

1-1-2013

Sales Manager Support: Fostering Emotional Health, Motivation and Customer-orientation in Salespeople

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Recommended Citation

Kemp, E., Leila Borders, A., & Ricks, J. M. (2013). Sales manager support: fostering emotional health in salespeople. *European Journal of Marketing*, 47(3/4), 635-654.

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Short Title: Fostering Emotional Health in Salespeople

Abstract

Purpose: The present research examines the role of sales manager support in promoting the subjective well-being of salespeople as well as the function of the sales manager in cultivating positive, motivating and productive environments.

Design/methodology/approach: An exploratory assessment of the relationship between sales manager support and emotional health in salespeople was conducted by interviewing sales professionals from diverse industries. The insight offered from these individuals, in conjunction with prior literature, provided the basis for the development of a conceptual model that elucidates the impact of sales manager support on the emotional well-being of salespeople and subsequently salesperson effectiveness. The model was tested using 154 salespeople. Structural equation modeling was used to analyze the data.

Findings: Results indicate that sales manager support is negatively related to emotional exhaustion and rumination, but positively associated with fostering positive working environments and future expectations. Salesperson motivation is positively related to positive working environments and customer-oriented selling and negatively related to emotional exhaustion.

Research limitations/implications: The study is cross-sectional in nature and no causal relationships could be established. Future studies might include field experiments that assess the effect of sales manager support on salesperson's well-being and behavior.

Practical Implications: The study demonstrates the important role sales managers have in promoting the subjective well-being of salespeople.

Originality/value: This research addresses how sales manager coaching specifically impacts elements of a salesperson's emotional health.

Keywords: Sales Manager Support, Emotional Exhaustion, Customer-Oriented Selling, Motivation, Salespeople and Time Management

Paper type: Research Paper

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Sales Manager Support: Fostering Emotional Health in Salespeople

Good sales managers support their sales teams by teaching, guiding and motivating them (Robert, mechanical construction).

Sales managers play important roles in developing the skills of salespeople as well as helping the organization achieve its objectives. Sales managers are responsible for ensuring that the sales force has the tools and training necessary to achieve the organization's goals related to maintaining customer relationships, and increasing sales volumes and profit (Cravens *et al.*, 1993; Deeter-Schmelz *et al.*, 2002). As a result, coaching in the form of guidance and feedback from the sales manager is paramount. A manager who displays competence, models exemplary behaviors and is a supportive communicator, can create positive working environments which can result in confidence and trust among salespeople (Tanner and Castleberry, 1990; Panagopoulos and Nikolaos, 2009).

Manager support is especially critical for salespeople. Salespeople are boundary spanners and the tasks and stressors associated with professional selling can be substantial (Babakus *et al.*, 1999; Lewin and Sager, 2008). Role stressors among salespeople can include rejection, a client failing to move forward with a sale, and incongruent demands placed on the salesperson by the client and the firm (Lewin and Sager, 2008). Salespeople are often in need of supportive interventions to prevent burnout and to help foster positive and motivating environments (Lewin

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and Sager, 2008). Researchers have suggested that it is important for sales managers to identify the needs of salespeople in order to encourage and motivate them to achieve their best (Hughes and Singler, 1983; Churchill *et al.*, 1976). The present research examines the role of sales manager support in promoting the subjective well-being of salespeople as well as the function of the manager in cultivating positive, motivating environments.

In the following research, first, an exploratory assessment of the relationship between sales manager support and emotional health was conducted by interviewing sales professionals from diverse industries. Secondly, the insight offered from these individuals, in conjunction with prior literature, provided the basis for the development of a conceptual model that elucidates the impact of sales manager support on the emotional well-being of salespeople and subsequently salesperson effectiveness. The model is then tested. Implications for the role of sales managers in creating and promoting positive working environments and consequently successful sales teams are offered.

Conceptual Framework

Salespeople are highly vulnerable to role stressors (Singh *et al.*, 1994); however, supervisor support can reduce stress levels (Lee and Ashforth, 1993; Schwab *et al.*, 1986). Not only can sales managers provide task-relevant resources, including technical information and training, but they can also offer empathy, encouragement and recognition. Such support can reduce the likelihood of salespersons feeling overwhelmed and eventually burning-out (Lewin and Sager, 2008; Nonis and Sager, 2003).

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In the interviews of sales professionals conducted for this research, the effects of emotional exhaustion, ruminative propensity (the tendency to engage in repetitive negative thought patterns) and time management were all issues that surfaced when discussing the impact of sales manager support on salesperson stressors. Thus, our framework of sales manager support on emotional health (see Figure 1) is derived from the experiences and insights of these sales professionals as well as from a review of theoretical concepts from the behavioral and sales literature. Ten sales professionals, including both sales representatives and managers from various industries (aliases were assigned, see Table 1) were interviewed. All sales professionals worked in business-to-business sales environments (e.g., mechanical construction, consumer packaged goods, clinical research, business services). Years of selling experience ranged from two years to twenty-six years. Five females and five males were interviewed. Each interview was of a semi-structured nature where participants were asked open-ended questions. Sales persons were asked questions about their relationship with their sales manager and how it impacted their emotional well-being and professional performance. All salespersons were initially asked five standardized questions in addition to follow-up questions (see Appendix for types of interview questions). Likewise, sales managers were asked questions about their respective relationships with the salespeople they manage, and how the subjective well-being of their salespeople might influence performance. Specifically, sales managers were interviewed to achieve a more holistic perspective regarding the role of emotional health in the selling environment and to better inform the implications of this research for managers. Each interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes and was taped and transcribed.

