



# What Distinguishes the Top Sales Performers in Seniors Housing? An Exploration of the Key Values and Motivators of the Industry's Top Sales Performers

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## ABSTRACT

In an exploratory, industry-specific study ( $N = 1,800$ ) of what motivates leading seniors housing sales professionals, three key values emerged in the response pattern of top performers: utilitarian/economic, social/altruistic, and theoretical. An additional qualitative study was conducted that provided rich content from comments harvested anonymously from the industry's top-performing sales people. Several seniors housing organizations of various sizes volunteered their sales staffs to participate in the TTI/Success Insights™ Workplace Motivators™ self-assessment, a globally validated assessment. Statistical analyses were conducted on the top and lower quintiles of the sales population. Salespeople are money-driven; although, in the seniors housing industry, other values emerged with equal prominence, creating a unique blend of values in the top-performing salespeople. The intent is to inform our peers of what was learned so that they may use this knowledge to increase their own sales effectiveness within their organizations. Additional testing and study replication should be conducted.

## INTRODUCTION

Many readers will agree that seniors housing sales requires a unique mix of skills in salespeople. The salesperson is assisting a client or customer with what may be the last large purchase of his/her or a couple's lifetime. The sales process is a balance of providing information, coaching, support, and moving toward a signed contract for sale. This is different from real estate sales because of the potential complexity of additional service options, and this creates a unique sales environment for seniors housing.

In this study, we explored top performers in sales at a variety of seniors housing organizations, attempting to answer a set of questions:

- What do these top salespeople have in common?
- What are the values (motivational drive factors) of the top performers?
- Are these values different from mid-level and lower sales performers?
- Can these values be measured in some way?
- What do the top salespeople say about themselves when asked about what motivates them to achieve?
- What can we learn about sustaining a higher level of motivation among our own salespeople?

These are some of the questions that we explored in this investigation. The intent is to provide both a quantitative and qualitative dataset from which the industry may learn some information that may be helpful in sustaining and encouraging top-performing salespeople. There also may be information that could assist in bringing the average and lower sales performers into a higher level of effectiveness.

## METHODOLOGY

Several seniors housing organizations of various sizes were asked to participate in each of the studies. Each organization provided a list of all salespeople and email addresses. A memo was sent from the sales principal of each organization to the sales force, telling them of the online instrument, that each would receive their own results in a report, and that no one

else in the organization would see their results. The instrument used was the Workplace Motivators™ instrument published by TTI/Success Insights.™

All reports were provided on a courtesy basis for each of the participating organizations. All salespeople were given the opportunity to respond to the instrument so as not to single out only the top-performing salespeople. Each of the participating organizations provided a confidential list of their top and lowest quintiles of salespeople. Selection for the top quintile was based on high numbers of move-ins, maintaining high occupancy census, high customer satisfaction while also maintaining the highest of ethics based on the records and data from their managers and supervisors.

In the first study, conducted in 2011, there was an exploration of the differences between the top, middle, and lower sales performers from the top, middle, and lower quintiles. One of the purposes was to explore the overall sensitivity of the instrument to distinguish between the three groups of salespeople. There are six scales in the TTI Workplace Motivator instrument, and statistically significant differences were found across three of the six scales in distinguishing between the top-, middle-, and lower-performing salespeople.

The second study was conducted in 2012 and was a quantitative and qualitative exploration of the response patterns of the top-performing salespeople. The qualitative aspect of the study provided additional insight into the motivation of the top performers. Selection for the second study was identical to the first study, with salespeople responding to the instrument, and a confidential list of the top performers created the aggregate group, also from a variety of different sized organizations.

The instrument used in both studies was the TTI/Success Insights Workplace Motivator instrument, with different populations of salespeople in each study. The instrument is a rank-order self-assessment with 12 questions, and each question prompt having six responses that are rank-ordered by the respondent from highest to lowest. The raw score

scale ranges from 12 to 72 points. The first choice in each of the 12 questions receives a score of 6 points, the second choice receives 5 points, the third choice receives 4 points, and then down to the last choice, which receives 1 point for scoring. Each of the response options is a statement that addresses one of the six value themes measured on the instrument. The six themes are theoretical, utilitarian/economic, aesthetic, social/altruistic, individualistic/political, and traditional/regulatory. A manual of the reliability and validity of the instrument is available through TTI/Success Insight (Klassen, 2012).

The qualitative portion of the second study provided open-ended questions sent to the top-performing salespeople through an online question and survey vendor. Six questions were asked, and open-ended responses were harvested anonymously. The six questions were:

1. What do you like best about your career as a seniors housing salesperson?
2. What do you like least?
3. If someone asked you, "What are the two or three primary components of your personal success," what would you tell them?
4. If you go home some days and think, "Yes! This is great!" or have a strong feeling of a big "win," what happens on the job that gives you that up-beat feeling?
5. How do you reconcile or explain the drive for money and also the drive to help others...both as high drivers of top performers in the seniors housing profession?
6. What do you appreciate most and least from your sales manager or supervisor in helping you stay optimally motivated?

