

# Keller Center Research Report

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## Bottom-Line Mentality: How It Affects Performance

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*Maria Morales Menendez, MBA*

## INSIDER: The Happiness Advantage

*Jacob Brenton, MDiv/MBA*



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# Keller Center Research Report

Baylor University, Keller Center for Research  
Hankamer School of Business  
One Bear Place #98007, Waco, TX 76798  
[www.baylor.edu/kellercenter](http://www.baylor.edu/kellercenter) » [Keller\\_Center@baylor.edu](mailto:Keller_Center@baylor.edu)

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# Bottom-Line Mentality: How It Affects Performance

*Matthew J. Quade, PhD, Benjamin D. McLarty, PhD, and  
Julena M. Bonner, PhD*

For better or worse, supervisors affect performance. Past research has proven that supervisors who prioritize the bottom-line above all else affect the behavior of their subordinates. In two studies, we dwell deeper into how employees perceive this type of supervisor and how this mentality affects the way subordinates act. We found that supervisors with high bottom-line mentality garner negative perceptions from employees, damage the relationship between the two, and lead to decreased performance—even when employees also have a high bottom-line mentality.



## Bottom-line Mentality and Social Exchange Theory

Bottom-line mentality refers to a mindset that focuses on bottom-line outcomes to the neglect of other priorities. This mentality is characterized by a singular focus and competitiveness. Supervisors with high bottom-line mentality will prioritize their own interests and view others—including their subordinates—as opponents to be bested or resources to be exploited in pursuit of the bottom-line. While the bottom-line is most often related to financial performance, it can be anything that is focused on at the detriment of competing interests.

Aside from bottom-line mentality, our research also draws from social exchange theory. Social exchange theory states that interactions between parties, such as a supervisor and employee, can create a high-quality relationship over time. However, to build this positive relationship, both sides need to follow certain “rules.” The most famous of these rules is reciprocity, where individuals respond in kind to how they are being treated.

## The Effects of Supervisor Bottom-line Mentality

Supervisors who consider the bottom-line as supremely important may not want their employees to fail. However, because bottom-line mentality drives them to pursue their own interests, they end up neglecting employee well-being. As a result, if these supervisors help employees, it is only to support bottom-line pursuits.

These actions effectively signal to employees that they are merely a means to an end. They also represent the opposite of what employees expect out of good supervisors: selfless and others-

focused behaviors. In this way, supervisors who have a high bottom-line mentality fail to build fondness and trust with their employees, leading employees to consider the relationship to be a poor social bond.

In turn, this negative opinion held by employees translates into poor work performance. This response aligns with social exchange theory: employees who feel neglected or used will also feel inclined to respond with reciprocity by withholding good work performance. Note that although employees are paid for their work, this purely economic exchange is not nearly as important as social aspects when employees determine the quality of a relationship and their subsequent response in the form of work performance.

We tested these ideas in two studies that involved a series of surveys to analyze the relationship of a combined 443 pairs of employees and supervisors in a broad range of jobs and industries. The results of these studies corroborate our hypotheses. In short, supervisors with high bottom-line mentality develop poor relationships with employees, who will withhold performance as a result.

### **What About Employee Bottom-line Mentality?**

Research has also shown that when employees and supervisors have differences in values or attitudes, the quality of the relationship between the two suffers. Accordingly, the lower the bottom-line mentality of an employee, the worse they will consider the relationship with a high bottom-line mentality supervisor to be and the worse they will perform. On the other hand, if supervisors and employees hold similar views about the bottom-line, the negative effects on the relationship and performance will be less severe. The findings from our two studies suggest these ideas hold true. Hence, we can conclude that even employees with high bottom-line mentality want supervisors that focus on interpersonal aspects of a relationship and not only on the bottom-line.

### **Application and Real Estate Perspective**

The results of our research are clear: if you manage or supervise others and you focus exclusively on the bottom-line, you are damaging those relationships and decreasing the actual performance of your real estate team. Therefore, you should be very aware of the message you pass along to employees, as even those who prioritize the bottom-line above all else can be negatively affected. If you have been pursuing the bottom-line at the expense of other priorities, you may be holding back your team. By shifting your mindset and actively building these relationships with employees, you can help them, and the company as a whole, thrive instead.

## Recommended Reading

Quade, Matthew J., Benjamin D. McLarty, and Julena M. Bonner (2019) “The Influence of Supervisor Bottom-Line Mentality and Employee Bottom-Line Mentality on Leader-Member Exchange and Subsequent Employee Performance,” *Human Relations*, doi: [10.1177/0018726719858394](https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726719858394).

## About the Authors

### **Matthew J. Quade, PhD**

#### **Assistant Professor of Management, Baylor University**

Dr. Matthew J. Quade (PhD – Oklahoma State University) teaches Leadership & Organizational Behavior as well as Principled Leadership to undergraduate students. He also conducts research on behavioral ethics, including ethical leadership, ethical behavior comparisons, customer unethical behavior, abusive supervision, and ostracism. His research has been published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Personnel Psychology*, *Journal of Management*, and the *Journal of Business Ethics*, among others.

### **Benjamin D. McLarty, PhD**

#### **Assistant Professor of Management, Mississippi State University**

Dr. Ben McLarty’s (PhD – Louisiana State University) research interests include personality and individual differences, aspects of job performance, entrepreneurship, and family business. He authored *Encyclopedia of Industrial/Organizational Psychology* and has most recently been published in *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, *Human Relations*, *Journal of Managerial Issues*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Journal of Management History*, and *Journal of Business & Psychology*, among others.

### **Julena M. Bonner, PhD**

#### **Assistant Professor of Management, Utah State University**

Dr. Julena Bonner’s (PhD – Oklahoma State University) research interests include behavioral ethics, moral emotions, ethical leadership, and workplace deviance. Her research appears in journals such as *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *Human Relations*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, and *Organizational Psychology Review*.

# #Retweet: How to Compose Shareable Tweets

Nima Y. Jalali, PhD and Purushottam Papatla, PhD



If you want to increase awareness of your brand, then Twitter was made for you. Your followers are some of your best brand ambassadors, as they voluntarily publicize your content to a broader audience. However, on social media, you don't have much time to secure followers' attention. Most users will only glance at a tweet for a few seconds before moving on to the next one, and users are only on Twitter for a few minutes a day.<sup>1</sup> If users do not

recognize the topic of your tweet within a few seconds, they will likely skip it and move to the next one that piques their interest. Brands therefore need to compose tweets so that attention-grabbing, content-rich material is recognized and the topic is understood with a simple glance. Our study draws on findings in psycholinguistics, and we analyzed whether the occurrence of topic-related words at the beginning of the tweet affects the number of retweets. Specifically, we studied sales-promotional tweets from 60 brands and found that concise tweets composed with topic-related words visible at a glance received more retweets. When composing a tweet, less is more, and every word is precious.

