



MENTAL TOUGHNESS AND THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SALESPEOPLE

A Case Study in 4 Polish Financial Services organisations.

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Sales is a profession where performance and efficiency are crucial outputs. This project examined whether salespeople who achieve the highest sales results differ from less well performing salespeople in terms of mental toughness and its individual factors. Are some of the mental toughness factors more significant than others?

4business&people (4B&P) carried a study on 60 salespeople from 4 large Polish Financial Services organisations (2 banks and 2 insurance companies, employing in total 4350 salespeople). Each organization randomly selected a few of their best and poorer performing salespeople.

The performance differentiator was based on sales income from the previous three months. The results were compared with a sample of 377 people working in positions other than as salespersons.

Mental toughness was assessed using MTQ48 and the mental toughness model developed by Professor Peter Clough and Doug Strycharczyk.

What emerged was two interesting and valuable observations

1: high mental toughness is a significant factor distinguishing salespeople as a professional group from other groups of employees in the same organisation/sector.

The study clearly showed that salespeople as a group have comparatively high mental toughness as compared to other employees in the same organisation.

In addition, salespeople's scores are higher than other employees on several scales: self-confidence in abilities, commitment, interpersonal confidence and control. This suggests that the practice adopted by many businesses of creating sales teams from "back room" staff without reliable selection and targeted development activity may not always give good results.

2: the distinguishing factors of a good salesperson is commitment and self-confidence

The study showed that looking at the overall mental toughness of salespeople is not sufficient to guarantee success. It appears that the mental toughness profile is equally important.

Studies show that high performance in salespeople is mainly determined by: commitment and confidence - an effective salesperson is confident of his knowledge and skills, manages relations with others well, while at the same time is committed and persistent in achieving his goals and objectives, even where there are difficulties and obstacles.

An interesting observation is that poorer salespeople have higher control scores particularly in relation to other mental toughness factors. This suggests that where salespeople do not have good self-awareness of their mental toughness, and have not learned how to manage this, this can hinder their sales effectiveness. Perhaps a strong “can do” approach is not appealing to a client. Financial services clients might prefer contact with experts - persons certain of their knowledge and skills. If they “go the extra mile”, a salesperson’s high level of commitment in persuading us may come in handy, as long as its without excessive pressure.

This is consistent with the observations from a UK study which showed that the most effective salespersons were slightly more submissive than assertive.

The study indicates that when looking for good salespeople it is worth checking their self-confidence and commitment. These are worth developing during training for salespeople.