



7 Actionable Habits of Top Performers

What Sales Leaders Need to Know

Keep it simple. Drive results.



ValueSelling Associates and Selling Power recently conducted a survey of more than 150 B2B senior sales leaders to identify the mindsets, attributes, and behaviors of top-performing salespeople. For this report, we've defined top performers as those who consistently exceed expectations.

The results of the survey uncovered 7 key habits that define top performers in an organization. These habits – a combination of learned skills and inherent traits – set the best salespeople apart. Top performers practice these habits more, and they are better at doing them than a middle-of-the-pack rep.

This report addresses:



The 7 key attributes of a high-performing salesperson, and why they matter

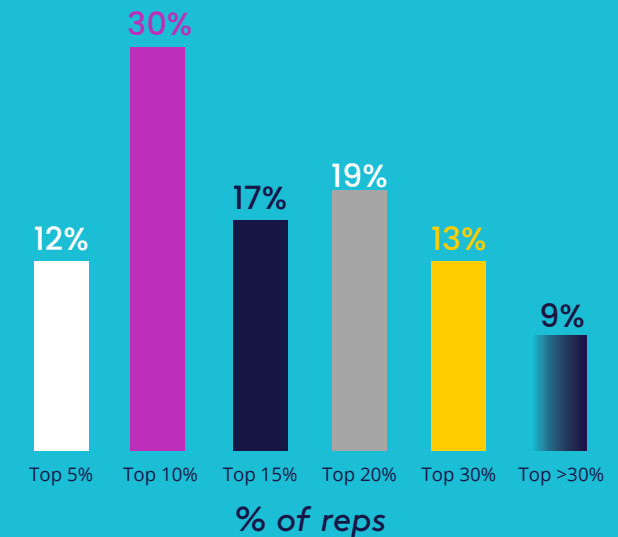


How coaching and development help drive consistent sales rep behaviors across the entire team and elevate average performers



What hiring managers should look for in the interview process to hire more top performers

What % of your reps do you consider to be top performers?

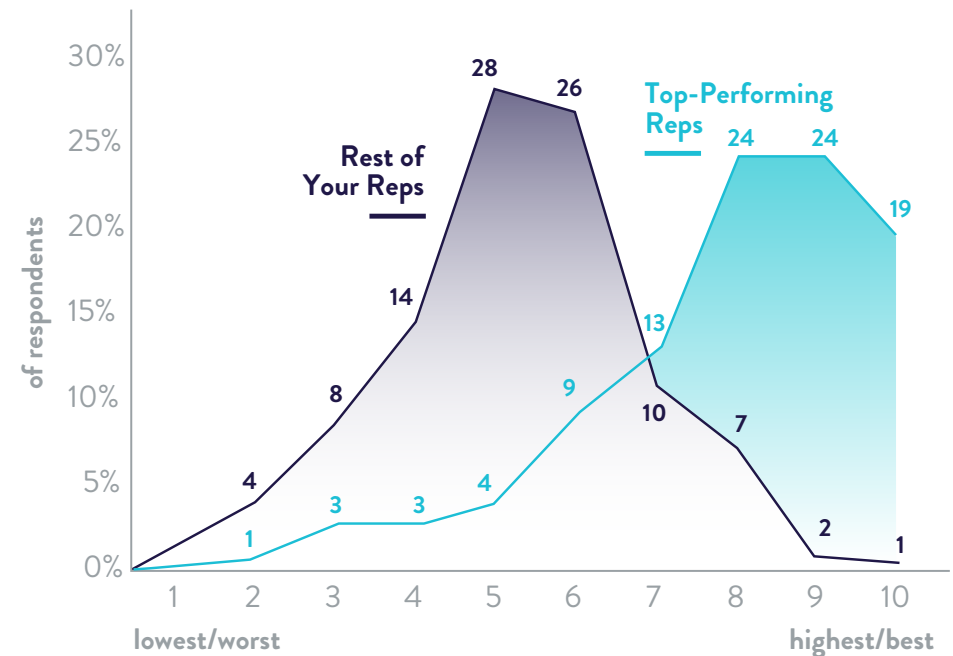


01 Communicating Value

Top performers know how to effectively communicate value throughout the sales process. The average salesperson can sometimes confuse this with communicating a value proposition, but there are clear differences. Communicating value is the art of quantifying the high-level value proposition for each prospective customer, drilling down from the generic promise and tying it to the buyer's unique challenges and priorities. Even

