

# KellerCenter Research Report



» December 2016, Volume 9, Issue 4

## The Stigma Turbine: (De)Stigmatization in the Real Estate Market

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# Keller Center Research Report

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# The Stigma Turbine: (De)Stigmatization in the Real Estate Market

Jane E. Machin, PhD, Ann M. Mirabito, PhD, and Natalie Ross Adkins, PhD

You have probably experienced situations where buyers, homes, or entire neighborhoods have been stigmatized. For example, you may have had buyers who were reluctant to look at a neighborhood near a cemetery or to consider a house where someone committed suicide. You may have even felt stigmatized yourself by people with negative stereotypes of realtors. Stigmas are subjectively discredited attributes such as physical conditions, behaviors, and group membership. The emotional reactions created by stigmas can prevent your buyers from making smart decisions and can limit your sales opportunities. In this article, we draw on our research on stigmas in the marketplace to offer three action steps you can take to neutralize stigmas in real estate (Mirabito et al. 2016).

## The Real Estate Stigma Turbine

To illustrate how stigma manifests in commercial markets such as real estate, we characterize stigma as a wind turbine. Like turbines, stigmas are powerful, dynamic and continually evolving. Three blades, representing properties, neighborhoods, and stakeholders, respectively, intersect in a central hub. Homes on the property blade are stigmatized by subjective negative features, such as being haunted, or being the site of a violent death. The neighborhood blade encompasses streets, towns, or regions with distasteful reputations. The stakeholder blade embodies the buyers, sellers, agents, and other people involved in the real estate transaction, all of whom could stigmatize or be stigmatized.

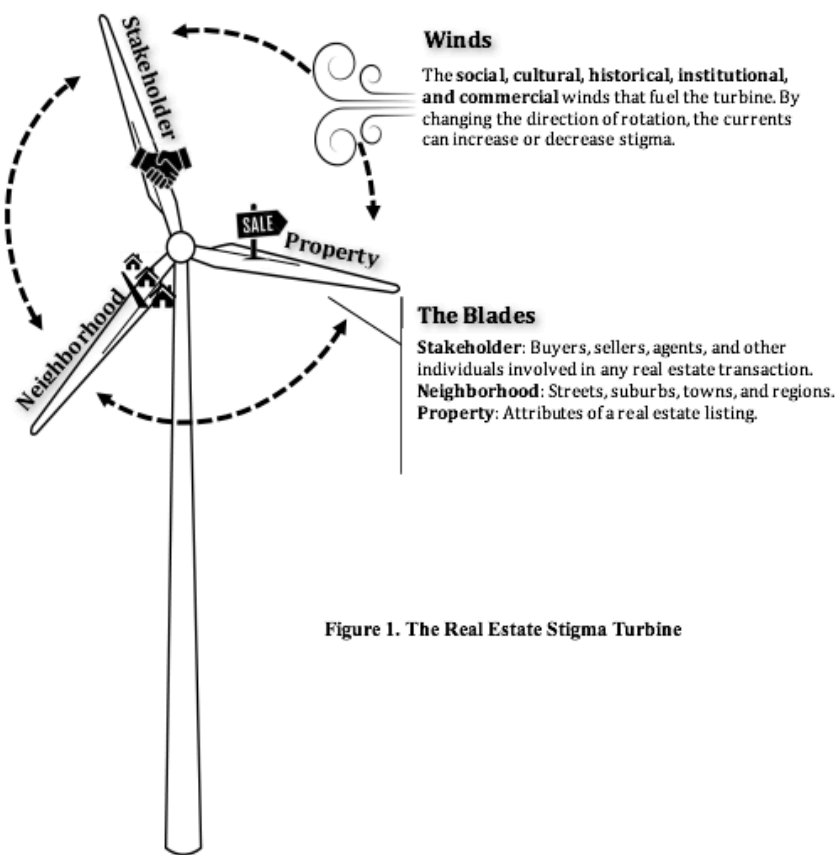


Figure 1. The Real Estate Stigma Turbine

Just as atmospheric winds propel turbines, the real estate stigma turbine is propelled by the metaphorical social, cultural, historical, institutional, and commercial forces that can both fuel and attenuate the stigmatization process. For example, the media is a cultural force that can stealthily reinforce – or negate -- stereotypes. Consider how [Marge's short-lived real estate sales](#)

[career on the animated show \*The Simpsons\*](#) characterizes real estate agents as self-serving and untruthful. The popular Phil Dunphy on *Modern Family*, however, may help boost the reputation of realtors (Bauder 2016). Government and other institutions can also influence stigmas. For example, financial redlining was initially fostered by Federal Home Loan Bank Board recommendations and later made illegal by the Fair Housing Act. Yet some lenders continue to restrict lending to some racial groups, and to certain neighborhoods (Yacik 2016). Just as winds ebb and flow, stigmas change over time. Once desirable property characteristics, such as popcorn ceilings and split-level house designs, are now shunned.

## How Realtors and Communities Can Eliminate Stigma

A shift in the direction of the winds driving the turbine will fuel or quell the stigmatization process. The Fair Housing Act shifted the legal winds and tamped down, though did not completely eliminate, discrimination on the basis of race, religion, sex, and family status. Realtors and communities can neutralize the cultural winds that drive stigmas by dismantling the three building blocks of stigmas: (1) labeling differences; (2) creating stereotypes by connecting the labels to damaging beliefs; (3) using the stereotypes to justify mentally separating the labeled group from the mainstream (Link and Phelan 2001).

### **Step 1: Replace stigmatizing language about discredited characteristics with positive labels.**

All human differences can be labeled, but some labels carry more weight than others. For instance, in most cultures, birth month and eye color are less important than race, gender, and physical condition. Once a label takes hold, however, it may become understood as a natural distinction. Marketers can avoid stigmatized labeling by choosing value-neutral titles; for example, fashion retailer Lane Bryant has replaced the *plus-size* moniker with *her size* and The Association for Retarded Citizens has rebranded itself as *The Arc*. In real estate, changing the name is often the first step in destigmatizing neighborhoods. The historically redlined Green Valley subdivision in Arlington, VA, for example, is now called Nauck. Similarly, using the terms *broker* and *brokerage* can help an agency disassociate itself from negative stereotypes associated with the label *realtor*.

### **Step 2: Actively refute stereotypes by vividly promoting counterfactual evidence.**

Stereotypes emerge when people's cultural beliefs and personal experiences lead them to forge a mental connection between labeled attributes and undesirable characteristics. Stereotypes are difficult to disrupt because contradictory evidence is uncertain and ambiguous, and thus easily dismissed. To be effective, counterfactual information must be vivid, as when Guinness challenged the disability stereotype with its *Friendship* ad. The commercial shows six men engaged in an intense game of wheelchair basketball. Near the end of the spot, five rise from their wheelchairs, a dramatic scene that implies disability-related stereotypes are superficial. Negative stereotypes of realtors as pushy salespeople devalue the occupation, making it one of the least prestigious according to a recent poll (Mekouar 2016). In the same poll, survey respondents ranked doctors, scientists, and firefighters—people who others rely on in times of crisis—as the most prestigious occupations. While buying a house is not life threatening, it is

frequently the most stressful event most Americans will experience ("Buying a House" 2016). By showing how realtors fight for consumers' dreams, the recent *Get Realtor*® campaign seeks to break negative stereotypes and reposition realtors as people to rely on (National Association of Realtors 2016). Many real estate firms send out quarterly market reports that provide valuable information to local residents with no explicit sales pitches.