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Emotional exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion occurs as a response to job-related demand stressors (Maslach and Jackson, 1981; Schwab *et al.*, 1986; Lewin and Sager, 2008). Syndromes include dread at the prospect of returning to work, increased absenteeism, diminished self-esteem, depression, insomnia and withdrawal from the organization or profession (Kahill, 1988, Moncrief *et al.*, 1995). Job-related burnout costs businesses hundreds of billions of dollars annually (Lewin and Sager, 2008). Emotional exhaustion is pervasive in people that work in boundary spanning positions such as sales (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). Tasks and stressors associated with professional selling can be considerable, as salespeople must meet the needs of their clients as well as their organizations (Lewin and Sager, 2008).

Stress on the sales job can arise because of an incongruity between a salesperson's desired job expectations and actual perceived conditions (Edwards, 1992). Additionally, rapid and turbulent changes can make a salesperson's job incredibly stressful. One of the sales managers interviewed expressed the importance of periodically accessing the well-being of members on her sales team through simple probing.

It is imperative that you monitor the emotional well-being of your rep. A simple, direct question of, "How are you?" will often invite your sales rep to bring forth the struggles of their day so that you can have an accurate read on where they are emotionally. Every rep and situation has to be dealt with uniquely, but make no mistake: helping stabilize your rep emotionally is one of the most important aspects of management (Carolyn, payroll services).

Many of the sales representatives interviewed shared how coaching from their sales managers prevented them from feeling overwhelmed by potentially problematic occurrences on the job.

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My sales manager teaches me to not get so worked-up over every problem. At first I did not like this advice because to me, everything that was a problem was a big deal. Teaching by example, he showed me who to contact and what to do in each situation. Now I have grown to realize that knowing who to contact to fix these problems quickly helps me to not get so overwhelmed by them (Denise, apparel).

At the mid-year review I was not at 50% of my annual goal. In addition, I was experiencing serious service failures with my two largest clients, which in turn, affected my ability to sell aggressively to new clients. My manager, asked me to re-focus my energies on securing business with new clients and let the operational teams focus on resolving the issues with my current clients. In addition, she gave me smaller weekly goals to meet instead of focusing on the large annual goal, which proved to be overwhelming to me (Phyllis, clinical research).

For a while advertising dollars began to trend away from radio, newspaper, cable, and TV and towards digital mediums. Those losses proved overwhelming and exhausting for me. After a good strategy session with my sales manager, I felt confident about pursuing another approach which energized and made me more successful on the job (Ulysses, entertainment and communications).

Subsequently, maintaining emotionally healthy salespeople is paramount. If salespeople interact on a regular basis with their sales managers and managers make efforts to provide their teams with the appropriate resources, whether it is training, feedback or empathy, the likelihood of stress and burn-out may be reduced. Consequently, the following is proposed:

H1a: Sales manager support is negatively related to emotional exhaustion.

Rumination

In my career, I have seen many salespeople caught in negative thought patterns. It can really overtake a worker's demeanor in the workplace. It is critical that sales managers keep an eye out for these attitudes. They can be contagious and can poison other salespeople on the team (Barbara, direct mail).

Salespeople can experience successes as well as failure on the job. On any day, they may be the victims of rude prospects and rejection. When a negative or disappointing event takes

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place, it may be human nature to engage in some degree of repetitive thought, or rumination about the situation. *Rumination* is defined as having recurrent thoughts that manifest as a result of the discrepancy between one's current position and a desired goal (Martin and Tesser, 1996). Many research scholars, including Nolen-Hoeksema and Morrow (1991), view rumination as having a maladaptive dimension, which consists of brooding because it involves having repetitive thoughts that are not directed at resolving the problem but may be about how an individual was "wronged" or "mistreated." Accordingly, rumination can also involve dwelling passively on the negative aspects of one's current situation (Nolen-Hoeksema and Morrow 1991; Wade et al. 2008). Such a "brooding" type of rumination (which is the focus of this research) may be associated with increased anger, depression and ineffective coping (Nolen-Hoeksema and Morrow, 1991). Moreover, ruminators do not engage in active problem solving; and if they do attempt to find solutions to the problem, the solutions they generate are often of lower quality than solutions they might develop if they were not ruminating (Lyubomirsky and Nolen-Hoeksema, 1995). Further, when victims of interpersonal offenses ruminate on the specifics of a hurtful situation, this can lead to negative psychological and relational outcomes. Research has found links between rumination and cognitive and emotional disturbance, including pessimistic thinking, depression, anxiety and decreased feelings of control over one's life (Lyubomirsky and Nolen-Hoeksema, 1995; Just and Alloy, 1997). For the salesperson, consistent and active rumination may contribute to eventual burnout and emotional exhaustion where the salesperson experiences depression, withdrawal from clients and an overall decrease in the quality of job performance.