## How We Read

The few recommendations about tweet composition that currently exist usually suggest putting attention-grabbing words like “WOW,” “LOOK,” or “TODAY ONLY” at the beginning of tweets to create a sense of urgency, but this approach does nothing to familiarize users with the advertised product. Recently, a study showed that most people share tweets when they sense a connection between the content of the tweet and the topics about which they like to tweet.<sup>2</sup> Those attention-grabbing words might be enticing users to glance at a tweet, but the content is not understood quickly, and thus, users don't see the connection for them and do not share them.

Our research is based on findings in psycholinguistics that suggest when we are not using much effort to read, like the everyday twitter user, we comprehend the meaning of a sentence by scanning a subset of the words in the sentence.<sup>3</sup> We experience certain paired eye movements when reading this way that we do not consciously recognize. The first movement is known as a *saccade*, which is a superficial scanning of the sentence that skips some words.<sup>4</sup> There is almost no comprehension during this movement. The second is a fixation on the last scanned character.<sup>5</sup> *Skimming* is the experience of a saccade-fixation pair followed by subsequent saccade-fixation

pairs until the end of the text. We have not read all the content, but we infer its meaning from the words on which we fixated. Research suggests that we spend about 20-35 milliseconds for each saccade and 150-500 milliseconds per fixation.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the goal is to maximize understanding with minimal effort and time.

## How We Share

Social media users typically share a tweet when they discern the meaning of it early in the reading process. If it takes too long, they will move on to the next tweet hoping to comprehend the meaning from a few words in a few seconds. Also, people will comprehend the meaning of the tweet based on the words on which their eyes fixate. So, if a tweet is saturated with topic-related words, the likelihood that their eyes will fixate on a word that conveys the right meaning is increased. Increase the chances of fixation on a topic-related word that interests the reader, and it will increase the chances for a retweet. Topic-related words are words that share semantic relationships that people group together. For example, the word “bank” implies finance-related ideas and creates the expectation of other related words like “federal” and “reserve.” If, however, the next word that is fixated on is “stream,” then readers would comprehend the sentence to be about rivers or other bodies of water.<sup>6</sup>

We find for sales-promotional tweets (SPT) that placing topic-related words at the beginning of the tweet results in more retweets. We also analyzed the effect of words from other topic categories and found a large effect of *calls-to-action* (CTA) words (although we also find that they should not to be used early in a tweet). The other large effects were of *time* and *brand* respectively. If possible, a tweet can contain all three of these topic-related words through creative content, hashtags, and links to other sites. However, less is more. Long tweets get significantly less retweets. If you must sacrifice something, do not sacrifice the CTA topic-related words.

## How to Compose Tweets

There are several factors that affect the “retweetability” of an SPT, such as posting time, the number of tweets per day, and punctuation. For instance, tweets posted on Sunday typically receive the most retweets. The number of retweets then decreases daily until Thursday. If a brand posts several tweets a day, retweets will decrease. Also, questions and multiple exclamations decrease the number of retweets. However, brand presence on other social media websites, the number of other brands that are followed, and presence on the Interbrand index have no discernable effect on retweetability.

It remains that the most significant effect on a tweet’s propensity to be retweeted is the early presence of topic-related words. We recommend that brands find the topics that interest their followers by regularly observing their most retweeted posts. Stay away from filler words that are only intended to grab attention or to increase the tweet’s length. Instead, draft concise, content-



rich tweets that contain words related to the topics that your followers are interested in sharing. Further, sprinkle multiple topic-related words throughout the tweet so your followers can spot the topic and understand the meaning of the tweet within a few seconds of scanning it.

Once you have compiled a list of words to which your followers respond, begin looking at your competitors' tweets and add successful topic-related words to your word bank. After you have spent time storing up these words, begin experimenting with new words that advertise the same topic and find ones that work the best. Make them short. Make them meaningful. Make them "skimmer friendly."



## #RealEstate

Every realtor is in the networking business. You need a client base that you count on for word-of-mouth advertising from your best customers to gain new business. Retweets are digital word-of-mouth advertisements. The customers you have helped are the best ambassadors of your personal brand. The relationships you formed with these ambassadors make them want to follow the work you do. If you are not using Twitter to grow your client base, consider tweeting at least once a day to tell your followers about your work, your listings, or your team. Find topic-related words that result in the most retweets, and use them early when composing concise tweets. Consider advertising your next open house with a call-to-action on Twitter. Slowly build your word bank and watch your brand penetrate new markets with almost no advertising cost to you. Oh, and remember to finish them with the most important call-to-action there is—#retweet.

## Recommended Reading

Jalali, Nima Y. and Purushottam Papatla (2019), "Composing Tweets to Increase Retweets," *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 36(4), 647-668.

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## About the Authors

### **Nima Y. Jalali, PhD**

#### **Assistant Professor of Marketing, University of North Carolina Charlotte**

Dr. Nima Jalali's (PhD – University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee) primary research interests include digital marketing, social media, unstructured data analytics such as textual analysis and image analytics. In his research, he develops and utilizes empirical models to gain marketing insights from customer's activities, which potentially informs firms to enhance their digital and social media strategies and tactics. His research has appeared in *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *Quantitative Marketing and Economics*, *Econometrics Reviews*, and *Journal of Multivariate Analysis*. His recent work looked at the role of topic word composition in tweet on retweets, the effect of color composition on click-rates in visual commerce, and the role of peripheral cues on product page visits and conversion from visual user-generated content.

### **Purushottam Papatla, PhD**

#### **Northwestern Mutual Data Science Institute Professor of Marketing, Co-Director, Northwestern Mutual Data Science Institute, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee**

Dr. Purushottam Papatla's (PhD – Northwestern University) research interests include Bayesian modeling of Big Data to understand how and why Instagram posts by consumers affect how other consumers respond to brands. He is also using Bayesian and Big Data methods with psycholinguistics to investigate why and how consumers engage with brands on Facebook, why consumers retweet brands' tweets, how Uber and AirBNB have affected consumer response to legacy taxi and hotel brands, and whether consumer ratings affect sales in the restaurant, hospitality, and music categories. His other current research projects also include studying what makes people watch ads on TV more fully rather than switching out of them using ad and program viewing data. Dr. Papatla works with companies through non-commercial research relationships and publishes his findings through scholarly journals. He teaches Marketing Strategy and Digital Marketing Strategy in the Executive MBA program and Doctoral Seminars on Bayesian Methods and Models in Marketing at his university. He also recently introduced a course called *Ideas and Applications of Data Science in Different Fields* that was very popular at his university. Dr. Papatla also has been, and continues to be, the Dissertation Committee Chair for several Doctoral students and serves as a reviewer and Editorial Board member for peer-reviewed journals.

