



# Drive ...Your Most Important Trait for Sales Success

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My senior thesis in college was titled "An Analysis of Athletes in Pressure Situations." As a psychology major and student athlete at Princeton University, I was curious to understand the mental aspects that create success or failure in sports and in life.

My research uncovered that a common denominator found in nearly all high-performing athletes was drive. Drive to succeed. Drive to accomplish a goal. Drive to make a difference. Drive to win. Drive is so important and powerful that it often pushes less talented individuals beyond those who have been born with higher skill sets but lack a burning desire to succeed.

So, why is drive so important? Because it requires you to have intense self-motivation in the face of rejection and because your business exerts constant pressure on self-esteem. People who possess high levels of drive are willing to smile in the face of rejection and have the constitution to thrive in today's competitive business environment. While your relationship skills, perseverance, value proposition, persuasiveness, emotional intelligence, referral network, and passion are important, these traits are not sufficient without drive.

In their groundbreaking book, [\*Never Hire a Bad Salesperson Again\*](#), Richard Abraham, speaker, writer and consultant to many Fortune 500 companies, and Christopher Croner, Ph.D., a

principal with SalesDrive, studied more than 80 years of research in the sales sector and uncovered the following three elements that make up drive: (1) need for achievement, (2) competitiveness, and (3) optimism.

### Need for Achievement

People who exhibit high-drive tendencies are motivated by the need to achieve outstanding results and are willing to do virtually anything it takes to get there. They are ambitious, disciplined, and always focused on advancement. They are never satisfied. These people have an insatiable appetite for success, setting the bar higher and higher. Their need for achievement is the inner motivation that causes them to relentlessly pursue excellence.

Where does this need for achievement come from? "Like most personality traits, it is heavily influenced by a person's childhood experiences" states Abraham and Croner. Research substantiates that the "parents or guardians of high achievers are praising, supportive, optimistic, hardworking and success oriented." It is interesting to note that high achievers are not always star students. "They excel at whatever is important to them in accomplishing their goals."

### Competitiveness

Driven people are born to compete and win. They relish the thrill of the race and the rush of winning. And they hate to lose. "In fact their loathing for losing is often as strong as their passion for winning. Like a thoroughbred race horse, they are always eyeing their peers...always comparing their performance to others." Simply put, they are hard-wired to be number one.

As you may have experienced firsthand, competitive people with high drive are sometimes difficult to manage. In these cases, they even compete with those of authority. But it is the tradeoff that must be reconciled as competitiveness is an essential element of drive.

### Optimism

Optimism is the ultimate element of drive as it provides the armor to withstand inevitable rejections and hardships. To the high driver, rejection is just part of the game. "Optimistic people credit themselves for success but do not take defeat personally." People who possess high levels of optimism have advantages over their pessimistic peers in three ways:

- They expect to win. They go through life with a self-fulfilling prophecy of success.
- They believe that their problems can be solved. They persist until a solution is developed.
- They are thick skinned. They interpret failure as something temporary, unusual and outside of their control. And, they have the unique ability to put rejection into proper perspective.

You can now appreciate the three elements to drive -- need to achieve, competitiveness and optimism. If you have one or two of the three elements, can you achieve drive? No, all three must be present. Abraham and Croner summed it up best by saying "If need for achievement is the engine, and competitiveness is the steering wheel, optimism is the key to the engine. Without all three you are never going to get out of the garage."

### **Recognizing Drive**

According to Abraham and Croner, it has been estimated that up to 50 percent of people who are currently making their living through sales are in the wrong line of work. They may be excellent communicators, likable and gregarious, yet they do not possess drive - the most important characteristic of people who sell for a living. Through proper testing and interview techniques, drive can be identified, measured and monitored. To thrive in a competitive business environment, you must recognize the importance of the three elements of drive and have a process to confirm that you and those individuals responsible for business development possess the critical trait.

Can you easily recognize a person with high drive characteristics? No. Drive can easily be misinterpreted and faked. It is difficult to discern a person's need for achievement (represented by industriousness) and optimism (represented by persistence in the face of failure). "It is often the server or dishwasher at the local restaurant who is working to pay for college, not the campus club president who has the drive to succeed."

### **Indicators of Drive:**

You may have a special interest in "indicators" that correlate to the need for achievement, competitiveness and optimism.

#### **Need for Achievement**

1. Substantial past sacrifices for success at work (time, other pursuits, etc.)
2. Has regularly exceeded expectations for projects, making sales numbers, customer service
3. Has been a sharp critic of own efforts; is tough on self in judging accomplishments
4. Has regularly shown effort beyond the typical work week
5. Has accomplished a very challenging work goal; has a specific plan to top that goal
6. Tells a story about a major accomplishment and hard work to achieve it
7. Has a story about exerting a tremendous effort leading to a major accomplishment; has done so regularly; feels that such effort is simply par for the course

#### **Competitiveness**

1. Has more than one recent example (work, home, sports)
2. Consistently ranks at or near the top of the sales team and gives permission to verify
3. Tells about enjoying the process of winning over a difficult customer

4. Manager ranks candidate as among most competitive
5. Tells about a competition with coworkers or with competitors over a customer; describes it as a common occurrence

### Optimism

1. A history of substantial effort to secure a new customer
2. Quickly puts rejection in perspective and bounces back by working on another sale
3. Attributes a problem to a temporary, unusual situation out of own control

[Source: Croner & Abraham, 2006]

The superstars of today and tomorrow share the three elements that take them to new heights of sales success—the need for achievement, competitiveness and optimism. Drive...your most important trait for sales success!

*\*All quotations sourced from [Never Hire a Bad Salesperson Again](#)*

### About the Author

Scott Addis, CPCU, CRA, CBWA is the CEO of Beyond Insurance and is recognized as an industry leader having been named a Philadelphia finalist for *Inc. Magazine's* "Entrepreneur of the Year" award as well as one of the "25 Most Innovative Agents in America." Beyond Insurance is a consulting firm that offers leadership training, cultural transformation, and talent and tactical development for enlightened professionals who are looking to take their practice to the next level. Since 2007, the proven and repeatable processes of Beyond Insurance have transformed individuals and organizations as measured by enhanced organic growth, productivity, profitability, and value in the marketplace.