THE EFFECTS OF SALESMAN PERSONALITY ON SALES PERFORMANCE OF INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDER IN THE TELECOMMUNICATION INDUSTRY: ZIMBABWEAN PERSPECTIVE

Memory Magandini and Tendai Ngwenya
Strategic Marketing (MSU), Sales Executive ZOL Zimbabwe
PhD student University of KwaZulu Natal, MCom Strategic Marketing (MSU), Member of the Marketer's Association of Zimbabwe (MAZ). Lecturer Department of Marketing Management, Midlands State University, .

ABSTRACT: *Generating income and revenue are the primary roles of sales personnel. Whilst management has paid particular attention in training and developing the sales personnel, they seem to negate the profound impact of the personality of the sales person. Given the same sales tools, level of education, and propensity to work, some salespeople succeed where others fail (Martin 2011). The evidence suggests that the personalities of these truly great salespeople play a critical role in determining their success. Some salespeople succeed where others are failing. Why do some sales people succeed where others fail? The research therefore examined the effects of self efficacy, locus of control, and proactive personality in determining sales performance in the telecommunication sector internet service providers (ISP's) in particular.*

INTRODUCTION

The correlation between salesman personality and sales performance has acknowledged substantial attention and discussion all the way through the 20th century. Salesman personality characteristics have been defined by Churchill et. al (2002) as psychological characteristics that enhance a person's ability to perform. According to Wiley and Carolyn (2005) sales personality is related to one's capability to perform the job that he or she has the right personal uniqueness and the right mind capabilities for selling. Sales performance is often explained as the quality and quantity of sales closed at a particular time phase. According to Colletti & Tubridy (2004), provided a list of sales activities for successful salespeople which include selling, working with distributors, entertainment, attendance on meetings, servicing products, working with orders, servicing accounts, travelling, communication, training and recruiting.

Researches such as Bandura (2003), Locke (2002) and Luthans & Peterson (2002) in various disciplines have researched on salesman personality and sales performance. In developed and developing countries, companies have also taken into considerations the importance of the salesman personality when hiring sales people. However these studies were carried out in developed countries which have resources and stable economies as compared the economy of Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe, no documented study has been done to evaluate the effects of salesman personality on sales performance despite most companies having sales reps / salesman to sale and market their goods. Although companies in Zimbabwe are starting to recognize the importance of

personality assessment (psychometric tests) in order to assess people personality in the banking sector, it is still neglected when in most sales profession. The telecoms sector needs to realize the importance salesmen personalities so that they can excel in sales and increase revenue.

Service provided by the sector is increasing in scope and speed offering a diverse range of opportunities and platforms (Telecommunication Industry Business Report 2014). Potraz 2012 statics show that data and internet service has 3 266 411 subscriber base with a 25.6% penetration rate. The telecoms sector offer products and services which include Voice, Internet and data and fixed voice.

The nature of the business requires providing service/product knowledge on a one to one basis with customers. There are many challenges in this sector which include stiff competition by ISPs which include players like Liquid telecom, ZOL, Africom, Telone and Utande Investments among others. The switching costs of customers are very low which makes the competition levels high. The players in the industry therefore view sales people as a major promotional tool in achieving sales volume.

Statement of the Problem

According to the sales report (first quarter) January to April 2014 some sales departments are failing to meet the targets or quotas set for them. In table 1.1 below it shows the negative variances on their quarterly targets.

Table 1.Sales quota performance

Business Unit	Achieved	Target/Quota	Variance
ZOL Zimbabwe	86%	100%	-14%
Liquid telecom	104%	100%	4%
Telone	78%	100%	-22%
Africom	69%	100%	-31%
Yumax (Utande)	88.5%	100%	-11.5%

Research Objectives

- To determine the effects of self efficacy on sales target achieved.
- To examine the impact of locus of control on closing sales deals.
- To establish the impact of proactive personality on maintaining customer relationships.

Delimitations

- The research was limited to eight ISPs in Harare because that is where all the headquarters for the sales and marketing departments are.
- The respondents included sales reps, customers and sales managers of ISP's.
- The research used secondary data from 2000 to 2014
- Theoretical focus was on sales personality and sales performance

Limitations

- The major limitation for the research was that the research was confined to Harare province which may not be a true representative of the whole country.The research also focused on effect of

salesman personality on sales performance and some of the information required for the research was withheld for privacy reasons.

