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THE VOICE OF THE SALES REP

FOCUS REPORT



**What Your
Sales Team
Isn't Telling You**

Learning More One Dish at a Time

I grew up in a family of seven children – six boys and a girl. Through four decades of raising their family, my parents never bought a dishwasher. “What for? You’ve got seven of them!” my dad would exclaim.

Each night, a different child took his or her turn drying dishes. My mom was on washing duty every night.

“If you want to find out what’s on you’re kid’s mind, have them grab a towel,” she frequently said.

I thought of this as I read through the results of The Voice of the Sales Rep survey, a joint effort by SalesFuel and Sales & Marketing Management. The survey uncovered a wealth of information by asking sales reps about three dozen questions.

When asked what made the best sales manager they ever had stand out, the reps had an array of answers, but most centered around some aspect of empathy, strong, clear communication, and humble, action-focused leadership.

The Voice of the Sales Rep survey is loaded with insights that can help sales managers be better at their job, which in turn helps reps be better at theirs. It’s great to get so much information from some 830 salespeople.

However, managers would be wise to draw similar insights from their own sales teams. Use one-on-ones and impromptu conversations to ask reps whether they have clarity about their role at the company, whether they feel they receive enough training and support, or what steps could be taken to put them in position to have more success.

If they’re in the office, maybe invite them to accompany you to the break room and throw them a dish towel.



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How Reps Rate Their Bosses, Teammates and Training

High marks for managers, but there is room for improvement in key areas

BY PAUL NOLAN, EDITOR, SALES & MARKETING MANAGEMENT



Among the most positive insights culled from the SalesFuel 2025 **Voice of the Sales Rep** survey is that more than three-fourths (78.07%) of reps who responded gave their manager a four- or five-star rating, while only 8% of respondents gave their manager one or two stars out of five.

A total of 374 respondents (45.06%) gave their managers five stars out of five. Another 274 (33.01%) gave their managers four stars. That such a large percentage of sales reps rate their managers highly is critical, as numerous studies show that a positive relationship with a manager is closely linked to increased motivation and performance, while a negative relationship is linked with poor performance.

CEOs fare almost as well in the SalesFuel survey, with 76.39% of respondents giving their CEOs five or four stars. A total of 349 respondents (42.05%) gave their CEO five stars, while 285 (34.34%) gave their CEO four stars. Only 7.59% of respondents gave their CEO one or two stars.

The stellar ratings for managers is a good sign for companies' ability to retain high-performing reps. A whopping 82% of employees surveyed by GoodHire, a company that performs background checks on job candidates, said they would potentially quit their job because of a bad manager.

“Engaged sales managers can also have a substantially positive impact – especially with younger salespeople – a phenomenon called the **Pygmalion effect**,” adds C. Lee Smith, CEO of SalesFuel and creator of the **TeamTrait** sales assessment test platform. “When a manager shows they genuinely believe in a young rep, it sparks drive and confidence. That’s when the light bulbs go off and magic happens.”

Performance Linked to Quality of Relationship

“The impact of the relationship between managers and employees should never be underestimated concerning employee performance and productivity,” confirms Nosipho Pearl Dlamini, Sachin Suknunan and Anrusha Bhana, three South African educators, in their 2022 report entitled “Influence of Employee-Manager Relationship on Employee Performance and Productivity.”

Interestingly, the high marks for managers from the more than 800 sales reps who responded to the SalesFuel survey differs significantly from the responses the three South African researchers received when they polled 40 administrative workers at a Durban financial services company. In that survey, only nine respondents said they had good to excellent relationships with their supervisor. Most respondents in that survey rated their supervisor’s management style at 5 or below on a 10-point scale, including 10 respondents who rated it as 3.

In addition to being significantly more satisfied with their managers compared with workers in the South African study, the majority of sales professionals who responded to the SalesFuel survey are also satisfied with their sales and marketing teams, their IT support and their company’s public perception.

Room for Improvement

One category where satisfaction appeared to be lagging is adoption and prioritization of artificial intelligence (AI). Slightly more than 20% of respondents rated their company’s prioritization of AI at one or two stars.

Also, salespeople appear to be only somewhat satisfied with their company's efforts in professional development. About 67% rate their company's sales training four or five stars, while nearly 14% give one or two stars to the training they receive.

