The “Way You Think Affects the Way You Work: Optimism for Inside Sales Representatives” guide is intended for anyone in a job that measures success by achievements. This guide will provide an in-depth look at optimism and pessimism, and how and why you can become more optimistic in the workplace. We will introduce offensive and defensive techniques to tackling pessimism and promoting optimism that should make you, your clients, and your fellow employees proud of what you do.

The “Optimism for Inside Sales Representatives” guide consists of:

- How to evaluate your thought patterns
- The Pros and Cons of optimism in the workplace
- Offensive and defensive techniques to battle pessimism
- Advice from renowned psychologists and AG Salesworks employees

We are confident that this complementary guide will help you increase your sales performance and your overall happiness.
Many theorists and psychologists agree that optimism, the inclination to expect the best possible outcome, improves individuals’ emotional and physical well-being. However, optimism also positively affects work performance, especially in situations where an employee’s worth is measured by his or her achievements. For inside sales representatives, who are continually rejected and rewarded when making a sales call, keeping an optimistic spirit is essential for success. Too often, sales representatives succumb to pessimism, or the tendency to believe that the worst will happen, resulting in a lack of motivation and self-confidence, and therefore a drop in sales. By practicing optimism, inside sales representatives will learn to expect the best, accept the worst and deal with situations accordingly, improving their work performance and overall confidence.

Thank you for taking the time to download this success guide and we hope it will provide you with valuable insight and the confidence you need to increase your job performance and decrease feelings of pessimism in the office.


Attribution Theory

Optimism and pessimism are not only states of mind; they are reactions. According to Saul McLeod at Simply Psychology, how an individual attaches meaning to events and forms causal judgments is called attribution theory.

For example, after an unsuccessful cold call, an employee may think, “I wasn’t successful because I’m incompetent.” However, another employee may think, “I wasn’t successful because the client did not have time to hear my call.” While we may think we’re able to identify which statement is more optimistic than the other, we must also be able to identify why.

The Attributional Style Questionnaire

Martin Seligman, one of the first psychologists to consider optimism’s effects on work performance, works with the question “Why?” by probing people to evaluate their thought patterns. He created a questionnaire to calculate optimism in employees called The Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ). This test presents the test-taker with a series of hypothetical failures, and then instructs him or her to write down the major cause of each failure. The test-taker then assesses the cause on three dimensions – stable/unstable, global/specific, and internal/external, rating each dimension on a scale from 1 to 7.

Sales Rep 1 vs. Sales Rep 2

Let’s take the earlier examples of those sales reps’ reactions to unsuccessful cold calls.

Sales Rep 1 said, “I’m incompetent.”
This is an internal, stable and global explanation: internal because it bounces back to the self, stable because it reflects on a characteristic that can not be changed, and global because it could affect many areas of that person’s life.

Sales Rep 2 said, “The client did not have time.”
This is an external, unstable and specific statement: external because it doesn’t place the blame on the self, unstable because it is merely temporary, and specific because it is isolated to one situation.

Obviously, Salesperson 2 was more optimistic. According to Peter Schulman, a Research Director of the Martin Seligman Research Alliance, individuals who make stable, global and internal explanations for bad events are more likely to give up, while those who offer unstable, specific and external explanations for events are more likely to succeed.
Responsibility and Blame

Salesperson 2 was realistic about the situation, choosing not to immediately resort to self-blame. About blame, it’s important to note that this article is not advocating that employees shirk responsibility for their actions. Often people automatically blame themselves when something goes wrong without proper justification. When the cause of an objection is unclear, which is often the case, continually blaming oneself can undermine confidence and impair work performance.

Blaming oneself and taking responsibility for one’s actions are completely different things. In a study by the Professor of Marketing at University of Laverne, Gordon J. Badovick, feelings of self-criticism resulted in an increased effort in sales representatives; when employees took responsibility for their performance, they increased effort to be more successful next time. Both Schulman and Badovick studied the effect emotions have on work performance, and both concluded that emotions do affect work performance and that positive emotions in fact increase work performance.

“When the cause of an objection is unclear, continually blaming oneself undermines confidence and impairs work performance.”

