

# Keller Center Research Report

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## Job Flexibility Enhances Working Mothers' Career Aspirations and Reduces Gender Gaps

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## Eliminating Toxicity through Servant Leadership

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## INSIDER: The Power of Discipline

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## INSIDER: Shut Up and Listen!

*Kristen Koehler, MBA Candidate*

# Keller Center Research Report

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# Job Flexibility Enhances Working Mothers' Career Aspirations and Reduces Gender Gaps

Julia B. Bear, PhD

The gender gap in pay is a vexing problem across industries. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, women earned 82% of what men earned on average and across industries in 2020. In the real estate industry, specifically, the gap was substantially larger: among real estate brokers and sales agents, women earned only 69% of what men earned.<sup>1</sup>



Greater flexibility at work is one antidote to these persistent gaps given that gender gaps in pay (and career advancement) increase as people, especially women, have greater caregiving responsibilities.

Unfortunately, however, asking for—and using—flexible work policies is often stigmatized, or frowned upon, at work.<sup>2</sup> Yet this stigma, which often translates into companies having flexible work policies that are on the

books but remain unused, also seems unfounded. In fact, we all know people who are ambitious about both their careers and their caregiving—who work tirelessly and also devote a great deal of time caring for others.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps offering flexibility actually can *enhance* ambition at work, especially for women.

In “Forget the ‘Mommy Track’: Temporal Flexibility Increases Promotion Aspirations for Women and Reduces Gender Gaps,” I investigated whether temporal flexibility (meaning control over and flexibility in scheduling work hours) would be associated with greater career aspirations, particularly among women.<sup>4</sup> Despite the derogatory notion of the “mommy track,” I predicted that temporal flexibility would lead to greater aspirations for a promotion among women, because they would anticipate less work-family conflict (and women tend to anticipate greater work-family conflict compared to men<sup>5</sup>).

## Findings from Two Studies

I tested my predictions in two studies: In the first study I used archival data, meaning existing data from a national survey, the General Social survey (GSS), which is conducted every two years across a wide swath of the U.S. population. I explored whether the degree of flexibility in one’s job is positively correlated with promotion aspirations and whether the correlation varies

by gender. In other words, is flexibility positively related to career aspirations, especially for women?

I analyzed data from the 2016 survey, which included items related to temporal flexibility (e.g., questions about control over work hours, how difficult it is to take time off if necessary) and career aspirations (a question about the importance of advancement at work). I also controlled for a variety of variables that could influence the results, including age, marital status, and usual number of working hours per week. Based on data from 381 respondents (56.2% women, the mean age was 46) who reported being employed and having at least one child, I discovered a significant statistical interaction between gender and job flexibility on career aspirations. In other words, for women, flexibility was significantly and positively related to career aspirations, whereas the effect was the opposite for men.

These results were encouraging, but they were correlational. Although job flexibility and career aspirations had a positive relationship for women, I couldn't conclude that flexibility *influenced* career aspirations for women. So, next, I used an experimental method to randomly assign people to read about a flexible or non-flexible job that was a potential promotion. I investigated whether the degree of flexibility influenced aspirations for this promotion.

In this second study, I conducted an experiment online among almost 400 working parents. First, all participants read about a promotion opportunity involving more responsibility, a larger number of direct reports, and a higher salary, but also longer working hours, more travel, and the expectation of availability outside of regular work hours. Next, participants assigned to the flexible job condition read, "In addition, you would have a great deal of flexibility with your working hours. And you would have plenty of control over your schedule." In contrast, participants assigned to the non-flexible job condition read, "In addition, you would not have much flexibility with your working hours. And you would not have much control over your schedule." Subsequently, participants in both conditions rated how much work-family conflict they anticipated in the new job and their aspirations for the promotion.

Not surprisingly, in the non-flexible job condition, men reported significantly higher promotion aspirations compared to women. However, in the flexible job condition, women and men did not differ in their promotion aspirations—there was no gender gap! Interestingly, both men and women reported significantly higher promotion aspirations in the flexible compared to the non-flexible condition. I also found that anticipated work-family conflict mediated, or explained, the interactive effect of flexibility condition and gender on promotion aspirations.

## **Implications for Reducing Gender Gaps in the Real Estate Industry**

Results from these two studies indicate that temporal flexibility—control over and flexibility with one's time at work—enhances women's promotion aspirations, particularly in the context of a time-intensive position. This effect is due to decreased concerns about work-family conflict.