companies with strong sales cycles get pigeon-holed as "nice-to-haves" because the rep communicated value around a problem that wasn't meaningful or impactful enough for the buyer to make a change. Top performers recognize that they must have a conversation rooted in metrics, objectives, and goals that will help them identify where their value proposition creates real business impact for the buyer.

How good are your reps at communicating value to the customer?



02

Asking Questions and Listening

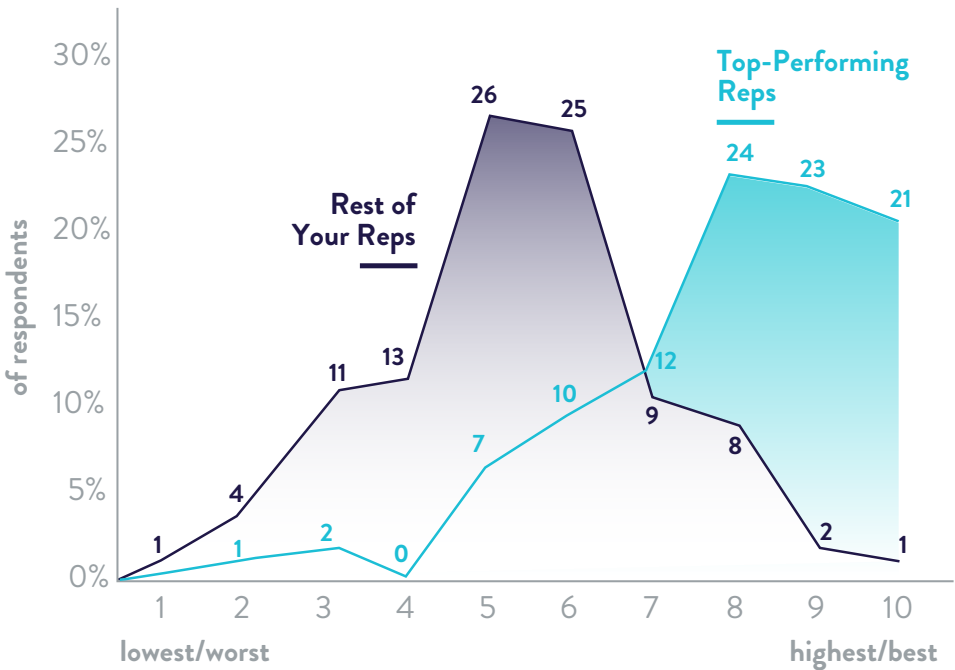
How do top performers pinpoint value for their prospect? By asking questions and listening to the answers. Sales leaders report that their best salespeople have an insatiable curiosity and never stop asking questions. For the average salesperson, questions are a means to an end – a way to get to the pitch.

Top performers recognize the importance of asking relevant, targeted questions throughout every sales conversation to gain a deeper understanding of the customer’s point of view. They go beyond superficial questions to identify and validate customer needs and challenges. In the interview process, candidates who are armed with research and prepared with their own questions are those who will do the same with a customer in the sales cycle.

Top performers also possess another critical skill—active listening. After asking questions, they engage with verbal and nonverbal cues, as well as confirm and clarify what they’ve

heard. While body language and other physical manifestations – facial expressions, seating position, etc. – can easily be observed during an in-person meeting, this becomes much more difficult to gauge in a virtual environment where most customer interactions are happening remotely. Active listening is a skill sales leaders must help reps develop, but it’s also a trait. Coaches should encourage reps to practice behaviors such as taking notes and paraphrasing customer sentiments to show they are truly paying attention. Alternatively, it’s important to discourage distractions, such as multitasking, that undermine active listening during a sales meeting.