Sales performance

Every sales manager's job is to determine what leads to superior performance which is significant to the continued existence and success of a firm. 20 years ago, authors like Walker, Churchill and Ford (1977) posited a model which is comprehensive of salesman performance where the antecedents of performance were classified into five categories which are, personal, organizational and environmental factors, motivation, aptitude, skills level and role perceptions. Roberts (2003) posit that sales performance can be measured using sales volume, dollar sales, management evaluations or self report measures of self efficiency. Krishnan, Netemeyer and Boles (2002) view sales performance as the salesperson's perception of the amount of sales achieved, the quality of customer relationships they maintain and the information they acquire about their organization's products, competition and also customer needs. However, literature provides several perspectives on evaluating sales performance and the discussion can go on and on with authors such as Colletti & Tubridy (2000) adding that sales performance are evaluated sales activities for successful salespeople which include selling, closing sales deals, working with distributors, entertainment, customer retention, attending meetings, servicing products, service delivery, travel, communication or information, training and recruiting.

Salesman Personality

The correlation between salesman personality and sales performance has acknowledged a considerable amount of attention and debate all the way through the 20th century (Impelman, 2007). The new segment of research established in the 1980s and growing in the early 1990s discovered optimistic results for the personality sales or job performance relationship (ibid).There is no agreement among theorists regarding the meaning of personality. They describe personality from a number of different perspectives. The examination of salesman personality and attitudes gives insights into the performance of people. Salesman personality is explained as a way in which a salesman views and understands himself, and the manner in which he/she interacts with the public and reacts to situations. Funder, (2001) defined traits as characteristics, lasting patterns of thinking, emotion and behavior that are constant over time and explain people's behavior across different situations. Churchill et. al. (2002) defined personal characteristics as psychological characteristics that enhance a person's ability to perform. Wiley & Carolyn in 2005 related salesman personality as one's capacity to perform the job with the right personal characteristics, the right mind capabilities for selling. According to Dr Bang (2012), personality can be defined as the various enduring and distinctive patterns of behavior and thought that are characteristic of a particular person. Marketing scholars have acknowledged the significance of personality works, particularly in giving some assistance for the recruiting and hiring of personnel.

Salesman personality is linked to three dimensions where the first dimension is linked to a salesperson's physical form or look such as age, height or weight. The second dimension is the personality with the unique traits and attributes patterns of thought, emotion and actions that define the salesperson's personal style and manipulate the interactions with the environment (Atkinson, Smith & Bern, 2006). Some of the personality distinctiveness linked with salespersons is empathy, self efficacy, self monitoring, sociability, self esteem, proactive personality and locus of control. The third dimension on the salesman personality is mental abilities which include verbal

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astuteness, mathematical ability and musical orientation and these are normally referred as accomplishment in psychology. For the rationale of this study, the second category was used that is the distinctive behavioral characteristics of salespersons (self-efficacy, locus of control and proactive personality influence on sales performance).

Effects of Self efficacy on sales quotas
Self efficacy is defined as the self perceptions of a sales person with regards to his/her ability to cope with any situation as it arises. Kanter, (2006) viewed self efficacy as self confidence. Bandura, (2004) defined self efficacy as a person's belief that she/he is capable of performing a particular task successfully. Therefore sales people with high self-efficacy can promptly manage the demands of tough jobs such as sales jobs. Self-efficacy has influential effects on sales performance because people try to learn and perform only those tasks that they believe they will be able to perform successfully.

According to Bandura as (cited by Lunenburg 2011), self-efficacy affects sales performance in three ways, that is, 1) Sales people with low levels of self-efficacy tend to set relatively low goals for themselves, they believe they cannot set high targets or cannot meet the sales targets set for them (Bandura & Locke 2003). Conversely, a sales person with high self-efficacy is likely to set high targets or goals 2) Employees with high self-efficacy generally work hard to study/learn how to perform new tasks, because they are confident that their efforts will be successful and will lead to meeting the sales targets set (Ivancevich, Konopaske, & Matteson, 2011). In contrast, Yuussef & Avolio (2007) realized that sales people with low self-efficacy put less effort when they are learning and performing complex tasks because they are not sure whether their effort will lead them into meeting the sales quotas or targets set. 3) Sales people with high self-efficacy are certain that they can attain a new sale and acquire a lost deal. Thus, they are likely to endure in their efforts to attain a sale whilst problems are rising. According to Lunenburg (2011), sales employees who believe they are incompetent in performance or acquiring a new sale are likely to give up when problems surface. Research by Bandura indicated that people perform at levels which are consistent with their self-efficacy beliefs. The higher the self efficacy, the more they strive to meet the sales quotas and sales volumes set for them (Lunenburg 2011).