# Are You on the Right Scent?

*Anna Girard, PhD, Marcel Lichters, PhD, Marko Sarstedt, PhD, and Dipayan Biswas, PhD*

Have you ever walked near or into an Abercrombie & Fitch store? If yes, you might have noticed a special scent, which, a couple of years ago, was a bit overbearing, but has recently been replaced by a more subtle variant. We can only speculate what the primary driver behind Abercrombie & Fitch's decision to install an ambient scent is. Possible goals include creating a pleasant atmosphere, advancing their customers' service experience, or simply masking bad smells in their retail stores<sup>1</sup>. Importantly, Abercrombie & Fitch is not alone in its efforts to leverage ambient scents. With an annual growth rate of 10% and a volume of over \$200 million in 2017, the market for ambient scents is growing rapidly.

It is, therefore, not surprising that ambient scents have also received considerable attention in academic research. Prior research in this domain has revealed that pleasant ambient scents have a positive influence on consumers' perceptions, of, for example, the physical servicescape and their brand evaluations<sup>2,3</sup>. Looking at prior research, however, we identified several blind spots in the literature. For example, do the positive effects also hold when consumers are repeatedly exposed to ambient scents without being aware of it? And do the positive effects prevail in a service environment characterized by many different olfactory influences (e.g., malodors)—as is often the case in real-world service settings? How do consumers react to the discontinuation of a scent campaign?



## Study Design

We quickly realized that answering these research questions is very challenging in a laboratory setting, where consumers (typically students) are exposed to an ambient scent under highly controlled conditions—as commonly done in prior scent research<sup>4</sup>. Evaluating the long-term effects in an olfactory-rich environment requires collaborating with an industry partner who would grant us access to its servicescape over several weeks, ideally months. Finding such a partner was very challenging, but we managed to convince a regional subsidiary of Germany's major railway company to support the project, as well as to involve a professional fragrance manufacturer who designed two different scents that fit its servicescape. Our first task was to identify the most appropriate scent and the optimal level of intensity, which we did by running a series of pretests. We found that even in the highest intensity levels, most customers did not

notice the scent, which was diffused via the train's air conditioning system—that is, they principally processed the scent subconsciously.

Next, we exposed commuters on a specific rail route section between two midsize towns in Germany to the ambient scent. The experiment ran over a period of four months. Every two weeks, trained interviewers went through the trains and identified the study participants and surveyed them with regard to their service perceptions. We simultaneously also surveyed commuters on another train section, where the trains were not scented. This was done to rule out any other explanatory factors that might contribute to changes in commuters' service perceptions over time. Our results not only confirm ambient scent's positive short-term effect, but show that the use of a subconsciously processed long-term ambient scent has an enduring, positive impact on consumers' evaluations of service quality, service experience, and service value. Furthermore, our results indicate that ambient scents' positive effect on service evaluations persists for at least two weeks after the ambient scent has been withdrawn.

Our research produced some further striking findings, which we couldn't report in the full paper. Most notably, we also queried consumers' satisfaction with the service provider and brand attitude and found no notable improvements in these constructs over time. This highlights an important boundary condition in the application of subconsciously processed ambient scents. Customers simply do not feel like they received preferential treatment from the service provider. Thus, subconsciously perceived scents do not contribute to companies' branding efforts. We also ran a series of qualitative interviews with several of the participants. These interviews confirmed that most participants did not notice any special scent and that they were generally in favor of introducing a pleasant ambient scent into the train compartments.

### **Implications for Real Estate**

Thinking in terms of the real estate industry, our study results suggest that real estate professionals can use subconsciously processed ambient scents to enhance potential home buyers' situational evaluation of the service experience, its quality, and its value. This effect not only functions temporarily but also when repeatedly frequenting your listings. An example might be when buyers repeatedly visit a specific property or view different properties you may have listed. In light of the positive effects and the low costs associated with ambient scents' use, scents have the potential to offer good returns on investment. Professional fragrance manufacturers sell ready-made scents for prices of approximately \$30 per cartridge, which lasts several weeks. Ambient scent is applied by placing the scent carrier in existing air conditioning systems or via scent diffusing devices.

## Recommended Reading

Girard, Anna, Marcel Lichters, Marko Sarstedt, and Dipayan Biswas (2019) “Short- and Long-Term Effects of Nonconsciously Processed Ambient Scents in a Servicescape: Findings from Two Field Experiments,” *Journal of Service Research*, 22(4), 440-455.

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## About the Authors

### Anna Girard, PhD

Dr. Anna Girard is currently working in the project management office of an international sporting goods company. Before that, she worked as a research and teaching assistant at several research institutes and gained extensive experience working for international retail and service companies. She wrote her doctoral thesis at the Institute for Marketing of the Ludwig Maximilians University in Munich, Germany. Her research interests focus on sensory marketing especially on scent marketing, service and retail marketing, and privacy in information security research. Her articles have been published in the *Journal of Business Market Management* and the *Marketing Review St. Gallen* and her research has been featured in several German media outlets.

### Marcel Lichters, PhD

#### Assistant Professor of Consumer Behavior, Otto-von-Guericke-University Magdeburg (Germany)

Dr. Marcel Lichters' (PhD – Otto-von-Guericke-University Magdeburg) research interests over the years have varied from context effects in consumers' product choices, over conjoint analysis in product innovations processes, sensory product research, and most recently to consumer manipulation through sensory marketing phenomena. His articles have been published in journals including, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Journal of Service Research*, *Marketing Letters*, *AMS-Review*, *Business Research*, *Health Policy*, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *BMC Health Service Research*, and *International Journal of Psychology*. Lichters has also gained extensive experience while working for years in

international market research companies. In addition, he has done consulting and/or research collaboration with several companies in the US, Germany, Switzerland, and Australia.

**Marko Sarstedt, PhD**

**Chaired Professor of Marketing, Otto-von-Guericke University Magdeburg (Germany) and Conjoint Professor, Monash University Malaysia (Malaysia)**

Dr. Marko Sarstedt's (PhD – Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, Germany) main research interest is the advancement of research methods to further the understanding of consumer behavior. His research has been published in *Nature Human Behavior*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *Multivariate Behavioral Research*, *Organizational Research Methods*, *MIS Quarterly*, *Decision Sciences*, and *Psychometrika*, among others. Marko has coedited several special issues of leading journals and co-authored four widely adopted textbooks, including *A Primer on Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling* (PLS-SEM). According to the 2019 F.A.Z. ranking, he is among the three most influential researchers in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Marko has been named member at Clarivate Analytic's Highly Cited Researcher List, which includes the "world's most impactful scientific researchers." Marko regularly consults leading companies on market research and data analysis topics.

**Dipayan Biswas, PhD**

**Exide Professor of Business and Professor of Marketing, University of South Florida**

DR. Dipayan Biswas' (PhD – University of California Irvine) research interests are in sensory marketing, retail atmospherics, and food marketing. His research has been published in *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, and *Journal of Retailing*, among others. His research has been featured in over 200 media outlets worldwide. He has done consulting and/or research collaboration with several companies in the United States, Germany, Sweden, France, India, and Norway.