How good are your reps at listening and asking good questions?



03

Practicing Empathy

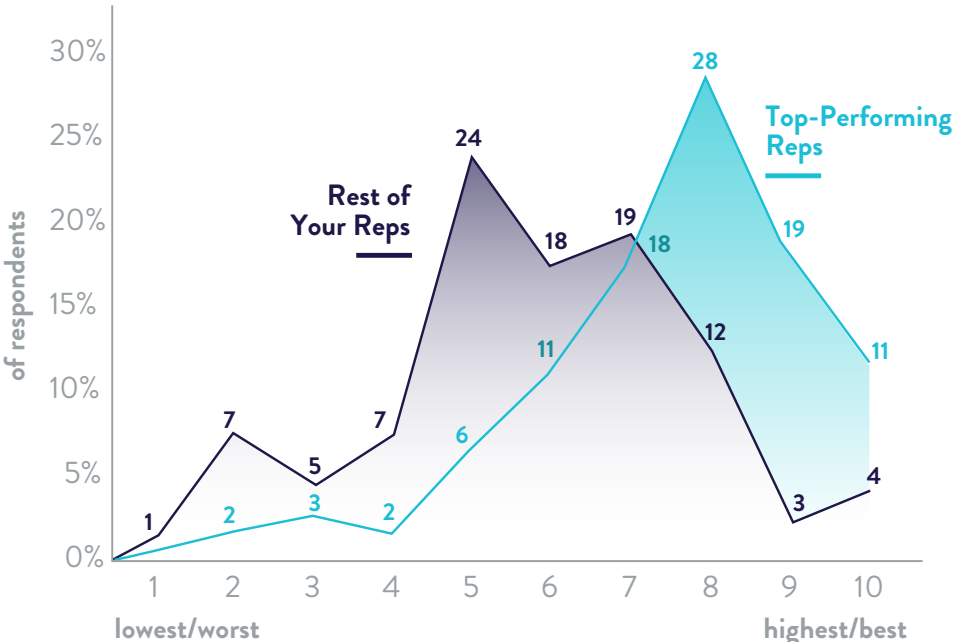
Empathy is one of the most critical attributes of a top performer, because it enables reps to truly understand their buyer’s perspective. Top performers understand that the more they can relate to the prospect, the deeper the relationship will be. Reps can put themselves in the shoes of their customers by doing research about their business and industry, asking questions and listening actively, and most importantly, focusing the conversation on the customer – not themselves.

For all salespeople, it’s important to strike a balance between empathy and ego. Top performers toe this line by creating a healthy tension in the sales cycle—they establish a clear need for their product or service by understanding the buyer’s needs, but they do it without arrogance. The opposite of an empathetic top performer is someone who is focused only on pitching and demonstrating their product or solution, regardless of the prospect’s situation.

While top performers spend quality time with quality prospects, average or bottom performers may sometimes use empathy as a crutch, which eventually becomes a barrier to the sales cycle. Reps must be able to practice empathy and also have courage to lead a dialogue with prospects.

While empathy itself is innate in people, certain components are skills – such as active listening and asking questions – that can be developed with the right coaching. Managers must model the same empathetic behaviors that they encourage their teams to practice.

How good are your reps at demonstrating empathy?



04

Using a Sales Methodology

“It’s easy to be busy, but not focused.”