The impact of locus of control on closing deals
The concept of locus of control (LOC) has received a great deal of attention during the last two decades (Munir & Sajid, 2010). The locus of control refers to the extent to which sales people believe that they can decide their individual outcome. Thomas et al (2006) defined locus of control as the extent to which individuals believe that they have control over their own destiny. In other words, locus of control refers to the circumstances that individuals attribute their success and failures to (Forte, 2005).

Carlton et al (2007) state that individuals with a strong internal locus of control believe events in their life derive primarily from their own actions. All the above authors agree that the individual have a control over their actions and destiny.

The locus of control construct has two dimensions, which are, internal locus of control and external locus of control. People with internal LOC believe that they can influence their leads in order to

close a sale and that their actions affect what happens to them but people with external LOC believe that they have little influence over the environment and what happens to them is due to external factors such as luck, or the actions of others (Spector 2002, Martin et al 2005). If a sale is acquired, they believe its luck or chance not their capability. Thomas et al, (2006) observed that locus of control plays an important role in closing deals or sales at work. It has been observed that locus of control is correlated to various important work outcomes including the ability to close deals/ sales and success in sales performance.

According to Chen & Silverthorne (2008), research has found that individuals with an internal work locus of control generally have lower levels of job stress and perform better. A meta-analysis on work locus of control has found that there are significant correlations between perceived control and job stressors such as role conflict and role ambiguity (Thomas et al. 2006). One study by Avila and Fern (1986) found a positive association between internal locus of control and sales performance for salespeople selling large computer systems, while for those selling small system computers, external locus of control was positively related to all performance measures. According to Howell & Shea (2001) they suggested that salesman with internal LOC orientation set higher targets for themselves are more likely to engage in managing issues themselves, are better suited to jobs that require initiative and problem solving capabilities, closing deals and are more likely to view innovations as opportunities.In theory, sales people that are low on internal LOC, should put forth more effort and persevere towards acquiring valued outcomes because they feel able to control outcomes. With greater efforts and determination, high sales performance is achieved (Markman and Baron, 2003). Empirically, the previous researchers have found LOC to be in connection with closing sales deals, job performance, and career success (Judge and Bono, 2001).

Effects of proactive personality on maintaining relationships
According to Seibert (2000), proactive personality is defined as the sales person's tendency to fix what is in the wrong, change things and use well planned ideas to solve problems. The proactive sales people take action to initiate important change instead of waiting to be told what to do. Crant et al (2001) state that, proactive sales people excel more over the course of their careers because they plan carefully and acquire greater understanding of how the politics within the company work. Proactive sales people are important assets to their companies because they may have higher levels of performance (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg 2003). According to Thompson (2005), they adjust to their new tasks very quickly because they understand the political surroundings well and make acquaintances more quickly.

Proactive people are eager to learn and engage in many developmental activities to improve their skills. According to Markose, Binu; Jayachandran (2009), proactive sales people are good at maintaining customer relationships. They put customers at the core of all activities, keeping them informed, making an avenue for complaints and quickly solving their problems and fixing everything that is wrong in order to satisfy them. In short, this is their way of listening to them (Crant et al 2001). However, Newman (2009) argues that people with proactive personality may be a liability for an organization. Newman (2005) further went on to elaborate that some customers can view a proactive sales person as too pushy, trying to change things other people are not willing to let go of, or using their initiative to make decisions that do not serve a company's best interests. According to Major (2006) a proactive sales person's achievement depends on understanding the

company's core values, ability, and skills to perform the job and ability to assess situational demands correctly

According to Judge and Bono (2001) a sales person with a proactive personality can easily maintain relationships with customers. They are convinced and positive that they are able keep customers fulfilled and maintain customer relationships. They are positive that they can keep on building up of relationships for the organisation. Garcia-Murillo and Annabi (2002) further went on to state that sales people with a proactive personality have customer knowledge which can boost in maintaining relationships with the customers. Customer knowledge refers to understanding your customers, their needs, wants and aims. Garcia-Murillo and Annabi (2002) give a pretty definition of customer knowledge as the collection of information and insight that you need to have to build stronger customer relationships. Customer knowledge includes a wider variety of less structured information that will help build insight into customer relationships.

