

Salespeople Spend About 10 Percent of Their Time Selling, Study Shows

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Most salespeople spend only 10 percent of their available time actually selling, according to the latest figures from Proudfoot Consulting's annual sales force effectiveness study. The study also shows a serious disconnect between how sales people think they are spending their time, and what is actually happening.

"When you think about how critical sales performance is to a company's top line, it is shocking how little time sales reps spend on what they were hired to do -- sell," said Luiz Carvalho, chief executive officer, Proudfoot Consulting. "Our work with clients shows that eliminating unproductive sales processes and behaviors can increase the sales force's active selling time to 30 percent, which can triple revenue opportunity and commissions."

Despite the growing investments companies are making in sales training and technology, active selling time has not increased over the past year -- in fact, time spent on administrative duties has grown by four points compared to last year's study. Sales people in the study believe they spend 50 percent of their time actively selling, yet in reality, most of their day is spent on paperwork, travel and problem-solving for customers. Here is how their time breaks down:

- Active selling: 10 percent
- Prospecting: 10 percent
- Problem Solving: 14 percent
- Downtime (e.g., personal phone calls and e-mails): 17 percent
- Travel time: 18 percent
- Administration: 31 percent

"Sales people are being pulled in too many directions," Carvalho said. "Companies need to take a long hard look at how much time their salespeople are wasting on tasks that should be done by other people or eliminated."

The surprisingly low amount of time that salespeople spend actually selling is significant because of how strongly their compensation -- and their company's revenue projections -- is tied to performance. According to a recent salary survey conducted by Sales and Marketing Management magazine and human resources association WorldatWork, a top performing sales representative earns \$153,417. However, fully 43 percent -- or \$66,075 -- of that figure comes from bonuses and commissions.

The Proudfoot study also looks at how effective salespeople are in eight key selling skills. Only 22 percent of study participants were considered competent in all eight; the remainder were judged to be poor or requiring improvement.

The biggest barriers to salespeople's effectiveness were found to be:

Lack of manager feedback or help for sales teams.

- Poor sales call quality and inadequate monitoring.
- Weak or cumbersome sales reporting systems.
- Training that was seldom reinforced or properly coached in the field.

Proudfoot's findings are based on more than 1,600 detailed studies of client projects in nine countries representing 10,000 hours of work. Study participants are direct sales and telesales professionals in insurance, manufacturing, retail, transportation, telecommunications, electronics, chemicals, paper, food & beverage, and engineering.

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