# Is Internal Support Key to Building Customer Relationships?

*Kevin Duane Bradford, PhD, Yongmei Liu, PhD, Yuying Shi, PhD, Barton Weitz, PhD, and Jun Xu, PhD*

Our research investigates how the relationship between the buyer and seller is affected by the effectiveness of the salesperson’s coordination of internal resources. Ultimately, this study explores the impact of customer relationship quality on sales performance. The foundation of this research revolves around the concept of Social Problem Theory (SPT)—which explains how a person earns the focus and support of a population or community. SPT provides guidance to understand how problems emerge and behaviors that individuals engage in to solve those problems.

A customer’s problem is the opportunity for the salesperson to create value for customers. Salespeople commonly need internal assistance when customer needs exceed the amount of resources salespeople have at hand. We introduce allocentrism, a trait-like predisposition to value relationships with others. The following research will outline how allocentrism leads to internal networking and helping behaviors that, in turn, meet the unmet needs of customers. Furthermore, salespeople who harness internal support, enhance customer relationship quality, and ultimately increase sales performance. Throughout, it is important to note that the term “salesperson” can be used interchangeably with agents or salespeople within the real estate industry.



## Framework from Allocentrism to Sales Performance

This research uses SPT to examine how salespeople obtain the internal support to address the needs of customers. Salespeople can enhance their internal support by engaging in internal networking and helping behaviors. In terms of real estate, this could be a customer who needs a loan or home architecture connections. Though this is outside of the typical real estate agent’s job description, salespeople who have the internal network to connect their customers to other resources are the agents who have the greatest customer relationships. In turn, the greater customer relationship quality, the greater sales performance.

Salespeople’s allocentrism is related to salespeople’s tendency to engage in internal networking and helping behaviors as well as external customer-oriented selling behaviors. Internal networking is an effective way to harness the internal support that salespeople need. Helping occurs when individuals make efforts to voluntarily help others on work-related problems or prevent the occurrence of problems. The effectiveness in obtaining internal support by salespeople is the extent to which salespeople successfully integrate internal resources to assist in customer opportunities beyond the capacity of the salesperson. Furthermore, satisfying the needs of customers builds credibility, satisfaction and thus, the quality of the relationship. This led us to the following hypotheses: (the arrow can stand for “leads to”)

H<sub>1a</sub>: Effectiveness in Obtaining Internal Support → Customer Relationship Quality

H<sub>1b</sub>: Customer Relationship Quality → Sales Performance

H<sub>2</sub>: Internal Networking → Effectiveness in Obtaining Internal Support

H<sub>3</sub>: Helping → Effectiveness in Obtaining Internal Support

H<sub>4</sub>: Helping → More Positive Internal Networking and Support

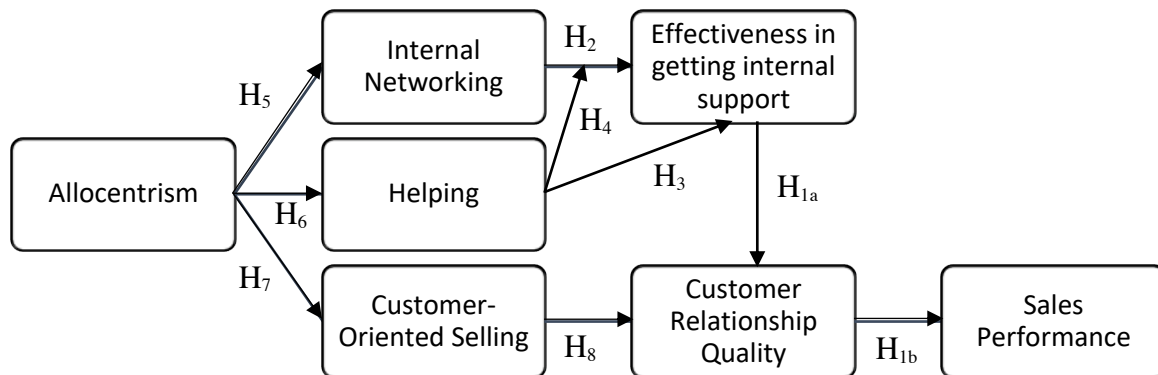
H<sub>5</sub>: Allocentrism → Internal Networking

H<sub>6</sub>: Allocentrism → Helping

H<sub>7</sub>: Allocentrism → Customer-Oriented Selling

H<sub>8</sub>: Customer-Oriented Selling → Customer Relationship Quality

The following diagram outlines the conceptual framework and hypotheses researched in this study.





## **Our Findings**

Our study tested the framework above and showed that all the proposed hypotheses are supported and statistically significant. The empirical results of our study indicate that salespeople who effectively coordinate internal support through networking help leverage this support to develop higher quality customer relationships. Through such internal support, salespeople are better equipped to deliver the fundamental promise of selling: the development of offerings tailored to the customer's needs. Allocentrism in this research proves important because it indicates a predisposition to build both internal and external relationships, an important trait for salespeople in their contemporary role.

## **Application**

While sales managers tend to put emphasis on salesperson-customer interaction, many have yet to embrace the importance of the strategic role of salespeople effectively coordinating internal resources to support customer opportunities. Furthermore, this supports evidence urging sales managers to direct salespeople to give effort and attention to identifying and developing connections with internal resources that can assist with their customer opportunities. The research also reveals that time spent engaging in allocentric behaviors enables salespeople to enrich their customer relationships. This tells us that sales managers could create events to provide introductions, to facilitate conversations, and to create informal lines of ongoing dialogue.

It should be noted that placing too much emphasis on salespeople individually for obtaining internal support resources without support of some formal allocation of internal resources is not advisable and can be costly. These costs can include restricted time away from customers and potentially ineffective and inefficient allocation of internal resources. Both, a well-structured formal internal support system and providing salespeople an understanding of the importance of informal coordination of internal resources is necessary. Finally, the measure of allocentrism can be used to assist in the selection process for sales positions that entail relationship management responsibilities. At the same time, the measure can be used to assist managers in identifying those salespeople that need support with internal coordination behaviors such as internal networking and help.

## **Recommended Reading**

Bradford, Kevin Duane, Yongmei Liu, Yuying Shi, Barton Weitz, and Jun Xu (2019), "Harnessing Internal Support to Enhance Customer Relationships: The Role of Networking, Helping, and Allocentrism," *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 27(2), 140-158.

## About the Authors

### **Kevin Duane Bradford, PhD**

#### **Professor of Marketing, University of California**

Dr. Kevin D. Bradford's (PhD – University of Florida) teaching areas of interest are consumer behavior, marketing research, marketing strategy, and sports marketing. He conducts research on developing understanding of significant issues within the marketing system and its relationship to society. Kevin received an "Excellence in Sales Scholarship Award" from the American Marketing Association's special interest group supporting research in the selling and sales management. He also received the honorable mention award for the "Best Paper Contributing to Theory and Practice to Retail Marketing."