According to Major (2006), proactive behavior has been indirectly linked to effective selling; an assertion underpinned by a logic, which states that in a world of high competition and choice, the passive, reactive seller is unlikely to do as well as his or her more proactive counterpart. Yet, little direct empirical evidence exists to substantiate this link. According to a research carried out by Pitt, Ewing and Berthon (2002), they addressed this knowledge gap by describing a study that assesses the effect of proactive behavior on the performance of an industrial sales force. The paper explored the issue of salesperson performance and the construct of proactive behavior (or pro-activeness). Using the Proactive Personality (PP) Scale to measure pro-activeness and the line manager's subjective evaluation to indicate salesperson performance, it was found that a small but significant relationship exists. Gerhardt, Ashenbaum and Newman (2009) argued that a proactive personality may be differentially related to performance dependent on job tenure and that self-managing behaviors may be a key linking mechanism between proactive personality and performance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
The researchers used interpretive approach to fully understand the effects self efficacy, locus of control and proactive personality on sales performances such as sales quotas, closing sales deals and maintaining relationships with the customers in ISPs. The population was made up of 1 000 374 which included salesmen from different ISP's, sales managers and customers who were randomly selected from the eight ISP's which are Zol Zimbabwe, Liquid Telecom, Telone, Umax, Africom, Yo Africa, Powertel Communication and Telco used in the study. A sample size of 384 respondents was used and was based on Krejcie & Morgan (1970) calculations.Secondary Data was obtained from the existing data in the companies' sales departments, periodicals, these encompassed past sales figures/reports and customer feedbacks among others. The data collection tools used included questionnaires and interviews for the research.

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Effects of self efficacy on sales quotas
Response gathered is recorded and presented on the following Fig 1 below:
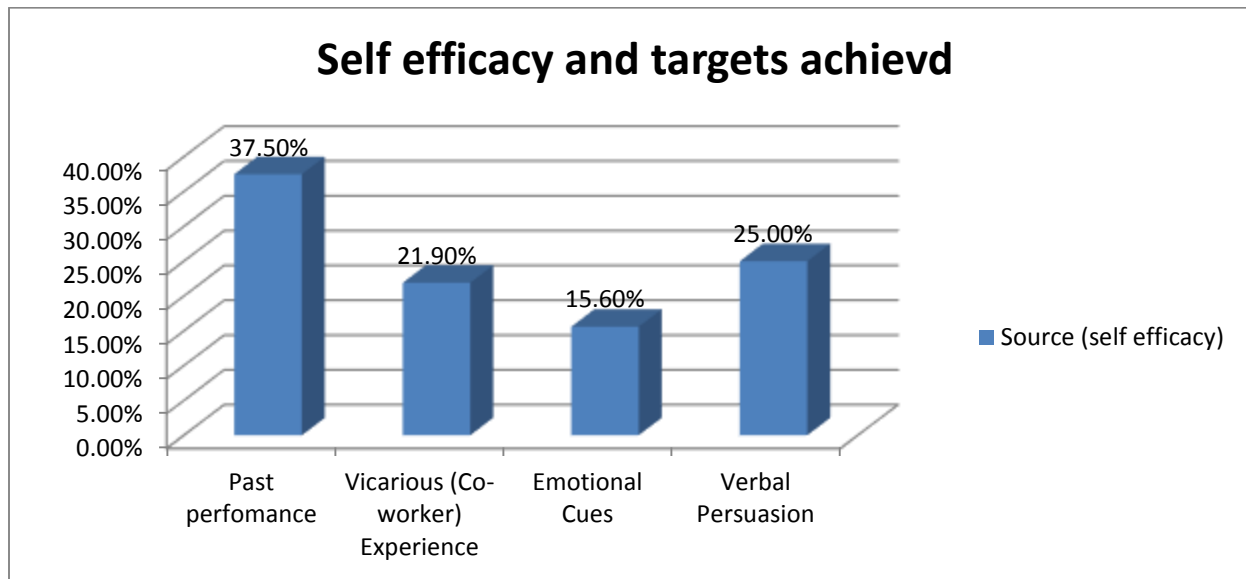
Fig 1 Sources of self efficacy and the influence on sales targets achieved

37.5% of the respondents showed that past performance has an effect on achieving sales targets. They stated that if a sales person achieved the quota/target in the past, that person will also achieve it in future to maintain the standard set. 25% of the respondents chose verbal persuasion influencing their ability to achieve sales targets. They stated that if manager has a belief in you and is verbally encouraging and supporting you, one feels confident enough to achieve the target thus meeting the target. 21.9% of the respondents chose vicarious (co-worker) experience. They stated that if a co-worker can meet the sales target, they can do it also. 15.6% showed emotional cues. The sales managers interviewed also agreed that self efficacy has an effect on the performance of the sales rep. They stated that sales rep with high self efficacy can reach the sales quota. They stated that sales people with high self efficacy have achieved the sales quota in the past and continuously do so which is in support by Bandura & Locke (2003).