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However, sales managers can provide salespeople with social support and encourage problem-focused coping as opposed to rumination. By engaging in problem-focused coping behaviors, a salesperson makes efforts to manage and modify problems associated with the stressful situation (Strutton and Lumpkin, 1993; Lewin and Sager, 2008). This often helps to reduce anxieties and various stressors. Most of the salespeople interviewed intimated about how repetitive thoughts and anxieties regarding negative occurrences on the job could affect their ability to be productive. One sales representative commented on how an experience with his sales manager was able to liberate him from ruminative thinking.

I am new in my industry and have spent quite a bit of time stressing and worrying about how cyclical this year has been. Even though I did not express my concerns to anyone, my sales manager recently called me to explain that the entire industry was down. We discussed ideas of how to best use my time during this down time period. That ten-minute phone call immediately helped relieve some of the stress I had been feeling (Robert, mechanical construction).

Additionally, instead of ruminating about negative experiences with clients, Denise's sales manager advised her on how to approach such situations.

I have had several instances where clients have blown up at me about issues with my product. Whether it is my fault or the factory's fault, I represent the face of my company and it is my job to take responsibility for any and all problems. Rather than getting mad or frustrated with myself or the factory, my sales manager has taught me to deal with each situation, by telling my clients that I have an "easy solution". It ensures trust with the client and calms me down as well (Denise, apparel).

Consequently, salespeople that receive support and guidance from their sales managers regularly might be less likely to engage in potentially destructive rumination, which can lead to emotional exhaustion. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are predicted:

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H1b: Salesperson rumination is positively related to emotional exhaustion.

H1c: Sales manager support is negatively related to rumination.

Due to the links found in the literature between rumination (particularly of the “brooding” type) and cognitive and emotional disturbance (Lyubomirsky and Nolen-Hoeksema, 1995; Just and Alloy, 1997), if the salesperson continues to engage in rumination, the effects of the manager’s support in helping the salesperson combat negative emotional outcomes is likely to be reduced. Specifically, problem-focused support provided by the sales manager, which helps to empower the individual and promote proactive behavior, may be in direct conflict with ruminative behavior, thereby further diminishing the effectiveness of the manager's support. Since evidence from the literature supports that rumination has been linked to various negative emotional outcomes (Just and Alloy, 1997), emotional exhaustion may ensue if there is excessive rumination. This suggests that rumination will likely mediate the relationship between sales manager support and emotional exhaustion.

H1d: Rumination mediates the relationship between sales manager support and emotional exhaustion.

Time management

Organizational scholars often link time management behaviors to stress reduction. Macan (1994) and Shahani *et. al.* (1993) have suggested that time management attitudes and behaviors are useful in preventing overload-based stress. Effective time management can lead to more efficient, satisfied and healthy employees (Schuler, 1979; Richards, 1987). Moreover,

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Macan (1994) found that engaging in time management behaviors was associated with lower levels of job-related tension, somatic tension and higher levels of job satisfaction.

In providing salespeople with the tools and resources needed to be successful, sales managers may also advise salespeople about prioritizing activities and the amount of time to spend on these activities. Those salespeople that are coached in such a manner may feel as though they have greater control over their time. Our interviewees remarked that the support and training received from their sales managers affected how they managed their time. Feeling more in control of their time led to feelings of confidence and enthusiasm about the job. A number of the sales representatives interviewed commented on how their managers suggested they manage their time:

In sales, it is very easy to lose track of time and not accomplish anything. My sales manager taught me that I could make the best use of my time by preplanning my week and sticking to the plan as much as possible. By blocking certain parts of my days to perform the necessary tasks related to my job, it helps to ensure that I make the best use of my time and get everything accomplished (Robert, mechanical construction).

Our motto within our sales group is to 'Keep It Simple.' We are encouraged [by our sales manager] to set 1-2 goals a day that we are able to achieve. This gives us a feeling of accomplishment (Phyllis, clinical research).

Hence, the following is predicted:

H1e: Sales manager support is positively related to salespeople's perceptions of the control they have over their time.

Sales manager support is not only important for helping salespeople manage their time effectively, but it is also crucial in helping to combat ruminative propensity, which may have a negative impact on time management. Ruminators often feel like they have lost control over their

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lives (Nolen-Hoeksema and Jackson, 2001). Accordingly, rumination about negative occurrences on the job may cause salespeople to feel as if they lack control over their time as well. In addition, perceptions of time control can have a substantial impact on job-related attitudes and behaviors. The literature suggests that there is an inverse relationship between effective time management and stress and tension on the job (Macan 1994; Jaramilo, Mulki and Locander 2005). Individuals that feel as if they have little control over their time may be more likely to become frustrated or overwhelmed (Jaramillo et al. 2005). As a result, the following is proposed:

H1f: Rumination is negatively related to salespeople's perceptions of the control they have over their time.