"High-performing sales professionals stand out by continuously seeking new knowledge and opportunities to build their skills," states Smith. "Those who consistently exceed their goals invest in themselves and put what they've learned into practice — a critical mindset for leveraging AI in sales."

Studies show that today's multigenerational work force craves more training, but only when it's applicable to their work and helpful to attain new skills or improve performance. In a SurveyMonkey poll of more than 650 workers (not all in sales), 86% said that job training is important to them. Nearly three out of four (74%) said they are willing to complete training outside of work hours to improve their job performance.

What skills should sales managers focus on? It can be industry- and even individual-specific, of course. However, when respondents to the Voice of the Sales Rep survey were asked to identify their top three weaknesses, four areas received over 30% of responses:

- Handling objections (37.11%)
- Connecting with the person who controls the budget (36.51%)
- Gaining referrals and testimonials (35.66%)
- Pre-meeting and pre-call intelligence (30.48%)

Beyond training, reps have a similar lukewarm feeling about the quality of their company's inbound marketing. Just over 66% rated inbound leads four or five stars, while 10.6% scored the quality of inbound leads as one or two stars.

Know and Hone Relationship-Builders

When it comes to improving the manager-employee relationship, the authors of the South African study cite a number of challenges that negatively impact how workers and their managers get along. These include poor communication, favoritism, lack of understanding, lack of guidance, and managers having poor people skills.

Clearly, the researchers state, ongoing management training in all areas should be prioritized. Emphasis also should be placed on employee recognition, improved communication and a structured means to address employee well-being.

One indication of what managerial skills matter most to reps is data from the SalesFuel survey on what qualities the best manager they ever had possessed. Strong leadership and communication skills, authenticity, empathy and a knack for inspiring were among the most common traits mentioned.

"He was supportive, but also communicated clear goals, targets and direction. He would also make sure senior management was aware of the efforts and achievements of the team," one survey respondent said of the best manager they ever had. Another stated, "Supportive. Provided clear direction and feedback. Clearly defined roles and expectations. Understood the stress of business and appropriately managed/distributed workload."

In his 2025 article on courageous leadership for Harvard Business Review, Ranjay Gulati, a Harvard Business School professor, advises leaders at all levels to focus on what is in their control.

"In the world of sports, this strategy is often described as focusing on process, not outcomes," Gulati writes. "Although you can't predict how your opponent will perform or the final score of any game, you do control your preparation, the energy you bring to the court or field, and how closely you adhere to your playbook."

The high scores that reps give their managers in the SalesFuel survey indicates that managers, in general, are doing a good job of guiding and supporting their teams. However, it's always wise to dig deeper into data to find areas ripe for improvement and means to build even stronger workplace relationships. There's ample evidence that such efforts pay off for everyone on the team.

Satisfaction by the Numbers

81%

say they enjoy working with their current team

80%

say it's fun to work in sales

78%

give their sales manager four or five stars out of five

76%

say they are motivated to do their very best almost every day

70%

say they want to be working with their current company two years from now

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Who's the Best Sales Manager They've Ever Had?

BY KATHY CROSETT, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF RESEARCH, SALESFUEL

One of the most effective ways to keep your sales team happy and productive is to become a great sales manager. But how can you do that? And how does your team really feel about you as their leader?

Our 2025 [Voice of the Sales Rep](#) survey collected insights from over 800 sales professionals to find out what makes an exceptional manager. Their feedback revealed the best sales leaders excel in four core areas: leadership, empathy, motivation and communication.

If you want to inspire your team and help them grow — both in their current role and future career — here's what you need to know.

Leadership

“The best sales manager I ever had stood out because they combined strong leadership with genuine support. They motivated us through clear goals, consistent coaching and a positive attitude.”

—Voice of the Sales Rep respondent

A great sales manager sets the tone for the department through goal setting and strategic direction. Nearly 50% of respondents in our Voice of the Sales Manager survey emphasized that coaching and training are key aspects of the job.

Reps depend on their managers to help them succeed, not just with prospects, but also in overcoming internal challenges. However, some managers fall short.

- Nearly one in 4 reps said their managers hold long, unproductive meetings.
- 21% cited avoidance of conflict.
- 18% reported managers who ignore requests for help.
- One in 6 indicated a lack of fairness when assigning leads

The best leaders address these pain points head-on. They understand that their credibility in all they say and do greatly affects their ability to develop others to their fullest potential. They show leadership by settling disputes, answering questions quickly, modeling the kind of behavior they expect from the team

clearly, and focusing on helping reps reach their goals rather than micromanaging.