### **Yongmei Liu, PhD**

#### **Associate Professor, Illinois State University**

Dr. Yongmei Liu (PhD – Florida State University) has taught courses in Organizational Behavior, Leading Organizational Change, Human Resource Management, Recruitment and Selection, and International Management. Yongmei's current research interests include emotion in organizations, and interpersonal dynamics at work, and her research has appeared in journals such as *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, *Human Performance*, *Human Resource Management Review*, *Journal of Management*, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *Personality and Individual Differences*, and *Personnel Psychology*. She reviews for numerous academic journals, and serves on the editorial boards of *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, and *Group and Organization Management*.

### **Yuying Shi, PhD**

#### **Assistant Professor of Marketing and Business Analytics, Texas A&M University Commerce**

Dr. Yuying Shi's (PhD – University of Florida) research area focuses on marketing analytics and digital marketing. Her research has been published in outlets such as *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *Review of Marketing Science*, *British Journal of Mathematical and Statistical Psychology*.

### **Barton Weitz, PhD**

#### **J.C. Penney Eminent Scholar, University of Florida**

Dr. Barton A. Weitz's (PhD – Stanford University) research interests focus on long-term relationships between firms in a distribution channel, salespeople and their customers, and firms and their employees. He is also interested in the use of organizational culture, supervision, and incentive compensation to motivate and control salespeople and service providers. Weitz has made important theoretical and empirical contributions to the marketing discipline. Three of his articles have been selected to be among the 10 most influential papers on personal selling and

sales management. Consumers and financial analysts are only now beginning to see the wisdom of predictions he made in a 1997 article titled “Interactive Home Shopping: Consumer, Retailer, and Manufacturers’ Incentives to Participate in Electronic Markets” about the challenges pure electronic retailers would face competing against traditional store-based retailers.

**Jun Xu, PhD**

**Associate Professor of Marketing, DePaul University**

Dr. Jun Xu’s (PhD – University of Florida) main research interests include selling effectiveness, channels of distribution and inter-organizational relationships and innovation. His research has been published in the *Journal of Marketing*, the *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, the *Journal of Business Research*, the *Academy of Management Learning and Education* and the *Journal of Vocational Behavior*. He also serves as a professional reviewer for the American Marketing Association, Academy of Marketing Science, Society for Marketing Advances, Academy of Management, Southern Management Association and other academic journals.

# Corporate Social Responsibility & Consumer Loyalty

*Didier Louis, PhD, Cindy Lombart, PhD, and Fabien Durif, PhD*

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has gained momentum worldwide. More and more companies are implementing CSR policies, plans and activities, as they believe that CSR will lead to superior business performance as a source of competitive advantage.<sup>1</sup> Historically, retailing has not had the reputation of being a leading sector in terms of CSR. Consumers do not spontaneously associate retailing with CSR.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, retailers are making efforts to communicate their CSR commitments and actions to customers in particular and to society in general.<sup>3</sup>



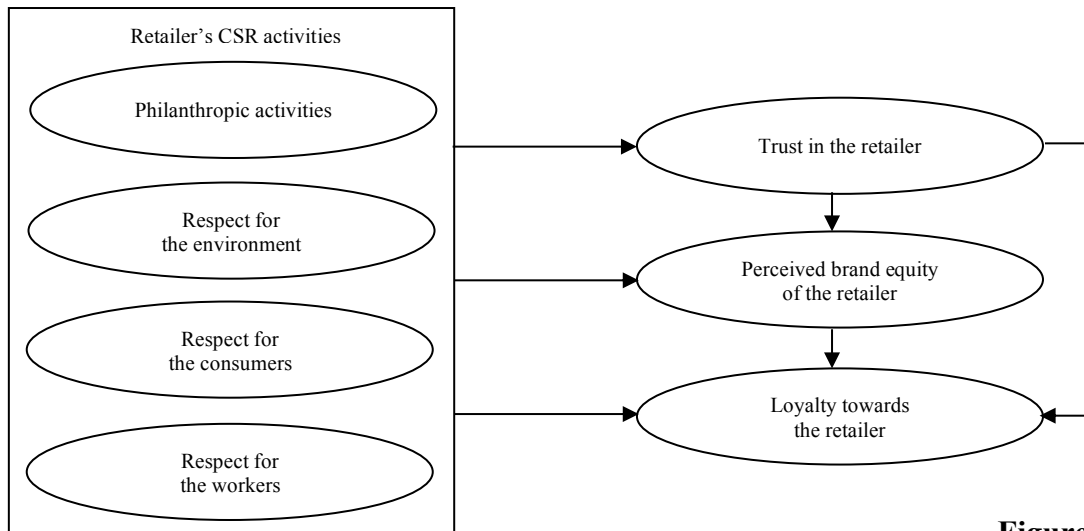
Most definitions of CSR are based on two common ideas: 1) companies must respect the law and seek profit, but their responsibilities go beyond these legal and economic responsibilities; 2) companies are responsible to all stakeholders for their activities—not only to their shareholders. According to Mohr et al.<sup>4</sup>, CSR represents the commitment of a company to minimize or eliminate its harmful effects and maximize its long-term beneficial impact on society.

CSR is generally conceptualized as a multidimensional construct.<sup>5</sup> Several typologies coexist in the literature,<sup>6</sup> but Moisescu<sup>7</sup> conducted a meta-analysis of the various instruments proposed in the literature to measure CSR. Amongst the various dimensions highlighted, four emerged in a large number of works<sup>8</sup>: philanthropic activities, respect for the environment, respect for consumers and respect for workers.

## Our Research

Our research investigates the impact of these four dimensions of a retailer's CSR activities on consumers' loyalty towards this seller. Our findings also establish that this relationship is positively mediated by consumers' trust in this retailer and/or its perceived brand equity. Lastly, our results indicate that this impact depends on the groups of consumers considered: the very responsible consumers (n = 213), the local sceptical recyclers (n = 168), and the least responsible consumers (n = 166). Consumers' socially responsible consumption behavior, their expectations of CSR activities implemented in companies, their attribution of altruistic motivations rather than strategic motivations to these companies engaged in CSR, and their scepticism towards them are the variables considered to form these groups. Figure 1 depicts the relationships we examine in this study.

## The Research Model



**Figure 1.**

A field study was conducted on 547 consumers, who were asked to select a retailer of their choice with which they were familiar (notably with its CSR activities) and to complete a questionnaire with regard to that retailer.

With partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), we show that, for the *very responsible consumers*, two dimensions of a retailer's CSR activities (philanthropic activities and respect for the environment) are positively associated with consumers' trust in the retailer and its perceived brand equity, which relates to higher levels of consumers' loyalty towards this retailer. For the *local sceptical recyclers*, only the philanthropic activities dimension of a retailer's CSR is positively associated with consumers' trust in the retailer and its perceived brand equity, which relates to higher levels of consumers' loyalty towards this retailer. By contrast, for the last group, the *least responsible consumers*, these paths do not work since no dimension of a retailer's CSR activities has a significant influence on consumers' trust in this retailer or on consumers' loyalty towards this retailer. Only one dimension of a retailer's CSR activities (respect for the environment) has a significant and positive influence on a retailer's perceived brand equity.