### Step 3: Identify opportunities to promote shared values between different groups.



Negative stereotypes provide the psychological justification for mentally distancing a stigmatized other. The in-group perceives the stigmatized out-group as homogenous and different. Marketers can interrupt the separation process by calling attention to the similarities between the two groups. During San Francisco's Pride Celebration and Parade, Burger King sold Whoppers in rainbow-colored wrappers, with the copy, *We are all the*

*same inside* (Steinmetz 2014). Similarly, communities can invest in desirable facilities to create unity. Leaks from an oil tanker led Mantua, Virginia, to build new schools and a community center to encourage nonresidents to think of Mantua as a town they'd like to live in, rather than as a town with remediated oil tank leaks. Realtors often take advantage of opportunities to participate in local events and initiatives to show pride and support for and identification with their communities.

Neutralizing stigmas takes courage but the results can be rewarding, on a personal, commercial and societal level. By engaging in these three actions, you can help turn the winds blowing the stigma turbine and help to destigmatize buyers, homes, neighborhoods and your own profession.

### Recommended Reading

Mirabito, Ann M., Cele C. Otnes, Elizabeth Crosby, David B. Wooten, Jane E. Machin, Chris Pullig, Natalie Ross Adkins, Susan Dunnett, Kathy Hamilton, Kevin D. Thomas, Marie A. Yeh, Cassandra David, Johanna F. Gollnhofer, Aditi Grover, Jess Matias, Natalie A. Mitchell, Edna G. Ndichu, Nada Sayarh, and Sunaina Velagaleti (2016), "The Stigma Turbine: A Theoretical Framework for Conceptualizing and Contextualizing Marketplace Stigma," *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, forthcoming.



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Award, the Rachel Hunter Moore Outstanding Faculty Award, and the Mortar Board Circle of Achievement. Her research focuses on consumer well-being including: wellness at work; improving outcomes and satisfaction with healthcare; threats to well-being from stigma; and consumers' challenges in managing uncertainty and risk information. Dr. Mirabito's research is published in leading marketing and medical journals including *Harvard Business Review*, *MIT Sloan Management Review*, *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, *Annals of Internal Medicine*, and *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*.

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# Identifying and Managing the Buying Center

Charles Fifield, MBA

The *buying center* is comprised of various individual influences that shape the buyer's purchase



decision. With many simple purchase decisions, these various influences are usually few in number. On the other hand, when making larger purchase decisions such as an automobile or a residence, or in business decision-making, the influences can be numerous and sometimes quite diverse, causing the decision-making process to be complex and cumbersome.

Since a successful selling process is about enabling the buyer to make a quality purchase decision, understanding how to productively manage the buying center's influences and efficiently guide the decision-making process can be critical to the final buy or no-buy outcome. Selling has been said to be about developing and delivering a story in which the buyer is the key character or hero. The buying center is much like a good novel's cast of characters. Successfully working the buying center is an artful process requiring multiple selling engagements.

Managing a typical buying center requires four key steps:

1. Identifying the buying center's makeup and organizing it in the form of a working matrix.
2. Mapping a strategy to effectively and efficiently work through the buying center to the desired end in mind, i.e., a win-win purchase decision.
3. Executing and improvising as needed to achieve the buying decision working in a *making it easy-to-buy* mode and implementing as agreed.
4. Planning follow-up meetings for performance reviews, prospect and reference building and future buying opportunities.

## Identifying the Buying Center and Composing the Buying Center Matrix

The buying center is comprised of individual influences that serve what can be termed meaningful *roles* in the decision-making process.

<b><u>Buying Center Participants</u></b>	<b><u>What They Do</u></b>
Initiator	Recognizes a need or a problem that can be improved or resolved by acquiring a product or service.
Gatekeeper	Controls the flow of information and access to buying center members, and usually executes the purchased product or service order.
Users	Utilizes or consumes the product or service.
Technical Influencers	Consults regarding technical issues.
Financial Influencers	Consults regarding financial issues.
Decider	Makes the final <i>yes</i> or <i>no</i> decision.
Champion	Advocates for the seller within the purchasing organization (typically from the purchasing organization).
Coach	Advises the seller regarding buying-center issues and personalities (typically from the purchasing organization, but absent from the buying center) .

Oftentimes, certain buying center members will perform more than one role. Also, for whatever reason, certain roles are oftentimes absent from a particular buying center. To clearly identify the individuals serving in the buying center, early in your buyer-seller engagement, the salesperson should inquire with the appropriate buyer representative, who is usually the gatekeeper, as to who will be involved in a decision-making process and their responsibilities or roles. This inquiry is often termed the buying center confirmation, and embodied in it are five pieces of necessary information:

1. Who are the members of the buying center and their roles?
2. How do they foresee the buying center operating step-by-step? (Note: At a minimum, know what will be the next step.)
3. What is the timing for making a purchase decision?
4. What are the key attributes of the product or service to be acquired?
5. If available, what are the budget considerations?

When formulating the make-up of the targeted buying center, it is best to begin with the standard set of roles and then identify the person or persons who will serve each role versus starting with individual names and then attempting to assign roles. In addition to the roles and names of parties serving those roles, it is critically important to develop each participant's projected wants. These can be business or financial in nature, but oftentimes buying center members are more concerned about personal risks or relationship values. A decider's primary want could be very

different from a user’s or technical advisor’s want. It is imperative to gain a clear understanding of what each member wants (and why) versus needs. This information will prove critical as the salesperson interacts with the buying center. The information gained should be transferred to a matrix as follows:

### The Buying Center Matrix

<b>Roles</b>	<b>Name(s)</b>	<b>Want(s)/Key Attributes</b>
Initiator		
Gatekeeper		
Users		
Technical		
Financial		
Decider		
Champion		
Coach		

In the context of even a relatively small residential real estate transaction, a buying center could easily include the following players:

- The initiator(s)
- A gatekeeper
- User(s), including children and other relatives who may be living with the buyers
- Local lending institutions who may become lenders
- Inspectors
- A title company
- An attorney
- An appraiser
- The decider(s)
- A coach for technical or relationship reasons
- A champion who could pave the way for fewer challenges

For a real estate agent to work efficiently and effectively with this broadly-based group, it is imperative to develop a long-term working relationship with most of these center members, including the local lending institutions, inspectors, title companies, attorneys and appraisers. By so doing, an agent's attention can be better focused on the short-term buyer variables, including the gatekeeper, the users and the deciders.

### **Mapping a Purchase Decision Strategy**

The next step in our managing the buying center process is to develop an execution strategy. In any organization, there is naturally an order or priorities to the buying center's decision-making process. These may be functional in nature or simply driven by personality factors. Certain individuals or interests need to be addressed before others are to be considered, i.e., putting first things first to prioritize the required interactions. This is much like sequencing the tasks and developing a critical path within project management formulations. For example, if specifications or technical reviews are required before a purchase decision can be made, it would be best to very early in the engagement have a groundbreaking dialogue with those center members, especially if these individuals represent a new relationship. If there are certain center members who have a particular focus of dissatisfaction, then it is best to gain a clear understanding not only of what members are looking for in a purchase decision, but also why. Emotions are a strong basis for change decisions being implemented and these need to be defined as well as properly positioned as you progress through the buying center.

### **Executing and Implementing the Strategy**

When moving through a buying center toward the purchase decision, the seller must be continually selling *each* member. One disinterested or *turned off* buying center member can ruin months of worthwhile planning and execution. As a result, many salespeople like to employ a divide-and-conquer strategy to minimize common relationship entanglements when working with a group of buyers. Also, champion or coach input can often help to identify and overcome foreseeable challenges.

