

SEVEN MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT TOP-PERFORMING SALESPEOPLE

By Sam Reese

If there's one profession that's plagued with myths and half-truths, it's sales. And no group is more subject to misunderstanding than your organization's top performers.

Let's examine seven of the most common misconceptions about world-class salespeople.

Myth One: Being a top-performing salesperson is easy. Essentially, you're just taking orders. World-class salespeople are tacticians, not strategists.

Reality: Sales involves thought and action. Like their colleagues in other departments, good salespeople like to innovate, coming up with great ideas and strategies for turning those ideas into reality. But at the end of the day, top performers understand that sales is about execution and results – and they understand that their ability to do that job well affects everyone in the entire organization, not just the sales team. They build their success on repeatable, quantifiable actions and best practices proven to generate success.

Myth Two: The best salespeople are naturals; they just wing it.

Reality: World-class sales performers “train” just like world-class athletes do. Our research indicates that, when compared with average performers, the best salespeople are:

- 56 percent more likely to document their strategy when pursuing a large deal.

- 57 percent more effective at selling at an executive level.
- 63 percent more effective at producing year-over-year revenue growth from existing customers.*

**2012 Miller Heiman Sales Best Practices Study*

World-class performers in any field are big on discipline and routine. They're consistent. They're constantly evaluating successes and losses to understand the "why" behind the results, then taking action to replicate or correct their process. They strive to learn new and better systems for getting things done. And they don't wait for breakthroughs. They make breakthroughs happen.

Myth Three: Top-performing salespeople are cutthroat competitors who want to see everyone else fail.

Reality: Like world-class athletes, sales stars don't tie their wins to others' losses. In fact, the best want everyone else to do well – they just want to do better! After all, in any field, it's more rewarding to beat competitors when they're at the top of their games than to breeze past them when they're down. There's little challenge, in sales or athletics, in beating someone who's a weaker performer or who's having a bad day. Competition enhances the sense of accomplishment in any race. Top salespeople often compete against themselves, motivated to hit a personal best each and every year. The best always want to get better.

Myth Four: World-class salespeople only care about making money. After all, that's how they get to the top.

Reality: Great sales careers are built on relationships, and great salespeople value those relationships above all else. Top performers think about more than pushing a product. They take ownership of the process and genuinely enjoy helping their customers solve problems, meet needs or move ahead with projects. In a sense, they're "pleasers." They truly like making customers happy – and they know that involves really understanding what their clients want to fix, accomplish or avoid.

Myth Five: World-class salespeople are intrusive and pushy.

Reality: World-class salespeople are curious. They see their role as a consultative partner. For that reason, they tend to ask a lot of questions. They try to uncover the underlying challenge or problem rather than just make the immediate sale. So, without exception, top performers are good listeners.

Naturally, good salespeople are persistent, but they don't badger or manipulate people. They know that in complex sales, there is "no one-size-fits-all" solution. As a customer's concept evolves, top sales people come back with one new approach

after another as they seek to tailor a solution to fit each customer's unique concept. And they do care how people feel about them. After all, they're building long-term relationships.

Myth Six: World-class salespeople are, by definition, self-centered and egotistical.

Reality: Like world-class athletes, top sales performers sometimes appear self-centered or egotistical. Actually, in both cases, it's often more that they're highly efficient.

Average performers view time as uncontrollable. By nature, world-class people in any field take the opposite view, avoiding anything that removes time from their control. And they typically have little patience for time-killing activities. They seek to execute with precision and consistency in front of customers because top salespeople value their customers' time and seek to provide efficient time-to-value interactions.

World-class people in any field tend to evaluate themselves honestly, harshly and constantly. In fact, they are often their own worst critics. They feel they're lucky when they win and completely to blame when they lose.

Myth Seven: World-class performers are driven by rewards and recognition, and they know that, eventually, they'll be able to coast on their reputations.

Reality: Many superstars welcome a little affirmation, but they get uncomfortable with adulation or recognition.

As for resting on their laurels: The best of the best never rest. Like world-class athletes, as soon as they attain their goals, they immediately set higher ones. Not for the next year, the next quarter or even the next month, but immediately.

Bottom line: World-class salespeople are afraid of complacency, of getting "fat and lazy." They strive for success, but it's hard to relax and enjoy it once they get there. Remember, top performers constantly strive to improve. It's all about getting better.

About Miller Heiman

Miller Heiman is a proven leader in sales performance, bringing game-changing insight to sales leaders worldwide for more than 35 years. With the experience gained from over 20,000 engagements, working with 1.5 million plus alumni, we help businesses implement sales-execution best practices to increase close rates, reduce sales cycles and lower the cost of complex sales. Our clients profit from our world-class selling system and repeatable methodologies, which leverage extensive research and a precise, customer-centric approach to promote sustained results. With offices around the world (United States, United Kingdom and Australia), Miller Heiman delivers consistent and timely results. For more information, visit www.millerheiman.com

About the Author

Sam Reese has been Chief Executive Officer for Miller Heiman since 2000. Previously, Sam held executive positions with British Telecom, Kinkos and Corporate Express. An author and speaker, Sam is a recognized thought leader in the areas of sales force productivity and sales force effectiveness. Prior to his business career, Sam Reese was an All-American distance runner for the University of Colorado and was a Nike-sponsored athlete.