Ultimately, reducing gender gaps in promotion aspirations can help to reduce the persistent gender gap in pay.

As mentioned above, the gender gap in pay in the real estate industry is larger than the average gender gap across industries. There are also stark gender gaps in career advancement to top leadership positions in the real estate industry, especially in commercial real estate.<sup>6</sup> Although some positions in the real estate industry are known, in fact, for offering flexibility, such as residential brokerage, corporate positions, as well as positions in commercial real estate, they could still benefit from the findings reported here. Overall, these results indicate that flexibility enhances, rather than detracts from, women's career aspirations. Let's retire the demeaning "mommy track": Highlighting flexibility and schedule control increases promotion aspirations among working mothers, an important implication for managers looking to recruit and promote female employees and who care about chipping away at these persistent gender gaps.

## Recommend Reading

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## **About the Author**

### **Julia B. Bear, PhD**

#### **Associate Professor, Stony Brook University**

Dr. Julia Bear (PhD – Carnegie Mellon University) research focuses on the influence of gender on negotiation outcomes, as well as conflict management in organizations. In her research, she investigates what factors, both individual and situational, influence the gender gap typically seen in negotiation outcomes, and how an understanding of these factors can help to reduce this gender gap in both initiation of negotiation and negotiation performance.

Dr. Bear's research has been published in journals and books, including *Academy of Management Review*, *Psychological Science*, *Academy of Management Journal*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *Sex Roles*, *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research*, and the *Academy of Management Best Paper Proceedings*. Dr. Bear is also the recipient of multiple best paper awards from the Academy of Management and the International Association of Conflict Management, as well as a Fulbright Fellowship and a Marie Curie Fellowship.

# Eliminating Toxicity through Servant Leadership

*Mitchell J. Neubert, PhD, Emily M. Hunter, PhD, and Remy C. Tolentino, MSN*

Incivility, rudeness, and a general disrespect for others has risen steeply in the workplace in recent years. The harmful effects of such incivility are yet to be fully uncovered and may be worse than originally predicted by researchers. The impacts of workplace incivility affect not only employees but also customers and third parties in contact with employees.



Thankfully, recent research has shown that leaders are not helpless in counteracting hostile work environments. Servant leaders, those who put the needs of others above their own, serve as a critical force in preventing group-level incivility through promoting a virtuous work climate.

## About Our Study

Our study dives into the effects servant leadership can have on a workplace environment. Social learning theory hypothesizes that employees learn and repeat what they see and hear their leaders do. A virtuous climate is thus created from employees' shared experiences in working for and with a servant leader. The intent of this study is to clearly understand the relationship between servant leadership and incivility and to provide practical advice for the real estate industry in reducing workplace incivility and its direct and indirect toxic effects.

## Servant Leadership

Servant leadership is characteristically others-oriented. Simply put, a servant leader's focus is follower growth and development, as well as a genuine care for others outside the organization. Servant leaders see the growth and flourishing of an employee or associated individual as a worthwhile ambition in and of itself. Typically, this leader has a strong faith in employees' capabilities, a positive outlook on employees' future prospects, and demonstrates genuine care and concern for subordinates. Servant leaders lead by example, letting actions speak for themselves, which thus sets the tone for acceptable and affirmed behaviors.

In past research, servant leadership has been linked to virtues that include: prudence, temperance, justice, love, faith, hope, and courage. Our research confirmed this in finding that servant leadership was related to a virtuous climate within work groups based on those seven virtues. Under the influence of a servant leader, employees demonstrated foresight and balance in



decision making. Following the example of a servant leader, these employees demonstrated sincere concern for others, an optimistic approach to work challenges, and were equitable and fair in the treatment of others. Finally, courage was evident within the work group as members followed the model of their leaders in serving others and encouraging empowerment, even at the risk of being eclipsed in status as they promote the flourishing of others.

Within a real estate firm, servant leadership has the potential to not only have a direct positive impact on subordinates, but also an indirect effect on clients and those in secondary social circles.

### **Virtuous Work Environments & Incivility**

Virtuous climates are based on character and a shared concern for self and others. Virtue in the workplace is focused on promoting good and upstanding behavior that advances the betterment and flourishing of others without regard of recognition or reward. These virtues help shape a real estate agent's actions, projects, and processes that help promote virtuousness within a company. Employees learn by means of social information processing, which they then assimilate into their work environment. For this reason, servant leadership has the possibility of promoting civility and at the same time minimizing incivility.