To minimize complications and delays, the seller should be anticipating the constraints or barriers to achieving a successful purchase decision. Too often, the buying process becomes a series of stress-building and disjointed activities versus a more seamless experience. The buying process should be designed to achieve the buyer feeling as though the purchase decision-making process was emotionally *easy* to execute.

## Follow-up Meetings for Performance Reviews

The acid test of business is customer satisfaction. Career-minded sellers must think long-term and should plan performance reviews with key buying center members shortly after every buying decision has been implemented to assess how well they met the expectations of others. If these meetings prove positive, then the sellers should be prepared to gain the openers/validators to future success stories through testimonials, referrals and references earned.



If the meetings prove negative, then a significant learning opportunity has been seeded. The only sustainable long-term competitive advantage is one's ability to learn faster than the competition, and these follow-up sessions with disgruntled buying center members are invaluable learning opportunities.

## Conclusion

Identifying and managing the buying center is a key element to effectively and efficiently guiding a buyer to a win-win purchase decision outcome. First, identify the center's players and their roles. To perform this task, a matrix format is suggested to minimize errors and oversights. Then the salesperson must gain insight into the individual center member's wants and whys in order to achieve a more productive or successful outcome for all. Next, the road to success must be strategically mapped out. This *mapping out* process to achieve the desired result could be viewed as similar to what you see when a football coach draws up a winning offensive play using Xs and Os, and it always indicates achieving success when executed. Lastly, the salesperson should, more often than not, be thinking long-term. Therefore, post-purchase performance reviews with key members of the buying center offer not only an opportunity to cement a productive relationship, but also a significant learning opportunity and fertile ground for obtaining referrals for future success.

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# How Emotional Intelligence Shapes Sales Outcomes Through the Stressful Sales Role

Richard G. McFarland, PhD, Joseph C. Rode, PhD, and Tasadduq A. Shervani, PhD

Salespeople with higher levels of emotional intelligence (EI) are better salespeople, right? The professional world has firmly embraced the importance of EI, and EI seems intuitively of importance in selling given the social, interactive nature of selling, the conflicting demands salespeople face, and the degree of autonomy and ambiguity inherent to sales processes (Kidwell et al. 2011). Formally, EI can be defined as *the ability to recognize, understand and manage emotion-laden information* (Mayer and Salovey 1997; Zeidner et al. 2008).

After investing a great deal in the training of EI, firms are starting to wonder if those investments are well spent. Why is that? One reason is that it matters a great deal how one defines and measures EI. Most EI training courses define EI too broadly, and depend on self-assessments of EI. Broad definitions of EI mean that we are including non-EI factors, such as personality factors, within the definition and measurement of EI. This results in



ineffectual training programs. Moreover, individuals are notoriously poor at self-assessing any form of their own intelligence, particularly their EI. The lower one's EI is, the more likely one is to rate their own EI as high. Fortunately, Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso's (2002) MSCEIT test of emotional intelligence overcomes both of these limitations, it measures EI and only EI, and it is an ability-based test, similar to how IQ is tested, and is thus not subject to self-assessment biases. The importance of using ability-based EI training programs and ability-based tools for assessing EI cannot be over-emphasized.

The second reason for disappointment is that despite the intuitive thinking that EI can directly affect outcomes such as sales performance, research actually suggests that there are no direct effects or at best the direct effects on job outcomes are quite small (Cron et al. 2005). So does that mean EI doesn't matter? We argue that it does matter, but in critically different ways than was previously thought. More specifically, we argue that it does matter, but only under certain circumstances. That is, while EI doesn't have significant direct effects on key outcomes, it does have important contingent effects. Therefore, we set out to develop and confirm a contingency model of EI in this research. Specifically, our contingency model proposed that salesperson EI



buffers the harmful effects of job stress (more formally known as role stress) on three work outcomes: emotional exhaustion, customer-oriented selling, and sales performance. The underlying logic is that in lower stress environments, salesperson EI may not be as important as in higher stress environments.

### **Contingency Model of EI: Research and Results**

Drawing upon the appraisal theory of emotions, the contingency model of EI maintains that EI is important in work settings, but only under certain conditions. The appraisal theory of emotions states that environmental stressors or other potential threats to an individual can impact attitudes and behaviors through a process that is mediated by emotions (Lazarus 1991; Scherer 1999). Because individuals with higher EI are better able to recognize, understand, and manage emotions, they are less likely to have negative emotional responses to job stress, and they are better at managing the negative emotions they do experience than lower EI salespeople. Lower EI salespeople may become overwhelmed by their negative and persistent emotional response to stress, which in turn can lead to long-term emotional exhaustion, and less resources to devote to job tasks, and more short-term thinking that is not conducive to better long-term customer service and performance. Role stress can be particularly harmful to salespeople's performance in their interactions with buyers because the interactive nature of sales requires salespeople to continually appraise the client, the situation, themselves, and all the emotional sequences that stem from the appraisal process. Salespeople overwhelmed by job stress will not have the cognitive resources to devote to these tasks.

We conducted a study with a Fortune 500 firm headquartered in the U.S. who is a major services provider. This study confirmed that higher levels of EI reduce the negative effects that role stress plays on salesperson emotional exhaustion. Salespeople with greater EI can better manage, and reduce short-term negative emotional responses to role stress that otherwise would lead to long-term emotional exhaustion. Similarly, our research confirmed that higher levels of salesperson EI reduced the negative effects of role stress on customer-oriented selling and on interactional sales performance. Salespeople with greater EI are better equipped to deal with role stress and reduce negative emotional responses that can overwhelm salespeople with lower EI.

Our research suggests that EI does matter, but in different ways than previously thought and that EI is perhaps not the silver bullet to solving all problems. Our research does support the idea that greater levels of EI are likely to be beneficial to salespeople when high levels of role stress are present in their sales jobs, but that EI may not be as relevant when role stress is lower. This supports the contingency view of EI, that is it is important in some cases, but not in others. This contingency view is supported in other sales research; for example, it was found that salespeople who are better able to read the emotions of customers (one aspect of EI) are not better performers per se, but they are better at practicing adaptive selling and customer-oriented selling (Kidwell, McFarland, & Avila 2007).

## Real Estate Perspective

Our research is especially applicable to real estate agents, because the same antecedent variables that our contingency model tested are found in the real estate agent role. Real estate agents operate in an industry that has cyclical highs and lows where pay is driven by commissions, thus role stress can be quite high. Additionally, real estate agents focus on customer-oriented selling that requires a great deal of agent investment to cultivate client-agent relationships. Because role stress is ever present in the demanding profession of real estate sales, our research affords real estate agents the opportunity to understand and manage the effect that role stress plays on the key outcomes of emotional exhaustion, customer-oriented selling, and interactional sales performance, which in turn have moderating effects on the agents' sales performances.



Real estate agents with higher levels of EI are better able to understand the source of particularly strong emotions. Such understanding allows those individuals to focus on specific emotions that facilitate desired thought processes. Sales professionals with higher levels of EI are also able to adopt multiple perspectives, and to determine the best emotional state to focus on while interacting with customers.

Therefore, understanding the effects that role stress plays on sales performance, and the moderation effects that EI has on emotional exhaustion, customer-oriented selling, and interactional sales performance can allow real estate agents to better manage that role stress and ultimately limit the effect that role stress has on sales performance.