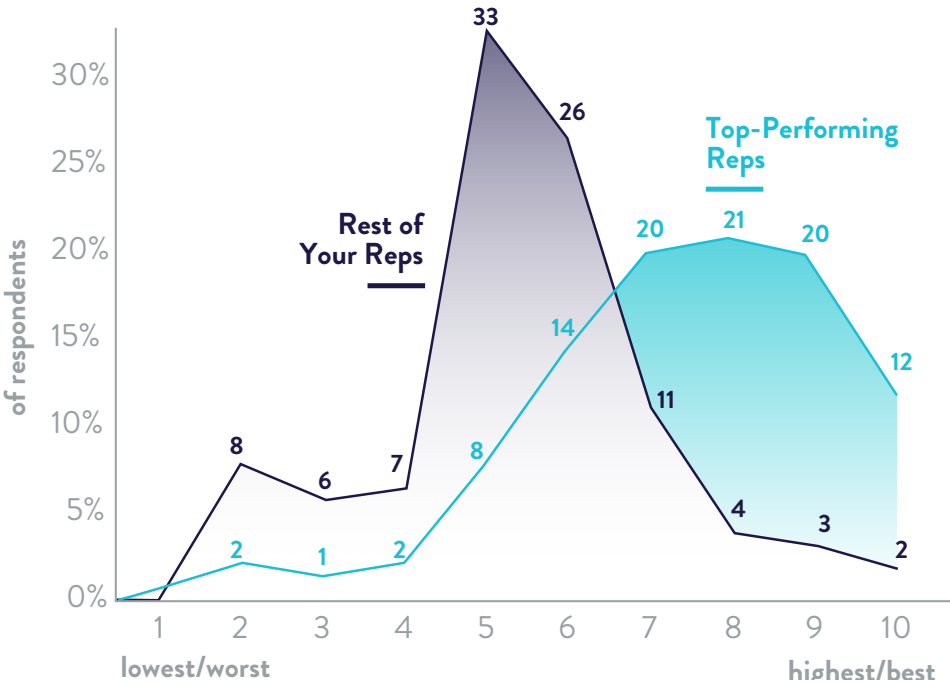
— Julie Thomas, President & CEO, ValueSelling Associates

Sales leaders agree that having a consistent methodology across the organization is critical to build a team of top performers. A methodology creates a common skillset, toolset, and mindset around the sales process. For example, all salespeople should be unified around the definition of a qualified opportunity or a high-value activity. Without these common definitions, salespeople might be spending too much time in the wrong places.

Top performers align their activities with the sales methodology, and know what it takes to uncover whether an opportunity is qualified – and they don’t waste time on ones that end up as “no decision.”

Sales professionals are now doing most of their work remotely. Management and onboarding are more difficult in a virtual environment, making a structured sales methodology even more important. Building in frequent and consistent check-ins, combined with technology, data, and analytics is critical to ensure sales reps are able to continue being successful.

How good are your reps at using a repeatable sales methodology?



05

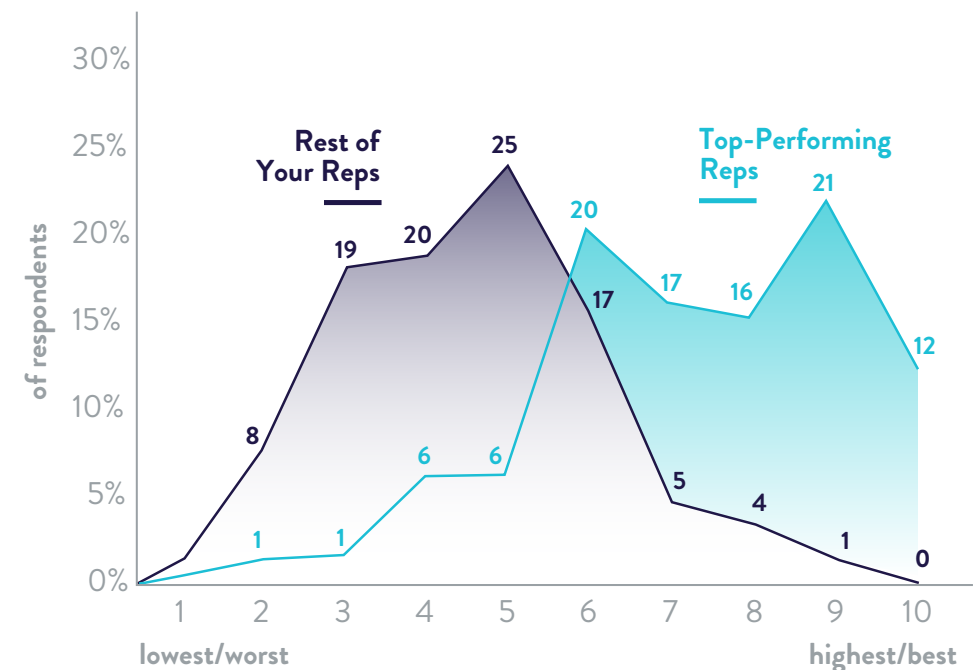
Building a High-Caliber Pipeline

Irrespective of their achievements, prospecting is often a rep's least favorite activity in the sales cycle. However, overachievers recognize its importance in being able to consistently add new opportunities to the pipeline.

