



IMPLEMENTING SUCCESSFUL METHODS

STRESS MANAGEMENT IN SALES

A Mercuri International White Paper

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Why stressed salespeople sell less

and don't even feel that they are stressed.

The pressure to sell is always high. Market share, earnings or even careers are at stake. This can often lead to negative stress. But, contrary to the myth that a good sales person is a good actor, the effects cannot be hidden. The inevitable result is that sales calls, meetings and ratios are not at their best.

A normal working day in sales: It should be a calm breakfast before a busy day but the Smartphone is showing a "red flag" in the forecast along with 40 new mails. His thoughts turn on the trip to the customers: "will I hit target?... Holiday plans have to be postponed, need to accelerate... 200 Mails still to be read... And tomorrow, I have to prepare the quarterly report for my boss... Traffic jam on the road? – oh no, I'll be late..." The subsequent appointment with the customer is not as good as expected. To save time lunch will be from a Fast Food Drive Through. "Tonight, I'll run a few miles, that will help", he thinks. The run in the evening refreshes him but even so he lies awake at night. His thoughts are fixed on the upcoming appointment with the boss. The next morning he does feel really fit. Soon there will be the weekend to work on the mails ...

Stress reduces performance in sales

Stress is often stigmatized as a sign of weakness in the performance driven world of sales. Further, there is the wrong belief that stress only exists where there are visible symptoms like insomnia and exhaustion. But stress happens hundreds of times a day, long before the symptoms become noticeable.

Every time a salesman even thinks or talks about a nuisance, a problem or anything negative, the stress mechanism is activated. And these situations are happening all the time: price negotiations, presentations, "difficult" clients, demanding customers, failures, lack of coordination between internal departments or a stressful working environment. But also the traffic jam on the motorway; or a train or plane delay can cause stress.

Even one negative thought causes stress. Salesmen may have negative stress a few hundred times a day.

Stress affects a salesman long before a critical limit has been exceeded and symptoms occur. Each athlete knows that with any negative thought their efficiency and performance will be reduced. It is all the more

www.mercuri.net

For more information contact: Thomas Trilling

Tel: +49 2132 93 06 0 or thomas.trilling@mercuri.de



STRESS MANAGEMENT IN SALES. **CONT.**

surprising that many sales professionals so easily get trapped by problems so easily, reducing their own confidence, conviction and performance. Because we can't hide all the changes in our choice of words, intonation, gestures etc. stress directly affects the result of a sales conversation with a customer.

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Did you know that 80% of all diseases are triggered or caused by stress? That 60% of all visits to the doctor are the result of stress? You think that you take part in sports regularly and that stress cannot harm you? Exercise or relaxation does not affect the evaluation of a nuisance in the future – the salesman will be angry again about the same topics. The consequence is that stress in sales reduces the ability to convince and to perform. And every suboptimal sales visit, day off, doctor visit or replacement costs a lot of money.

And studies show that many managers are not good role models: they accept their own stress damage and demand the same from their staff (e.g. Haufe, 2011).

Less stress leads to better results

Higher gross margin through better sales pitches: Even in high pressure situations, sustaining charisma and the power of persuasion means that language will be more customer- and solution oriented. The value of the offer can then be presented calmly. Price challenges are reduced and the negotiation position is strengthened.

Better success rates in the sales process:

The sales process is shortened, because the seller faces less buying resistance. Fewer appointments are required to close the deal. Calm and confident

communication lead to an improved information base and better networking in the buying centre.

More effective use of the working time:

Negative talk about customers, colleagues or supervisors and over-focussing on problems is reduced to a minimum. In an a typical sales team, several hundred hours of working time a month can be used for goal-oriented work instead. Fewer problems will be taken home and work-life balance will improve.

Combining a high-performance sales culture with stress management

The culture that characterizes a sales organisation is usually built up over several years and is based on shared values, ways of thinking and standards of conduct of the whole sales team. It is strongly influenced by existing sales management and leadership systems.

To integrate effective stress management into the sales culture and to improve performance, Team members need to feel valued at all times, have a sense of security as well as a certain freedom in decision making. This makes a real difference. For example, in high performing teams the amount of positive communication is three times greater than in average performing teams (Fredrickson/ Losada 2005)

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However, research shows that the reality of corporate culture is far from the ideal that the companies would like it to be. Middle managers in particular, who really are *in* the day-to-day-business and closest to the employees, often have a significantly more negative view of the corporate culture than top managers do. (Kienbaum, 2011)

STRESS MANAGEMENT IN SALES. *CONT.***Executives design the sales culture**

The sales culture is strongly influenced by the way executives behave. If a Sales Director writes emails to employees at 11 p.m. he or she implies that they should be read and answered at that time too. The unwritten law might become "If you want your sales career to progress in this business, then make sure you're available 24/7"; and the "don't come to me with problems, only with solutions" is not always the best corporate culture! Sales leaders need to evaluate the effects this all has on health, communication, relationships and sales.

The good news is that solution oriented thinking that reduces stress can be implemented, even in high-pressure sales situations. The key to minimizing stress levels lies in the design of the change process. Examples of this are the introduction of a new remuneration system and the process of acquiring new customers. A salesman, who was used to talking with technicians about products features and who now has to talk about added values on a management level, needs proper support in the learning process. Otherwise he will suffer from stress in many ways.

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The components of the sales culture that are perceived as stressful depends on the corporate environment and the people working in the company. The starting point is to identify and analyse all the elements that stress levels. This will allow you to implement purposefully and continually. All the different activities need to be integrated at level of the individual, the sales team and the overall design of the sales management system. If this done successfully then motivation, the working atmosphere, customer relationships and the sales result itself can improve significantly and sustainably.

**Thomas Trilling**

Senior Sales Consultant
Head of Mental Sales Performance
Mercuri International Deutschland GmbH
<http://de.mercuri.net/content/mental-sales-performance>