A key implication of this is that when stress levels are particularly high, instituting EI training programs that are focused on managing stress can be particularly important. Additionally, while one's EI can be improved through training, some people are more emotionally intelligent than others, thus firms may desire to use EI assessments in screening for hiring purposes when job stress is very high.

## Recommended Reading

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# Newly Hired Agents Who Fail Should Try, Try Again

Jeffrey Boichuk, PhD, Zachary Hall, PhD, and Michael Ahearne, PhD

Salespeople's roles are far from failure-proof. In fact, approximately 50% of salespeople fail to reach their annual sales targets (Ahearne et al. 2012). With so much focus on quotas and *making the numbers*, it's no surprise that salespeople have a difficult time remaining positive and ethical when times get tough. The result can be a phenomenon called *learned helplessness*.

What is *learned helplessness*? It occurs when (1) pessimism results in acts of helplessness and (2) repetitive, seemingly uncontrollable failure leads people to behave helplessly (Abramson, Seligman, and Teasdale 1978). The impact is profound for sales organizations. In particular, *helpless* salespeople are more likely to quit during their first year of work, exhibit little or no persistence during customer interactions, and engage in unethical sales behaviors.

## Our Study

Our research aimed to answer three critical questions that can help sales organizations improve the performance of their new hires. First, when new hires face successive periods of sales performance failure, do their sales behaviors change? Second, if so, what behaviors do these salespeople perform and why is there a shift in behavior? Finally, can managers influence how salespeople perceive failure as well as salespeople's behaviors?



To answer these questions, we conducted two studies. Study 1 involved salespeople hired by a furniture retailer in the southern United States. This company was ideal for our research because it had recently expanded its salesforce, enabling us to study 537 newly hired salespeople. Additionally, this business-to-consumer (B2C) context and the company's commission-based incentive structure allows our results to be generalized to the residential real estate industry.

Study 2 involved business participants from Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk system. Outside the realm of B2C sales (Study 1's focus), this study investigated a business-to-business (B2B) sales context, allowing for our results to also be generalized to the commercial real estate industry. In total, 635 usable responses were gathered in Study 2. Participants were asked to imagine that they made a decision to join an insurance company's salesforce on a full-time basis and that their initial goal was to make at least as much money per month in their new position as

they currently make. Subsequently, they were shown four passages related to their new employment situation.

Our research addresses a common fear in the real estate industry – failure. Facing failure head-on and avoiding poor habits that could result from failure is vital for real estate professionals to be successful in the long term. To be fair, it is not a question of *whether* real estate professionals will experience failure but *when* and *how often* bouts of failure will happen. So, let’s take a look at how our research provides insights for the real estate professional.

## The Enduring Impact of Failure

In our first study, we sought to (1) examine whether cumulative periods of sales performance failure are associated with increased levels of pushy, sales-oriented behaviors and (2) understand the role of a supervisor’s leadership style on how new hires adopt a company’s prescribed sales process.

Assessing the first study’s results, we believe that sales managers can alleviate the deleterious effect that unmet sales goals have on newly hired salespeople’s pushy, sales-oriented behaviors *initially*. However, the efficacy of the leadership style we studied, which is termed *core transformational leadership* in the literature, seems to be fleeting. After four instances of sales performance failure, it no longer matters whether or not a sales manager is articulating a vision, leading by example, and fostering the acceptance of group goals. Newly hired salespeople adopt pushy, sales-oriented behaviors at the same rate after this threshold of sales performance failure, irrespective of their sales manager’s leadership style.

Study 2 provided greater support for the results we found in Study 1 and extended them in two notable ways. First, we found that perceived task difficulty explains the relationship between sales performance failure and pushy, sales-oriented behaviors. We also found another leadership style, termed *error management* in the literature, to be an effective approach that sales managers can use to restore the efficacy of transformational leadership during the salesforce socialization process. This additional leadership style focuses on framing errors and failure in a positive light, highlighting the instructional benefits that stem from failing and getting back on one’s feet.

In sum, the theory of learned helplessness proposes a sobering warning for the sales profession: newly hired salespeople are likely to adopt pushy, sales-oriented behaviors during the sales force socialization process because of the failure-prone nature of sales jobs. Our results suggest that cumulative periods of sales performance failure are associated with increased pushiness in the form of sales-oriented behaviors (e.g., stretching the truth about product features). Yet we also found that framing errors positively can unlock the value of well-articulated visions, role models, and team atmospheres, which gives sales managers a viable approach to enhance their new hires’ sales skills.

## Implications for Real Estate Sales Professionals

What does this mean for real estate professionals? Seasoned real estate professionals are bound to be familiar with the daily challenges that the profession brings with it. However, the same may not be true for incoming agents with less exposure to failure.

We offer three key insights from our research that a real estate professional tasked with leading a team should find useful:

1. Set achievable sales goals for your new sales professionals.
2. Combine core transformational leadership with error management.
3. Downplay the stigma of missing sales goals during the sales force socialization process.

### Setting Goals

While a supervisor is not responsible for setting a real estate agent's goals, the sales leader can help new agents with the personal goal setting process. Goals provide clarity and help agents focus on the most valuable tasks at hand.

Goal setting need not be complex. In fact, according to Real Estate Champions, seven simple principles can help set clear, powerful goals:



1. Goals must be specific, detailed, and clear.
2. Goals must be measurable.
3. The best goals have deadlines.
4. Goals need to challenge an agent's capacity or be beyond his/her current capacity.
5. An agent's goals need to possess congruency with his/her values and beliefs.
6. An agent's goals must have balance between his/her personal life, family, financial, spiritual, physical, mental, and business goals.

### Error Management

As a leader of other agents, the ability to articulate a vision, lead by example, and foster acceptance of group goals is no doubt a valuable skillset. However, while core transformational leadership may be intuitively appealing, we found that its impact can be fleeting.



A new real estate professional wants to be viewed as experienced. However, for long-term success, salespeople must be willing to experiment and try new things early on to see what works best for them. As a sales supervisor or mentor to new real estate agents, you should encourage newly hired agents to not be afraid to make errors – even if they reveal that an agent is a novice.

### **Missed Sales Goals**

Especially for new agents, the stigma of missed sales goals can be a heavy burden. New agents want to hit their goals, impress their colleagues, and start strong. However, if not careful, these new agents may miss out on valuable opportunities for growth that will set them up for even greater success down the road. Providing space for new agents to miss their sales goals while still learning valuable lessons is important for growth. Otherwise, we found that they are at risk of adopting pushy, sales-oriented behaviors, which customers detest.

### **Conclusion**

Failure is an unavoidable component of the salesforce socialization process for new hires. While cumulative periods of sales performance failure are associated with pushy, sales-oriented behaviors, sales supervisors who support their agents via transformational leadership behaviors and error management techniques create enduring effects. Allowing oneself to make errors may be difficult – especially for aspiring real estate agents just beginning their careers – but the long-term benefits may outweigh the negatives and lead to better-prepared and more versatile agents.

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Professor Boichuk's research interests include the areas of business-to-business marketing, marketing analytics, and sales force effectiveness. Published in the *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Accounting Research*, and *Journal of Retailing*, his current research portfolio addresses such questions as: “Why do salespeople use hard sell tactics?”; “What factors cause salespeople to misread customers’ interest levels?”; and “What do companies ask of the sales function when earnings are short of important targets?”. After graduating from the University of Houston doctoral program, Professor Boichuk received the inaugural American Marketing Association Emerging Scholar Award. He was also named the 2015 AMA Sales SIG Dissertation Award winner and an ISBM Business Marketing Doctoral Fellow for his dissertation work. Outside of academia, Professor Boichuk has professional experience with ZS Associates.