## RESULTS

### The Utilitarian/Economic Motivator

In our investigation of motivators in top sales performers, the utilitarian/economic factor was the strongest motivator for the top performers who scored higher than the lower performers on this scale ( $M$

= 50,  $SD = 9.5$ ); however, this motivator in some other industries has been observed to be at even a higher level; e.g., we have observed higher utilitarian/economic in the competitive field of large contract information technology ( $M = 68$ ,  $SD = 10.2$ ) (see **Table 3** and **Figure 3**). That substantially higher level score was absent from the top sales population in the seniors housing industry, indicating that they have developed a sensitivity to successfully build (in our opinion) a sales triad of winning a successful contract: trust, credibility, and rapport. Our industry's top performers appear to know the sensitivity needed in the sales process and seem to keep it tipped in their favor.

The lower sales performers scored lower on the utilitarian/economic scale ( $M = 42$ ,  $SD = 8$ ). For many of the lower performers, the money drive was second in rank below the social/altruistic drive to help others. Based on the aggregate results of the Workplace Motivators reports, with the lower performers in the industry there emerged a theme that seemed to indicate that they appreciated being a "coach and counselor" substantially more than they did being a salesperson.

**Figure 1** shows mean scores on all subscales of the measure. In order, the six rows are U/E - utilitarian/economic (drive for money), S/A - social/altruistic (drive to help others), T - theoretical (drive for knowledge), A - aesthetic (drive for balance and harmony), I - individualistic (drive for uniqueness and independence), and T/R - traditional/regulatory (drive for order and structure).

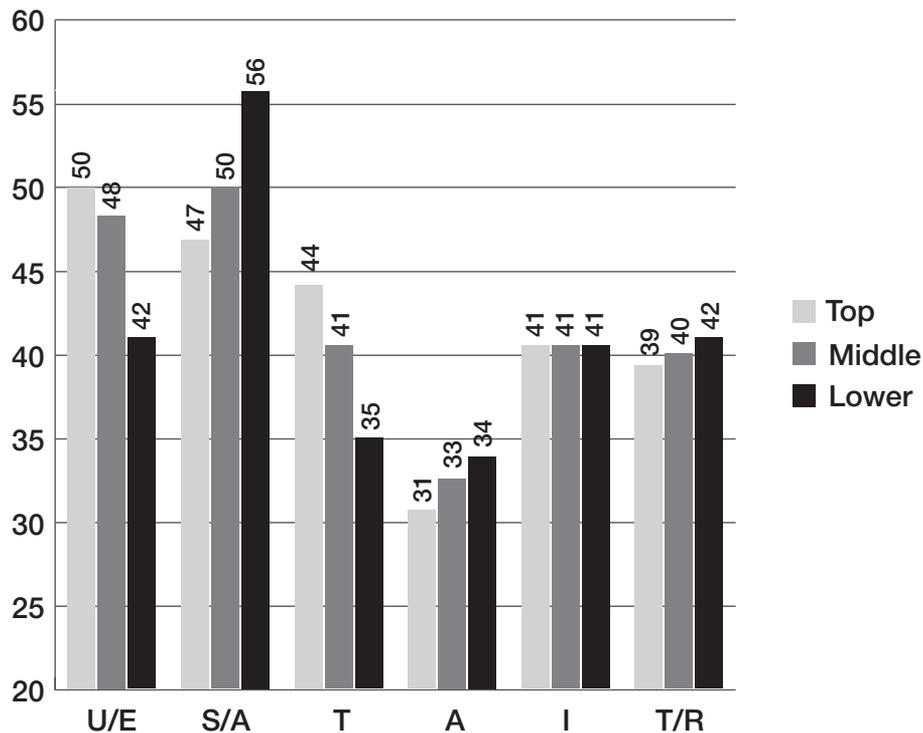
A linear relationship appeared in the utilitarian/economic motivator subscale such that the top performers indicated a stronger drive for financial gain than did the middle and lower quintiles. (See **Table 1**, row 1, and **Figure 1**, column-set 1.) *T*-tests were performed between the top and lower quintiles for each of the scales; middle quintile scores are posted as additional reference points. It is likely difficult to train these motivators into an individual or into a sales force, as these may be more intrinsic drives than simply a set of skills to be learned. This higher economic drive may assist the top performers in pre-approach,

**Table 1. Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for All Six Subscales Among the Three Sales Performance Groups.**

Motivators Subscale	Top Quintile Mean / SD	Middle Quintile Mean / SD	Lower Quintile Mean / SD
Utilitarian/economic*	50 / 9.5	48 / 8.7	44 / 8.9
Social/altruistic**	47 / 12.1	50 / 9.1	56 / 8.6
Theoretical***	44 / 7.4	41 / 8.9	35 / 9.4
Aesthetic	31 / 6.3	33 / 9.2	34 / 11
Individualistic	41 / 8.8	41 / 9.2	41 / 9.9
Traditional/regulatory	39 / 8.4	40 / 9.6	42 / 10.7

\* $p < 0.1$  / \*\* $p < 0.05$  / \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

**Figure 1. Mean Scores On Measures By Performance Group.**



\*Note: Means are rounded; U/E = Utilitarian/Economic, S/A = Social/Altruistic, T = Theoretical, A = Aesthetic, I = Individualistic, T/R = Traditional/Regulatory

presentation, handling objections, and closing the sale, regardless of individual behavioral styles.