Empathy

“She was empathetic as I was developing. She always had a suggestion as opposed to a just get-it-done attitude.”

—Voice of the Sales Rep respondent

The roller coaster ride of the sales profession delivers plenty of thrills. But reps also face rejection, ghosting and shifting priorities. Even top performers hit walls. And these are the moments when they need empathy from their managers.

Supportive managers offer guidance, not just directives. They understand each rep's challenges and tailor coaching accordingly. However, there's often a disconnect between what managers think their team needs and what reps actually struggle with.

- 37% of reps say handling objections is their top weakness.
- 35% of managers agree — but 39% believe pre-call intelligence is the bigger issue.

To close this gap, managers can use tools like the [TeamTrait™ Sales Skills Assessment](#) to identify skill gaps and customize coaching sessions.

Generational differences also play a role. For example, 25% of Gen Z reps want more coaching from their manager — a reflection of their eagerness to learn and grow in the early stages of their careers.



Motivation

“Patient, understanding, motivational — he knew when to brag about your successes during a sales meeting to make sure you got recognition from the higher-ups.”

—Voice of the Sales Rep respondent

Motivation is the fuel of a successful sales team. The rising tide of rejection means that even high achievers close only about **30% of their deals**. It's no wonder that 25% of reps say their managers could do a better job motivating them. Among overachievers, that number rises to 33%.

Personalized rewards can be an effective solution to motivational problems. Managers can use psychometric assessments from TeamTrait™ to understand what drives each rep:

- Some crave financial incentives.
- Others value autonomy, creativity or professional growth.

For instance, 39% of Gen Z sales reps want more opportunities to be creative. Encourage them to bring new ideas for outreach or prospecting — this tactic fosters ownership and innovation.

The survey also revealed that 58% of reps want to learn new skills, regardless of performance level. Managers can deliver by introducing AI tools, sharing industry insights, or having reps teach their “sales superpowers” to peers.

With nearly 39% of sales professionals actively considering new jobs, providing motivation and development opportunities can significantly reduce turnover.

Communication

They were “dedicated, hardworking, with good time management and communication skills.”

—Voice of the Sales Rep respondent

Effective communication ties everything together. Yet, 22% of Gen Z reps say their managers lack clarity in assignments or expectations.

While 73% of all reps say their role in the company is clear, only 69% of lower-performing reps agree — and just 53% say they understand what managers expect of them.

This clarity gap can hinder performance. Great managers communicate frequently and in ways that resonate with each rep. They set measurable goals, reinforce accountability and ensure that each team member knows exactly how success is defined.

The Impact Great Sales Managers Have

The best sales managers balance results with relationships. They lead with purpose, coach with empathy, motivate through understanding, and communicate with clarity.

As the data shows, sales reps don't just want direction, they want connection. They thrive under leaders who see their potential and invest in their growth.

By focusing on each rep as an individual rather than an employee, you can transform from a “manager” into a trusted mentor — the kind of leader your team will remember as the best they ever had.



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The Motivation Mismatch: Why Commission Isn't Enough Anymore

BY JESSICA HELINSKI, DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH, SALESFUEL

Nearly a third of B2B salespeople say it's gotten harder to stay motivated compared to just one year ago, according to SalesFuel's [Voice of the Sales Rep](#) study of more than 800 sellers.

4 out of 10 report experiencing stress on the job within the past year, and 70% say they struggle to achieve work-life balance. These factors not only lead to burnout but also impact performance – with only 29% of B2B sellers regularly meeting quota.

What Do Modern Reps Really Want?

The study also reveals greater demand for incentives beyond money. Commission has long been considered the driver of sales performance, but that dynamic is clearly shifting.

While financial incentives remain important, there is a strong demand for benefits that improve quality of life and personal growth. Nearly half of reps cite time off, such as additional paid vacation, flexible hours or longer lunch breaks, as a top motivator. This underscores their desire to reclaim personal time and reduce stress.

Professional development is another area of interest for reps. Nearly half (48%) value opportunities to learn new skills. This could include training, mentorship or the chance to tackle new challenges. 30% say they've recently pursued coursework or training to advance their abilities, and 40% say they would appreciate additional professional development support from their company.