Incivility is notably different from acts of misconduct, troubling behavior, or violence. Simply put, incivility is mistreatment characterized by rudeness, lack of courtesy and disregard for others; it is a violation of mutual respect. Low power groups such as women, children, minorities, etc. have a much higher likelihood of being the targets of incivility. Disrespect in the workplace damages trust and energy created in positive relationships and replaces it with fear that creates irritability, intolerance, and the absence of common courtesies. A lack of common courtesies also decreases communication, which can be detrimental to business units built on collaboration.

In addition, incivility commonly increases emotional exhaustion, psychological distress, withdrawal, an increase in turnover, and general counterproductive work practices. This can spill over to how followers, or in our study, employees treat other stakeholders of the organization such as customers or clients.

### **Managerial Implications**

If generally accepted rudeness in the workplace is not kept in check, it has the potential to generate widespread negative consequences. Incivility does not occur in isolation—it permeates through a work environment that overlooks mistreatment, including sexual harassment and bullying. Often, real estate agents are given the tools to manage incivility, but little is done to actually eliminate incivility in the workplace. We suggest a great first step in eliminating

incivility in the workplace is raising awareness and creating zero-tolerance policies that apply to the organization's entire workforce, regardless of position or title.

Creating a virtuous workplace climate begins with purposefully promoting positive behaviors and clearly communicating acceptable and unacceptable office behavior. Firm managers or team leaders should consider creating a code of ethics as well as an anonymous reporting system for violations of that code, holding each member of the organization responsible. Formal training on the effects of incivility as well as employee conflict resolution training also have the potential to reduce incidents. The success of the creation of a civil environment hinges on leadership. Servant leadership is shown to increase safety, justice, trust, and other-centered behaviors in the workplace, so it is prudent to train leaders at all levels on the principles of servant leadership, such as prioritizing follower well-being, high-quality relationships, and follower empowerment.

## **Conclusion**

Real estate firms should look at more than skillsets when hiring and promoting. Strong moral character and a desire to serve others goes a long way in creating a healthy and civil work environment. Leaders have the opportunity, and more importantly, the responsibility to create a positive work environment. Servant leaders have the unique advantage of not only being proven to reduce workplace incivility, but also to contribute to the creation of a civil climate and a more productive work environment.

## **Recommended Reading**

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Dr. Mitchell J. Neubert's (PhD – University of Iowa Tippie College of Business) research interests are focused on understanding how leadership, particularly servant leadership, and ethics affect the performance and well-being of people and organizations. He also is interested in how faith intersects with these research interests. He is the primary investigator on a National Science Foundation grant exploring the relationship of religion and entrepreneurship. He has published in several journals including *Personnel Psychology*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Leadership Quarterly*, *Christian Scholars Review*, *Human Relations*, and *Journal of Business Ethics*. He also is the author of two textbooks and teaches in Baylor's undergraduate and Executive MBA programs.

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Dr. Emily M. Hunter (PhD – University of Houston) teaches organizational behavior to MBA students and runs the National Undergraduate Negotiation Competition. Her research on servant leadership, workday breaks, and work-family conflict has appeared in academic journals such as *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of Management* and *Journal of Organizational Behavior* as well as featured in *The Washington Post*, *Fast Company*, and other media outlets. She is also co-author of the book "Organized Innovation: A Blueprint for Renewing America's Prosperity."

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# The Science Behind a Smile and a Social Media Share

*Daniel McDuff, PhD and Jonah Berger, PhD*

The benefits of earned media within the real estate industry are invaluable. Rather than paying for advertising, your client base—through word of mouth and social sharing—increases



brand/product awareness at essentially zero cost. Earned media, for this reason, specifically social sharing, has become an area of great interest within academic research exploring issues such as why some advertisements go viral while others fall flat and how real estate firms can design ads to increase sharing potential.

## About Our Study

Previous research points to impression management as the most important factor in why content gets shared. People care about how others view them, so they are more likely to share content that frames them in a good light. Other research points towards emotion as the link between increased sharing. Consumers turn towards others to regulate and make sense of their emotions.

Contrary to prior research, we hypothesized that specific emotional expressions have distinct effects on social sharing in the context of online video advertisements. Sharing is stimulated not only by the degree of emotion but other factors, including levels of stimulation and certainty. We confirmed this hypothesis with the use of a new data collection framework examining facial responses to hundreds of different video advertisements to test which emotional expressions are linked to sharing.