When it comes to building a robust pipeline, top performers are more focused on discipline than intensity. They are rigorous about prospecting, and do what it takes to reach the right people, with the right message, at the right time. These reps possess a mindset, supported by a set of skills – time management, identifying goals and objectives, overcoming obstacles, making phone calls – that leaders must develop through sales training and coaching. They also maintain

a disciplined prospecting cadence that is built into their daily activities, so that there is always time dedicated to the activity. Aside from making space for prospecting, top performers are targeted in their approach, and know what it takes to create a real opportunity.

How good are your reps at building a high-caliber pipeline?



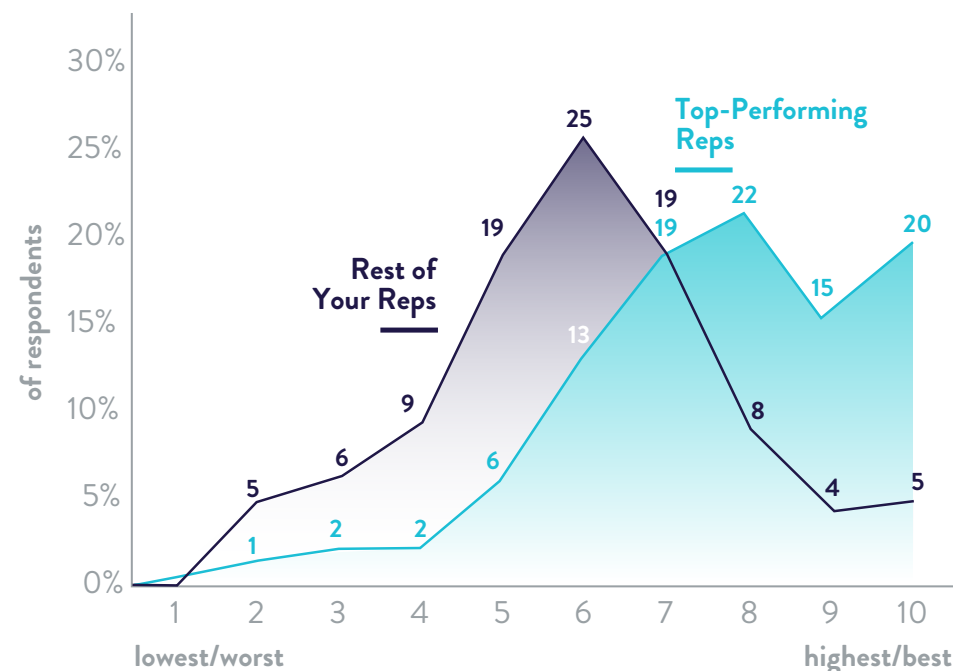
Staying Open to Coaching & Development

Top performers love to learn and are open to feedback. When it comes to hiring them, sales leaders should look for signs of a learning mindset: Do they invest in their personal development outside of work? Do they believe there is always more to learn? Are they willing and able to effectively self-evaluate their strengths and areas for development?

When it comes to coaching, sales managers have a few key mandates. First, they must role model the right behaviors. Second, leaders must communicate consistently and clearly about their expectations for reps' daily activities. Their management philosophy should enable sales reps to prioritize the activities that are fundamental for success. When managers send mixed messages about where sales reps should spend their time, it becomes more difficult for those reps to take action effectively and efficiently.

Where reps struggle, coaches should course correct and help them see what to do differently. But leaders should also celebrate achievements – even the little ones – to reinforce leading indicators of success throughout the sales cycle.