Additionally, reps want acknowledgement. Almost half say

48%

Value Opportunities to Learn New Skills

30%

Recently Pursued Coursework or Training

40%

Want Additional Professional Development

knowing that upper management is aware of their good work is appreciated. This reveals that many sellers simply want to feel that leaders value their efforts. For these reps, acknowledgment isn't just nice to have — it's a critical factor in feeling supported and motivated to excel.

Are Managers Misaligned?



According to [Gallup](#), 70% of team engagement is directly influenced by the manager. Yet the SalesFuel study alarmingly reveals that a quarter of sellers say their manager fails to inspire them.

Many managers do not fully recognize what drives today's salespeople, leaving their teams feeling undervalued, unsupported or misaligned with the incentives offered.

This is one reason why more sales managers are making “self-motivation” an important criterion in their hiring process. This motivational challenge is leading to retention issues, as well. 30% of sales managers admit that retaining sellers is becoming increasingly more difficult. And nearly 39% of reps say they're considering new jobs.

How Should Managers Respond?

For C. Lee Smith, SalesFuel CEO and co-author of *The Leader's Playbook: CEOs Transforming Vision Into Action*, his company's research makes one thing about employee motivation abundantly clear.

“A dead battery can't jump start a dead battery. In this study, a common refrain from salespeople is their sales managers first need to be engaged and motivated themselves. This starts with

having the self-awareness to understand what's impacting their own enthusiasm and how it is rubbing off on their team," he explains.

Another key for leaders is to balance universal needs - everyone wants great pay and benefits - with each salesperson's individual needs to keep them inspired and successful.

SalesFuel's Kathy Crosett notes, incentives are not a one-size-fits-all matter. Managers can gain valuable insight into what drives each employee by using psychometric assessments, such as TeamTrait™, and observing their motivational levels during their one-on-one meetings.

"Managers need to focus on what they can control and influence most. One of them is regular communication and active listening to understand each team member's personal drivers," she advises.

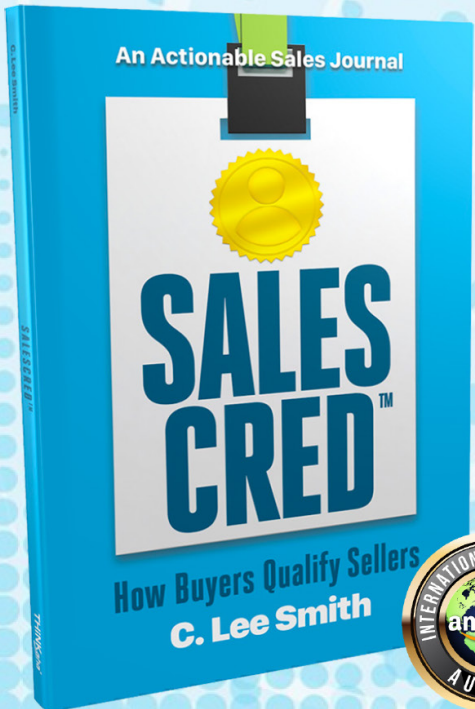
Dr. Bob Nelson, a workforce motivation expert who has worked with 80% of Fortune 500 companies, agrees. On an episode of the Manage Smarter podcast, he affirms SalesFuel's findings are consistent with what he commonly sees in the field - from his largest clients to his smallest.

"Providing workers with recognition and respect can make a world of difference in getting the best efforts out of them, keeping them and helping you develop a reputation for treating employees in a way that helps attract talent to work for you and your organization," he says.

The writing is on the wall: The usual commission-as-motivation system isn't keeping reps happy or productive. It's up to sales managers to recognize personal motivators of each team member

and offer rewards accordingly. With an emphasis on burnout prevention, skills development and clear acknowledgement, leaders can drive their team to peak performance while also improving retention and hitting company goals.





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What's Driving Adoption (and Avoidance)

How Smart Sales Teams Win by Balancing Automation with Authenticity

BY C. LEE SMITH, SALESFUEL CEO + AUTHOR OF "SALESCRED: HOW BUYERS QUALIFY SELLERS"

AI is finding its way into the everyday routines of sales reps, but usage remains uneven. 17% have only “dabbled” with AI, according to the 2025 [Voice of the Sales Rep](#) study conducted by SalesFuel.

Many more are using AI for prospect research, data analysis and automating mundane tasks — freeing up more time for selling.