### **Top Performers Demonstrate a High “Sincerity Factor”**

Top performers in the seniors housing sample also indicated a strong social/altruistic drive to help others. (See Table 1, row 2, and Figure 1, column-set 2.) In most sales populations we observed in private, unpublished studies, the economic and altruistic drives are inversely correlated (this is supported in the TTI Technical and Validation Manual as well) such that when scores on one drive increase the other decreases. In our sample of seniors housing professionals, both the drive for money and the drive to help others were evident in top sales performers. Such a finding is important because a seniors housing purchase may be one the largest and most important purchases that one makes in a person's lifetime.

We also found that the lower sales performers reported higher scores on the social/altruistic scale. Specifically, this group's altruistic mean score was 12 points higher than their mean utilitarian/economic score. This difference may indicate that this group's focus was to help others; while this is a noble goal, it diminishes the business aspect of their transactions.

As indicated in Figure 3, a strong linear relationship appeared when assessing the social/altruistic motivator such that lower performers reported a substantially higher altruistic score than did the top performers. Indeed, the lower-performing group scored highest on this subscale, and they reported a high social/altruistic factor, which is necessary but perhaps not sufficient. This may imply that this group highly values helping people, perhaps to the point of giving away their coaching and advice and perhaps not leading toward a signed contract. As such, it may be prudent to train such salespersons with an awareness of this finding; i.e., lead the conversation toward next steps nearer a close and contract.

### **Top Performers Do Their Homework: They Have an Appetite for Learning**

Many top sales performers also have an appetite for knowledge; they are continually learning about important aspects of their professions, including properties, prospects and clients, their competition, the real estate market, and the economy. As such, they also may have good contract knowledge, so whenever they are faced with a difficult question about the fine print or minutia, they may readily know the answer. Additionally, credibility and trust are both built from a foundation of product knowledge, and a high sincerity factor helps to round out the third component of the sales triad; namely: rapport. (See Table 1, row 3, and Figure 1, column-set 3.)

The lower performers also showed a lower theoretical score; i.e., a lower appetite for learning and knowledge. This approach may leave the group vulnerable when a prospect asks a number of basic-level questions to which the lower performer may have no answer or needs to call his/her manager for assistance. Furthermore, such lack of knowledge may erode credibility of the salesperson. Fortunately, ongoing training and development may help to increase these salespersons' knowledge base, especially if management holds the sales personnel accountable and offers appropriate motivation and rewards them.

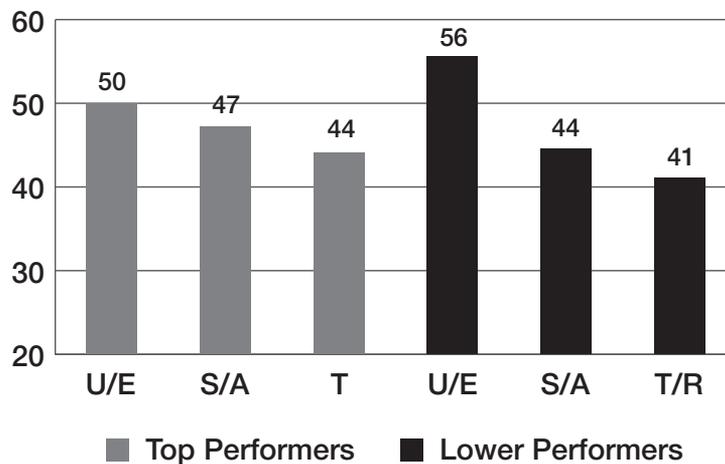
These findings indicate that the top performers may be in perpetual learning mode, including always asking questions and applying their knowledge base to solve unique problems with each new client. For example, they may have better knowledge of their properties, their clients, the industry, and their competition. As a cause, we hypothesize that the top performers may do more job-related homework than their lower-performing counterparts. This approach also may help build trust, credibility, and rapport with clients and prospects.

When we observe the spread of the top three ranked scores for both performance groups, we find a rather narrow spread of six points between the first

**Table 2. Comparison of Top and Lower Sales Performers Rank-Order Scores.**

<b>Top 3 Motivators for the Top Performers (in rank order)</b>			
Rank	Motivator Theme	Mean	SD
1 <sup>st</sup>	Utilitarian/Economic	50	9.5
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Social/Altruistic	47	12.1
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Theoretical	44	7.4
<i>Note that there is only a 6-point spread between the first and third ranks in the top performers' scores.</i>			
<b>Top 3 Motivators for the Lower Performers (in rank order)</b>			
Rank	Motivator Theme	Mean	SD
1 <sup>st</sup>	Social/Altruistic	56	8.6
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Utilitarian/Economic	44	8.9
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Traditional/Regulatory	41	10.7
<i>Note that there is a large 15-point spread between the first and third ranks in the lower performers' scores.</i>			

**Figure 2. Means of the Top Three Subscale Motivators of Top and Lower Performers.**



*Note: Means are rounded; U/E = Utilitarian/Economic, S/A = Social/Altruistic, T = Theoretical, T/R = Traditional/Regulatory*

and third ranked scales in the top performers. (See Figure 2 and Table 2.) It is interesting to observe a 15-point spread between the first and third-ranked scales in the population of lower performers. Also note that the Theoretical scale (drive for knowledge and learning) is absent in the top three rankings of the lower performers.

