Earning Effective Referrals with the Right Incentives
Rachel Gershon, PhD, Cynthia Cryder, PhD, and Leslie K. John, PhD

How Older Adult Couples Make Downsizing Decisions
Nikki Buckelew, PhD

The Secret to Linking CSR to Financial Profitability
Sean Yim, PhD, Young Han Bae, PhD, Hyunwoo Lim, PhD, and JaeHwan Kwon, PhD

Beat the Averages: How to Write More Engaging Facebook Posts
Keith A. Quesenberry, M.S. IMC and Michael K. Coolsen, PhD

How Psychological Resourcefulness Increases Sales Performance
Bruno Lussier, PhD and Nathaniel N. Hartmann, PhD

INSIDER: Atomic Habits
Maria Morales Menendez, MBA

INSIDER: The Technology Fallacy
Brian LeCompte, MDiv/MBA Candidate
How Psychological Resourcefulness Increases Sales Performance
Bruno Lussier, PhD and Nathaniel N. Hartmann, PhD

If one were to poll executives around the nation asking what one thing their corporation could do today to increase sales, what kind of answers would be submitted? New CRM software? Additional advertising? Scale up your prospecting? Answers would no doubt be myriad and specific to the products sold and the challenges facing that industry. Our research shows, however, a simple practice salespeople can initiate to boost sales performance and customer satisfaction. The change requires no additional sales training and, when implemented well, works to relieve salesperson stress, rather than add to it.

Our research showed that psychological resourcefulness influences a salesperson’s customer-oriented behaviors—defined as the ability to assess and meet customers’ needs,1 which in turn leads to better sales performance and customer satisfaction. We define psychological resourcefulness as the extent to which persons utilize their positive psychological capacities, including optimism and resilience. Optimism can be defined as “one’s general expectation of successful and favorable outcomes.”2 Resilience is “the capacity to overcome or bounce back from adversity, conflict, failure, or other events that induce high levels of stress or pressure.”3 Previous studies have shown that utilizing these positive attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors can expand a person’s diverse, exploratory, and novel behaviors—skills that come in handy for sales and customer relations.

Building on Broaden-and-Build

An essential organizational behavior theory used to construct our study is the broaden-and-build theory. This theory holds that people can broaden their momentary thoughts and build enduring responses. Essentially, well-practiced momentary habits can become permanent fixtures in our lives. As a theory within positive organizational behavior, the broaden-and-build theory means that practiced positivity can “broaden people’s momentary thought-action repertoires and build their enduring resources.”4 Our study seeks to apply this theory by assessing how psychological resourcefulness, or the utilization of positive attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, builds customer-oriented behaviors. These behaviors can then increase sales productivity. That is, optimism and resilience, by means of psychological resourcefulness that results in customer-oriented behaviors may then increase sales.
Therefore, our study sought to evaluate three hypotheses related to how psychological resourcefulness broadens and builds a salesperson’s customer-oriented behaviors and results. First, we wanted to understand if psychological resourcefulness is positively directly related to customer-oriented behaviors. Second, we sought to test if salespersons’ customer-oriented behaviors are positively directly related to sales performance and customer satisfaction. Finally, we hypothesized that the salesperson’s customer-oriented behaviors mediate the positive influence of psychological resourcefulness on sales performance and customer satisfaction.

**How We Carried Out Our Study and What We Found**

To test these hypotheses, we designed a survey after conducting 30 in-depth interviews with sales professionals, evaluating what questions to ask and how to optimize our study. We randomly selected 175 salespeople across 17 organizations, and from each of these salespeople, we randomly selected one of their clients and administered an extensive questionnaire at the end of a client meeting to both the salesperson and the client.

After evaluating the results, we confirm the positive relationship between salesperson psychological resourcefulness and customer-oriented behaviors. Optimistic salespeople were more likely to show customer-oriented behaviors. Additionally, more resilient salespeople facing adversity and challenges in their work were more likely to show these customer-oriented behaviors. In developing a conceptual framework based on this finding, we are also able to show that higher levels of psychological resourcefulness positively impact a salesperson’s customer-orientation, leading to improved sales performance and customer satisfaction. Through this middle step of customer-orientation, we can say that psychological resourcefulness positively influences customer satisfaction and sales performance.

**What This Means for You**

A previous generation of sales professionals may have focused primarily on product knowledge and training clients to adapt to market needs and product benefits. Today’s market, however, calls for much greater customer orientation—behaviors designed to promote salesperson-customer relationships and customer satisfaction. In real estate especially, the highly specialized nature of each property means you must be completely oriented to a variety of customer needs and wants, such as affordable financing, customized amenities, or income-producing capabilities.

Second, salesperson optimism and resilience can lead to more diverse, exploratory, and novel behaviors, leading to the kind of problem-solving necessary to meet customer needs. Our research shows a positive correlation between optimistic, resilient salespeople and sales performance and customer satisfaction. Managers then should hire for optimism and resilience, even including tests for optimism and resilience in the interview and application process.
Optimism and resilience can also be taught to an existing sales team. Managers can help build optimistic employees by fostering realistic conversations on potential adversities and the availability of solutions. As salespeople face inevitable rejection, managers can help salespeople separate the immediate adversity (a rejected cold call) from deeply held beliefs (for example, that a rejected sales call is a personal insult or sign of wrongdoing.) Emphasizing these simple practices of optimism and resilience are not simply good for office morale; they have the potential to increase sales and customer satisfaction within your company.

**Where We Go From Here**

Broadening our capacity through continued optimistic and resilient practices builds habits which help us become more oriented to customers. In turn, this customer orientation habit will lead to better sales performance and higher customer satisfaction. Optimism and resiliency require no additional complicated business knowledge of sales theory. Besides the studied benefit on sales and client relations, the increased resiliency of improved psychological resourcefulness can help salespeople as they process the inevitable failures inherent in the job.

**Recommended Reading**


**References**


**About the Authors**

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Dr. Bruno Lussier (PhD – Grenoble University) conducts research on sales force effectiveness, relationship marketing, positive organizational behavior, and ethics. His work has been published
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Dr. Nathaniel N. Hartmann (PhD – Purdue University) works with companies to perform managerially oriented research on issues related to sales force effectiveness, buyer behavior, and innovation. Nathaniel has been the recipient of the Shelby D. Hunt/Harold H. Maynard Award for making the most significant contribution to marketing theory in *Journal of Marketing* within a calendar year.