The survey reveals both enthusiasm and uncertainty about AI use in B2B sales. While many reps experiment with AI tools, few understand where it fits into their company's sales ecosystem. Only one in six salespeople believes their company has clearly defined goals on AI.

This is where strong managerial leadership becomes critical. Start by creating — and communicating — an AI adoption roadmap for your team. When AI has a defined role aligned with corporate goals, it stops being a novelty and starts driving measurable performance.

Based on data from the study, here's a manager's playbook for using AI to elevate performance and credibility without losing the human element.

Close the Clarity Gap on AI and Data Security Policies

As AI enters client interactions, buyers are asking sharper questions about data protection and transparency, yet only four in 10 sales reps say they clearly understand their company's “Responsible or Ethical AI policy.” Salespeople who cannot confidently explain how client data is protected — or how AI is being used by their company — risk eroding trust before the deal even starts.



83% of sales reps do not believe their company has clearly defined goals for AI

Sales managers need to first understand their company's

Responsible AI Policy and ask clarifying questions about its enforcement. Then coach reps to talk plainly about how the organization safeguards client data.

Transparency is a differentiator in building trust. Teams that proactively discuss how AI is used to serve the client, rather than hide behind it,—signal professionalism and reassurance that it's safe to share sensitive business information. This kind of information makes dealing with objections easier, leads to higher closing rates, and enables your recommendations to deliver the result your customer seeks.

Develop Critical Thinking Skills for Leveraging AI

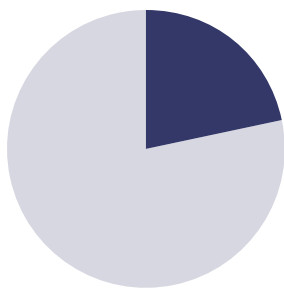
By now, you've probably heard at least one story about how AI errors, hallucinations or “workslop” have led to real-world consequences. Some salespeople resist AI for fear of being embarrassed when it goes awry.

This opens the door for a vital managerial skill: teaching critical thinking in the age of AI. Managers should encourage reps to always question AI output, verify it and learn from its limitations. Scenario-based coaching works well here. Present AI-driven client profiles or email drafts and challenge reps to spot errors, overgeneralizations or tone issues.

By reinforcing discernment, leaders prevent “cognitive offloading,” where reps stop applying judgment and simply echo what the machine provides. A critical-thinking culture ensures that sales effectiveness improves with AI, not in spite of it.

Make Human Verification a Standard Practice

AI always sounds smart, but it's not always right. A recent Salesforce study says that 71% of customers believe it is important for a human to validate AI output. But the SalesFuel study reveals that only 24% of salespeople feel the same way.



Only 24% of salespeople believe it's important for a human to validate AI output

To maintain reputation integrity, sales managers should establish human verification protocols for any client-facing, AI-produced content. Every deck, report or outbound communication should undergo manual review. The short time it takes is far less than having to course correct later.

Verification doesn't inhibit speed, it ensures trust.

Invest in Training that Combines Technology and Empathy

Most sales teams lack practical, integrated AI education. Only four in 10 reps say they are crystal clear about how to use AI to improve results.

True AI fluency requires more than technical knowledge and learning how to prompt. It demands emotional and ethical maturity. AI in sales training programs like SalesCred address this intersection by combining AI proficiency, proprietary business intelligence and emotional intelligence.

Sales leaders need to invest in ongoing education that goes beyond "how to" workshops. Training should model real scenarios — how AI can analyze account patterns, highlight prospect triggers, or prepare reps for objections — while reinforcing that authentic human connection remains

Use AI for Outreach Without Overreliance

AI changes daily, but how reps influence people does not. One of the biggest ways sales teams use AI is for writing email sequences. This is especially true for salespeople who often miss quota.

This underscores a simple truth: Automation can save time, but outreach still requires oversight, editing, and revision. Your reputation is at stake. Sales managers should encourage reps to use AI for brainstorming and first drafts but maintain control over how they communicate (and connect) with buyers.

Create Internal Knowledge Loops

Perhaps the biggest takeaway from the Voice of the Sales Rep study is the need for sales leaders to formalize AI learning for sales. They should also maintain a culture where their team feels psychologically safe to be less than perfect when first attempting to apply AI to a task.

