

## What Makes A Great Salesperson Tick?

“There are two kinds of salesmen in the world,” the printer said, “there’s the good ones, and then there’s all the ones I’ve hired. I wish I could figure out what makes a good salesman tick.”

I said: “Let’s not limit ourselves to ‘good’ ones. Let’s talk about what makes great salespeople tick. Because it’s been my experience that most printers are working with flawed assumptions, and that has a lot to do with the high failure rate in the industry.”

### Money Motivated

The first flawed assumption is that great salespeople are money-motivated, or as one of my clients recently put it, “coin-operated.” It’s simply not true, and here’s my proof of that statement. Almost no one is earning as much as they could, or even as much as you probably want them to. (That’s assuming that you want them to sell more, and you’re willing to pay them more if they do. Based on what I see and hear, that’s a pretty safe assumption.) If all of these salespeople were really money-motivated, the opportunity to make more money would be working better!

Even beyond that, as a motivating factor, it’s really not the money that motivates most highly-motivated people. It’s what they can do with the money. The most motivated salespeople I know are motivated by specific things they want to have in their lives. I’m working with two young salespeople right now who know exactly why they’re working so hard. For one, it’s about paying off college loans. For the other, it’s about buying a house. These, by the way, are serious young people who didn’t get into sales because they enjoy meeting new people. They got into sales because they know it provides a real opportunity to have the kinds of things they want to have in their lives. Yes, for one of them right now it’s about *not* having that college debt, but I can assure you that she has some ideas about what’s she’s going to spend her discretionary income on once she actually has some!

By the way, another flawed assumption is that people who *need* to make more money will automatically be motivated by the opportunity to do that. Before you hire someone who fits that description, please ask yourself why he or she hasn’t earned that money in the past. In my experience, the problem usually starts with not knowing how to sell more in order to make more money, which means it’s a training challenge, not just a motivational challenge. The problem is often exacerbated when it’s a person who simply isn’t willing to work hard enough to make more money, which means it’s a management and accountability challenge.

### Self-Starter

Still another flawed assumption is that great salespeople are self-starters, who neither want nor need any management. Actually, the self-starter assumption isn’t completely flawed, but what causes self-starting seems to be. In my experience, you want to be careful with people who tell you they love to sell, or that it’s all about passion. I think you’re better off with the person who tells you that he or she understands the importance of doing a job for a full day, every day. I think there’s a perception within the sales community that great salespeople are artists. OK, there’s no question that the great ones are creative in their approach to meeting the challenges of selling, but beyond that, they just plain work hard—because that’s what the great ones do, in selling or sports or medicine or teaching or anything else.

As for not wanting or needing any management, I think that flawed assumption stems mostly from listening to underachievers who can talk the talk, but either can’t or won’t walk the walk. I know some great salespeople. They are always open to anything that might help them. It is true that they generally don’t have a lot of patience with “management” that isn’t helping them, but that’s a flaw in the management, not the support and accountability that great salespeople welcome.

Bottom Line: If you start out with flawed assumptions, you’ll almost certainly get an unsatisfactory result. I hope I’ve given you a few things to think about today!