Figure 3 shows the group (i.e., seniors housing and high-tech) differences across three the motivators compared. Of particular interest is the very high utilitarian/economic score and very low social/altruistic score in the sample of high-tech salespersons. There appears to be similarity of scores in the seniors housing sample, with only a six-point range between the three motivators. High-Tech sales professionals showed a 32-point range across those same three motivators. The primary reason we chose to illuminate these industry differences was to highlight the observation that the theoretical, economic, and altruistic scales in the results of the seniors housing population show a very narrow range of scores compared to other sales populations. Table 3 indicates that each of these observed differences is significant at the  $p < .01$  level.

### Finding, Keeping, and Motivating the Top Sales Performers

In a follow-up study, we further examined scores of the seniors housing industry's top sales performers, defined as those in the top 20% of their companies for high rates of move-ins, high occupancy census,

and high customer satisfaction while maintaining the highest of ethics. Based on those parameters, we reached 187 respondents. We obtained scores on the TTI/Success Insights Workplace Motivators instrument from these 187 top performers from a pool of more than 1,800 salespeople at companies of varying sizes and operation types. Royal Star Properties and Target Consultants, Inc., jointly sponsored the research, and it represents, to our knowledge, the largest statistical study of exclusively top performers in the seniors housing industry.

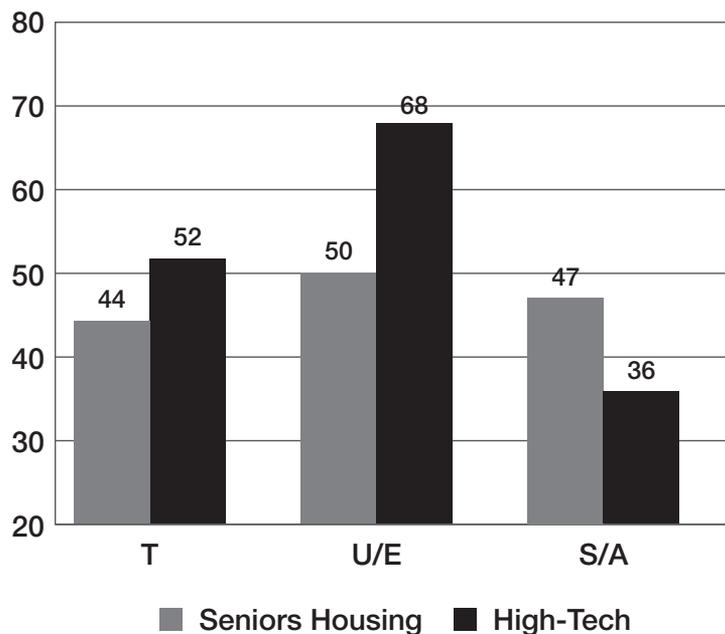
Through the auspices of Royal Star Properties, contacts were established with a variety of companies in the seniors housing industry. Corporate officers and directors were asked to provide a list of their top 20% sales performers, based on identical criteria as presented in the first study. These individuals were given access links to complete the Success Insights Workplace Motivators instrument. The respondents received an immediate report-set, and no others within their organization received copies; this was done to establish trust and guarantee anonymity for each respondent. The managing principals of the host company received a narrated summary of the aggregated results. This summary was produced in an open and anonymous manner, to be shared with other staff as they chose.

Once collected, the scores were aggregated in total and by company, and descriptive statistics were determined. Additionally, tests of reliability were

**Table 3. Comparison Between Seniors Housing and High-Tech Top Sales Performers**

	Seniors Housing Mean / <i>SD</i>	High Tech Sales Mean / <i>SD</i>
Theoretical <sup>***</sup>	44 / 7.4	52 / 9.1
Economic <sup>***</sup>	50 / 9.5	68 / 10.2
Altruistic <sup>***</sup>	47 / 12.1	36 / 6.1
*** $p < .01$		

**Figure 3: Comparison of Seniors Housing and High-Tech Top Sales Performers**



*Note: Means are rounded; T = Theoretical, U/E = Utilitarian/Economic, S/A – Social/Altruistic*

conducted. Of primary importance was the observation that across all participating companies, the top performers reported a very close range of mean scores across all subscales from the instrument. Also, within each range of mean scores, salespersons at some companies appeared to have established their own culture, making it slightly different from other companies. These differences may indicate specific company cultures, which may elicit a feeling of job fit among their employees. This job fit also may in part explain why some sales professionals leave one company within the industry to work with another company that provides for them a better fit.

Others found that compensation plans with higher variable proportions may lead to higher levels of intrinsic motivation, especially in younger salespeople (DeVecchio & Wagner, 2011). This increased intrinsic motivation may account for some early-career employment shifts between organizations within the seniors housing industry. In some of the

comments by top performers, the reader may gain additional insight into the dual importance of compensation and a spirit of helping.

