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Criteria of Successful Career in Sales: Sales Managers Perspective

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Abstract

The goal of this paper is to determine which criteria for sales managers the most important when are choosing a candidate for the position of salesperson. That will allow students who want to build their career in sales to prepare beforehand for what will be required of them, thereby helping companies in the future hire salespersons who will be better prepared for the challenges which this profession brings. The research was conducted through a questionnaire distributed to sales managers at companies in the Republic of Macedonia. Each one of them assesses the importance of certain criteria related to formal and informal education, knowledge of foreign languages, skills, personal characteristics, etc., by using a given scale. The obtained results are presented and analyzed.

Keywords: sale, sales managers, salesperson, students, research, learning, knowledge

JEL classification: C83, M21

Introduction

Everything starts from sales; nothing happens until a sale happens. Moreover, the sale itself does not merely represent a final transaction for selling products or services, but it also stands for negotiation, finding the best employees, transmitting the idea for the business, keeping up a good atmosphere in the company, building strategic alliances, opening new businesses, establishing good relations with the suppliers and the rest of the stakeholders, etc., i.e. a sale is every communication of any type that we utilize to achieve our goals. Consequently, it requires daily investing in oneself (in one's complete personal development) and as such represents one of the most complex profiles, especially because of the fact that human nature is immeasurable and there is no formula for successful communication in different situations.

The most important thing in sales is the opportunity for its application in every situation and transfer of knowledge in three forms. Firstly, transfer of knowledge acquired in sales from one's professional to their private life, with the goal of improving the relations with every person we come into contact with, and vice versa, what has happened in our private life, we can put into use in business. Secondly, transfer of knowledge in different businesses and different industries, with a change in one's life commitments, or as an opportunity to enter various businesses and intersect the knowledge. Thirdly, transfer of knowledge in other countries because regardless of the regulations that exist in that country, the rules for sales are universal.

In the framework of this work, we have posed two research questions: 1) What are the largest advantages and disadvantages that brings building a career in sales? 2)

What criteria are most important to sales managers for the choice of candidate for the position of salesperson?

Choi et al. (2015) investigate the influence of the characteristics of salesperson on behaviour of a buyer in the relationship buyer-supplier. 155 sales professionals of manufactures in Japan provide the data, and in order to analyze the data it was used structural equation modelling approach. Loveland, Lounsbury et al. (2015) examine the relationship between personality traits and job satisfaction and career satisfaction in the case of salespeople. The sample was comprised of 299 salespeople and the latent profile analysis (LPA) was used to assess this sample along the following personality dimensions: emotional stability, extraversion, work drive, teamwork orientation, customer service orientation, optimism and job satisfaction and career satisfaction. Job satisfaction and career satisfaction were used as dependent variables. Yakasai and Jan (2015) investigate the impact of Big Five Factor of personality traits on the performance of salespeople. The five personality dimensions are: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness.

In the existing literature, we didn't found a reference in which were included our research questions which means that our research is original.

Methodology

In order to get an answer to the posed research questions, a questionnaire, which consisted of a total of 35 questions, was prepared. The target group being the sales managers employed in institutions in different industries.

Aside from the questions regarding sex, age, level of education, and where the sales managers had acquired their highest level of education, we wanted to gain information as well about the industry of the institution they work at, the number of employees in the institution, and the number of employees in the sales sector. Additionally, we wanted to observe how many years the new salespersons need to reach the point of being sales experts who could train the upcoming salespersons. Moreover, we wanted from every sales manager to identify the three largest advantages and disadvantages that building one's career has in sales. In order for students who would like to build their career in the field of sales to be better prepared for their first job position as salespersons, the last question contained 22 criteria (formal education, attended trainings in the required field of expertise, attended trainings out of the required field of expertise, previous working experience related to sale, candidate's motivation, knowledge of English, knowledge of a foreign language other than English, organizational skills, communication skills, negotiation skills, computer skills, time management, leadership, teamwork, integrity, problem management, vision for oneself, change management, self-discipline, looks, coming from an entrepreneurial family, coming from a family that was involved in sale) that the sales managers had to grade according to the importance they placed in regards to the choice of candidates for the position of salesperson. To grade the importance of every criterion, a scale from 1 to 5 is given, where 1 stands for the least important, while 5 stands for the most important. In addition, the sales managers are given the opportunity to expand and grade the criterion/criteria that according to them is also important, but has not been mentioned. The questionnaire was sent to 100 sales managers by email in March 2016, and they were given a period of one week to fill it in and send it back to the authors of this work.