One step in this direction is to create AI knowledge loops within the sales department and contribute to them regularly. Establish

internal communication channels in Slack, Microsoft Teams and other internal systems where reps share:

- Successful prompts that produced actionable insights
- Examples of AI improving client engagement
- Challenges where AI misfired — and how human judgment corrected it

This turns scattered adoption into collective intelligence. When the team learns together, adoption accelerates and innovation compounds. AI hesitators may also begin to use the technology when they see their team's success.

Address the Emotional Side of AI Adoption

AI anxiety is real. In the study, nearly one in five sales reps admitted they worry that AI might make salespeople irrelevant in the future. This emotional undercurrent cannot be ignored. Reps who fear replacement rather than empowerment are less likely to adopt new tools effectively.

Sales leaders play a major role in reframing this narrative. The message should be simple and consistent: AI supports the salesperson; it doesn't replace them. Managers can demonstrate this by publicly showing how AI reduces preparation time, eliminates administrative busywork and frees up more time for salespeople to attend to other tasks.

Teams that view AI as a productivity partner, not a threat, respond with increased confidence and engagement.

Champion the Advantage of Human Intelligence Over AI

Top-performing sales teams in the (near) future won't be the ones with the most data, they'll be the ones who know how to think critically, act ethically and sell intelligently in partnership with AI.

Sellers are ready to learn. They just need managers who will lead with purpose, define the boundaries, and model responsible AI fluency. Following this blueprint will result in faster skill adoption, tighter compliance and higher engagement across their teams.



AI Won't Influence Buyers, You Will.

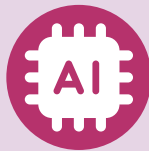
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The Top 10 Traits That Set High Performers Apart

Salespeople and Sales Managers Reveal What It Takes to Succeed

BY DARBY C DOLL, TEAMTRAIT GLOBAL BRAND MANAGER

AI is finding its way into the everyday routines of sales reps, What does it take to be a top revenue producer in the age of AI and economic uncertainty? And how can you identify one and add them to your sales team?

Two recent surveys from SalesFuel – the [Voice of the Sales Rep](#) and [Voice of the Sales Manager](#) – reveal what drives winning salespeople and how the best sales managers identify them during the hiring process.

The message is clear: how a rep shows up – mindset, motivation and adaptability – matters more than what’s on their resume, especially now that nearly all candidates are using generative AI to beef up their credentials.

As importantly, a sales manager’s gut instincts based on a good interview no longer cut it. Sales managers need to incorporate a proven sales acumen assessment in their hiring process to gain the data and insights to make the best hire.

Mindset Over Skill Set

Nearly one in three sales managers (29%) says mindset and motivation outweigh skill set when hiring. That’s a major shift away from the old checklist of past job experience and product knowledge.



Nearly 1 in 3 sales managers says mindset and motivation outweigh skill set when hiring

Today’s top sellers aren’t just knowledgeable, they think differently. They stay calm under pressure and bounce back fast from rejection constantly looking for ways to improve. And they use technology to gain an advantage.

Reps with a growth mindset adapt and thrive during disruption and raising the performance bar for everyone around them.

Managers also cite empathy, self-awareness and response time as key sub-traits under the umbrella of adaptability.

The 10 Traits of High-Performing Salespeople

Through SalesFuel’s research, both salespeople and sales managers told us 10 traits that are the best predictor of sales success:

1. **Grit and determination:** Remaining persistent, resilient, undeterred
2. **Confidence:** Communicating conviction and earning trust
3. **Self-motivation:** Driving themselves without constant oversight
4. **Problem-solving:** Turning pain points into opportunity
5. **Time management:** Investing limited time where it generates the most impact
6. **Optimism:** Exuding infectious, positive energy while turning negatives into positives
7. **Initiative:** Doing what needs to be done to hunt new prospects and delight existing clients without being told
8. **Curiosity:** Asking smart questions, being open to new ideas and being a lifelong learner
9. **Adaptability:** Thinking quickly on their feet and adjusting to rapid (and sometimes unforeseen) changes in the market
10. **Coachability:** Seeking feedback, striving to level up and investing personally in their improvement

And the newest one that has not appeared in previous surveys:

10+1. Leveraging AI: Bringing critical thinking to sharpen knowledge and amplify sales efforts without letting themselves be embarrassed by the technology



Why Assessments Are a Must in Sales Hiring

Today's sales candidates are using AI to build glowing resumes, script interview answers and even simulate mock interviews. That means even seasoned sales managers can be misled by well-rehearsed but surface-level performances.