In essence, the fact that a retailer is perceived by consumers as engaged in philanthropic activities has a direct and indirect positive influence (expressed directly through consumers' trust in the retailer and indirectly through consumers' trust in the retailer and its perceived brand equity) on consumers' loyalty towards this retailer for the very responsible consumers and the local sceptical recyclers. Similarly, when a retailer is perceived by consumers as being environmentally friendly, there is an indirect positive influence on consumers' loyalty towards this retailer. Specifically, this positive effect is expressed through consumers' trust in the retailer, through its perceived brand equity, and through consumers' trust in the retailer and its perceived

brand equity for the very responsible consumers and through its brand equity for the local sceptical recyclers and the least responsible consumers.

## Real Estate Implications

At a managerial level, this research thus indicates that the dimensions “respect for consumers” and “respect for workers” do not have an impact on the variables considered in this research: consumers’ trust in the retailer, their loyalty towards it, and perceived brand equity. By contrast, being perceived by consumers as engaged in philanthropic activities or being environmentally friendly has a positive impact on consumers’ trust, loyalty, and perceived brand equity.

On the one hand, the respect for the environment dimension has a direct impact on brand equity and an indirect impact (through consumers’ trust and/or perceived brand equity) on consumers’ loyalty for all three groups of consumers considered in this research (the very responsible consumers, the local sceptical recyclers and the least responsible consumers). This specific dimension also has a direct impact on consumers’ trust for the very responsible consumers. Consequently, to improve their relationships with these three groups of consumers, firms should implement policies to reduce their consumption of natural resources, make their business activities more environmentally friendly, and make their services eco-friendly. Importantly, they should communicate these efforts to potential and current clients.



On the other hand, being engaged in philanthropic activities has a direct impact on consumers’ trust and loyalty, and an indirect impact on perceived brand equity for the very responsible consumers and the local sceptical recyclers. Consequently, to improve relationships with these two specific groups of consumers, firms should consider investing locally, to get involved with and promote social and cultural activities within their

communities while communicating and sharing this involvement and commitment to CSR with their clients.

## Recommended Reading

Louis, Didier, Cindy Lombart, and Fabien Durif (2019), “Impact of a Retailer’s CSR Activities on Consumers’ Loyalty,” *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 47(8), 793-816.

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## About the Authors

### **Didier Louis, PhD**

#### **Professor of Marketing, University of Nantes**

Dr. Didier Louis' (PhD – Burgundy University) research interests center on consumers' behavior in retail stores, sales promotion, private label, brand personality, sponsorship and corporate social responsibility. His work has been published in leading French journals (*Décisions Marketing, Revue Management et Avenir*), in international journal (*Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management, Journal of Product and Brand Management*), and in a number of national and international conferences.

### **Cindy Lombart, PhD**

#### **Associate Professor, Audencia Business School**

Dr. Cindy Lombart (PhD – The Catholic University of Mons) has been a member of the In Situ Lab (Audencia Business School) since 2005 and, since 2017, a member of the GreenUXLab (University of Québec in Montréal (UQAM)). A specialist of consumers' behavior at the point-of-sale, she conducts experiments, in a real store laboratory, on key retail variables (price, promotions, assortment, store brands, merchandising) and on store and retailer price images. She also focuses on responsible consumption behavior such as the consumption of organic and fair-trade products, of local and regional products, of *terroir* store brands and ugly fruits and vegetables as well as on retailers' corporate social responsibility and their CSR images. Her current work integrates new technologies such as virtual reality and thus she conducts experiments in a virtual store. She is the author of publications on these different topics in leading French journals (*Recherche et Applications en Marketing, Décisions Marketing, Revue Management et Avenir*) as well as international journal (*Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management, Journal of Product and Brand Management*).

### **Fabien Durif, PhD**

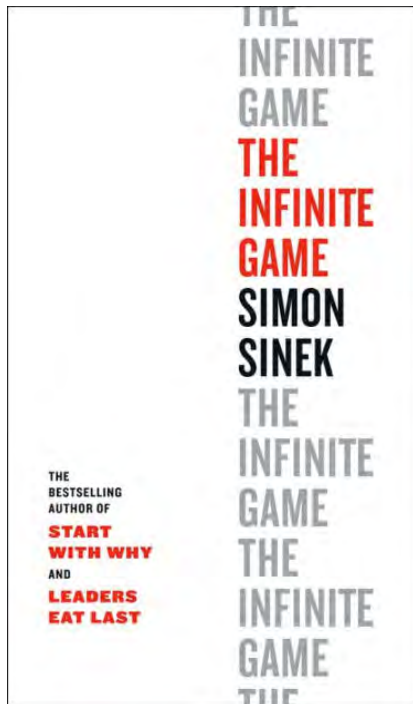
#### **Associate Dean of Research and Professor of Marketing, University of Quebec at Montreal**

Dr. Fabien Durif's (PhD – HEC Montreal) research interests vary from ethics in marketing to responsible consumption, and most recently to second-hand economy and collaborative consumption. Dr. Durif has published in *Journal of Business Research, Journal of Promotion Management, International Journal of Market Research, Journal of Consumer Marketing, European Journal of Marketing, International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management, Technological Forecasting & Social Change, International Journal of Consumer Studies, Journal of International Consumer Marketing, Ethics and Information Technology, British Food Journal, Sustainability* and others. He is the Director of the UQÀM School of Management's Responsible Consumption Observatory, specifically the Observatoire de la Consommation Responsable (OCR), and the GreenUXlab, a research laboratory in new user experiments and in eco-responsibility.



# INSIDER: The Infinite Game

Maria Morales Menendez, MBA



In a world where finite and infinite games exist, one must play in a finite and infinite way, respectively. Finite games have a beginning, middle, and an end, with known players and fixed rules—think, a baseball game. Infinite games are quite the opposite. One can change how they play the game at any time and for any reason. The game of business has no finish line and no winner, players simply drop out (acquisition or bankruptcy). The same can be said about life or a career. Achievements occur throughout, but again, with no way of “winning.” One must learn to play the right way, in the right game. When we lead with a finite mindset in an infinite game, the outcomes are a decline of trust, cooperation, and innovation. Like all infinite games, in the game of life, the goal should never be to win, but instead to perpetuate the game. The focus of Simon Sinek’s *The Infinite Game* revolves around five essential practices to adopt an infinite mindset: advance a just cause, build trusting teams, demonstrate the courage to lead,

study worthy rivals, and prepare for existential flexibility. This article summarizes how to adopt these practices as a leader in order to perpetuate the infinite game of business—which includes real estate.