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Michael Ahearne is Professor of Marketing and C.T. Bauer Chair in Marketing at the University of Houston. He is also Research Director of the Sales Excellence Institute. Mike's research has primarily focused on improving the performance of salespeople and sales organizations. He has published over 40 articles in leading journals such as *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Management Science*, *Strategic Management Journal*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, and *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*. In 2013, Mike was recognized by the American Marketing Association as one of the 10 most research productive scholars in the field of marketing. His research has been profiled in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Business 2.0*, *Business Investors Daily*, Fox News, *INC* magazine and many other news outlets.

Mike's textbook *Selling Today: Partnering to Create Customer Value* is the highest grossing professional selling textbook in the world, with copies being distributed in over forty countries. Paired with the many teaching awards he has won at the MBA and undergraduate levels in Sales, Sales Management, and Key Account Management, Mike has a proven track record of excellence when it comes to disseminating knowledge in his field. He has also had a significant impact outside of the classroom based on the reach of the Sales Excellence Institute, which is widely regarded as the worldwide leader in sales education and research. Mike was recently honored as the inaugural winner of the Sales Education Foundation's Research Dissemination Award for the impact of his research on business practice.

Before entering academia, Mike played professional baseball for the Montreal Expos and worked in marketing research and sales operations for Eli Lilly and PCS Healthcare. He actively consults in many industries including insurance, health care, consumer packaged goods, technology and transportation.

# Integrating Psychological Capital into Your Sales Organization

Scott Friend, PhD, Jeff Johnson, PhD, Fred Luthans, PhD, and Ravipreet Sohi, PhD

The Dalai Lama once said, “In order to carry a positive action, we must develop here a positive vision.” It’s no secret that a positive outlook can have dramatic impacts on a person’s day-to-day activities. In fact, according to the Mayo Clinic, positive thinking can result in increased life span, lower rates of depression, and better psychological and physical well-being (Mayo Clinic 2014).

With clear benefits, it stands to reason that employers should focus on promoting a positive work environment. However, in sales – a dynamic profession riddled with stress-filled days and common denials – the potential impact of positive psychological factors is largely absent from the literature. With performance improvements and human resource development on the line, *psychological capital* stands to positively impact employee attitudes, behaviors, and performance.



## The Intricacies of Psychological Capital

Originally formulated by Luthans (2002) for the field of organizational behavior and human resource management, *psychological capital* is defined as a “positive psychological state of development that is characterized by: (1) having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks, (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future, (3) persevering toward goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed, and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success” (Luthans, Youssef, and Avolio 2007, p.3).

*Psychological capital* sales research provides a new lens to understanding salesperson-motivated effort and perseverance which may drive sales performance, offset the high cost of salesperson turnover, improve cross-functional sales interfaces, and enrich customer relationships. So, for leaders of real estate agencies, *psychological capital* promises to impact the top and bottom lines.

The resources that make up *psychological capital* were derived by Luthans (2002) based on scientific criteria of having theory and research, demonstrated valid measurement, being open to development, and having desired impact. The four that best met these inclusion criteria were hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism (HERO):

- *Hope* – one’s ability to set goals, self-motivation to accomplish goals, and ability to proactively determine alternative routes when achieving goals – is a valuable tenet. Those higher in the hope capacity are better able to derive multiple pathways to job success and accomplish their goals in a given situation. Further, those higher in hope utilize contingency planning as they forecast obstacles to achieving goals and identify multiple pathways to attain their targeted goals (Snyder 2000).
- *Efficacy* represents a positive belief in one’s ability to take on challenges and expend the necessary effort to succeed. Efficacious employees are typified as more confident in their abilities, and in turn, more persistent and likely to engage in task-specific activities (Bandura 1986).
- *Resilience* determines the difference between those who recover from adversity and those devastated by diversity. Those exhibiting higher levels of resilience recover psychologically to higher levels equal to or even beyond previous levels of homeostasis (Richardson 2002).
- *Optimism* represents a positive outlook to outcomes, including positive emotions, motivation, and realism. Unlike pessimists, optimists “differ in how they approach problems and challenges and differ in the manner and success with which they cope with adversity” (Carver and Scheier 2002, p.231).

While the four positive resources noted above may appear on the surface to be similar, considerable evidence exists in both the positive psychology and *psychological capital* literature demonstrating their conceptual and empirical differences (Luthans, Avolio, Avey and Norman 2007).

### **Applications of Psychological Capital to Sales**

*Psychological capital* has important implications for both individual-level salesperson outcomes and intra-organizational and extra-organizational sales contexts. Individually, employee *psychological capital* is frequently positively related to positive individual-level outcomes (e.g., performance, satisfaction) and negatively associated with undesirable individual-level outcomes (e.g., turnover intentions).

## Performance

Relating to performance, salespeople higher in *psychological capital* are likely to be more energized than their counterparts. These salespeople put forth effort manifested in higher performance over extended periods of time because they believe they are capable of achieving high performance (i.e., they have higher self-efficacy). Further, salespeople high in *psychological capital* have willpower and generate multiple solutions to problems (i.e., they have more hope). They make internal attributions and have positive expectations for future results (i.e., they operate with higher optimism), and they respond positively and persevere in the face of adversity and setbacks (i.e., they exhibit stronger resilience). Together, the four *psychological capital* resource components (HERO) tend to increase performance because they reinforce extra effort from salespeople, promote the generation of multiple solutions to problems, enhance positive expectations about results, and engender positive responses to setbacks.

## Attitudes

Sales research commonly focuses on reducing salesperson role stress, improving satisfaction, and reducing costs associated with turnover. While *psychological capital* is primarily directed at performance improvement, employees with high *psychological capital* levels also display more positive work attitudes, such as satisfaction and commitment (Luthans, Youssef, and Avolio 2015), and are better equipped to combat stress (Avey, Luthans, and Jensen 2009). *Psychological capital* negatively relates to undesirable outcomes, such as turnover intentions and job search behaviors (Avey, Luthans, and Jensen 2009; Avey, Avolio and Luthans 2011).

## Intra-Organizational Effects

A leader's *psychological capital* has a positive impact on the *psychological capital* of his or her followers (Story et al. 2013), which in turn results in numerous desirable attitudinal, behavioral, and performance outcomes. Leaders with high *psychological capital* act as models for their followers and positively influence their *psychological capital*.



Such leader-follower *psychological capital* transference is referred to as the contagion effect. As followers observe the combined positive impact of the four *psychological capital* resource components in action, they are more likely to emulate the behaviors associated with their leader's *psychological capital* (Story et al. 2013). Modeling includes directly observable positive behaviors, as well as positive cognitions such as setting

challenging goals, pursuing goals, solving problems creatively, planning for contingencies, appraising situational factors in a positive manner, and operating with high self-motivation. The underlying contagion premise also holds true to sales-based intra-organizational relationships, such as peer-to-peer interactions and team transference.

### **Extra-Organizational Effects**

Outside the organization's boundaries, *psychological capital* may similarly influence performance and attitudinal outcomes. This is explained by signaling theory which provides a framework for how employees signal their value and future benefits to potential partners through controllable and meaningful elements of personal presentation (Spence 1973). With regard to relationships between individuals, the positive effect of a salesperson's attitudes may transfer over to the customer and improve customer satisfaction.