## Translating Emotion: Facial Expressions

Although manual methods of translating emotion through text exist, for instance, estimating positivity/negativity by simply tallying the number of positive and negative words used, this approach is less feasible with video. Although advances in technology have allowed recognition of images, it is still extremely difficult to infer emotional reactions that will occur from an image. If an ad features a baby, for example, the system will be able to recognize the ad contains a baby, but it does not have enough information on what emotions viewers will experience. Facial expression is therefore the best method for translating emotion.

The face undoubtedly plays a key function in emotional expression. Facial expressions work to outwardly express or signal emotions. When someone is happy, sad, or angry, their face is noticeably different. For this reason, facial analysis is a simple, easy, and inexpensive tool to

measure emotional reactions. Measuring emotions by simply asking respondents “how do you feel” often provides inaccurate responses because people do not have insight into what specific emotion they are feeling (distinguishing a negative emotion such as anxiety or anger can be difficult). Facial expressions can be consistently linked to emotions such as anger, fear, joy, surprise, pain, and deceit through the Facial Action Coding System (FACS).

Facial expressions are indicators of emotional experiences such as anger, fear, joy, surprise and pain. The Facial Action Coding System (FACS) provides a taxonomy for researchers to code expressions systematically.



Figure 1.<sup>1</sup>

Facial analysis then allows for an unobtrusive method of measuring behavior with certain actions typically associated with expressions of specific emotions within a defined context (such as watching TV ads) (see Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> This type of coding allows researchers to study variation in individual facial response rather than relying on aggregate measures—one advertisement as a whole being more positive than another. Individual variations in responses are then studied to understand if such variation is linked to sharing. At its best, facial analysis allows for scalability, repeatability, and observation in a viewer’s typical environment.

### Managerial Implications

Results confirmed facial expressions linked to positive emotions (smile) are proven to increase user sharing. Negative facial expressions (lip depressor associated with sadness), however, were linked to decreased sharing with the exception of nose wrinkles linked to disgust that increased sharing. While disgust and sadness are both negative emotions, they do not have the same effect on social sharing behavior. Content creators often avoid negative emotions all together. Our findings, however, reveal that not all negative emotions should be avoided, as some negative emotions actually boost sharing probability.

Facial analysis is useful in moment-to-moment analysis, rather than reviewing an advertisement generally as a whole. Facial analysis techniques allow advertisement creators to pinpoint specific moments within the advertisement that are working well and other parts of the advertisement that should be replaced. For example, if a particular character within an advertisement is decreasing

sharing potential, the character can be removed by shifting scenes instead of rewriting the entire advertisement.

It's important to note, some advertisements may invoke negative emotions on purpose; other advertisements may accidentally raise negative emotions, and not every viewer will respond to the advertisement in the same way. For instance, emotional expression varies significantly by culture. In some cultures, strong emotions are encouraged while in other cultures certain emotions may be deemed inappropriate. Exploring individual responses for this reason provides valuable insight.

Once content is created, facial analysis can also be useful in resource allocation. If analysis reveals that advertisement B has more sharing potential than advertisement A, real estate agencies can choose to increase resource investment in advertisement B, which expects a higher return on investment. Facial analysis can also help in determining which outlet best suits an advertisement—television versus social media—based on sharing potential and other downstream outcomes.

## Conclusion

Facial analysis assists in helping real estate social media managers boost sharing. If we understand why people share, we can more accurately design content that increases sharing potential. Up until this point, there was little research to show what impact negative emotions had on sharing of advertisements. From our research, real estate agencies can more easily pinpoint what emotions an advertisement should aim to evoke and what content is more likely to be shared. Earned media, in this case sharing on social media, is essentially a zero-cost marketing technique.

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## About the Authors

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Dr. Daniel McDuff (PhD – MIT Media Lab) is a principal researcher at Microsoft, where he is working on scalable artificial intelligence tools for understanding human behavior, health, and well-being. He completed his PhD at the MIT Media Lab, where his research helped spawn a new field of imaging-based physiological measurement. Previously, McDuff was director of research at Media Lab spinout Affectiva, where he led analysis of the largest facial expression dataset in the world. His work has received awards from Popular Science, SXSW, The Webby Awards, and ESOMAR and has been reported in The Times, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, BBC News, Scientific American, and Forbes.