### **Theoretical, Economic, and Altruistic Motivators**

In Study 1, we observed that there were differences between top and lower performers regarding values/motivators scores, especially across three of the six value themes (i.e., theoretical, economic, and altruistic). A brief summary is provided in **Table 4**.

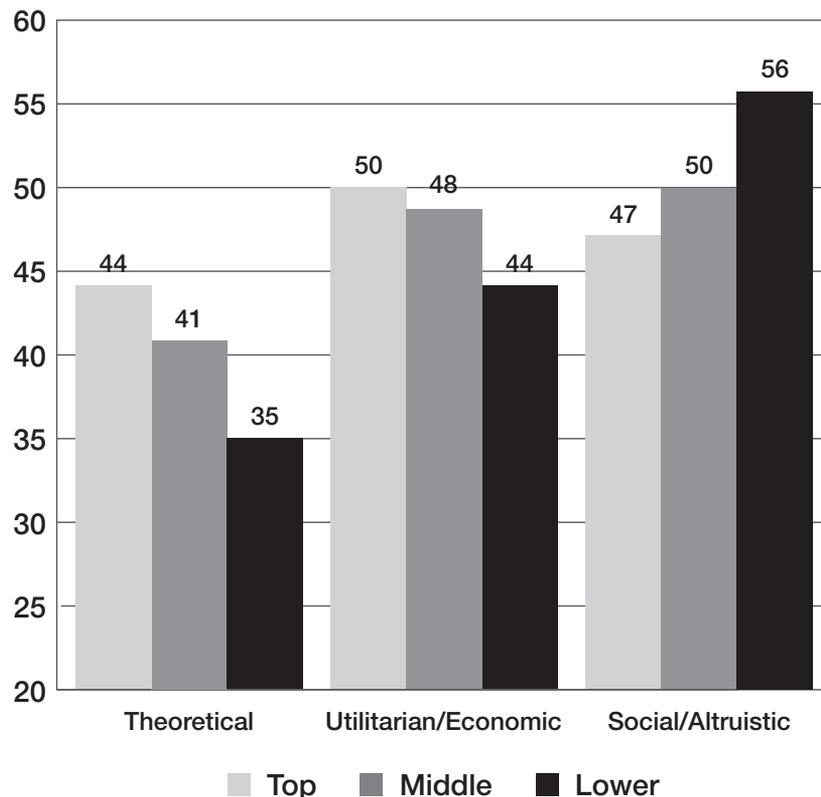
The research concentrated on the unique constellation of values, drives, and motivators of the sample. It is indeed a unique constellation of motivators, especially with the economic and altruistic motivators positioned only a few points apart. This finding is substantially different from other reports in studies involving sales and customer service industries over the past 30 years. We have privately conducted these studies, and they also are supported with the TTI

**Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations in Motivator Scores of the Top, Middle, and Lower Sales Performers.**

Motivators Subscale	Top Quintile Mean / SD	Middle Quintile Mean / SD	Lower Quintile Mean / SD
Theoretical***	44 / 7.4	41 / 8.9	35 / 9.4
Utilitarian/ Economic*	50 / 9.5	48 / 8.7	44 / 8.9
Social/Altruistic**	47 / 12.1	50 / 9.1	56 / 8.6

\* $p < 0.1$  / \*\* $p < 0.05$  / \*\*\* $p < 0.001$  / Means are rounded.

**Figure 4. Means in Motivator Scores of the Top, Middle, and Lower Sales Performers.**



*Note: Means are rounded.*

technical information available from their Website. For example, in a general sales population, the economic score (e.g., financial incentive) is typically negatively correlated with the altruistic score (e.g., drive to help others); e.g., this correlation is about

-.83 across many high-tech (e.g., software, biotech, and pharmaceuticals) sales environments. In the general sales population, this correlation is about -.68; however, within the seniors housing industry, economic and altruistic scores show a .28 correla-

tion. This finding indicates that the top performers in seniors housing are unique among sales professionals.

### **Three Principal Drivers and Motivators: Head, Hand, and Heart**

Theoretical score (i.e., head) may be perceived as the drive for knowledge and an appetite for learning new things. The seniors housing industry's top performers are ones who approach their job with a drive to learn. These salespersons want to learn about the industry, the competition, their prospects, properties that are open, and new processes and procedures. Furthermore, gaining knowledge may be an intrinsic motivator for the top sales performers who have an appetite to learn it on their own.

The economic score (i.e., hand) may be understood as the drive for material rewards; e.g., salespersons with such a predisposition may expect to receive high monetary rewards for doing great work. Such a predisposition is not necessarily a statement of greed but perhaps one of practical work ethic. As such, our industry's top salespeople appear to have an appropriate business sense such that they have an understanding of the monetary reward for themselves and their company.

