

The Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Sales

Given the interpersonal nature of sales, the characteristics of sales professionals that are typically described (e.g., motivation, confidence, drive, and assertiveness), the high stakes of sales, and the impact sales can have on an organization's bottom line, it is not surprising that this profession is one of the most well-researched in relation to emotional intelligence (EI). Studies that looked at EI and employees in sales occupations found that the Emotional Quotient-Inventory 2.0® (EQ-i 2.0®) can help with selecting and screening sales professionals, as well as assessing and improving sales performance.



How does emotional intelligence impact sales performance?

When studying the impact of EI on sales performance in various industries, researchers were able to use the EQ-i 2.0 subscales to differentiate between top and bottom performers. For instance, one researcher found that higher Decision Making scores on the EQ-i 2.0 were related to higher sales performance among 85 technology sales professionals¹.

Among insurance sales agents, Seligman and Schulman found that in comparison to the weakest sales performers, top-performing insurance sales agents tended to score higher on Assertiveness, Happiness, Self-Regard, Self-Actualization, Stress Tolerance, and Optimism².



A global sales unit of a major Canadian financial institution (CIBC) found that scores on the EQ-i 2.0 accounted for 32% of booked sales and 71% of pipeline sales. The top-performing sales professionals in that sales unit scored highest in Interpersonal Relationships, Self-Actualization, and Empathy. They also tended to score well in Flexibility, Stress Tolerance, and Reality Testing³.

Researchers have also found that improving one's EI skills through targeted training could lead to improved performance. American Express Financial Services implemented a program to improve their employees' EI skills leveraging MHS' EQ-i 2.0. Fifty-two sales consultants that took part in the program found an average increase of 2% in their sales performance, which is the equivalent of tens of millions of dollars in additional income generated. The same group also reported greater success in their personal lives. The program was successful in improving their Assertiveness, Empathy, Reality Testing, Self-Actualization, Self-Regard, and Optimism^{4,5}.

"After including the EQ-i 2.0® as [a] component of their hiring process, new debt collectors with top EQ-i 2.0 scores met 163% of their quotas."



Can emotional intelligence be used to improve the selection process?

Other than using the EQ-i 2.0 to help develop sales-related skills, researchers also examined its potential utility in the selection process. Bachman and colleagues found that EQ-i 2.0 scores predicted success among debt collectors. Top-performing agents tended to score higher in Assertiveness, Independence, Self-Actualization, Problem Solving, Optimism, and Happiness. They also found that after including the EQ-i 2.0 as one component of their hiring process, new debt collectors with top EQ-i 2.0 scores met 163% of their quotas, while hires that scored lower were only able to meet 80% of their quotas⁶.

Using the EQ-i 2.0 as a selection tool should be carefully undertaken. To identify the right talent for your needs and make a confident prediction about their performance, you need to gather information. Ideally, that information will be high quality, directly tied to what you are predicting, and available across all candidates to provide a reliable benchmark when comparing them. It should also be a legitimate reflection of the candidate's knowledge, skills, or abilities and be difficult to fake.

This decision challenge is where the promise of assessments lies. When a company uses assessments for hiring, they believe that their investment in these tools will improve the accuracy of their hiring predictions, resulting in greater performance, lower turnover, and a variety of other benefits that come with making better hiring decisions. Other potential benefits include a more efficient selection process, reduced bias, and greater protection against litigation. When used properly, assessments can add tremendous value, give organizations a competitive advantage in a tight labor market, and deliver a great return on investment.

Ensure any selection tool you use is appropriate for the role you are hiring for, that it is fair and reliable, and that it is administered and interpreted correctly. Ultimately, assessments should improve the accuracy of your selection process and help you make better, more confident hiring predictions.

**Keep the conversation going.
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References

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³ Sitarenios, G., & Stein, S. (1998). *Emotional intelligence in the prediction of sales success in the finance industry*. Unpublished manuscript. Toronto, Canada: Multi-Health Systems.

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⁵ Schwartz, T. (2000). How do you feel? *Fast Company*, 35, 296. Retrieved from www.fastcompany.com/magazine/35/emotion.html

⁶ Bachman, J., Stein, S. J., Campbell, K., & Sitarenios, G. (2000). Emotional intelligence in the collection of debt. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, 8, 176-182.