Nearly half (46%) of managers now use sales acumen testing and behavioral assessments before making offers. They've realized that gut instinct isn't enough to spot real potential.

Even more revealing, sales managers who rated their teams poorly or only marginally effective are 20% less likely to use pre-hire assessments than managers who gave their sales team a five-star review.

Assessments uncover what interviews can't – how a candidate thinks, what motivates them, their values. And a proven sales acumen assessment helps you analyze their actual strengths and weaknesses for key sales competencies.

But there's a caveat. If a candidate's assessments fall short in a key area, but they score high in coachability, there's a good chance they can improve those skills if you're willing to develop them.

When paired with interviews, credible hiring assessments give you a data-driven edge into who will thrive and deliver on your sales team.

Build Your Team Around Traits That Multiply

The surveys show one consistent pattern: top performers never stop learning. They seek training, take feedback graciously, and stay on top of the latest industry developments. They apply what they've learned to pivot quickly and focus on what really matters to their accounts.

AI can help with research and efficiency, but the human edge – namely, critical thinking and emotional intelligence – still closes deals.

Hiring for traits like curiosity, initiative and coachability builds teams that push each other to excel. These reps learn faster and stay composed when challenges hit.

Action Steps for Sales Managers

Hire for drive and mindset first. Use behavioral interviews to reveal motivation.

Use sales acumen assessments. Get hard data on traits that predict performance.

Test coachability. Ask how they've turned feedback into results. Probe curiosity. See how they tackle unfamiliar challenges.

Watch for structure and optimism. Ask how they plan their day.

Assess AI alignment. Do they use it to think smarter and move faster - or just use it to reduce their effort?

The Bottom Line

Mindset drives performance. Skills can be taught, but grit, curiosity and adaptability are developed through practice and persistence.

With nearly one-third of sales managers ranking mindset above skill set and almost half using assessments, the smartest teams are hiring with data, not instinct, to identify top performers.

Ready to hire sales hunters who are wired to win?

Start with a TeamTrait Sales Acumen Assessment and learn which candidate has the mindset to perform and the drive to succeed.

Get your free profiles and sign up for a demo at [TeamTrait.com](https://www.teamtrait.com)

Stop Bad Sales Hires Before They Happen



Make Decisions
Based on the
Candidate's Likely
Behavior, Not Their
Best Behavior



The Skill to Sell

World-class Sales Acumen Assessment scores aptitude for 18 disciplines at every stage - including leveraging AI



The Will to Sell

Three psychometric assessments reveal their natural grit, motivators, and desire to win - even under the stress of a deadline



The Fit to Flourish

Exclusive Four Fits™ methodology predicts their likely job fit, plus how they'll fit with your sales manager, company and customers



Schedule Your Free Demo Today at TeamTrait.com

7 Reasons Why Top Sales Reps Leave And What You Can Do to Keep Them

BY C. LEE SMITH, SALESFUEL CEO + CO-HOST OF THE MANAGE SMARTER SHOW

41% of high-performing salespeople — those who consistently exceed quota — say they've been approached about changing jobs at least twice in the past year, according to new findings from SalesFuel's [Voice of the Sales Rep](#) survey. Some even get recruiting emails weekly. All it takes is the promise of a 15% bump in on-target earnings to tempt your best reps, especially if you haven't paid attention to their other needs.

To keep them motivated and loyal, here are seven key priorities sales leaders need to focus on right now:

1. Allow Autonomy Over Bureaucracy

Top sales reps thrive on independence and want the freedom to pursue their strategies. The study finds excessive process, needless approvals and rigid adherence to process are among the fastest ways to trigger dissatisfaction and job searches.

What You Can Do:

- Eliminate red tape and empower top performers to make decisions when possible.
- Trust their judgement on deals and discounts. Ask for their recommendations. Don't be too quick to answer yes or no.
- Let them (your most important stakeholders) weigh in on tech and contractors.

2. Lead with Strength, Credibility and Transparency

A recurring message from high performers: Sales managers make or break engagement. Reps rank their bosses and departments often more positively than managers expect. Yet poor communication, lack of feedback and micromanagement can still push top talent out the door.

Additionally, compensation structures that don't reward top results or seem "capped" can quickly drive a high-performing rep to look elsewhere. The same can be true for a sales manager's lack of credibility and transparency.

