

# What's *inside* top sales performers?

Research in the USA, Germany and Holland confirms that exceptional sales performance can be predicted, and that top-performing salespeople are similar in very specific ways. **Nik Plevan**, Managing Director of The Best Behaviour Company, explains the implications for companies, sales people, and those who are accountable for sales performance.



The most successful organisations know that recruiting the right salespeople is one of the most powerful “secret weapons” in their arsenal of competitive strategies. What they may not know, is that recruiting top-performers can be as simple as following a proven formula based on recent findings from an international study conducted by Target Training International. The research concludes that top salespeople worldwide place a high value on efficiency, utility and economics.

As a result of over twenty years of research, we have been advising companies that it is what's on the *inside*, not the *outside*, that counts, especially in sales performance, and dispelling the myth that recruiting good looking and sounding people correlates to sales performance.

Most past research on top salespeople has been focused on behaviour. Behaviour - like looking good and sounding good - is easy to observe and has long been regarded as a key indicator of sales performance. But there is little research as to what goes on *inside* a top sales performer. Our groundbreaking work in the US and Europe now confirms that attitudes, values and beliefs far outweigh “looking good and sounding good” in distinguishing top salespeople.

Two of our most significant beliefs were confirmed by these studies.

- 1. Top performing salespeople worldwide are similar and;**
- 2. Attitudes, values and beliefs are more important than behaviour in determining sales performance.**

In all three studies, only top performing salespeople were included, and they responded to two assessments. One was based on the internationally validated DISC behavioural model, and the other on TTI's Personal Interests, Attitudes and Values model (PIAV), currently being validated internationally.

The behavioural assessment identifies eight behavioural patterns:

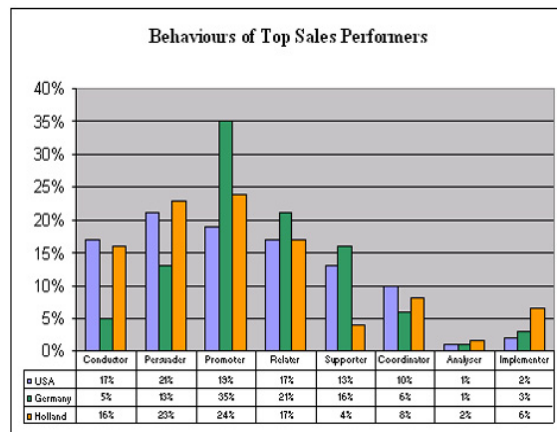
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|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. <b>Conductor</b>    | - direct and results-oriented   |
| 2. <b>Persuader</b>    | - optimistic and flexible       |
| 3. <b>Promoter</b>     | - verbal and trusting           |
| 4. <b>Relater</b>      | - co-operative team player      |
| 5. <b>Supporter</b>    | - accommodating and persistent  |
| 6. <b>Co-ordinator</b> | - cautious and self-disciplined |
| 7. <b>Analyser</b>     | - precise and detail-oriented   |
| 8. <b>Implementer</b>  | - creative and indecisive       |

The PIAV assessment measures six distinct attitudes or values that provide the context for motivation – “why people do what they do;”

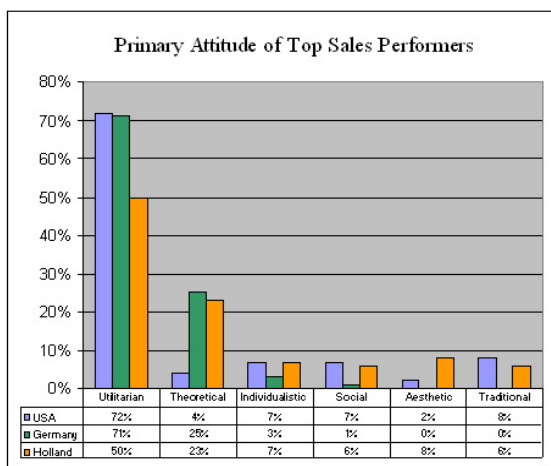
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|---------------------------|---|
| 1. <b>Utilitarian</b>     | - a focus on practicality, efficiency or economics                  |
| 2. <b>Theoretical</b>     | - a focus on education, learning and truth                          |
| 3. <b>Aesthetic</b>       | - a focus on beauty, harmony and balance                            |
| 4. <b>Individualistic</b> | - a focus on controlling one's own destiny or the destiny of others |
| 5. <b>Social</b>          | - putting others before self  |
| 6. <b>Traditional</b>     | - a focus on a system for living                                    |

In all three national studies, the majority of the 800 sales people studied tended to be spread across six of the eight behavioural patterns, with only minor variations between countries. This suggests that salespeople with most, if not all, behavioural patterns can be top performers. Therefore, selecting sales people according to their behaviour - "how they look and sound" - can be misleading.

But, when it comes to what is on the *inside* of top performing salespeople, there is a definite correlation between sales performance and a strong Utilitarian attitude. While the results indicate that cultural and environmental factors have a modifying effect on motivation, Utilitarian attitudes are dominant, regardless of nationality.



### The most important selection criterion when recruiting salespeople is a high Utilitarian attitude.



The implications for the global sales community, whether they are salespeople, or those who recruit, manage, develop and motivate them are clear. The most important selection criterion is a high Utilitarian attitude. Once salespeople with a high Utilitarian attitude are recruited, the job satisfaction and motivation buttons that need to be pushed are efficiency, practicality and economics.

Studies of attitudes also reveal that when a person's highest attitude is fulfilled, he/she is motivated towards the second highest attitude. For example, a top performing salesperson whose highest attitude is Utilitarian followed by Aesthetic, will begin to be motivated by beauty and harmony only after they have satisfied their financial goals through the most efficient and practical methods. This provides important insight into incentives. Income and other financial incentives will yield the best effects with high Utilitarian salespeople, unless they are already completely satisfied in those areas. Although financial rewards are always a safe bet, incentives should be tailored specifically to each salesperson's motivations.

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Over the coming months, The Best Behaviour Company will be carrying out similar research on top sales people in the UK, to identify how our leading sales professionals compare against their US and European counterparts. To take part in the study, and receive a free behavioural and attitudinal assessment for yourself and your salespeople, please contact Nik Plevan on 01782 505488 or e-mail [nik@bestbehaviour.net](mailto:nik@bestbehaviour.net).