The altruistic score (i.e., heart) may be perceived as the drive to help others. This score may be what makes the seniors housing salesperson unique, as this score is substantially lower in salespersons in some other high-tech industries, as reported in Figure 2. We interpret this to indicate that the top performers in seniors housing show a genuine sincerity factor in their affect and presentation. These salespersons like to be of service to others, which may be part of their intrinsic motivation and part of their internal paycheck. This altruistic score also indicates the level to which one may engage in increased discretionary effort. This is supported in the research on organizational citizenship behaviors, where the presence of helping behaviors increased commit-

ment to both colleagues and the organization at large (Dagenais-Cooper & Paille, 2012). Comments by top performers provide reinforcement for these findings.

### **Insight from Top Performers...In Their Own Words**

In our study of the motivators of the industry's top performers, we sent a follow-up survey with open-ended questions via an online survey vendor. These were the questions we asked:

1. What do you like best about your career as a seniors housing salesperson?
2. What do you like least?
3. If someone asked you, "What are the two or three primary components of your personal success," what would you tell them?
4. If you go home some days and think, "Yes! This is great!" or have a strong feeling of a big "win," what happens on the job that gives you that upbeat feeling?
5. How do you reconcile or explain the drive for money and also the drive to help others...both as high drivers of top performers in the seniors housing profession?
6. What do you appreciate most and least from your sales manager or supervisor in helping you stay optimally motivated?

Many seniors housing organizations have used a variety of nonmonetary incentives within our industry to boost sales performance. These have been shown to not only lower costs but also to increase proactive engagement toward the job (Morrell, 2011). Following are comments from some of the top performers related to nonmonetary compensation, and because of the close scores of utilitarian/economic and social/altruistic drivers, these nonmonetary incentives may be of special importance to the seniors housing profession.

Verbatim responses from top performers regarding the survey questions are presented. Their answers:

**What do you like most about your career as a seniors housing sales professional?**

Providing a solution for a family in dire need, and offering them support and knowledge about senior living. Being the educator and making a difference in the resident and families' lives. // Helping families, seniors, and professionals find the right solutions for their situation. Diagnosing dynamics and history to get deeper into the relationship part of the sales process—I really like problem solving. I also enjoy the ability to move about in and out of the office. I could never just sit at a desk all day and churn out work. // Helping others, making a difference, being competitive in the market as one of the best communities in this area. //

**What do you like least about your career as a seniors housing sales professional?**

That it's never enough. Even when you are at 100% occupied you still have to continue to push and remain consistent because anything can happen to change your occupancy number. // There is room for some great improvements with internal community leadership. I hear from residents about issues that come up, and I feel it would be so easy to fix the issue, but sometimes things just seem to be "swept under the rug," resulting in move-outs. // When families are not understanding the importance of making that change sooner rather than later. Very sad. // The fact that some people can't afford to live here and there aren't very many options in this area. Also, I wish that we were able to get some Medicaid beds so that people didn't have to move out when they ran out of money. // Paperwork, data entry, chasing down dud leads and Internet inquiries, which seem to have a low threshold of callbacks from the consumer. Constant oversight and scrutiny of the sales process. Company seems to be more and more focused on bottom line. Sometimes too many people to answer to. //

**If someone asked you, "What are the two or three primary components of your personal success," what would you tell them?**

Dedication and determination. // God, hard work, family support. // Increase occupancy, getting more referrals sources, learning how to deal with people. // Quick follow-up to leads, make yourself available when your potential resident is available, and try to identify exactly what is important to the potential resident or family in the community they choose, and show them what you are going to do to address their needs and what is important to them. // Ability to completely understand caregiving struggles; I have personally lived it. Excellent discovery process. It is necessary to completely understand who the customer is, what makes them tick, what they are most concerned about, and what they think will make the situation better. // Stay focused and be consistent with communication and follow-ups. Also feel and really mean what you say when communicating with people. If you don't feel what you are saying, you are not being sincere, and they need to trust what you are telling them. Going through the "motions" will not make you successful. //

**If you go home some days and think, "Yes! This is great!" or have a strong feeling of a big "win," what happens on the job that gives you that upbeat feeling?**

Definitely getting a move-in creates this feeling, especially when you had to work hard and they were looking at other options. // Knowing that I have helped a family find what they were looking for and getting an "atta boy" once in awhile. I also get that feeling when I see my team pull together and work hard to accomplish a goal! // It is all about helping and working as a team. // I go home every day feeling great just knowing that I put 100% effort forth all day long and that I did the best that I could to make a difference and touch someone's life in that day. It is very rewarding. // Getting to 97% or bet-

ter, helping someone in a crisis, and commission, of course! //

**How do you reconcile or explain the drive for money and also the drive to help others...both as high drivers of top performers in the seniors housing profession?**