What You Can Do:

- Provide psychological safety for high performers to be open with you. Then, act on the feedback they provide.
- Regularly benchmark compensation packages. Communicate clearly about how commissions and bonuses are earned.
- Walk the talk. Model the behavior you're asking of them.
- Invest in developing your management skills, even if your company won't.

3. Build a Winning Roster

High-performing reps don't just want bigger paychecks — they want to win. 30% said their team would be more successful if everyone was more proficient. They want to be on a team of true professionals who know what it takes to win and have the desire to do it.

What You Can Do:

- Cultivate a team culture of collaboration, not competition.
- Hold every member of the team accountable. Don't shy away from having difficult conversations with those who aren't measuring up.
- Avoid cutting corners when hiring so you can quickly fill an open seat — even for support roles.
- Give everyone the training and knowledge to thrive, especially in AI.

4. Provide Crystal-Clear Paths for Advancement

Only 51% of top salespeople report having a crystal-clear path for advancement within their current company. For them, career stagnation is a deal breaker.

These reps actively seek new challenges, expanded responsibilities or a defined route to leadership. Without visible, achievable steps for promotion or skill development, they are more susceptible to outside offers.

What You Can Do:

- Ask about their career goals early and often.
- Map clear milestones and openly communicate what it takes to move to the next level.
- While three out of 10 top performers have expressed an interest in management, note that it may not be the best path for them. Being a high-performing manager requires a different mindset and skillset.

5. Provide Frequent Recognition and Acknowledgement

They may tell you it's not important, but even small gestures can have a big impact on motivation. The data aligns with broader research: Properly recognized top performers are 45% less likely to leave their company within two years. Companies focusing on employee recognition see 31% less voluntary turnover.

What You Can Do:

- Make recognition routine, sincere and personally meaningful. Learn their favorite things and provide them as signs of appreciation when possible.
- Celebrate big wins, call out hard-fought lessons and ensure high performers know their impact matters, publicly and privately.
- Show your top reps that you've made company leadership aware of their success. This also makes you look good with higher-ups.



6. Celebrate Customer Relationships

Nearly half of top salespeople say their top “superpower” is connecting with buyers on an emotional or logical level. They are energized by building real value and lasting relationships with customers. They also know this is the fastest path to referrals and repeat sales.

Losing sight of a greater mission, or feeling reduced to a numbers game, erodes their loyalty and happiness.



What You Can Do:

- Applaud not just results, but also how wins are achieved, highlighting creative prospecting, customer loyalty and relationship wins.
- Reinforce the value of their work. Share customer success stories and case studies that illustrate impact.
- Connect daily activities to the broader company mission. Equip them with purposeful challenges, not just quotas.

7. Demonstrate Care About Their Personal Well-Being

Burnout is real. High achievers can be the first to accept extra work. They're also the ones you lean on the most. But chronic stress, unclear expectations or poor work-life balance are top triggers for disengagement and turnover.

What You Can Do:

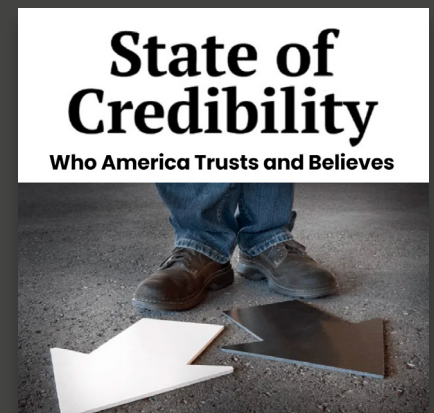
- Show you care about them as people. Recognize important dates like birthdays, anniversaries and other important events in their lives.
- Monitor workloads for early signs of burnout. Resist the urge to rely solely on your top reps when you need a quick revenue hit.
- Give them the flexibility to adjust their work schedule when needed. Don't make them jump through hoops to schedule PTO, pick their kids up from daycare or leave early to attend their kids' game or recital.

The Best Defense Against Poaching Is Thoughtful Proactivity

If you're not investing in what matters most to your top performers, someone else will. Don't just compensate them well. Challenge them often, give them what they need to excel, and make their future with you unmistakably clear.

DATA THAT DRIVES DECISIONS

Exclusive Research for Revenue Generators™



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Ask about our licensed data to fuel your app, platform or project.