Click the button to tweet this quote! And look for other buttons throughout this article!
Optimism for Inside Sales Representatives

Before we offer advice on how to become more optimistic like Sales Rep 2, let’s consider the effects of optimistic or pessimistic behavior on sales performance. According to Schulman, the effects of optimism are: increased motivation, greater sales productivity and better physical health. All are important for an achievement-based job like inside sales representative.

**Expectation**

Optimism and motivation go hand-in-hand. The more optimistic a sales representative is about an outcome, the more motivated he or she is to reach that outcome. Ability and motivation are necessary to close a deal, but the *expectation* to close that deal is also an important factor. In other words, employees must train their minds to expect the best possible outcome. They not only need the ability and the desire to succeed; they also need the belief they will succeed.

**Proven Success**

Optimistic salespeople are more successful. A study conducted by Seligman and Schulman with two insurance companies found that people with optimistic explanations sold more insurance and were less likely to quit than those with pessimistic explanations. The optimists, measured by the ASQ, sold 35 percent more insurance than the pessimists.

Another study focused on cultivating optimism in others. Metropolitan Life hired Seligman to help with their sales turnover; after they gave him access to their new sales candidates, he administered their usual testing measures as well as his new test, the ASQ. He found that people who scored high in optimism sold 33 percent more than those who scored low. He then recommended that MetLife only hire people who scored high in optimism, and here were the effects:

- MetLife increased its market share by 50% in less than two years. *(HR Magazine, November 1, 1997)*
- The company also out-sold its pessimistic counterparts by 21% its first year and by 57% the next. *(Fortune, January 15, 1996)*
Pessimism for an Inside Sales Representative

The effects of pessimism are not nearly as positive. Pessimism can lead to depression, or severe dejection, hopelessness and feelings of inadequacy, if it’s magnified. It can also affect the environment around you. The transmission of moods can happen instantaneously and even unconsciously as one person mimics another. “While it is no surprise that people in a joyous mood stoke the feeling by, for instance, rehashing a victory, psychologists find that people do the same with unpleasant moods,” wrote NYTimes correspondent David Goleman.
OK, you’ve evaluated your thought pattern and weighed the pros and cons of being an optimist in the workplace. It’s now time to start employing techniques to become an optimist. The good news is that cognitive training techniques can help individuals learn optimism. Even devoted optimists can use these techniques, as they can sometimes be bogged down by pessimistic beliefs when exposed to prolonged stress. There are several ways to increase optimism in the workplace, which will increase success in life. I’ve divided these ways into defensive techniques, which bar the mind against pessimistic thoughts, and offensive techniques, which actively promote optimism in everyday activities.

Defensive Techniques

- Schulman offers cognitive training in a nutshell. First, he says, identify what events trigger your pessimistic attitude.

  Example: Some activities that inside sales representatives perform can cause them to stop dead in their tracks. It could be giving a presentation, making cold calls, asking the boss for a raise, writing a report, or trying to resolve an interpersonal conflict.

- After identifying the situation, gather evidence to evaluate why you’re intimidated by that situation. Learn how to be more scientific in your thinking; does the evidence support or refute the negative belief? Often, beliefs are bad habits (such as self-blame when not justified), that can be changed with practice.

- In the third step, these thoughts are replaced with more accurate and constructive beliefs. To do this, we follow Dr. Albert Ellis’s ABC model, adding the letter “D”:

  Adversity: Identify the problem. “I’m afraid of giving presentations.”
  Beliefs: Identify why you think it’s a problem. “I’m not smart or outgoing enough to give a successful presentation (internal and stable. I guess I’m not a good fit for this job, and I’m not very persuasive (global).
  Consequences: Identify how this pessimistic feeling will make you feel. “I feel overwhelmed, dwell on my fear of public speaking, procrastinate on my work in favor of fretting about the upcoming presentation, lose self-confidence and motivation, and eventually give up.”
  Disputation: Dispute your claim. “I don’t need to be outgoing to give a presentation; I just need to be clear and concise. I just need to work harder on my transitions, and come up with a technique to stave off my nervousness. At least I know my coworkers will support me.”
• If you start to recognize pessimistic thoughts creeping in, use a thought-stopping technique, such as snapping a rubber band on your wrist or focusing on your surroundings. To keep your mind away from pessimistic thoughts, play mental counting games, such as counting backwards from 100 by increments of 7, recall a success, or imagine a pleasurable experience.