How good are your reps at **staying open to coaching and sales training**?



07

Dealing with Adversity

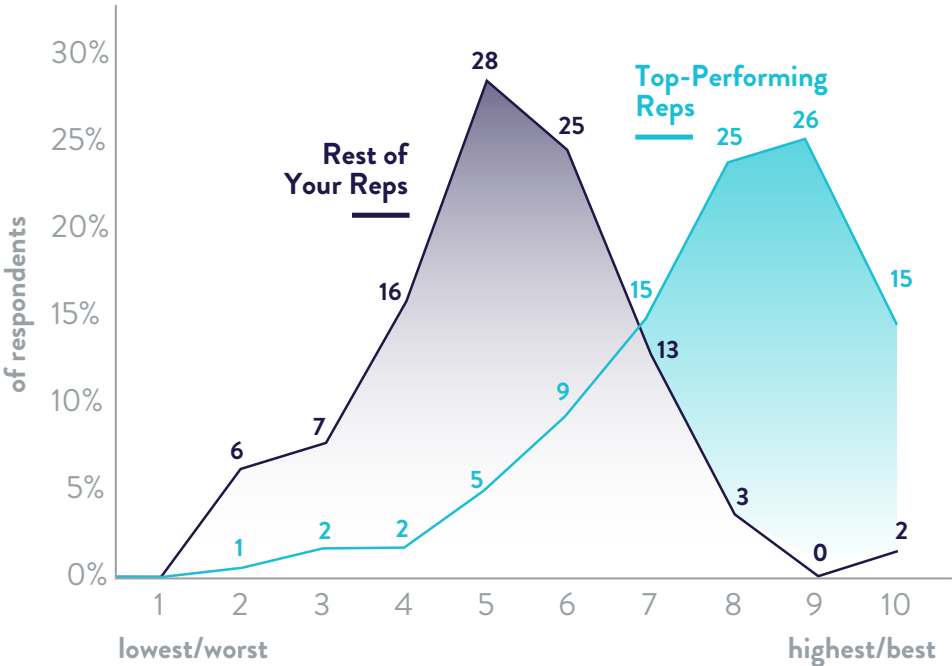
“Top performers realize that success and failure are on the same road. They’re not opposite.”

— Julie Thomas, President & CEO, ValueSelling Associates

The highest-achieving sales reps have a short-term memory. Objection is a core part of being in sales, and those who can persevere through it are the most successful. When top performers face adversity, they are resilient and look for the lesson. Average performers often take rejection or adversity personally, and, as such, they struggle. It should not be a salesperson’s goal to avoid failure. Those who aren’t experiencing challenges on a regular basis probably aren’t talking to enough people.

From a development perspective, when a rep has a disappointment, a coach must help them elevate out of the situation and see the lesson for the future. A good coach will help them pinpoint their blind spots and figure out how to fix them. However, resilience is something to hire for. Hiring managers should ask scenario-based questions to uncover how a candidate might deal with adversity. What is the most difficult thing they faced in their career? How did they react? What did they learn? What would they do differently next time? Asking these questions, and listening for key indicators of resilience, set managers up to hire more top-performing salespeople.

How good are your reps dealing with adversity and rejection?



With the right coaching and development, many average sales reps have the potential to become top performers. For sales leaders, it is critical to look at the entire sales team and diagnose each individual's challenges and potential for success.

While top performers typically possess these 7 habits – encompassing a high-achieving mindset, skillset, and toolset – every sales professional is unique. When both managers and reps alike are willing to hold up the mirror, build a concrete plan, and do the work, becoming a top performer is achievable.

About ValueSelling Associates®

ValueSelling Associates is the creator of the ValueSelling Framework®, the practical and proven sales methodology preferred by sales executives around the globe. Since 1991, ValueSelling Associates has helped thousands of sales professionals increase their sales productivity and realize immediate revenue growth. We offer customized training to Fortune 1000, mid-sized, and start-up companies to keep it simple and drive sales results.

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