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Within the remote-work culture of real estate, it is not unusual to find a lone wolf salesperson, one who prefers to work independently when making decisions, setting priorities, and accomplishing goals. These individuals tend to prioritize their own interests and are prone to focus on outcomes rather than on structured processes. It is not uncommon for lone wolf salespeople to have a “sell at all costs” mentality, which can lead to ethical dilemmas. In this research, we explore the relationship between lone wolf sales tendencies and ethical behavior. We also explore whether perceived supervisor support and the cognitive attribute of self-efficacy serve as moderators for ethical decision-making tendencies of a lone wolf salesperson.

Lone wolf salespeople are prevalent in many industries, and their strengths likely lend themselves toward a profession like real estate, where much of the work is self-initiating and individualistic. Through understanding the findings of our research, supervisors and sales managers can more effectively manage salespeople with lone wolf tendencies and take action to mitigate any unethical behavior.

Perceived Supervisor Support

Not all salespeople prefer to cooperate and collaborate with colleagues. Lone wolves possess intrinsic motivation, determination, and a competitive spirit that fuels their career success; they are also recognized as poor team players who view colleagues as less competent and not as committed to the organization. Harnessing the aforementioned elements and moderating the negative aspects, though, can produce a highly effective employee.

Through our research, we found that the perception of supervisor support tends to decrease the negative relationship between categorical lone wolves and ethical decision making. With input and support from a supervisor, lone wolf salespeople will be less inclined to believe that they can get away with unethical behaviors.

Supervisors who add accountability, guidance, and emotional support can help develop a lone wolf salesperson by promoting values and behaviors that deter unethical decision making. In addition, perceived supervisor support can foster an environment of recognition and feedback where lone wolves may be more inclined to seek support from others. By providing recognition
and positive reinforcement, supervisors can influence lone wolves to excel and attain personal goals while also contributing to and achieving goals of the firm.

**Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy is an individual’s confidence in their abilities to perform a job or task in an effective manner. While having confident, competent employees is crucial to running a successful real estate business, salespeople who are high in self-efficacy are more focused on themselves and the pursuit of individual goals rather than the goals of the firm. We explored the impact of self-efficacy on lone wolf salespeople’s tendency toward ethical behaviors and found that self-efficacy strengthens the negative correlation between lone wolf salespeople and their ethical decision-making. In other words, salespeople who feel they do not need the help of others may be tempted to complete tasks in an unethical manner if it means they can do it without having to depend on someone else. For instance, an agent may offer legal advice to a client in an effort to expedite the purchase process, whereas legal advice should always be referred to an attorney. In this case, the agent and firm can be held responsible for said advice.

Another key takeaway from our research is that when interviewing for sales positions, employers should note that the assumption that a higher level of self-efficacy is always beneficial is not necessarily true. When paired with lone wolf tendencies, self-efficacy heightens unethical behaviors.

**Conclusion**

One thing made clear through interviews with sales professionals is that lone wolves are not inherently unethical, nor do they have intentions to act in an unethical manner. However, an inclination toward unethical behaviors can harm customer relationships and have negative consequences for the employer.

Lone wolves provide value to a selling organization in their high energy and determination to get things done, but they require the proper oversight to mitigate unethical behavioral tendencies. By providing guidance and feedback, an effective supervisor can reduce a lone wolf’s tendency toward unethical behavior.

In real estate, there is not always a structured, guided process for connecting with a customer and making a deal happen. Every transaction has different obstacles and special circumstances, which is why our research provides helpful insights into effective management strategies. Through our research, we found that lone wolf salespeople, compared to their colleagues, are more likely to act unethically. Most concerning is the finding that self-efficacy strengthens the relationship between lone wolf tendencies and negative ethical behaviors surrounding sales efforts. By contrast, lone wolf salespeople are less likely to act unethically when they feel that their supervisor is supportive of their goals.
By understanding the tendencies of a lone wolf salesperson, a supervisor or employer can effectively manage to achieve optimal results from salespeople while mitigating unethical behavior that is detrimental to the firm.

**Recommended Reading**


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