There is no monetary reward for how it feels when you see you've positively impacted someone's life. When you know in your heart that a senior needs our help and will thrive in an environment like ours, and you get through to them or their family making the decision, the gratification knowing you helped is reward enough. The money is like icing on the cake, and you are working diligently to secure a move-in, so that's how it correlates, but I think we all choose social as important because of how good it feels, just like receiving a bonus check, to help others. // My heart is really in what I do. I believe in the product that we have, and it makes a difference in someone else's life, and the money aspect is a contributing factor, because the more I help the more I make. I have to eat and live, so why not earn a good income doing what makes you feel good? And it's honest! // I don't think of myself as a sales person. I am a solutions provider, social worker, negotiator, informationalist, listener, relationship building/mender, and pursuer of the good in every person/family I work with. My successes are due to my honest pursuit of helping others, not the money motivator. // We all need money, and it is a great incentive to push us when we need that extra push for whatever reason. It is just a great feeling to help a senior in need and to make their life more worth living every day. // Vacancies are financial opportunities for me and my company. The more lives I save by moving residents into my community, the more I am financially rewarded, so it is a win for me and my community. This meets my need for social do-gooding and my financial reward. // When I produce, it is a win-win situation. I am able to help save a life along with receiving a bonus. There is no sin in helping others and mak-

ing money at the same time. When I know I am going to commission based on move-ins or high occupancy, it definitely gets my adrenaline pumping. Once you reach that goal, I definitely want to do it again. It makes up for the days when things are slow, and I see a light at the end of the tunnel. // For me, personally, the salary range for salespersons in communities is not what I would consider high pay. Therefore, for me, my drive is the social aspect of the position at a fair rate. If I were going for the high dollar, I would select another industry, unless I chose to be in regional or divisional management. //

**What do you appreciate most and least from your sales manager or supervisor in helping you stay optimally motivated?**

*Most.* I appreciate the guidance and support offered the most. // Autonomy. // I appreciate most that I can depend on my sales manager; she is available to help me find resolutions. // I appreciate that I can call my sales manager at any time to bounce ideas around or strategize when stuck in the sales/relationship process. // I appreciate the fact that I can reach out to him and ask for help with an incentive or an idea on how to nudge something along. He has a great balance with the ability to encourage and build up my confidence. He's very effective in the way of motivating me to succeed and not threatening failure. I truly appreciate him. // Trusting me to do my job. //

*Least.* The least would be the micromanagement and sometimes what seems to be unrealistic goals that create pressure, which creates high stress. // What I don't like is when there is HIGH pressure. I understand this comes with the job; however, I will work just as hard with or without high pressure. When there is high pressure, I just get really irritated. // I don't really feel much motivation from her. // What I like least is the constant micromanaging and pushing for sales. The bottom line now outweighs our company motto, and there is constant pressure to perform. // One thing we do not get credit for

is emailing verses call-outs. Emailing, most often, is our open leads preference of communication. We get credit for calling out but do not get credit for the numerous hours that we spend connecting via email. I also think there is a lot of time wasted on emails sent by every regional and divisional manager. It is nice to recognize everyone's success, but day in and day out emailing what everyone else is doing is so time consuming. Our regional leaders can let us know they are happy with our performance personally. //

## DISCUSSION

This investigation was a three-part study. The first was an initial study in 2011 to distinguish between response patterns of top, middle, and lower quintiles of salespeople in seniors housing. This helped to establish that the instrument was sensitive enough to distinguish between the quintile groups. The second study was both a quantitative and qualitative study of the industry's top sales performers. We provide the following suggestions to seniors housing sales managers and salespeople, based on the results of this investigation:

- Suggestion 1 - If you want your sales force to increase sales, find performers who have this "economic drive" with balance and remember that the "revenue clock" is ticking over their shoulders.
- Suggestion 2 - If you want your sales force to increase sales, train them on these behaviors: be sincere, be a good listener and coach, and don't forget that you are a sales professional. Protect your time, talent, and thoughtwork.
- Suggestion 3 - Based on these findings, to increase the performance of a sales team, it may be important to encourage them to do their homework and to increase their personal knowledge base.

Our finding was consistent with other research in moderating the "Type A Behavior Pattern," as

explored in environments that require strong interpersonal skills and relationship building (Bartkus, Howell, & Haws, 2011). Whether the moderating effect, or balancing the drive for money and the need to serve as a coach and counselor, is one of sensitivity, or balance of drive factors, or some other variable, it nevertheless indicates a less extreme position toward money taken by our top sales performers.

In our sample, it appears as though top performers brought a high social/altruistic drive to their professions while maintaining grasp of their assigned role; i.e., being a salesperson. This finding is good news, although it is also a challenge when hiring new salespeople; e.g., many salespeople are driven by financial rewards and may have a substantially lower altruistic score, as indicated in prior private studies for high-tech companies. Because top seniors housing salespeople in our study showed evidence for both of these drives (economic and altruistic) at a higher level, they may be somewhat rare in the general sales population, suggesting that more time and effort may be required of management to find and retain these top performers.

Because of the differences in scores with the lower sales performers, there may be some caution flags to look for. This may translate into any of these job behaviors, including: spending longer amounts of time in a coach/counselor role, lower ability to handle objections with confidence, or lower ability to inject urgency into their sales process, with an outcome of longer sales cycles. Each of these traits may be an opportunity cost for one who remains in coaching/counseling mode too long.

Other studies analyzing a salesperson's customer orientation showed an optimal level with regard to sales performance and customer orientation (Homburg, Muller, & Klarmann, 2011); e.g., customer orientation may be detrimental to sales results if taken to the extreme. Customer orientation is evident in all levels of sales performers in seniors housing, although those who maintained a higher level of customer orientation, in addition to an

appropriate business sense of the economic aspects of the sales equation, as evidenced by their response patterns to the instrument, emerged in the top quintile of sales performers.