Not surprisingly, the concept of *psychological capital* presents a tremendous opportunity for real estate professionals facing challenging situations each day. In describing the benefits of *psychological capital* through our research, real estate and sales professionals alike can greatly benefit and improve their sales outcomes.

### **Implications for Real Estate Sales Professionals**

What does *psychological capital* mean for real estate professionals? Seasoned real estate professionals are bound to be familiar with the benefits of a positive work environment. However, by keeping the numerous benefits of *psychological capital* in mind, one can improve sales-specific relationships and outcomes.

As a real estate professional, you no doubt interact with many people each day. Individually, your outlook on life has a major impact on your attitudes, behaviors, and performance. If you work in an office, you experience *intra-organizational outcomes* – those around you may have an impact on you through the contagion effect. But the real estate agent's life is not confined to an office – you likely remain constantly on the move as you encounter clients. The agent-buyer-seller relationships you form are influenced by *extra-organizational outcomes*.

Perhaps most importantly, each of the four *psychological capital* resources is malleable and open to development (see PsyCap Interventions and training modules; Luthans, Avey, and Paterra 2008). As an agent, each of the four components can thus have a major impact on your daily life and be continually advanced:

- Hope: It's no secret that things often do not go as planned, especially in the world of real estate. However, as mentioned above, those high in hope are better able to derive multiple pathways to job success. Remaining hopeful (and reflecting upon previous successes) allows you to move past obstacles – lost deals, fickle buyers, etc. And, when



you do get slowed down by an obstacle, hope allows you to quickly launch into a predetermined alternative pathway preventing you from being stuck long.

- **Efficacy:** Confidence is key to the role of an agent. If you fail to instill confidence in your seller or buyer, they are likely to be leery of trusting your advice and may seek alternative options. As an agent, it's not a question of if challenges will arise, but when. Efficacious employees are typified as more confident in their abilities, and in turn, more persistent and likely to engage in task-specific activities.
- **Resilience:** Failure will happen. A deal will fall through at the last minute or a strong lead will pick a competing agent. The role of a real estate agent is filled with adversity and high failure rates. Add outside commitments, such as a family, and you're bound to experience conflict. However, the true merit of a successful agent is in those who are able to recover from setbacks quickly. Don't dwell on the incident. Learn from your mistakes and press on knowing there are many more opportunities to be discovered.
- **Optimism:** Aim to be a "glass half full" person in your daily life and you're sure to see differences. A family of four searching for a dream home on a tiny budget may seem like a challenge. But, with an optimistic outlook, an agent will be more likely to reach success and put forth the effort necessary regardless of increasing challenge.

Ultimately, agents high in *psychological capital* will find themselves filled with willpower and constantly seek out solutions to problems. Instead of giving up and blaming the world for issues, they will respond positively and persevere. With extra effort, multiple solutions to problems, and positive expectations, a real estate agent possessing *psychological capital* will no doubt see improved performance.

## Conclusion

While having a positive outlook on life will lead to a great enjoyment of life, it's clear that the impact will be seen in the workplace as well. For real estate professionals, the daily adversity and challenges can often drag agents down and act as a constant reminder of the difficulty of the profession. However, with an emphasis on the four components of *psychological capital*— hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism – and a focus on the added intra- and extra-organizational outcomes, a real estate professional is sure to benefit from an increase in *psychological capital*.

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Dr. Scott Friend (PhD – Georgia State University) is an Assistant Professor of Marketing at Miami University's Farmer School of Business. Dr. Friend's research focuses on issues of relevance to sales force management, sales strategy, and creating customer value. More specifically, his work focuses on buyer-seller relationships, sales performance and sales failure, and key account management. Friend's work has been published in the *Journal of Service Research*, *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, *Journal of Business Research*, and *Industrial Marketing Management*. Further, Friend's dissertation, entitled *Why Are You Really Winning and Losing Deals: A Consumer Perspective on the Determinants of Sales Failures* won the 2011 American Marketing Association (AMA) Sales SIG Dissertation Award. Dr. Friend has taught an array of courses at Georgia State University, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Miami University including Creating Customer Value, Professional Sales, Sales Force Management, Business-to-Business Marketing, Marketing Research, and Principles of Marketing.

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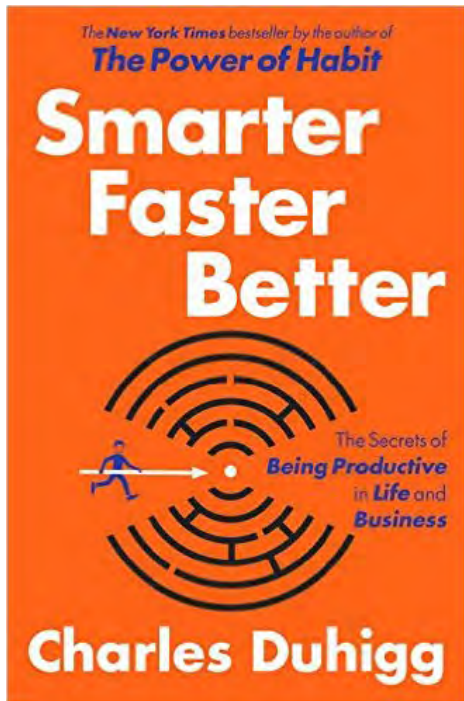
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# INSIDER: Smarter, Faster, Better

Erick Huntley, MBA Candidate



Productivity, as defined by dictionary.com, means “the quality, state, or fact of being able to generate, create, enhance, or bring forth goods and services.” Productivity is a wonderful business buzzword, but what real-life impact does it have? For Charles Duhigg, this question can be answered with three simple words: *Smarter, Faster, Better*. Thus, when posed with the question, “Can you be more productive?”, nearly everyone would respond “yes,” but the question “How?” is much more difficult to answer.

Productivity can be addressed with a multitude of approaches. One can focus on creating stronger teams that promote a safe environment for expressing ideas. Another area of focus could be how to manage others in a decentralized manner, so that those closest to the problem are able to directly impact the solution. A third focus could be innovation by using real-life experiences that solve

issues at work. The following three topics are a small sample of what it looks like for you as a real estate agent to progress toward becoming *Smarter, Faster, and Better*.

## THINK POINT # 1: What Motivates You?

There are times when you find that you are stuck in a rut. Every task set before you seems mundane and trivial, so you put forth less and less effort. Eventually the smallest tasks may seem like the most difficult to complete. The importance of self-motivation is without question. Statistically, self-motivators tend to earn more money than peers, report higher levels of happiness, and are more satisfied with their jobs, families, and lives. So, how do you push through those times when we feel unmotivated?

Motivation, basically, boils down to feeling like you are in control. Tasks or chores can be made into choices to give a feeling of more control. Psychologists from Columbia University published research in the journal *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, showing people who feel they are in control, work harder and push themselves more. Additionally, tying your menial task to the greater goal or a meaningful decision gives a sense of purpose. In this way, these small tasks help to realize the bigger picture and what you hold as goals and values for your life.

As a real estate agent, you are confronted with many tasks that could be mundane including completing, submitting, and filing real estate documents, coordinating appointments, showings,

open houses, and meetings, and responding to emails and phone calls. Charles Duhigg wrote about his experience responding to emails and found that he would put off the task over and over again in favor of watching TV. Therefore, taking lessons from his own book, he transformed replying emails from a chore to a choice to give him the determination to follow through. Initially, he responded to several emails with a single sentence answering the main question. In effect, he used his control to make a choice; for example, “Do I attend the meeting or not?” Once he made the choice, filling in the rest of the email required less thinking because the choice had already been made. You can make the same simple decision with regard to which appointments or showings matter most to you or which leads are most important for you to develop. Ultimately, by completing these tasks, you will be getting closer to the why you are in this profession. Whether it be providing for the future of your family, purchasing a dream house or car, or being able to live comfortably. Answering the simple choices will lead to accomplishing your goals.

