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Improving Sales Performance with Manager Likeability
Edward L. Nowlin, PhD, Doug Walker, PhD, and Nwamaka A. Anaza, PhD

Is it important for salespeople to like their managers? Past research has established that people will “do things for people they like,”¹ but does this have an impact on a firm’s sales performance? Our research examines both of these questions and establishes that manager likeability is an extremely important driver of sales performance both directly and indirectly. Further, we demonstrate that relational identification—the degree to which salespeople embrace their sales role and activities as defined by their sales managers—is a means by which manager likeability impacts sales performance. In this context, relational identification is “the extent to which one defines oneself in terms of a given role-relationship.”² Therefore, developing a strong relational identification between the manager and salesperson is essential to having a positive impact on sales performance. As a real estate manager (broker), it can often be difficult to determine ways to increase likeability among salespeople (agents), but there are several steps and practices that can increase your likeability as a manager.

Practices to Increase Manager Likeability

Our research determines that manager likeability is a powerful driver of organizational sales performance. Therefore, as a manager, it is important to recognize the need to be likeable from the perspective of the salesperson. How can managers improve their likeability? Our research suggests several practical implications to increase manager likeability and therefore sales performance.

Develop Relationships Outside of Work Environment
As a manager, it is critically important to incorporate time with salespeople outside of their direct work environment. Managers should integrate events and activities that allow them to interact with salespeople on a personal level. These interactions can take place in a structured activity, such as a team building exercise, or an unstructured activity, such as a birthday party or dinner. If managers are able to develop their relationships with salespeople outside of the structured workplace, then manager likeability will likely increase.

Establish Opportunities to Interact Regarding Career-Oriented Situations
Managers should seek opportunities that will drive salespeople performance and guide them through career-oriented interactions. Career-oriented situations include sponsoring salespeople,
providing exposure and visibility, as well as providing challenging assignments. Managers should capitalize on their ability to provide salespeople with extensive expertise and resources to help salespeople advance their careers. Salespeople will have heightened relational identification with their managers when they see that their managers want them to be successful beyond their current position and performance.

Consider Likeability During Recruitment
Our research suggests that during the recruitment process, firms should assess how well the recruit’s identity matches their prospective manager’s identity. A meeting should take place between the prospective manager and the recruit to assess each individual’s perception of the recruit’s roles in the firm. It is important to analyze whether the manager and recruit’s role analysis align in order to increase relational identification between the manager and salesperson in the future. If the manager and recruit’s role identification do not align, it may be best to avoid complications further down the line and look for another recruit who better fits the identified role. The greater the alignment between the manager and recruit’s role assessment, the higher the likelihood of relational success. Therefore, considering recruit’s role identification in the hiring process can lead to greater sales performance for the firm.

Educate Salespeople to Understand Manager Expectations
Salespeople often find themselves wondering why their managers have certain expectations regarding their role. As a manager, it is essential to provide salespeople with an understanding of why certain managerial expectations exist. The more insight the manager can provide concerning the manager’s perception of expectations and responsibilities, the increased probability that the manager’s and salesperson’s relational identification will align, and that salespeople’s performance will reflect the sales manager’s expectations.

Search for Points of Commonality with Salespeople
Finally, managers can leverage points of similarity and commonality with their salespeople and should actively pursue points of commonality to build rapport with their salespeople. Rapport building is especially important to salespeople who have recently joined the firm; however, rapport building should be looked at as an ongoing process and should not be neglected even after an employee is no longer considered “new.” Overall, managers should look for similarities and commonalities with salespeople to build rapport and develop greater relational identification.

Real Estate Implications
Real estate managers can use the practices detailed above to improve manager likeability and therefore increase their firm’s sales performance. As a real estate manager, likeability is an asset that you can leverage. Manager likeability can be heightened through thoughtful interactions both internally and externally to the workplace. Although developing a relationship with salespeople can be a lengthy and time-consuming process, it is likely to be a rewarding experience for both the manager and salesperson. As a manager, you can move your salespeople
from focusing on the “me” to broadening their self-identification into the “us” or “we,” which can prove to be a powerful motivator in their sales performance. Managers have an ability to influence their salespeople. As managers develop and nurture their salespeople, they can foster relationships that not only benefit both the manager and salesperson, but improve company sales performance as well.

Recommended Reading


References


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Dr. Edward L. Nowlin’s (PhD – University of Nebraska-Lincoln) research interests have focused on drivers of salesperson performance and the relationship between fantasy sports, gambling and consumer choice. In particular, Dr. Nowlin’s research examines the effect of information, manager actions, and manager and coworker relationships and their impact on sales performance. Dr. Nowlin has published in Journal of Business Research, Industrial Marketing Management, European Journal of Marketing, Journal of Public Policy & Marketing, Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice, Health Marketing Quarterly, Journal of Political Marketing, and Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing, among others. In 2015, Dr. Nowlin was awarded the Best Paper Award at the Society of Marketing Advances Annual Conference, Personal Selling & Sales Management Track. He was also a recipient of the 2020 College of Business Administration Contributions in Research Award.

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