H1g: Salespeople's perception of the control they have over their time is negatively related to emotional exhaustion.

Positive and productive working environments

Motivation and positive working environments

Through effective coaching, sales managers can motivate salespeople by instilling confidence in them (Walker *et al.*, 1977; Tyagi, 1985; Jaworski and Kohli, 1991; Johlke et al., 2000). *Motivation* involves the effort the salesperson anticipates expending on tasks associated with his or her job. A manager with strong motivational skills inspires salespeople to put forth greater effort. In the sales literature, the salesperson's motivation to expend effort on the job and his resulting performance is usually viewed as a function of the salesperson's ability, financial

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compensation, psychological incentives (recognition, opportunities for personal growth), and organizational and managerial factors (Walker *et al.*, 1977).

Further, effective coaching and guidance from the sales manager can stimulate the salesperson's internal drive and induce positive affect and emotions. Research from the psychology literature suggests that positive emotions can broaden thought-action repertoire (Fredrickson, 2001). This broadening occurs by augmenting an individual's scope of attention, cognition and action. Hence, positive emotions experienced by salespeople can influence and heighten motivation (Badovick *et al.*, 1992). Research also suggests that positive emotions help enhance psychological, social, intellectual and physical resources (Fredrickson, 2001).

Several of our interviewees were eager to share the impact their sales managers had on creating positive work environments. This support, often served as encouragement, which helped to motivate them, even in challenging situations.

My sales manager inspires me, not just by telling me how to grow, but we sit down and make a list of goals for each month and determine what I will need to do to meet my goals (Denise, apparel).

My sales manager never misses the opportunity to brag about his sales team to his boss. Anytime he sends him an email about me, he copies me on the message. This is definitely a confidence booster (Robert, mechanical construction).

Sales managers aid salespeople in having positive outlooks by reiterating the opportunities available to them. By getting salespeople to buy into the company's objectives and accepting delayed gratification, sales managers not only create a positive outlook, but help foster enjoyable existences within the organization for salespeople (Matt, consumer packaged goods).

Further, the sales managers interviewed explained what they feel is essential in keeping salespeople motivated and in fostering positive working environments.

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Sales managers help motivate salespeople by telling them how important they are to the company. In order for the company to succeed, customers rate the company by the first people they see – the salespeople. This gives the salesperson a feeling of worth (John, commercial plumbing).

A word of encouragement and an offer of assistance often can make the salesperson feel important. Sales managers can motivate their salespeople by reminding them that the successes they attained previously can be easily surpassed by just doing what they have already done along with keeping a positive attitude. Constant recognition and being rewarded for a job well done can keep salespeople going (Susan, home construction).

There are times when salespeople need positive reinforcement. For example, there was a time when one of my account managers was attempting to secure a contract with a very large retailer and they continued to delay him day in and day out. I took a moment to meet him for a cup of coffee after one of his visits and explained to him what a good job he was doing and reviewed all of the other accounts he had secured during his time with me. This was a huge confidence boost that helped him through the rough patch he was experiencing (Daniel, entertainment and communications).

Subsequently, based on previous literature and the experiences of the sales professionals interviewed, we propose the following:

H2a: Sales manager support is positively related to motivation.

H2b: Sales manager support is positively related to positive emotional reactions in sales people.

H2c: Salespeople's positive emotional reactions are positively related to motivation.

Although positive working environments can contribute to more motivated salespeople, negative emotion, stress and burn-out can adversely affect the salesperson. As suggested in the literature (Moncrief *et al.*, 1995), the outcomes of emotional exhaustion can be deleterious in the work environment. Because emotionally exhausted individuals may experience dread at the prospect of returning to work, depression and diminished self-esteem (Kahill 1988), it is

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proposed that emotional exhaustion will have an unfavorable impact on motivation. Hence, the following is proposed:

H2d: Emotional exhaustion is negatively related to motivation.

Future expectations

My sales manager is very optimistic, but also realistic about the future. When we sat down to create next year's forecast, I had no problem agreeing with the number he asked me to produce even though it was quite a bit higher than last year (Robert, mechanical construction).

Vroom (1964) postulated that individuals develop expectancies regarding the outcomes of their behavior and subsequently behave in a manner likely to result in preferred performance outcomes. *Future expectations*, or *expectancies*, are the salesperson's perceptions of the linkage between the effort he/she spends on various activities and the resulting level of performance. Future expectations can be a function of the salesperson's level of self-esteem, perceived competencies and ability (Walker *et. al.*, 1977). Since sales managers can help develop the skills of salespeople and foster positive environments, future expectations and expectancies may be likely to increase with continued sales manager support. Additionally, as salesperson's future expectations increase, motivation may be likely to increase (Oliver, 1974; Johnston and Kim, 1994).