## **THINK POINT # 2: How Do You Get From Here to There?**

Goal setting is a major source of productivity because it can help turn vague aspirations into concrete plans. An easy way to begin goal setting is through the SMART goal system:

- Specific
- Measureable
- Achievable
- Realistic
- Timeline

Having a goal that is specific and achievable forces us to focus on what steps are required to accomplish the goal. These requirements also help to ensure that the goal is realistic. If the specifics or achievability change, the goal may have to be changed to make it realistic. Measurability and timeline force discipline and tangibility into the process rather leaving the goal as a vague aspiration.

SMART goals by themselves are not enough because it is easy to create goals that are easy to accomplish and not make any progress in developing your business. Sometimes the elation of a completing a goal will outweigh the need to struggle and grow with more difficult goals. This is why GE developed stretch goals to pair with the SMART goal system. Stretch goals are meant to be so ambitious that initially, it may be unclear how to achieve them. GE found that their employees were utilizing the SMART goal system, but the company wasn’t advancing. GE was not becoming more productive. Therefore, they challenged specific departments to create goals that seemed impossible at first, but when they were combined with SMART goals, the path forward began to take shape with the help of this process. The division manufacturing airplane engines cut defects by 70%.

For a real estate agent, a stretch goal might be to sell more houses than everyone else in your office. At first, this goal seems daunting because you may not know what steps are required to become the number one agent.

However, this goal will look more achievable when you break it down into SMART goals. First, you might consider the number of houses you need to sell to become the number one agent.

Once you know how to measure the stretch goal, individual SMART goals will create a concrete plan of action. One SMART goal could be generating 50 qualified leads every month using resources including paid advertising, social media, and your company website. This goal is specific and measurable (50 leads), achievable and realistic (using marketing assistance), and on a specified timeline (every month).



SMART goals can either be deterministic or fluid. Some goals require you to fulfill a one-time task that is crucial to achieving your ambitions. Other goals need to be adjusted as you become more efficient or discover new methods for productivity. Whatever these goals are, make certain that they align with your ambitions, dreams, and values.

### **THINK POINT # 3: Are You Focused?**

Have you ever been in the middle of showing a house, thinking that everything is moving smoothly, and you are so close to completing a deal to suddenly find that everything is falling apart? This could be a common occurrence if you haven't prepared properly. As your showing begins to fall apart, you can't repair any damages that have occurred. Things falling apart may result from two common issues: cognitive tunneling and reactive thinking. Cognitive tunneling occurs when you lose ability to direct your focus and you grasp at the easiest and most obvious stimulus. Tunneling could occur due to a desire to answer every question that a client has to reassure the client s/he is making the right decision. While reassuring the client is helpful, you might find that you are responding to the client without understanding what is at the heart of his/her complaints. You may feel that you have assuaged any fears, but the client may feel that you don't understand his/her wants and needs. Reactive thinking occurs when you build habits, so that responses come naturally without concentration. While reactive thinking can be good for staying focused on day-to-day tasks, it can be detrimental when interacting with a client. It is important to be prepared and have answers to client's questions, but, each client is different, so preset answers may have negative impacts.



Charles Duhigg illustrates mental models with the health of an infant. A nurse was monitoring the infant's vital signs and saw that the baby was eating and sleeping, and that the heartbeat was strong. A different nurse, utilizing mental models had a clear picture in her head of what a healthy baby should look like and saw that this baby had many symptoms, that when combined, were cause for concern. She saw that the baby's skin looked mottled, belly was distended, and the pinprick in her heel was a blot instead of a small dot. To some nurses, these symptoms are just data points, but to the nurse utilizing mental models, this was a baby that needed immediate medical attention.

Creating mental models will help to increase focus and avoid cognitive tunneling or reactive thinking. A mental model is a picture in your mind of what you expect to see. With a mental model, you can visualize your interaction with a client. It is essential in your mental model to visualize the interaction with as much detail as possible in order to determine how you will respond. You should both visualize verbal communication and non-verbal communication, so you can manage what your client needs to see and hear. Just as the nurse saw that the baby did not fit her model of what a healthy baby ought to look like, you can do the same with what a happy or satisfied client should look like.

## **Conclusion**

There are many paths to becoming a more productive person in your real estate career. One of the biggest steps to becoming more productive is knowing what your end goals are and who you want to be. Once you have this final destination in mind, you'll have a true motivating factor, a stretch goal for your SMART goals, and a mental model for which to compare your life. Being productive in itself is a choice, and if you choose to do so, you on your way to becoming *Smarter, Faster, Better*.

## **Recommended Reading**

Duhigg, Charles (2016), *Smarter Faster Better: The Secrets of Being Productive in Life and Business*, New York, NY: Penguin Random House LLC.

## **About the Author**

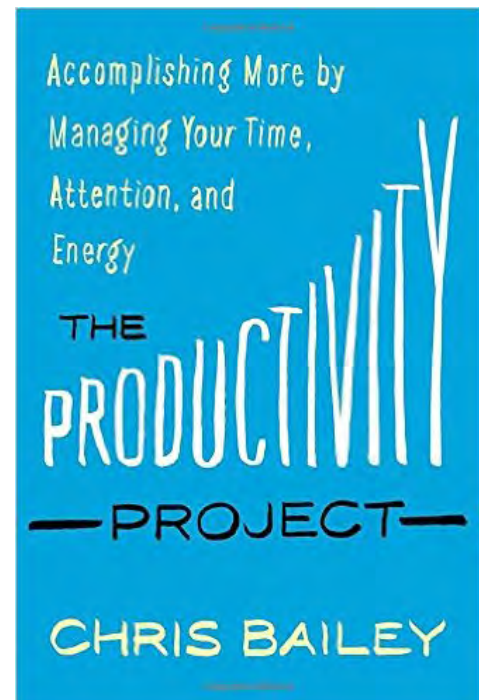
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Erick is a graduate student from Lynnwood, Washington. He earned his bachelor's degree in chemistry from Whitworth University and his master's in biochemistry from Baylor University. He is currently pursuing his MBA at Baylor University and plans to leverage his skills in both chemistry and business to great value.

# INSIDER: The Productivity Project

Courtney A. Harris, MBA Candidate

Author and blogger Chris Bailey claims that productivity is not about how much you do. Instead, productivity is all about how much you accomplish. In his book, *The Productivity Project*, he explains the productivity tactics he believes will have the biggest impact on your work and help you stop procrastinating, feel more energized, and work smarter not harder. He breaks productivity down into three ingredients: time, attention, and energy. The more time, energy, and attention you invest in your most significant and high-impact tasks, the more you accomplish. But, before attempting to apply any of his recommendations, Bailey challenges the reader to start by identifying why he/she wishes to become more productive. Investing your time into become more productive is a waste if you don't really care about the new habits you're trying to implement. Without the why behind your desire for increased productivity, you won't have the motivation to sustain the changes in the long run anyway.



Once you know why you want to be more productive, you can identify what you wish to accomplish by applying Bailey's rule of three. At the start of each day (and each week), write down three things you want to accomplish by the end of that day (week). The three things you listed are now to be your focus for the day and the week to come. Do this for your work life and your personal life. Now that you know your why and what, you can move on to the how, specifically, how to manage your time, attention, and energy, the three ingredients of productivity.

