

# What Really Drives Your Top Performers?

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Do you know what separates your top performers from those who give it their all, but never quite make the grade? During these tough times, nothing matters more than the mental attitude of your top performers. What is it about them that enables them to rise to the top?

It is more important, now than ever before, that you know the answer to that question, as you compete in a game where the rules are changing at lightning speed. The last year is one that none of us will ever forget. If yours is like most companies today, you had to shrink to squeeze through the eye of the storm. And you had to learn how to compete on a completely new playing field.

Your competitors are no longer in your neighborhood or on the other side of town. They are on the other side of the world. And they are awake as you try to sleep. Meanwhile, many of the partners you counted on, your banks and your suppliers, have forgotten their promises.

The sand has shifted beneath your feet. But you are still standing. This is a tribute to your competitiveness, self-discipline, optimism and resilience. You've made it through. Still you have changed. Your company is smaller. You've become substantially faster. And, you are a little smarter. But you haven't had much time to assess what you've been through. How your world has been turned upside down. How you've recovered. How you will be different this year.

How do we prepare for a future that is so uncertain? When everything we have learned in the past has little to do with what we're going through now?

Every time you hear a trend that indicates that things are starting to head in one direction, a major event occurs right afterward that is contradictory. Situations are literally changing from day-to-day. So is the glass half-empty? Or half-full?

At the end of the day, our top talent is ultimately what distinguishes us. Everything else can be copied by any of our competitors. And one thing we've learned, for certain, about top performers is that they want to be connected with *other* top performers. They do *not* want to be working side-by-side with someone who will not carry their weight.

So, what have we learned about the psychology of top performers that might help you win in these uncertain times?

In our studies throughout the past half-century, we have discovered that there are three characteristics – above and beyond all others – that distinguish the best salespeople. And they become even more important now, during these tough times.

These three characteristics are: an inherent ability to connect with others; an inner need to persuade; and the ability to bounce back from rejection. Top performing salespeople all possess those qualities. And during tough times, it is essential that your salespeople all possess ample quantities of these three qualities. Because each of those three qualities is being challenged like never before.

They are empathy, a need to persuade and resilience. Your top salespeople need these three qualities. And so do you.

First, let's start with resilience. Resilience is what enables us to brush ourselves off after getting knocked down and carry on with even more determination. And even our best salespeople are being rejected more than they've ever experienced. The concern is that they are used to learning from mistakes.

Did they ask for the order too early? Or not know enough about their competition? Or, perhaps, not know enough about their prospect?

When the going gets tough and the rejections come time after time after time, it becomes a lot more difficult to learn from them. And then change the next time. So our best salespeople are really tested. And they are looking to us to help, to help them dig deeper inside to get through all the rejection they are encountering. Then shake it off and carry on.

As a leader, you are there to empathize and listen, but you've got to replace that fear with hope and confidence. You're needed to talk about and focus on the right messages; and, perhaps, change those messages because the old messages don't work anymore.

That's where your empathy kicks in. It is your empathy that enables you to connect with your top performers, to let them know that you truly care about them, and to help them re-connect with themselves – and with their prospects and clients, all of whom are going through the same thing.

They are looking to you to replace their fear with confidence. And that's where your persuasiveness needs to kick into high gear. For top performing salespeople – and top leaders – it all starts with empathy, persuasiveness and resilience.

We have yet to meet a top performing salesperson – or a leader – who does not possess these three qualities in substantial degrees. Let us close with what Roger Staubach told us, when we interviewed him for our *New York Times Best Seller* "Succeed on Your Own Terms."

This is the guy who personifies grace under pressure. This is the guy who led the Dallas Cowboys to four Super Bowls, winning two of them; and who 14 times led his team to victory when his team was behind in the last two minutes of the game. This is the guy who every Minnesota Vikings fan can tell you threw the first "Hail Mary Pass," then coined the phrase.

After going on to found The Staubach Company, an enormously successful commercial real estate enterprise, we asked him: Which sports analogy makes the most sense in the business world?

Without pausing, he said, "Competition is certainly important. Being clear about your goals is crucial. But for me, the key to developing successful organizations is the people you surround yourself with. Succeeding in business, in sports, in your life, is a matter of pulling together

people you can trust, who have their priorities in line, who have the talent, ambition, and desire to reach beyond themselves and make something really big happen – particularly when the pressure is on.”

And the pressure is on now, like never before.

So, in essence, as a leader during these tough times, your focus needs to be on setting a confident tone, keeping your top performers engaged and replacing any salespeople who don't have what it takes to step up to the challenge.

You owe it to yourself and to your company to surround yourself with *only* those people who are – or have the potential to be your next top performers. Connect with them. Build your strength around them. Engage them to exceed expectations.

And make sure you let them know that they are your future.

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