Thus, the following is proposed:

H3a: Sales manager support is positively related to a salesperson's future expectations.

H3b: Future expectations are positively related to motivation.

Customer-oriented selling

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Salespeople must understand customers' needs to develop effective solutions to satisfy those needs. Thus, companies should direct salespeople to adopt relational selling behaviors (Paparoidamis and Guezi, 2009). One component of relational selling involves enlisting customer-oriented selling. *Customer-oriented selling* is defined as the implementation of the marketing concept by the salesperson where he/she focuses on identifying and satisfying customer needs (Saxe and Weitz, 1982; Paparoidamis and Guezi, 2009). This approach requires that salespeople enlist behaviors that increase long-term satisfaction (Dunlap *et al.*, 1988). Customer-oriented selling skills include determining whether customers understand sales presentations, respond accurately to customers' questions and explain product benefits in terms of how the offering allows customers to achieve desired outcomes (Saxe and Weitz, 1982). The sales professionals interviewed credited much of their successes to engaging in customer-oriented selling behavior.

The most important thing that I have learned in my professional selling career is customer-oriented selling. I have learned how to find the "pain" in my clients and deliver the best solution to them. Finding out what they really like or don't like in their current product, gives me a strong advantage on how to sell them the benefits of my particular product. I get to know them on a deeper level and build a relationship with them. I become more than just their sales rep, but a person that they enjoy seeing on a quarterly basis (Denise, apparel).

It's all about the relationship with the customer. Customers do not want to feel pressured. They want to feel like they are in the hands of a professional that is friendly and easy to relate to. By building the client relationship, the salesperson can assure that they will have many repeat customers and will experience residuals and referrals from the original sale for years to come (Barbara, direct mail).

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Research has demonstrated that customer-oriented selling improves salesperson effectiveness and performance (Paparoidamis and Guezi, 2009). Motivated salespeople are often willing to expend the necessary effort to achieve high performance outcomes. As a result, they may be more inclined to make concerted efforts to recognize and understand the needs of their customers and deliver the best solutions for them. Satisfied customers contribute to the successful performance of salespeople. Therefore, the following is hypothesized:

H4: Motivation is positively related to customer-oriented selling.

Method

A web-based survey was sent to salespeople in over 16 fields (e.g., consumer packaged goods, pharmaceuticals, medical supplies, business services and advertising) in the United States. Firms from various industries were chosen in order to improve the generalizability of results. Twenty sales managers were contacted in person, via phone or email. They were asked if they would share the survey with their salespeople and encourage participation. Sales managers sent the survey to all salespeople within their respective divisions. Over 300 salespeople were sent the survey. Scales used to measure the constructs in the survey are presented in the Appendix.

A total of 154 completed surveys were received. For the most part, a gender-representative sample was achieved. In most of the industries from which our sales force was drawn, men make-up 52-55% of the sales force, and women represent 45-48% of the salespeople (Gabriel and Schmitz, 2007; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). In our sample, fifty-four percent of the respondents were female and forty-six percent were male. Fourteen percent of the

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respondents were 18-24 years of age, thirty percent were 24-34, forty-three percent were 35-54 and twelve percent were 55 and over. Sixty-six percent of the participants were White/Caucasian, twenty-four percent were African American, two percent were Latino/Hispanic, two percent were Native American, one percent was Asian American and four percent listed themselves as "Other."

Results

The data were subjected to structural equation analysis in AMOS 17.0 using the maximum likelihood estimation method. As recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), a two-step procedure was used to first assess the model for construct and discriminant validity and then to test hypotheses in the structural model. Additionally, statistical techniques, including the marker variable technique (Lindell and Whitney, 2001; Malhotra et al., 2006), were applied to ensure that findings were not inflated due to common method bias. Results indicated that common method bias did not distort our inferences.

Measurement model

Many of the constructs in this study were measured using existing and established scales taken from the sales and behavioral literatures (see Appendix). In addition to employing standard statistical techniques (e.g., performing exploratory factor analysis, examining item-to-total correlations, obtaining Cronbach alphas) to assess the model for construct and discriminant validity, confirmatory factor analysis was performed. Four items were dropped from the model (one from rumination, two from emotional exhaustion and one from control over time) in order

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to improve fit. The final measurement model then exhibited adequate fit χ^2 (569.85); p-value (.01); CFI (.90); IFI (.91); TLI (.88); and RMSEA (.07).

To test for convergent validity, factor loadings, along with the average variance extracted were calculated for each latent variable. Standardized factor loadings exceeded the 0.6 threshold as recommended by Hair *et al.* (2006). Additionally, as seen in Table 2, the average variance extracted (ranged from .50 to .88) for each construct exceeded the recommended rule of thumb of 0.5 (Hair *et al.*, 2006), which is an indication that the variance captured by the construct is greater than the variance due to measurement error.

