

Chapter 1

Introduction

ABSTRACT

Sales peak performance (SPP) amongst B2B sales professionals has been a long-standing and perennial challenge, and consequently, businesses, academics, and practitioners have continued to try and shed some light on how these challenges can be addressed. These challenges continue to be a source of debate that has been exhibited by the ongoing conversations within the boardroom, data from current research, and trends within the B2B selling environment. The quest to find answers as to why there is a disproportionate amount of salespeople underperforming and identify new insights and practical solutions to help organisation develop better strategies that will then translate into better sales performances is the accentuating underpinning for this book. This chapter will commence with an overview of the SPP challenges as the basis of the discourse, which will provide context and direction for the remainder of the chapter and book.

There is nothing strange or mystical about change, nothing superhuman. Change is constant and continuous. In the world of selling, change is also relentless, it is rapid, and it is reality. You can only be certain of its uncertainty. To effectively deal with change, simply requires your willingness to take a step beyond. Therefore, if you want or need or demand more from life, business, staff, customers or prospects, you have to change. The old way may no longer be appropriate or even work. Your past assures nothing, it is an influencer,

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not a guarantor. Clinging to the old way just because it has always been done that way, thwarts new ideas, opportunities and solutions. (Blackman, 1998)

1.2 RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The quote by Jeff Blackman in 1998 turned out to offer considerable foresight in the world of personal selling and it still remains very relevant as we function within a continually changing socioeconomic and political landscape. Business leaders are faced with unprecedented challenges for growth in order to deliver improved business performances, as they are tasked to do more with fewer resources to support their objectives (Brown, 2012). The pre-recession economic landscape and formula for sales success will no longer get the job done within the confines of a post-recession economy (Dixon and Adamson, 2013). Change presents challenges and it is vital for researchers within the sales and sales management fields to try and address the realities of a changing marketplace (Weitz et al., 2005). Sales organisations and sales environments are currently all subject to change in light of new technologies, economic environments and buying behaviours (Marshall et al., 1999). Bass and Wind (1995) propose that some marketing disciplines have developed to the extent that it seems appropriate to try and understand where we are and ascertain what has been learnt, in order to develop research themes that may offer useful insights for future research in selling.

In today's challenging and competitive economic marketplace, personal selling is regarded as the key to success for many industrial organisations (Ingram et al., 1992) and one of the most imperative considerations facing businesses is in relation to their ability to manage the salesforce and improve their performance (Koshy and Sing, 2010). The proficiency by which organisations can gain the most out of the salesforce continues to resonate with sales managers (Skinner, 2000), as the gap continues to widen between the highest performing salespeople and other members of the team. The quest is to understand why certain salespeople perform at SPP levels within the same environment and under similar conditions, whilst others struggle to achieve their targets.

The role of personal selling and the ability of the salesforce to perform at SPP levels continue to be of critical importance for the success of most businesses. Dixon and Adamson (2013:14) postulate that the need to understand what sets apart 'star' performers from the rest of their colleagues "has never been more urgent". However, much of the literature on sales is

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