

Motivating sales representatives: the importance of non-financial motivators

Personal selling is an important driver of performance for many organisations. A poorly motivated sales force will be costly to the organisation in terms of lower productivity and performance, excessive staff turnover, increased expenses, higher use of the sales manager's time and a negative effect on the morale of colleagues. Keeping one's sales forces motivated is thus key.

Motivation is at the heart of how innovative and productive employees are, and management has to get it right to enable employees of the organisation to perform effectively. This is tricky, as not everyone is motivated by the same rewards, and sales managers need to work towards adapting the motivational environment to the individual.

Many organisations invest a great deal of time and money in designing incentive schemes that are failing to achieve their objective of motivating employees. Large amounts of money are spent on financial incentives, while ignoring non-financial incentives. As companies become increasingly cash-strapped, using non-financial motivators might be the solution. But which non-financial motivators are important to a sales force, and do they differ according to demographic variables?

Non-financial rewards, such as achievement and recognition, are effective in motivating sales representatives and are an important part of a manager's motivational mix. Like financial incentives, non-financial incentives can be carefully adjusted to produce a strong impact on the motivation of sales people. In order to use non-financial motivators such as job dimension (challenge, variety and feedback) and leadership characteristics (support and trust) to improve sales performance, it is important to examine the nature of their roles in influencing the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of sales people.

A study was undertaken by [Dr Melanie Wiese](#) (staff member in the [Department of Marketing Management](#)) and Dr R. Coetzee to explore the importance of various non-financial motivational factors for pharmaceutical sales representatives. The study also examined whether differences exist between the demographics of pharmaceutical sales representatives and the importance that they attach to non-financial motivators.

The results indicate that sales representatives view 'good relationships with customers' and 'being well informed' as the two most important non-financial motivators. 'Having power over other people' was a more important motivator for sales representatives with a lower educational background. 'Growth and promotion opportunities' were more important to males, while differences were found between various age groups and the importance they attached to 'flexibility of their jobs'. These results could be used to influence the structure of motivational schemes at pharmaceutical companies and enable management to recognise those factors that might lead to increased performance levels.

The full reference for this study is:

[Wiese, M.](#) & Coetzee, R. 2013. The importance of non-financial motivators to pharmaceutical sales representatives: A demographic study. *Southern African Business Review*, 17(1):23-56 – also available via [UP Space](#).