## THINK POINT #1: Create a Just Cause

A *just cause* is not the same as our *why*. A *why* comes from the past, a statement of who we are, and it cannot be changed. Conversely, a just cause is a vision for a future state that does not yet exist—one so appealing that people are willing to make sacrifices in order to help advance toward that vision. A company with a just cause allows for an employee to like their job some days, but love their job *always*. This is about creating a future that employees hope to live in and will commit to help build. In order to create an impactful just cause, it must be:

1. *For something* – affirmative, optimistic and tell us what we stand for
2. *Inclusive* – open to all those who would like to contribute
3. *Service oriented* – for the primary benefit of others
4. *Resilient* – able to endure political, technological and cultural change
5. *Idealistic* – big, bold, and ultimately unachievable.

The quick-serve salad company, Sweetgreen, stands for something bigger than selling salads with their just cause: “to inspire healthier communities by connecting people to real food.” Real food to Sweetgreen is defined as locally sourced and whole ingredients. Their employees feel connected to their jobs on a deeper level, as their goal is to make communities healthy through the products they create—ultimately, a truly unachievable goal.

In order to further solidify this, think of sales in real estate. A finite-minded company offers products they think they can sell to people, while the infinite-minded company offers products people want to buy, and that make their lives better. The former description is focused primarily on how the sale of those estates benefit the company, while the latter is primarily focused on how the products benefit those who buy them. When creating a just cause, one must connect employees to the benefit of others.

A written cause should work like a compass and guide the business model, not the other way around. Money is the fuel to advance a cause or a result, but is not the cause itself. With an effective just cause as a compass, each succession of leaders, their gaze looking beyond the horizon, can more easily navigate the technologies, politics, and cultural norms of the day without the founder present. Sinek states that without a sense of purpose, no company, either public or private, can achieve its full potential.

Overall, the keeper and enforcer of this cause should be top leadership. Infinite-minded leaders will work hard to look beyond the financial pressures of the current day and put people before profit as often as possible, because they believe in the just cause and longevity of the company. Additionally, though these leaders may get rich while doing what they’re doing, they aren’t doing it to get rich. They’re doing it because they believe in the just cause.

## **THINK POINT #2: Establish Trusting Teams and the Courage to Lead**

Sinek states, “Leaders are not responsible for the results; leaders are responsible for the people who are responsible for the results.” An infinite-minded leader in any industry knows it is important to nurture trusting teams and a healthy environment, which create a community of employees that believe in their leaders, even when they make mistakes or take unexpected turns. Trust is built over time when leaders put people before profits and act in a way that lives up to those words.

In his book, Sinek explains that a world-famous trapeze artist would never attempt a brand new, death-defying act for the first time without a net. In the same way, we cannot find the courage to lead without the help of others. Those who believe what we believe are our net. To demonstrate the courage to lead, a fundamental idea must be understood—hard decisions are never made by great women or great men, they are done by great teams, great partnerships, and great people who decided to stand together with deep trust and common cause.

### THINK POINT #3: Use Existential Flexibility and Worthy Rivals

In the infinite game of business, there is no winner, and therefore being the best is a “fool’s errand,” since there can be multiple players who do well at the same time. Instead of viewing competitors as those who must be beat, a worthy rival can reveal to us where we can make improvements. Having a worthy rival provides leaders humility, agility, and a single point of focus for strategies to be developed and resources to be allocated. Where an organization once fought primarily for the good of others and for the good of the cause, without a worthy rival, organizations are more likely to fight primarily for the good of themselves. Additionally, worthy rivals are the best way to improve and adapt before it’s too late.

Adapting can sometimes be an extreme disruption to a business model or strategic course in order to more effectively advance a just cause, otherwise known as an existential flex. Early in his career, Steve Jobs decided to flex and change Apple’s business model with the development of the MacIntosh. He decided this after encountering new emerging technology that could turn the organization on its head. Jobs stated, “Better we blow it up than someone else.” He invested in the company and developed the first user-friendly computer, which became the standard for Apple’s competitors. A look at worthy rivals gives an infinite-minded leader a sense of infinite vision and the need for strategic shifts—even extreme ones. The motivation for an infinite-minded player to flex is always to advance the just cause of the organization. With a community of trusting employees also dedicated to the cause, it is clear to them why the flex was made, and passion for the cause is only reignited.

### Conclusion

In the world of real estate and business overall, rules aren’t set, players aren’t always clear, and there isn’t a “winner.” The only way to succeed in the infinite game is to perpetuate the business far beyond your time. Leaders must rethink decisions that only affect the short-term success of a company and, instead, be guided by a just cause and make decisions for the longevity of the company. In real estate, this means putting your people above profits, establishing a trusting environment, becoming self-aware through your rivals, and having the courage to flex when necessary for the cause. As you shift to an infinite mindset, it’s key to remember:



1. We don’t get to choose whether a particular game is finite or infinite;
2. We do get to choose whether or not we want to join the game;

3. Should we choose to join the game, *we can choose whether we want to play with a finite or an infinite mindset.*

Sinek ends his novel with a question: “We only get one choice in the Infinite Game of life. What will you choose?”

### **Recommended Reading**

Sinek, Simon (2019), *The Infinite Game*, Penguin Random House, LLC.

### **About the Author**

#### **Maria Morales Menendez, MBA**

#### **Baylor University**

Maria Morales Menendez earned her Bachelor of Science in Biosystems Engineering from the University of Kentucky and her MBA with a Healthcare concentration from Baylor University. Maria currently serves as an Administrative Fellow at Tenet Healthcare’s Palm Beach Group and Delray Medical Center.

# INSIDER: The Happiness Advantage

Jacob Brenton, MDiv/MBA

If you were to hear the term “positive psychology,” what ideas come to mind? Unrealistic optimism? Self-esteem exercises? Though these misconceptions are hard to shake, Harvard University instructor Shawn Achor condenses his years of positive psychology research in *The Happiness Advantage* to encourage readers that positive change is possible by changing perspective. Achor is a Waco, Texas native known for his Ted Talk on happiness and teaching the Harvard course on happiness. Because his research on positive psychology hit as the 2008 recession took effect, he has now spent years tailoring his findings for the business community.

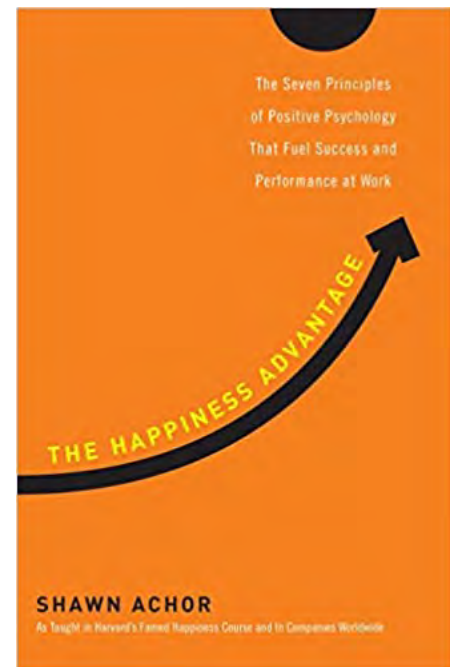
Achor summarizes his findings into seven principles: a summary of the increased productivity of happier people, the benefits of leveraging happiness, finding opportunity, capitalizing on failures, controlling areas we can impact, setting ourselves up for success, and perhaps most importantly, creating a social support network. Distilling Achor’s points down even further, four central themes can be gleaned to harness the author’s proposed “happiness advantage.”