In order to assess discriminant validity, the Fornell–Larcker test (1981) was performed. Discriminant validity is demonstrated when the average variance extracted from a construct is greater than the squared correlations between that construct and other constructs in the model. The average variances extracted between each construct were greater than the squared multiple correlations for each construct pairing. Composite reliabilities were also assessed for each construct to ensure that each exhibited internal consistency (ranged from .70 to .95). All measures exemplified acceptable reliability by exceeding the recommended 0.7 threshold (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). The results from the structural model follow.

Structural model

The structural model and hypotheses were evaluated after attaining a validated measurement model. The model (see Figure 1) exhibited a good fit: χ^2 (597.63); p-value (.01); CFI (.90); IFI (.90); TLI (.88); and RMSEA (.07). Both direct and mediated effects were predicted between exogenous and endogenous variables. Results are presented in Table 3.

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H1a-c predicted direct effects between relationships involving sales manager support, emotional exhaustion and rumination. All hypotheses were confirmed. Results demonstrate that sales manager support is negatively related to emotional exhaustion and rumination. However, salesperson rumination is positively related to emotional exhaustion. H1d proposed mediation. Specifically, rumination was predicted to mediate the relationship between sales manager support and emotional exhaustion. Following MacKinnon *et al.* (2002) product of coefficients test for mediation and Zhao *et al.* (2010), mediation was confirmed, $z = 2.71$, $p < .01$.

H1e-g proposed direct effects between perceived control over time, sales manager support, rumination and emotional exhaustion. H1e-g were also supported. Further, H2a predicted a positive relationship between sales manager support and motivation. This hypothesis was not supported ($\beta = .01$, $SE = .07$, $p > .05$). However, H2b and H2c, predicting direct relationships between sales manager support and positive emotional reactions as well as motivation and positive emotional reactions, were validated. Despite the lack of significance between sales manager support and motivation, post-hoc analysis revealed that the emotional reactions of salespeople fully mediated the relationship between sales manager support and motivation, $z = 3.24$, $p < .01$, (MacKinnon *et al.*, 2002; Zhao *et al.*, 2010). H2d, which suggested that emotional exhaustion was negatively related to motivation, was also supported.

Further, H3a, which hypothesized a relationship between sales manager support and future expectations, and H3b which predicted the association between future expectations and motivation, were both supported. Finally, H4 predicted that motivation would be positively related to customer-oriented selling. H4 was confirmed.

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Discussion and limitations of research

Sales managers are a critical link between the salesperson and the organization and can play an important role in the emotional health and success of salespeople. Findings from this research indicate that sales manager support is negatively related to emotional exhaustion and rumination, but positively associated with positive emotional reactions in salespeople and future expectations. Moreover, salesperson motivation is positively related to positive emotional reactions in salespeople and customer-oriented selling, but negatively related to emotional exhaustion.

The direct relationship between sales manager support and motivation did not reach statistical significance in this research; however, the experience of positive emotions by salespeople was found to fully mediate the relationship between sales manager support and motivation. As indicated in previous literature, salesperson motivation may be influenced by a number of factors (Walker *et al.*, 1977; Tanner and Castleberry, 1990; Panagopoulos and Nikolaos, 2009). Further, the narratives of our interviewees and evidence from the behavioral literatures (Fredrickson, 2001) demonstrate that emotional well-being and the experience of positive emotions can be a primary psychological factor impacting motivation. A sales manager that helps to foster a positive working environment may be inherently motivating his/her sales force. This may explain the mediating effect of positive emotional reactions between sales manager support and motivation.

Additionally, rumination was found to mediate the relationship between sales manager support and emotional exhaustion. We purport that excessive rumination reduces the effects of

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sales manager support in dealing with various negative emotional outcomes. Subsequently, the relationships found for rumination and positive emotional reactions in salespeople in relation to sales manager support underscore the impact that emotional well-being has in the selling environment, especially since salesperson turnover is a significant concern among selling organizations.

Results from this research indicate that emotional exhaustion is negatively related to motivation and previous literature has demonstrated that it can be a major cause of turnover (Babakus *et al.*, 1999; Singh *et al.*, 1994). However, this research suggests that sales manager support may not only be able to diminish, but possibly reverse the effects of salesperson emotional exhaustion. For example, as indicated, rumination mediated the relationship between sales manager support and emotional exhaustion. Sales manager coaching could curtail ruminative propensities in salespeople by promoting problem-focused coping behaviors. With problem-focused coping, individuals make attempts to manage or modify the source of stress and embrace problem-solution approaches to their stressors (Strutton and Lumpkin, 1993). Managers can encourage salespeople to engage in activities and behaviors that are aimed at removing or circumventing the source of stress. Some of the managers in our study were able to employ successful interventions with their salespeople (e.g., altering strategies, re-focusing efforts and managing time differently) in order to help them cope with stressful situations. Such efforts to directly address a stress-inducing situation using problem-focused coping can be associated with lower levels of emotional exhaustion (Etzion and Pines, 1986; Kidwell *et al.* 2007; Lewin and Sager, 2008).