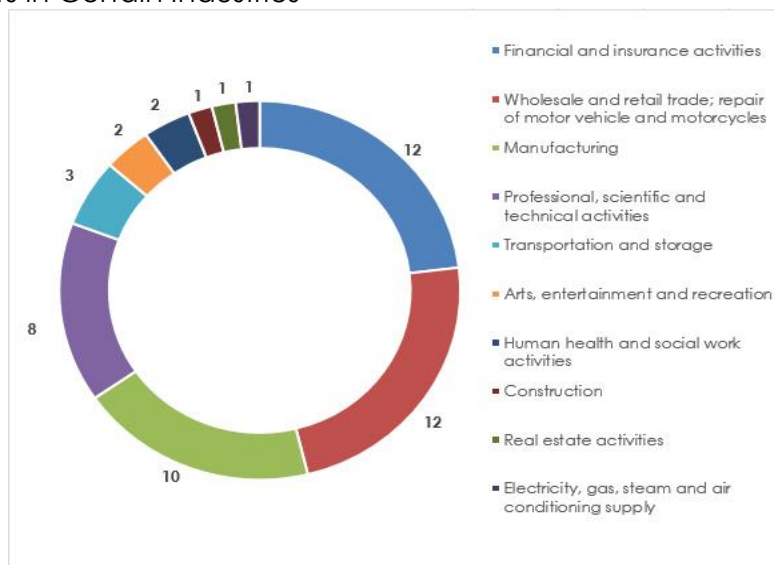
Results

The questionnaire was fully filled in by 52 sales managers, and what follows are the analyzed results from the given questions.

Out of 52 participants, 27 are male, and 25 are female. According to age, the youngest participant is 25 years old, and the oldest is 57 years. Regarding their level of education, the largest number of the participants have acquired higher education (35), 10 of them have MA degrees, 6 have vocational education, and 1 is a PhD.

According to the National Classification of Activities – NCA Rev.2 (2013) (Financial and insurance activities; wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; manufacturing; professional, scientific and technical activities; transportation and storage; arts, entertainment and recreation; human health and social work activities; construction; real estate activities; electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply), 12 participants are sales managers in institutions that function in the following industries: financial and insurance activities, wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; 10 of them are sales managers in institutions in the framework of the manufacturing industry; etc., and there is 1 participant each as a sales manager in the industries of construction, real estate activities, and electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Sales Managers in Certain Industries



Source: Author's illustration

According to the number of employees in the institutions, it is confirmed that 13 corporations are micro, 15 are small, and an equal number of corporations are middle and large (12 of them). The average number of employees in the sales sector is 40. 24 sales managers think that the new salespersons will need up to three years to become sales experts who could train the future salespersons, 18 of them think that they will need between three to five years, while 10 of them think that five to ten years are necessary.

Building one's career in sales has 21 advantages (Table 1) and 13 disadvantages (Table 2). According to the highest number of employees (26), the biggest advantage in building one's career in sales is building a large number of contacts. 24 participants stated developing communication skills as an advantage, 9 participants stated avoiding the everyday office monotony and time management, while 4

participants stated: self-discipline, opportunity for advancement, being principled, reputation, implementation of the knowledge from sales into other areas of the company, rewards for achieved success, lifestyle change and change of way of thinking.

Table 1

Advantages that Building One's Career has in Sales

Number	Advantage	How many times the advantage is mentioned by the participants
1	building a large number of contacts	26
2	developing communication skills	24
3	avoiding the everyday office monotony	9
4	time management	9
5	improving one's personal financial state	8
6	developing negotiation skills	8
7	teamwork	7
8	developing organizational skills	6
9	building knowledge	6
10	developing sales skills	6
11	independence	5
12	solving problems	5
13	self and professional promotion	5
14	self-discipline	4
15	opportunity for advancement	4
16	being principled	4
17	reputation	4
18	implementation of the knowledge from sales into other areas of the company	4
19	rewards for achieved success	4
20	lifestyle change	4
21	change of way of thinking	4

Source: Author's calculations

According to the highest number of participants (24), the largest disadvantage that building one's career in sales has is the lack of distinction between work hours and free time. 22 participants stated the frequent loss of time with indecisive clients as a disadvantage, 18 participants stated stress as a factor, 15 participants stated great competition, while for 4 participants the demotivation that comes from not accepting great achieved results presents a disadvantage.

Table 2
Disadvantages that building one's career has in sales

Number	Disadvantage	How many times the disadvantage is mentioned by the participants
1	no distinction between work hours and free time	24
2	losing time with indecisive clients	22
3	pressure to fulfil targets	19
4	stress	18
5	great competition	15
6	insecurity when market conditions change	12
7	inability to bring direct decisions from a managerial aspect	10
8	large expenses on trips	8
9	variations of the monthly salary	7
10	fear of personal failure	6
11	great responsibility	6
12	individual successes are not appreciated	5
13	demotivation from not accepting great achieved results	4

Source: Author's calculations

When selecting candidates for the position of salesperson, the sales managers pay the most attention to the criteria of communication skills (the average grade of importance is 4.86), followed by the criteria of negotiation skills (4.82), self-discipline (4.74), and motivation of the candidate (4.58), while the least amount of importance is paid to the following criteria: coming from a family that was involved in sale (2.02) and coming from an entrepreneurial family (1.82) (Table 3). Aside from the stated 22 criteria that the sales managers graded on the given scale, additional criteria were not given.