Effects of locus of control on closing the deals
Response on the impact of locus of control on closing sales deals were gathered, recorded and presented in fig 2 below:
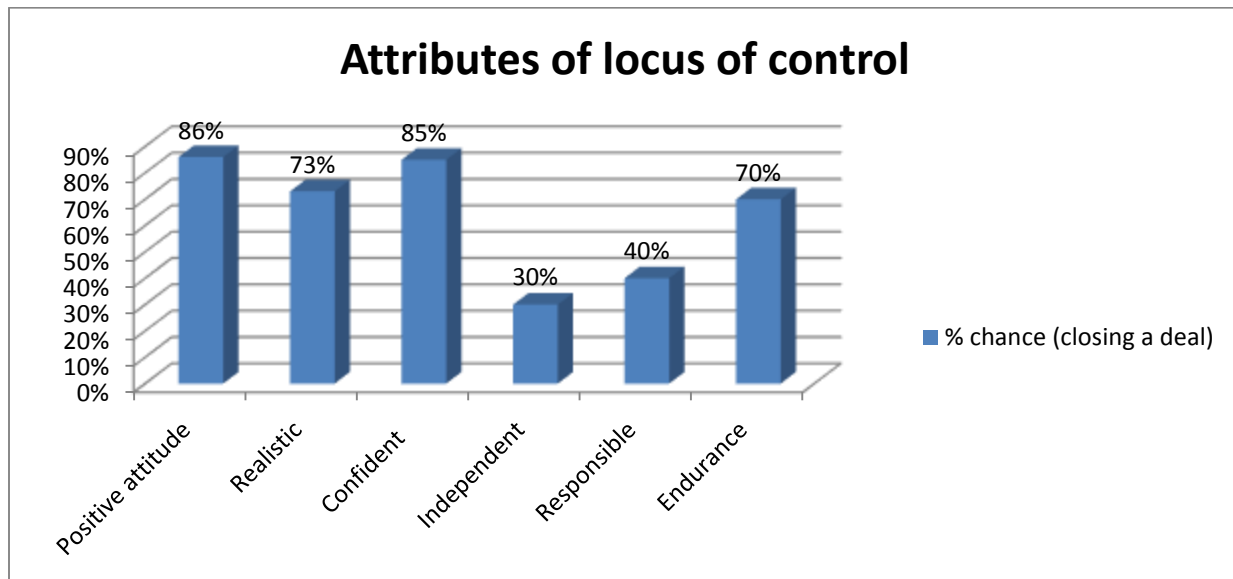
**Fig 2 effects of locus of control on closing sales deals**

From the results on fig 4.2 above, the sales rep responded that a sales person with a positive attitude has 86% chance of closing the deal. A sales person who is realistic, that is one who resort to their own devices has 73% chance of closing a deal. From the respondents, a confident person has 85% chance of closing a deal and 70% chance of closing a deal with endurance. Responsible and independent had a low chance of closing a deal with 40% and 30 % chance respectively. From the survey, on average the salesperson has a 66.2% chance of closing the deal when he/ she have the characteristics/ attributes of locus of control above. Thus showing the effect locus of control has on closing sales deals.

From the interviews three quarters of the interviewees had a view that for a sales rep to close a deal, it is the confidence, endurance and ability to control the situation at the point where a sale is about to be closed. These findings were supported by Thomas et al (2006) who states that sales people with internal locus of control tend to see a strong connection between their actions and the consequences of those actions thus they usually perform better .