• When faced with adversity, search for the humor in the situation, or take action and find what you can do to make it better. “Manage results, not excuses,” as President of Sales Leadership, Inc. Colleen Stanley recommends.

• Don’t make excuses for yourself. Accept self-defeat. Then, motivate yourself to work harder. Thus, practice realistic optimism; accept the situation as it is, but strive to make it better.

**Offensive Techniques**

• Tara Kraft and Sarah Pressman proved in a scholarly article that smiling can make you feel happier, and, by transmission of moods, it can make your client feel happier as well. It also influences cardiovascular and affective responses to stress, proving both physiological and psychological benefits from smiling during stress.

![Figure](image.jpg) To test their theory, Kraft and Pressman placed participants in a neutral group (left), a standard-smile group (middle) and a Duchenne-style group (right). Participants who wore a Duchenne, or genuine, smile had a smaller heart rate, and thus responded less to stress.

• Along the same veins, laughter also decreases stress and increases feelings of optimism. Laughing at a customer’s joke or making your own joke (as long as it’s not self-deprecating) can lead to feelings of comfort between you and your client. Humor leads to increased endorphins and dopamine, increased relaxation, reduced pain and reduced stress, as well as increased creativity, improved problem-solving ability, enhanced memory and increased ability to cope with stress by providing an alternative, less serious perspective on one’s problems according to family physician Dwenda Gjerdingen. It can also increase self-esteem, leading to better motivational skills for inside sales representatives.

**Terms to Remember**

Realistic optimism
the opposite of blind optimism; taking control of your actions, fixing solutions, and expecting the best out of situations

Manage results, not excuses.
President of Sales Leadership, Inc. Colleen Stanley recommends.
• Don’t be monotone when teleprospecting. Work on keeping the cadences of your sentences bouncy and buoyant; you will sound more inviting on the phone. You need to sell your product, but you also need to sell your voice, and yourself, to your prospects.

  Mike Ricciardelli, our own Manager of Client Operations at AG Salesworks, suggests to ask yourself questions such as:
  “Do I sound tired or lackadaisical when I’m having my conversations?”
  “Do I need to smile more while I’m having a conversation?”

• Celebrate your successes. Did you just close your first deal? Did you finally reach the right representative for your product? Reward yourself with a fancy lunch or a weekend at the beach. This will teach you to focus more on your successes than your failures.

• Give up control. Roll with the punches, as they say. Not everyone will want to hear from you. Keep in mind that some clients hear from countless sales people every day. Instead of focusing on one case, move on, always thinking about the future, the next time you make a call. Don’t overcomplicate things. As AG’s Director of Client Operations Craig Ferrara wrote, “it’s our choice to overcomplicate things.” Choose not to. Instead of dwelling on one complication, move on, trying to control only what you can control and rolling with the situations that you can’t.

• Make goals for yourself every day. Keep a to-do list and relish being able to cross off the items. Actually complete the goals. This will cultivate a sense of achievement, even if not all the goals are as big as closing a deal.

• Keep a gratitude journal, or notes on what went best during the day, and consult it at the beginning of the week to motivate yourself. Doing so will again cause you to think about the best parts of the week instead of the worst parts.

• Spread the optimism. If you see someone who may be frustrated, make their day; it will make you and your coworker feel better. Paul Alves, CEO at AG Salesworks, does this every day, creating, maintaining and spreading optimism within an environment where “individuals believe passionately in the vision of their and their company’s success.”
Conclusion

What you’ve read here should convince you that optimism is key in sales positions. Emotions do play a significant role in sales motivation. Positive reactions to not-so-positive events show maturity and confidence, and make you, the employee, feel better about what you’re doing. Being more optimistic, and training yourself and others in optimism, will increase motivation and also increase sales. Follow the techniques above to create a more optimistic atmosphere in the workplace.

References


AG Salesworks: “Optimism for Inside Sales Representatives”

Blog:

Sales Prospecting Perspectives

Books and Success Kits:

Sales Prospecting Success Kit
Inside Sales Management Success Kit
eBook: Gear Up For Success: 8 Steps to Get Sales & Marketing Cranking in Unison

Social Networking:

LinkedIn: http://www.linkedin.com/company/ag-salesworks
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