Table 3

Average grade of importance for criteria for the choice of candidate for the position of salesperson

Criteria	Mean
Communication skills	4,86
Negotiation skills	4,82
Self-discipline	4,74
Motivation of candidate	4,58
Problem management	4,48
Teamwork	4,44
Integrity	4,38
Change management	4,36
Time management	4,34
English proficiency	4,24
Organizational skills	4,22
Vision for oneself	4,20
Leadership	4,04
Computer skills	4,00
Attended training in the required field of expertise	3,74
Previous working experience related to sale	3,72
Looks	3,62
Knowledge of a foreign language other than English	3,58
Formal education	3,48
Attended training out of the required field of expertise	2,84
Coming from a family that was involved in sale	2,02
Coming from an entrepreneurial family	1,82

Source: Author's calculations

Discussion

This work posed two research questions: 1) What are the largest advantages and disadvantages that brings building a career in sales? 2) What criteria are most important to sales managers for the choice of candidate for the position of salesperson?

On the basis of the answers from the 52 sales managers regarding the advantages and disadvantages that sales brings, 21 advantages and 13 disadvantages have been covered. The biggest advantages are building a large number of contacts (mentioned by 26 sales managers) and developing communication skills (mentioned by 24 sales managers), followed by: avoiding the office monotony and time management (mentioned 9 times), improving one's personal financial state and developing negotiation skills (mentioned 8 times), teamwork (7 times), developing organizational skills, building knowledge and developing sales skills (6 times), independence, solving problems and self and professional promotion (5 times), self-

discipline, opportunity for advancement, being principled, reputation, implementation of the knowledge into other areas of the company, rewards for achieved success, lifestyle change and change of way of thinking (4 times).

The disadvantages that building one's career in sales has are fewer in number, and the most frequently mentioned disadvantage is the lack of distinction between work hours and free time (mentioned by 24 sales managers), followed by pressure to fulfil targets (19 sales managers), and stress (18 sales managers), while for 4 sales managers the demotivation that comes from not accepting great achieved results presents the smallest disadvantage.

When selecting candidates for the position of salesperson, the sales managers pay the most attention to: communication skills, negotiation skills, self-discipline, and motivation of the candidate (with average grades of importance of over 4.5), followed by problem management, teamwork, integrity, change management, time management, knowledge of English (which is necessary in a globalized world), organizational skills, vision for themselves, leadership and computer skills (with the average grades of importance of over 4.00). The criteria with average grades of importance less than 4.00 are: attended trainings in the required field of expertise, previous working experience related to sale, looks, knowledge of a foreign language other than English, formal education, and attended trainings out of the required field of expertise.

As an encouragement to the fact that the students are more and more dependent on their own skills in this profession, these two criteria are of the least importance: coming from a family that was involved in sale and coming from an entrepreneurial family.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to determine which criteria for sales managers the most important when are choosing a candidate for the position of salesperson. In order to fulfill this aim a questionnaire was constructed, which was further fully filled in by 52 sales managers who work in institutions of different industries. 22 criteria were given and they were each graded by the sales managers on a scale from 1 to 5, and no additional criteria were added. According to the average grade of importance, the most important criteria by the sales managers are communication skills, negotiation skills, self-discipline, candidate's motivation, problem management, teamwork, integrity, change management, time management, proficiency in English, organizational skills, vision for themselves, leadership and computer skills.

The limitations of this study regard the small number of fully filled-in questionnaires by the sales managers, although our opinion is that there would have been no significant differences in the gained results. In a following research we are planning to develop a multi-criteria AHP model for the choice of candidate in the sales sector, which can be used in any institution for the purpose of choosing a candidate that will fully satisfy the most important criteria of the position (according to the sales managers).

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About the authors

Violeta Cvetkoska was born on July 19, 1984 in Skopje, Macedonia. She graduated from the Faculty of Economics-Skopje, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, as the best student of the Department of Management in 2007. She received her MA in the field of Operations Management at the Faculty of Organizational Sciences, University of Belgrade, in 2010. She received her PhD in Economics at the Faculty of Economics-Skopje, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, in Skopje in 2013. From 2014 onwards she has been working as an Assistant Professor in the subject of Management Science at the Faculty of Economics-Skopje, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje. She has participated in many international conferences, symposia, seminars, trainings and workshops. She is the author of several scientific papers published in the proceedings of international conferences, symposia and journals. She is a member of the Croatian Operational Research Society (CRORS).

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