### **Jonah Berger, PhD Professor of Marketing, Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania**

Dr. Jonah Berger (PhD –Stanford University) is an internationally bestselling author of multiple books including [\*Contagious: Why Things Catch On\*](#), [\*Invisible Influence\*](#), and [\*The Catalyst: How to Change Anyone's Mind\*](#). He has published dozens of articles in top academic journals, teaches Wharton's highest rated online course, and popular accounts of his work often appear in places like *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Harvard Business Review*. He is a popular speaker at major conferences and events and consults for a range of Fortune 500 companies and startups.

# What to Look for in Your Next Sales Hire

*Willy Bolander, PhD, Cinthia B. Saturnino, PhD, Alexis M. Allen, PhD, Bryan Hochstein, PhD, and Riley Dugan, PhD*

The sales profession is one of the fastest-growing occupations in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the importance of hiring the right salesperson for your organization is going to become even more crucial. Not only does a salesperson help to bring in additional revenue for your firm, but the cost of hiring new personnel can also be extremely high. The average estimated cost to hire a new salesperson is between \$54,000 and \$200,000.<sup>2</sup> Thus, as sales organizations look toward the future, managers need to get hiring decisions right the first time to alleviate unnecessary costs and propel their organization's success.



As a manager tasked with hiring your organization's next salesperson, your job is to filter through countless resumes to find the best candidate. But what qualifications do you look for? Further, what decision making heuristics (i.e., decision rules that are thought to communicate information about a number of candidate characteristics in a single metric) can be applied to hiring salespeople, and to what end?

Historically, the most popular heuristic used for sales hiring has been how much prior selling experience a candidate possesses. This can be demonstrated by a review of any job posting site where nearly every sales-related post includes a statement similar to “5 years of sales experience required.” More recently, however, another hiring heuristic has been growing in popularity: whether or not that candidate participated in formal collegiate sales education. Our research looks at the effects of previous sales experience and formal sales education on newly hired salespeople's performance trajectories over time, along with the impact of the manager's coaching behaviors. Our results provide insights into the benefits, as well as the drawbacks, of each hiring heuristic along with recommendations for how to adaptively coach new salespeople depending on which heuristic led to their hire.

## Hiring Heuristic 1: Prior Sales Experience

Organizations often regard prior sales experience as one of the most important factors when hiring a new salesperson. The hiring firm perceives that the salesperson with previous sales experience will minimize their firm's training investment while producing advantageous gains for the firm.<sup>3</sup> While prior sales experience is an important hiring heuristic, firms must be



cautious when hiring an individual solely based on sales experience. Salespeople with prior experience could be limited in their selling techniques based on their training. Training in corporate sales often involves on-the-job training<sup>4,5</sup> where a salesperson focuses on tactics specific to a given organization rather than a holistic selling process.<sup>6</sup> When addressing whether to hire a salesperson with prior sales experience, the hiring manager should weigh the initial benefit of decreased training costs with the possible repercussions of limited growth potential if the candidate's selling behaviors, as a result of habitual use, are rigid and difficult to adapt to a new industry or organization.

## **Hiring Heuristic 2: Formal Sales Education**

As another principal hiring heuristic for managers, formal collegiate sales education programs are gaining in popularity. These programs emphasize the importance of understanding and applying selling techniques regardless of product or industry. In comparison to prior sales experience, these programs are far more standardized, and place more emphasis on teaching the selling *process* rather than specific products or service knowledge. Individuals trained through formal sales educational programs are allowed to focus on building their techniques while not being faced with extraneous performance pressures, such as selling a home for their client. Furthermore, sales education programs provide their students with the ability to apply new information across various scenarios<sup>7</sup> without the threat of immediate performance consequences. When determining whether to hire an individual with a formal sales education, their education's benefits must be weighed against the increase in on-the-job training that your organization will need to provide.

## **Impact of Hiring Heuristics on Performance Over Time**

Our research assessed the initial performance levels and performance growth of newly hired salespeople according to their level of prior sales experiences and whether they received formal sales education. We found that one's level of prior sales experience enhances initial performance while inhibiting potential further growth. This finding reveals that while previous sales experience will help organizations by saving them time and money in the short run, there should be some concern with their ability to sustain long-term growth for themselves and the firm.

On the other hand, we found that sales education does not amplify initial performance but instead has a positive long-term effect on performance growth. An individual with formal sales education may be costly for your organization up front but will enhance your growth opportunities over time. Overall, there is no clear answer regarding whom to hire—the individual with prior experience or the individual with sales education. Still, firms can significantly benefit from analyzing the benefits and costs of each hiring heuristic. If a firm were to choose an individual with prior sales experience, it would likely see short-term gain coupled with limitations in the long run. If a firm were to select a recent graduate of a formal sales educational

program, it would likely have increased upfront costs and reap the initial investment benefits over time.