Analysis of response on effect of proactive personality on maintaining customer relationships
The research sought to examine the impact of proactive personality on maintaining customer relationships. Response gathered was recorded and presented on fig 3 below:
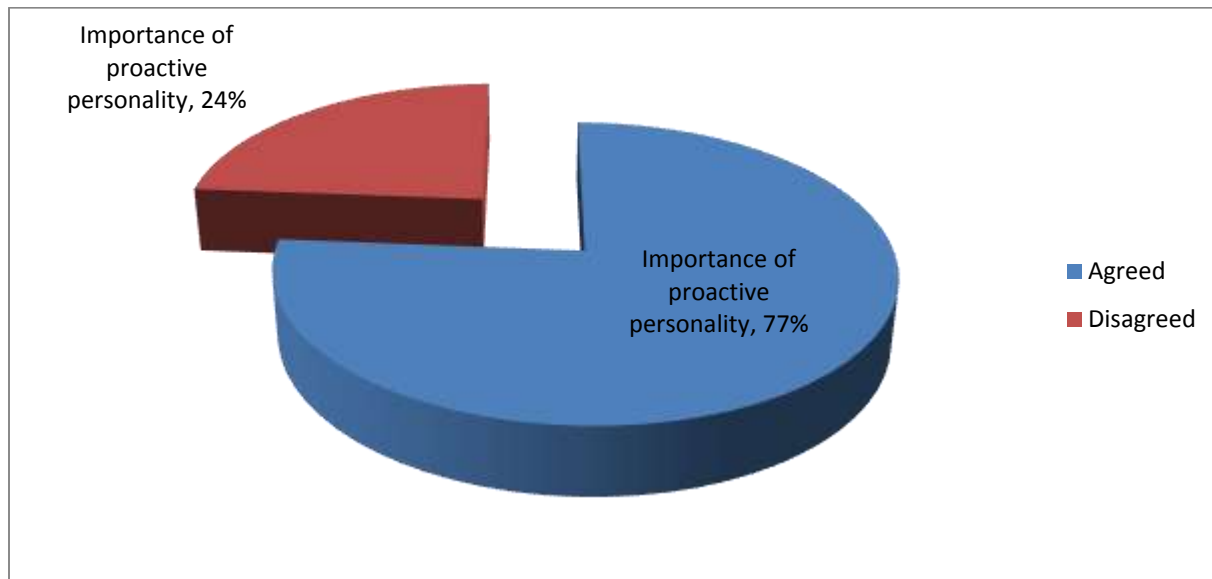
Fig 3 Importance of proactive personality on maintaining customer relationships

77% agreed that proactive personality is important on maintaining relationship. They stated that with the proactive personality a sales person's inclination is to fix what is wrong and there initiative to solve problems. This helps in maintaining customer relationships and increase loyalty thus has an effect of maintaining customer relationships. Customers would want a long life with the company. 24% disagreed that it is important in maintaining the relationships with the customers. The findings are supported by Markose, Binu & Jayachandran (2009), who state that proactive sales people are good at customer care. This is the kind of approach they do in winning, maintaining and developing relationships with the clients.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) The researchers recommends the management in the ISPs to establish specific, short-term or immediate goals or sales targets that will challenge the sales people, yet still viewed as achievable and realistic. This is in line with Schunk and Pajares, 2002 who states that improving self efficacy of a sales person does not require setting of sales target that are not realistic and achievable.
2) The management should boost the capability and confidence of a sales person, they should match the sales person's sales achieved to the quota or targeted set for that sales person, rather than comparing one sales person against another or comparing one sales person to the rest of the team. This approach along with an encouraging atmosphere can boost up one's attitude in self efficacy, whilst unease can challenge it.
3) Sales managers can reduce stressful and tense situations and lowering anxiety surrounding the selling process or sales process of the sales people. Sales person's self-efficacy potential for achieving sales target or quotas can also be improved or made better through guided practice, mentoring and role modeling.

CONCLUSION

The researcher recommends the ISP's to search and recruit qualified sales workers and consider self efficacy, locus of control and proactive personality, as an element of their selection decision. The varying degree of self efficacy there in each salesperson encourages them to progress forward to achieve the sales target or quotas set for them. Salespersons that keep on meeting their targets are expected to feel motivated and confident of their capabilities to achieve the specific sales quota. The researchers also concluded that a salesperson should be in control of the situation even in closing sales deals. Lastly proactive personality is important and has an effect because a sales person has an inclination to provide good customer care services which will help in maintaining relationships with the customers. With the use of a personality inventory in sales employees' selection processes, it might add important information regarding any employment decision. Personality testing is a useful and aiding instrument, in terms of its ability to separate potentially poor sales performers from top sales performers.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The researcher recommends further research may on finding the impact of self-esteem of sales personnel pertaining to particular product lines. An exploration on the effect of different components of self-esteem such as self-image, self-respect and achievement may possibly be conducted as sales personnel in common have high level of ego needs.

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