## THINK POINT #1: Managing Your Energy

Contrary to popular belief, you can actually accomplish so much more if you work on your most important and meaningful high-impact tasks when you have the *most energy* instead of the *most time*. Taking on your high impact tasks when you have the most energy, which Bailey calls your Biological Prime Time (BPT), allows you to not only do a noticeably better job on them, but also, most importantly, finish them faster since you are able to put forth at least double the amount of energy and focus during your BPT than during other times.

In order to enact this strategy, you must first identify when your BPT is by tracking how your energy fluctuates over the course of a typical day. Every hour, on the hour, for at least a week, take a minute to rate how much energy you have at the moment on a scale of 1 to 10. Bailey has a chart with everything you need to do this on his website – [www.productivityprojectbook.com](http://www.productivityprojectbook.com).

In the end, the more you align when you work and what you work on with your energy levels, the more productive you will be.

If you observe that your energy levels fluctuate dramatically or are consistently low, Bailey offers three main ways to cultivate your energy levels. The first is to drink for energy. This involves drinking more water and fewer alcoholic and sugary drinks. Water helps you think more clearly and have more energy. Not drinking enough water can lead to fatigue, sleepiness, anxiety, and difficulty concentrating -- all of which will lessen your productivity.

There are absolutely no productivity benefits from drinking sugary drinks or fruit juices. Caffeine offers no productivity benefits either unless it is consumed strategically. For example, if you start your day between 6:00 am and 8:00 am, try consuming caffeine between 9:30 and 11:30 am to avoid mid-afternoon crashes and negative impacts on your sleep. Also, try consuming caffeine only before highly demanding tasks, such as giving an important presentation or writing a complicated article. Avoid caffeine before working on creative tasks as it has been shown to decrease your performance with tasks requiring creativity.

Although skipping the gym in favor of doing an extra 30 minutes or hour of work may seem like the most attractive and productive option at times, in reality, you accomplish more in the long run by nurturing your energy levels through exercise. Exercise is the most powerful way you can optimize brain function and combat fatigue and stress. Exercise ultimately increases productivity because it enables you to bring more energy and focus to your work and therefore get the same amount of work accomplished in less time.

Similarly, we are often faced with the decision to cut back on sleep in favor of having more hours to work on tasks, but, as with exercise, consistently getting the recommended seven to nine hours of sleep a night allows us to work more efficiently and with more energy. Lack of sleep greatly reduces productivity because it has detrimental impact on our mood, memory, mathematical reasoning skills, and our ability to concentrate, learn, and solve problems. So, the extra working hours you gain from cutting back on sleep are rarely worth the energy and productivity costs.

Despite being the last ingredient of productivity that Bailey mentions, energy is no less important than attention and time. Cultivating your energy levels through adequate sleep, exercise, and water consumption will help you maximize not only your BPT but your productivity overall as

well. Regardless of how well you manage your time and/or attention, if you don't also manage your energy, your productivity will inevitably plummet.

## THINK POINT #2: Managing Your Attention

The first step in managing your attention is identifying what has your attention and deciding if it's actionable or not, and if so, what that next action must be. To do this, Bailey recommends performing a brain dump in which you externalize your tasks by writing them down. Brain dumps free up mental space and allow you to think more clearly. Bailey suggests externalizing tasks into different types of lists, such as a to-do list, a waiting-for list, a worry list, an inbox review list, and separate lists for each individual project you have. But, of course, simply listing tasks and projects isn't enough. In order to reap the full benefits from the lists and truly clear up any mental space, you must actually tackle what you have listed or else you will go back to paying too much attention to what you still haven't accomplished.

A second attention strategy Bailey proposes is the use of hotspots. Hotspots are the seven basic areas of our life into which all our tasks, projects, and commitments can be placed. The seven hotspots are as follows:

1. Mind
1. Body
2. Emotions
3. Career
4. Finances
5. Relationships
6. Fun

The idea behind hotspots is to list all of the commitments you have in each category. Then, once a week, review the lists and think critically about how much time you spent in each during the week before and decide how you wish to distribute your time and focus in the week to come. This is called *tilting* and it separates the most productive people from everyone else. The most productive people are able to adjust every week to gradually become more productive and correctly prioritize the hotspots in their lives. They are able to tilt between hotspots to focus on one more than the others over both the short and long run.

Has your mind wandered at all since you began reading this? Yes? Well it would be surprising if it hadn't. Throughout the day, your brain seesaws between two modes: wandering mode and central executive mode. Unfortunately, Western society has come to over value the central executive mode, but by letting your mind wander at times, you can carve out more attentional space for yourself, creating room for more, brainstorming, problem-solving, and creativity. The more attentional space you have, the more productive you can be.



To advantageously let your mind wander, perform this mind capture ritual every day or two. Sit somewhere with a pen and a sheet of paper, set a timer for 15 minutes, allow your mind to wander and write down any ideas or thoughts that bubble up to the surface. The mind capture ritual is especially great on days when you feel overwhelmed and need to quickly carve out additional attentional space for yourself.

Research indicates that we only focus solely on what's in front of us for about 50 percent of the time. Strengthening your attention muscle will increase your ability to focus on a present task and allow you to become more efficient with your time and attention. Your attention muscle is made of three parts. The first part is the central executive, or the thinking and planning portion of your brain. The second and third parts are focus and awareness. Single tasking is one of the best ways to strengthen your attention muscle because it builds up your focus. Multitasking yields a false sense of productivity in the form of busyness, and almost every study has actually demonstrated that multitasking is detrimental to your productivity. Single tasking, on the other hand, allows you to invest all your time, attention, and energy into one task and accomplish more in the same or even less time. The other great way to strengthen your attention muscle is meditation. Meditation builds your awareness and may help with impulsiveness, the trait that contributes to procrastination the most. Defending your attention muscle against distractions is also vital. Limiting interruptions from your smartphone, computer, and other devices affords you extra attention and focus. The most productive people are those who work deliberately, and it's impossible to work deliberately without strengthening and defending your attention muscle.

### **THINK POINT #3: Managing Your Time**

When working to become more productive, managing your time should actually take a backseat to managing your energy and attention because time management is actually impossible. We can't control time. Time has ticked away and will continue to tick away -- minute by minute, hour by hour, unchanged, as it has always done. What we can manage is *when* we work on tasks and for how long. When scheduling time for a task, you are essentially forming attentional and energy boundaries around the task. When you limit the amount of time you spend on a task, you motivate yourself to expend more energy, focus for a shorter period of time and create a sense of urgency that pushes you to work faster and more efficiently with less procrastination. However, *managing* your time is only important when you cultivate how much energy and attention you

will have during the day and identify what you wish to accomplish. Remember, you can manage and control your attention and energy, but you cannot manage and control time.

## **Conclusion**

Increasing your productivity by cultivating your energy and attention and scheduling when you work on tasks and for how long have great rewards when coupled with clear goals and reasoning. However, it is possible to take productivity too far. Don't focus so much on being productivity that you forget to actually be productive. The point, Bailey stresses, is to take the productivity techniques that work best for you, and leave the rest behind. Lastly, to accomplish more, it's true you have to make sacrifices, but don't try to make them all at once. The road to productivity is one of small incremental changes, but small changes add up over time.

## **Recommended Reading**

Bailey, Chris (2016), *The Productivity Project: Accomplishing More by Managing Your Time, Attention, and Energy*, Crown Business.

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