## THINK POINT #1: Happiness Works

Before continuing, we should understand Achor’s definition of happiness. The author adopts the same three-fold definition of happiness his predecessor in the field, Martin Seligman, used: heightened pleasure, engagement, and meaning. Note that this is not an encouragement toward the flippant and exclusive pursuit of pleasure. Instead, Achor recognizes that pleasure is but one pursuit in happiness, alongside engagement in work and finding meaning in the world.

Achor’s research, alongside the field of positive psychology, yields surprising results. Those who exhibit a life marked by pleasure, engagement, and meaning aren’t just more satisfied in their personal lives, but they also demonstrate higher productivity, fewer sick days, and change careers less often. Though traditional wisdom might suggest seeking happiness is a diversion from productivity, the author cites multiple studies showing that employees make better decisions faster when they are happy.

Having fun at work and infusing tasks with engagement isn’t just more pleasurable for employees, it correlates with better outcomes and helps the corporate bottom line. The correlation is compelling, but how will you apply this competitive advantage of happiness to



your life? Achor insists that for most people, a naturally happy disposition is not the norm, but that attitudinal change is possible. The rest of Achor's book focuses on the kind of practices we can use to build a professional and personal life that pursues a happiness advantage.

### **THINK POINT #2: Dealing with Failure**

One major practice Achor recommends is examining how we deal with failure. The author starts with simply acknowledging that failure will happen. No positive disposition will prevent all business failures, nor should we expect it to. The difference is that happier people will deal better with their failure. When we encounter failure, we often either retreat from the problem or spend inordinate time circling around it and emphasizing our perceived weaknesses. Sometimes though, in failure, we find a new opportunity for growth.

This growth path is, of course, the most difficult path to find in that moment, so Achor encourages readers to instill a habit of looking for upward opportunities. Managers must work to cast failure as an iteration on the process toward success. It is in casting this opportunity culture then that employees begin to try their more creative solutions. Will many of these innovations fail? Of course. But amid this failure, some of these ideas will succeed, because employees were brave enough to try.

One helpful tool in instilling an opportunity culture is understanding our explanatory style. When you encounter a setback, how do you explain it in your mind? Do you find a positive angle while reassuring yourself it could have been worse? Or do you focus on the problem and wish it had happened to someone else? *How* you explain your problems and your challenges is important. The goal here is not to ignore problems or gloss over the tough road ahead. Rather, the goal is that the stories and explanations we tell ourselves find the opportunities and the more positive results from the failure.

### **THINK POINT #3: Goals and Setting Yourself up for Success**

As a real estate professional, many things are out of your control: other agents, fickle buyers, difficult markets, etc. Some of your job tasks inherently necessitate putting out fires you did not start. Achor asks us, though, to focus continually on what we can control. The focus then is not on feeling helpless or overwhelmed, but rather, on our strengths and the areas we can change. As we begin to see changes in this closely held area, we can start to do more to impact the areas we inhabit.

As we consider our own little spheres of influence, the tried and true concept of setting attainable goals comes into view. Especially in the corporate world, goals are often set as part of a checklist, filed away and never revisited until the annual review. To help us achieve these goals, the author suggests a simple model of integrating habits into our daily life, which put the goals in our line of sight. If we build barriers to keep us from breaking our best intentions, we have already begun the process of growing toward our goals. For example, falling asleep in your gym

clothes so that you can work out in the morning or removing the batteries from your remote so you watch less TV can be practical ways to meet your personal goals. If we set up situations for success, we may find ourselves happier in life, leading to more positive outcomes.

#### **THINK POINT #4: Social Support Networks**

These days, we are busier, more stressed, and less connected to humanity than ever before. Our in-person communal spaces are less popular, so we attempt to fill that void with social media. Achor contends that there is no substitute for a support network of people we know in person. People who have a community of others with whom they might experience successes and failures are inevitably happier than those who do not have this vital community. Of course, this does not mean that all introverted people must suddenly become outgoing socialites. Just having a few people “in your corner” has proven to improve quality of life, career success, and overall happiness.

As a real estate professional, you are likely already better at recognizing and fostering community than many others. You are involved in selling physical assets in real communities to real people. How can you go further, though, in understanding the social support networks which underlie your work, and what networks might need to be strengthened? For example, how well do you know the social community of the areas in which you work? Beyond the local schools and proximity to a park, are you able to tell buyers what the neighbors in this area are like?

Perhaps more importantly, are you helping to foster an appropriate professional social support network at the office? You and your coworkers need one another to help cope with the challenges of today’s complex business environment. Beyond viewing one another as business assets, we should work to foster environments of care and concern for each other. While there are certain personal boundaries we should not cross in the professional environment, the point remains—offices that connect over the coffee pot and lunch break produce more successful and happier employees.



#### **Conclusion**

In considering how to apply more positive practices to your life, these suggestions may seem obvious. Achor encourages us to get out and start living them. The author acknowledges that while the research he presents puts hard numbers to these concepts, he’s not suggesting much

that hasn't already been suggested. But rather, the key to living into happiness is carrying out the things we know we should be doing.

Perhaps the simplicity of these practices is their great strength. Nothing Achor recommends is a closely guarded secret or hard to implement—but living into a happier life takes work. Dedication. Faith. If we are to move beyond solely focusing on fleeting pleasures toward a deeper engagement with meaning, we need to put work into capitalizing on the normal failures in our life. We need to set our goals and master our own spheres of influence, before reaching into the world. We need to invest time and effort into others who care about us. Perhaps then, we can find the happiness advantage Achor promises.

### **Recommended Reading**

Achor, Shawn (2010), *The Happiness Advantage: The Seven Principles of Positive Psychology That Fuel Success and Performance at Work*, Currency: New York.

### **About the Author**

#### **Jacob Brenton, MDiv/MBA**

#### **Baylor University**

Jacob Brenton graduated with his Master of Divinity/Master of Business Administration from Baylor University in 2020. He earned his Bachelor of Science in Computer Graphic Design from the McLane College of Business at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor in 2014 and then worked in a non-profit before returning to school. Jacob enjoys studying the intersections of faith, business, ethics, and technology, and he currently serves as Acting Interim Pastor of St. John United Church of Christ in Robinson, Texas.





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[www.baylor.edu/kellercenter](http://www.baylor.edu/kellercenter) | [Keller\\_Center@baylor.edu](mailto:Keller_Center@baylor.edu)

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