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Finding ways to motivate salespeople is a major responsibility of the sales manager. Sales managers that create a positive working environment serve to increase motivation. Some of the salespeople in our study shared how their managers helped to foster positive environments by offering encouragement, recognition, performance feedback and positive reinforcement. These behavior-based controls (Nikolaos and Sergios, 2009) helped to keep them satisfied and motivated. Motivated salespeople are often more likely to engage in selling behaviors, such as customer-oriented selling which improves salesperson effectiveness and results in positive outcomes for the customer and organization in the long-term.

Given the significant impact sales managers have on the performance of salespeople and organizational objectives, the development and training of sales managers should be a major concern for sales organizations. Sales managers that cannot effectively coach salespeople may require instruction and training (Dubinsky *et al.*, 1997; Rich, 1998). Specifically, guidance may be needed in the implementation of sales manager training programs. This may include suggesting the type of information that should be communicated to managers, who should preside over the training, and how information should be disseminated.

Although this research makes important contributions in understanding the role of sales manager support in promoting salesperson emotional health, it is not without its limitations. The data from this study were cross-sectional in nature and no causal relationships could be established. Future studies might include field experiments that assess the effect of sales manager support on salesperson well-being and behavior.

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Although the primary focus of this research was on examining the link between sales manager support and the emotional-well-being of salespeople, future research might examine how sales manager support impacts other job-related outcomes. For example, as a growing body of literature investigates the value and drivers of relationship selling (Paparoidamis and Guezi, 2009), future studies also might examine the effect that sales manager support and coaching have on developing relationships and trust with key accounts. Additionally, recent research has examined the role of the sales manager in shaping ethical behavior in salespeople (Cadagan, 2009). Research that studies the impact that sales managers have on promoting and modeling ethical behaviors and the effect of such behavior on salespeople will also provide interesting insight.

Because sales managers may require training to become effective managers, future studies might also examine what type of training might be most effective for sales managers, especially with regard to providing social and emotional support to salespeople. Sales managers may be instructed in techniques that can be used by salespeople to help them better manage stressful situations. Further, the current research used both qualitative and quantitative data in exploring the role of sales manager support on salespeople. Additional research should continue to use multi-method approaches to learn about and gain more in-depth understanding about such complex behaviors.

An effective sales manager can have a positive impact on a salesperson's subjective well-being and performance. As sales managers provide feedback and model positive behaviors, they can win the trust of salespeople. More research is warranted to understand ways in which the

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sales managers can positively influence salespeople's emotional health, motivation and performance.

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Table 1**Salesperson interviewees (n = 10)**

Name (Alias)	Sales Professional Type	Company Type	Years of Selling Experience	Gender
Robert	Sales Representative	Mechanical Construction	3	Male
Denise	Sales Representative	High-end Apparel	2	Female
Phyllis	Sales Representative	Clinical Research	15	Female
Matt	Sales Representative	Consumer Packaged Goods	12	Male
Ulysses	Sales Representative	Entertainment and Communications	6	Male
Susan	Regional Sales Manager	Home Construction	20	Female
Barbara	Regional Sales Manager	Direct Mail	8	Female
John	Regional Sales Manager	Commercial Plumbing	26	Male
Daniel	Regional Sales Manager	Entertainment and Communications	10	Male
Carolyn	Regional Sales Manager	Payroll Services	12	Female

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Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, Average Variance Extracted and Pearson Correlations

	Means	SD	Reliability	AVE	EE	R	COT	PE	M	FE	SMS	COS
Emotional Exhaustion (EE)	2.68	1.12	.86	.60	1.00							
Rumination[®]	3.28	1.35	.92	.66	.53 ^a	1.00						
Control over Time (COT)	4.38	.91	.74	.58	-.50 ^a	-.32 ^a	1.00					
Positive Emotions (PE)	5.90	.84	.83	.63	-.23 ^a	-.22 ^a	.23 ^a	1.00				
Motivation (M)	6.03	.86	.92	.79	-.31 ^a	-.16 ^b	.10	.36 ^a	1.00			
Future Expectations (FE)	5.97	.95	.94	.88	-.30	-.15	.10	.35 ^a	.40 ^a	1.00		
Sales Manager Support (SMS)	5.61	1.28	.95	.75	-.52 ^a	-.28 ^a	.35 ^a	.37 ^a	.28 ^a	.26 ^a	1.00	
Customer-Oriented Selling (COS)	6.07	.69	.70	.50	-.06	-.07	-.06	.08	.20 ^a	.25 ^a	.01	1.00

^a Significant at .01 level

^b Significant at .05 level

Table 3**Test of hypotheses**

Hypotheses			Standardized Coefficient	Standard Error	Critical Ratio	p-Value
H1a:	Sales Manager Support	→ Emotional Exhaustion	-0.37	0.06	-4.45	p < .01
H1b:	Rumination	→ Emotional Exhaustion	0.33	0.06	4.07	p < .01
H1c:	Sales Manager Support	→ Rumination	-0.31	0.08	-3.56	p < .01
H1d:	Sales Manager Support	→ Rumination	→	Emotional Exhaustion		
H1e:	Sales Manager Support	→ Control over Time	0.35	0.08	3.5	p < .01
H1f:	Rumination	→ Control over Time	-0.28	0.08	-2.78	p < .01
H1g:	Control over Time	→ Emotional Exhaustion	-0.34	0.09	-3.43	p < .01