Many resources are available to encourage increasing product knowledge. A recent contribution, the Challenger Sales Model (Dixon & Adamson, 2012), encourages sales professionals to influence the sales process in three ways: teaching the customer, modifying their insights in various contexts, and appropriately challenging the existing state of the prospect to aim for a move-in. This includes creating a constructive tension within the prospect and to slightly disrupt their status quo, and a strong knowledge base may assist our top salespeople in each of these areas.

The lower performers showed a remarkably different graphset, and especially in their top three motivators. Social/altruistic (helping) motivator was the highest and 12 points higher (on the scale from 12 to 72) than the economic drive. The lower performers evidenced response patterns showing that they really want to help others (i.e., the high altruistic scores). That is the good news. The other news is that they may give away too much time, talent, thoughtwork, and the company's revenue as they serve the prospect as a housing coach or consultant and forget to attach a sales role to that effort. Can lower performers be coached into a more sales-assertive role? We believe they can. The manager needs to help develop them to continue in their helping role but to also increase their sales agendas for closing more sales.

Other studies explored explanatory style using the Attributional Style Questionnaire among insurance sales agents and provided evidence that lower productivity was associated with a pessimistic explanatory style. In the present study, the top performers in seniors housing sales may confirm both survival and productivity as described by Seligman and Schulman (1986). In a broader series of literature reviews and narrative, Pink (2009) described three critical elements to "drive" personal success: autonomy (e.g.,

the utilitarian/economic drive illuminated in this study), mastery (e.g., with a direction toward the theoretical drive for knowledge, which emerged in the present study as a driver of top performers), and purpose (e.g., a broad sense akin to the social/altruistic drive factors identified in the present study).

## CONCLUSION

### Keys to Maintaining Optimal Motivation

Based on the findings from Studies 1 and 2, we offer several suggestions for helping sales staff stay optimally motivated. First, a review of Pink's (2009) book provides a holistic chronicling of research relative to the motivation of sales professionals. Specifically, Pink provides evidence that motivation does not require excessive external interference, although it should receive some support.

Regarding salespersons who maintain an increased theoretical drive: offering knowledge-based incentives such as training courses, books, and magazines and journal subscriptions may be successful motivators. Additionally, frequently calling upon this group's knowledge and expertise during staff meetings may provide them with motivation to continue their learning. Other incentives for this group may include asking for their participation during the planning of knowledge-based events, such as community information sessions for prospects, and supplying them with additional information in the form of topical mail, brochures, and information sheets to be used for their own enrichment and to give to their prospects and clients.

For salespersons with a predisposition for economic drives, frequent financial reinforcements (e.g., monetary bonuses) and attention to their economic drive likely serve as successful motivators. Additionally, we suggest offering clearly communicated, high-end returns for those who are willing to work hard to receive them, and to provide these salespeople with individual and companywide recognition because

this action recognizes and reinforces their drives for success.

For salespersons with higher altruistic drives, we suggest utilizing such individuals in training, teaching, mentoring, and coaching roles to the extent that they are comfortable, and that such utilization does not interfere with their primary responsibility of sales. Allowing these individuals flexibility with their work schedules to accommodate service activities and helping others would also likely provide important motivation.

### **Instead of “If/Then,” Try “Now That” Motivators**

Because the seniors housing industry's top performers are probably already motivated to do their best, we must not ignore them but rather understand that the traditional carrot and stick motivation techniques of the industrial age won't necessarily work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. From Pink's (2009) research summary, we also learn that attaching a monetary reward to some behaviors that are already intrinsically rewarding may actually have adverse effects. To this end, we offer several suggestions for motivating sales staff.

Rather than presenting an incentive as “If you reach your quota, *then* you will get a given reward,” we suggest an approach such as, “*Now that* you've helped us reach quota, here is a reward that is important to you.” Providing high altruistic salespersons with paid time off to engage in community involvement (e.g., volunteering, service work, etc.) may be an effective reward. Additionally, some organizations like FedEx have found it successful to allow employees to take 10% to 20% of a workday away from their typical duties in order to work on a job-related task of their choosing (Pink, 2009).

Studies of sales forces' productivity also provide various models or rubrics against which seniors housing managers may build strategy and modify current practices (e.g., Ledingham, Kovac, & Simon, 2006), which, when combined with findings from the current study, many have a positive effect on

sales productivity. Many of these strategies explore both the drive factors of the sales people and the existing support systems within the greater organization. Additionally, a careful examination of reward systems that value good performance, a culture of openness, jobs that are meaningful, and management processes that are fair, trustworthy, and transparent may boost performance of individuals and full teams of salespeople (Nohria, Groywberg, & Lee, 2008).

To our knowledge, the current research was the first of its kind, and we hope it will provide new directions in seniors housing research. If replicated, we expect that these assessment instruments and knowledge gained herein will lead to increased awareness of these instruments and increased exploration of creative reward systems among those seeking to use best practices in managing their properties. Other questions will emerge, and we encourage continued exploration by our colleagues.

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