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Are extraverts are the best candidates for sales positions? Despite the proliferation of this assumption in numerous sales organizations, studies have shown that there is a weak and inconsistent relationship between extraversion and sales performance. In fact, recent studies indicate that *ambiverts* (individuals falling in the middle of the extraversion and introversion spectrum) actually achieve the greatest sales productivity (Grant 2013).



With one-in-nine Americans working in a sales role (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2012), Western culture seems to hold a favoring bias toward extraversion (Cain 2012). Studies also show that extraverted individuals choose sales jobs more frequently (Barrick, Mount, and Gupta 2003) and are hired more often than introverted individuals (Dunn, Mount, Barrick, and Ones 1995). This bias runs deep in the real estate industry, as well, manifesting itself in the agency/brokerage setting where gregarious agents are perceived as the most likely to succeed.

The goal of this article is to encourage real estate managers and agents to rethink the “extraverted sales ideal” and to provide insights for agency managers in hiring and training processes.

The Root of the Extraverted Sales Bias

The bias toward extraversion is not an unsubstantiated phenomenon, but exists with the support of several studies. Three studies in particular support this notion, beginning with the idea that extraverts have the assertiveness and enthusiasm to effectively engage with a wider variety of clients. Extraversion empowers individuals to be outgoing, sociable, and comfortable initiating interactions with others (Furnham and Fudge 2008). In real estate, it can be difficult to generate productive leads, and many perceive that only the “fearless” can experience real success through cold calling.

Secondly, selling involves the persuasion of potential clients to purchase a product or service, and extraverts are more likely to display confidence and contagious levels of enthusiasm and energy (Vinchur, Schippmann, Switzer, and Roth 1998). In real estate, the demands of client prospecting may overwhelm an agent and appear to better suit agents who exhibit a large amount of enthusiasm and stamina. For individuals who are not extraverted, the emotional demands surrounding prospecting can be a discouraging revelation, impacting motivation and overall performance.

Lastly, selling is dependent on convincing customers to change their attitudes and behaviors. Extraverts, more so than introverts, possess a firm and forceful approach when negotiating with clients, giving them an advantage to close pending sales (Stewart 1996). The assumption that aggression leads to success is a real deterrent for professionals who are naturally inclined to sell on the foundation of trustworthy relationships. In real estate, the “do whatever it takes” mentality often rewards agents who can close the deal, regardless of the relational outcome.

Despite its advantages, extraversion may also have some *negative implications* for buyer-seller relationships.

First, extraverted salespeople may focus more heavily on their own perspectives than on client perspectives. Recent studies show that extraverts tend to gravitate toward the spotlight (Ashton, Lee, and Paunonen 2002) and are more likely than introverts to dominate conversations. This behavioral pattern can lead to the inadvertent suppression or neglect of others’ perspectives (Grant, Gino, and Hofmann 2011).

Secondly, extraverted salespeople may elicit negative responses from prospective clients. An extravert’s confidence may be perceived as “over the top” (Ames and Flynn 2007; Judge et al. 2009) leading clients to believe that the salesperson is attempting to influence their purchase decision (Campbell and Kirmani 2000). The recognition of a salesperson’s persuasion focus causes clients to protect themselves and resist the salesperson’s influence (Friedstad and Wright 1994; Williams, Fitzsimons, and Block 2004).

Do Ambiverts Have an Advantage?

A recent study tests the prediction that ambiverts should achieve higher sales than introverts and extraverts (Grant 2013). A survey was taken by 340 employees of outbound call centers across the United States and assessed the “Big Five” personality traits: *extraversion*, *conscientiousness*, *agreeableness*, *openness*, and *neuroticism*. These traits were measured against the employees’ monthly sales performance.

The data show that ambiverted employees in these call centers (i.e., those who fall in the middle of the “extraversion spectrum”) are predicted to generate \$151.38 per hour, compared with \$114.96 for highly extraverted employees and \$126.80 for highly introverted employees. Additional results suggest that ambiverts have a sales advantage over extraverts, regardless of their assessment relative to the “Big Five” personality traits.

Implications for Real Estate Professionals

The real estate industry has traditionally championed the extraverted agent, rewarding him for his inexhaustible effort, energy, and networking skills. Extraverted agents, as well as introverted agents, have the opportunity to reassess behaviors and work toward a more productive sales

experience. Ambiverts should feel confident to approach deals with the knowledge that *balance* on the extraversion spectrum can maximize productivity and results.

Managers also have an opportunity to reassess hiring and training processes to maximize the investment in potential sales leaders. Here are several questions to consider when identifying and training sales leaders in your organization: *Am I limiting my hiring to those that I have identified as extraverted? Do my training techniques and incentives align with my agent's strengths, regardless of personality type?*

Research is showing that one size *does not* fit all. If you are highly extraverted, you might ask yourself: *Am I truly listening to my prospective client's needs or am I only thinking about how I will reply? What non-verbal cues are clients providing in response to my confidence and enthusiasm to close a sale?* If you are highly introverted, you might consider: *What situations do I avoid because feel that extraversion is required for success? How can I stimulate a client's attention during the sale in congruence with my strength in active listening?*

Conclusion

If you are truly an ambivert, know that it *is* possible to achieve a successful sales career. And if you lean more towards introversion or extraversion, consider ways to achieve greater balance in your sales approach. With no perfect sales personality, a balanced perspective can pay dividends for real estate professionals looking to optimize sales performance and enhance client relationships.

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