H2a:	Sales Manager Support	→	Motivation	0.01	0.07	.12	p > .05
H2b:	Sales Manager Support	→	Positive Emotions	0.37	0.06	4.56	p < .01
H2c:	Positive Emotions	→	Motivation	0.33	0.08	3.81	p < .01
	Sales Manager Support	→	Positive Emotions	→	Motivation		Post Hoc Assessment
H2d:	Emotional Exhaustion	→	Motivation	-0.21	0.07	-2.0	p < .05
H3a:	Sales Manager Support	→	Future Expectations	0.23	0.08	2.90	p < .01
H3b:	Motivation	→	Future Expectations	0.34	0.12	4.36	p < .01
H4:	Motivation	→	Customer- Oriented Selling	0.29	0.08	2.73	p < .01

Appendix

Standardized Interview Questions

(Salespeople)

1. What are your thoughts on how sales managers help their salespeople?
2. Tell me about a time when you felt burnt-out and your sales manager helped you through it or how your sales manager helped you from feeling burnt-out.
3. Tell me about a time when you found yourself consistently thinking about a negative experience and how your manager did or did not help.
4. Tell me about a time when you experienced positive emotions and what effect it had on you.
5. How has your sales manager's support helped you with your confidence and positive outlook on the future?

(Sales Managers)

1. What are your thoughts on how sales managers help their salespeople?
2. How have you helped your salespeople to have confidence and a positive outlook on the future?
3. What do you do when you feel your salespeople might be getting burnt-out?
4. What do you do when you notice your salespeople engaging in negative thought patterns?

Measures

State Rumination – Adapted from Wade *et al.* (2008)

(7-point Likert Scale)

Consider the following scenario. You have been working with a potential buyer for six months now. This week you think that you can get a commitment from the prospect. This sale is equal to 50% of your monthly sales quota. You meet with your prospective buyer and he/she informs you that he/she is going to buy from another company. Please respond to the statements below based on how you would react to this outcome.

I can't stop thinking about how I was wronged by this person.
 Memories about this person's wrongful actions have limited my enjoyment of life.
 I have a hard time getting thoughts of how I was mistreated out of my head.
 I try to figure out the reasons why this person hurt me.*
 The wrong I suffered is never far from my mind.
 I find myself replaying the events over and over in my mind.

Emotional Exhaustion - Adapted from Singh *et al.* (1994)
(7-point Likert)

Working with customers is really a strain for me.*
 I feel I am working too hard for my customers because they're too demanding.
 Working with my sales manager directly puts heavy duty stress on me.
 I feel emotionally drained by the pressure my sales manager puts on me.
 I feel I work too hard trying to satisfy non sales employees of the company.*
 I feel burned out from trying to meet top management's expectations.
 I feel frustrated because I can't work directly with non sales employees (e.g., shipping, order processing)
 I feel dismayed by the actions of top management.

Perceived Control over Time – Adapted from Macan (1994)
(7-point Likert)

I feel in control of my time.
 I find it difficult to keep to a schedule because others take me away from my work.
 I underestimate the time that it would take to accomplish tasks.
 I must spend a lot of time on unimportant tasks.*
 I find myself procrastinating on tasks that I don't like but that must be done.

Positive Emotional Reactions – Adapted from Badovick, Hadaway and Kaminski (1992)

Please rate the extent to which you experienced the following emotions in the past month as a salesperson. (1 = no feeling at all; 7 = extremely strong feeling)

Pleased
 Happy

Good

Motivation – Adapted from Badovick, Hadaway and Kaminski (1992)
(7-point Likert Scale)

I plan to increase my overall efforts to reach my sales quota.

I plan to work harder to make my sales quota.

I have plans to increase the quality of my sales activities.

Expectations of Future Success – Adapted from Badovick, Hadaway and Kaminski (1992)
(7-point Likert Scale)

The probability of reaching my sales quota is good.

I will most likely make my sales quota for this month.

Customer-Oriented Selling - Kidwell, McFarland and Avila (2007)

(1 = not at all important and 7 = extremely important)

State the benefits of the offering and see if the prospect is interested in it.

Ask the prospect questions during the sales presentation to establish the prospect's understanding.

Provide a specific response to the exact question raised by the prospect.

Admit the prospect's objection, but point out advantages that compensate for the objection.

Manager Support - Adapted from Jaworski and Kohli (1991)
(7-point Likert)

My sales manager does a good job of helping me develop my potential.

In general, I am satisfied with my sales manager.

My sales manager sees that I have the things I need to do my job.

My sales manager gives me recognition for improvement in my performance.

My sales manager demonstrates confidence in my ability to meet most objectives.

My sales manager shows approval for me when I put forth my best efforts.

*Note: Item removed to improve fit.