for those obstacles.

By preparing for potential impediments, you can harness the benefits of negative thinking while maintaining your natural optimism.

7) They're Persistent Yet Respectful

Nearly half of reps will abandon a prospect after one follow-up. Yet 80% of sales require five follow-ups.

That's why successful reps are usually persistent. Because they give up less easily than their peers, they win far more deals.

Unfortunately, some people take persistence to mean extreme aggressiveness. If you're calling and emailing prospects so frequently that even seeing your name gives them angry hives, you're definitely going overboard. Remember that following up only works if it leads to a relationship -- and no one wants to work with a stalker. Top reps know the difference between following up with prospects and chasing them down.

For instance, calling or emailing "just to check in" is pushy. Asking if they're still interested in achieving a specific goal and then providing a relevant suggestion, on the other hand, is persistent.

Offering a product demo while they're still in the education stage? Too much, too soon. Delving into their problems and helping them identify a possible solution will earn you their trust, so that down the line when you bring up the demo they'll actually say yes.

Now that you know what it takes to be the best, figure out which traits you already possess and where you could improve. With hard work and focus, you can become one of -- if not *the* -- best rep on your team.