## How to Coach Them

In addition to assessing key hiring heuristics, organizations must also consider the effect of sales manager interactions on salesperson performance. Specifically, our research examines the extent to which sales managers serve as role models—a subtle, non-confrontational approach—or provide corrective feedback—a direct, confrontational approach—when trying to coach a new sales hire. Our research finds that managers should use corrective feedback with sales-educated new hires as their egos are not threatened by such direct coaching and role modeling with experienced salespeople as being too direct can damage their egos and actually reduce their performance growth further.

In real estate, sales managers must make favorable hiring decisions. With an increase in the number of sales positions, it will become increasingly difficult to determine who to hire. Our research shows that the hiring heuristics of prior sales experience and formal sales education have both short- and long-term benefits and costs for the organization. Therefore, as a sales manager, it is up to your ability to coach these new hires in a manner that mitigates the costs while aggregating the benefits.

## Recommended Reading

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# Applying Adaptive Selling Techniques: Exploring How

*Dr. Sascha Alavi, Dr. Johannes Habel, and Dr. Kim Linsenmayer*

Consider Alex, a real estate agent who recently entered a conversation with a potential client, Sarah. Sarah is a 32-year-old physician who is shy, goal-orientated, and has a calm communication style. Taking this client's behavior into consideration, to what extent should Alex adapt his sales behavior to these characteristics when interacting with Sarah, and how would Alex's adaptations influence the likelihood of a home sale?



## Defining Adaptive Selling

Formally defined as the “alteration of sales behaviors during a customer interaction or across interactions based on perceived information about the nature of the selling situation,” adaptive selling conceptualizes the adaptations Alex makes in response to Sarah's characteristics.<sup>1</sup> Previous research indicates that adaptive selling is a critical success factor in personal selling. Specifically, adaptive selling is associated with increased job satisfaction on behalf of the salesperson,<sup>2</sup> customer satisfaction with the product and salesperson's approach,<sup>3</sup> and salespeople's selling performance.<sup>2</sup> As such, it is clear that adaptive selling is essential to the success of salespeople. However, the existing body of literature is largely limited in practical application. It fails to capture which specific behaviors a salesperson changes in accordance with specific characteristics of the selling situation. Otherwise said, current research merely suggests that Alex would benefit from adjusting his behavior in response to Sarah's attributes, yet fails to explain what adjustments should be made. Our research sought to capitalize on this shortcoming and instigate a discussion that explores this question of *how*.

## Study One: Exploring the Facets of Adaptive Selling

In our first study, our team sought to explore the facets of adaptive selling. Specifically, we conducted interviews with ten experienced salespeople in various industries and asked the interviewees to evaluate their adaptive selling behavior using the established, widely utilized, and generic scales established by Spiro and Weitz.<sup>4</sup> Then, we coded the responses to address how salespeople practically implement adaptive selling into their sales endeavors. Analysis revealed two main categories of adaptive selling: salespeople's perceptions of customer attributes on which they base their behavior (bases of adaptation) and their behavioral changes based on these perceptions (adapted behaviors).

Ultimately, analysis of our qualitative research revealed ten specific bases of adaptation and adapted behaviors. The bases of adaptation that emerged include customers' needs, personality, social status, communication style, body language, and relationship length. The adapted sales behaviors that emerged include salesperson's product recommendation, argumentation, communication style, and body language. Moving forward, these ten specific facets of adaptive selling were used as the basis for our team's second, quantitative study.

## **Study Two: Linking the Facets of Adaptive Selling**

In our second study, our team sought to link these facets of adaptive selling to established survey scales. Specifically, we aimed to examine the extent to which the ten bases of adaptation and adapted behaviors explain the variance of salespeople's scores on traditional adaptive selling survey scales. This information is vital to practically understand salespeople's interpretation of adaptive selling when responding to the adaptive selling measurement items on the standardized survey scales established by Spiro and Weitz.<sup>4</sup> To execute this quantitative research, our team surveyed a sample of 289 salespeople working in various professional selling industries.

Our team measured adaptive selling by utilizing items from generic survey scales that are frequently employed in academic studies.<sup>4-6</sup> Further, we also utilized specific scales that captured salespeople's use of the bases of adaptation and adapted behaviors and measured these items by adapting generic items. For example, in addition to asking "I vary my sales style from customer to customer," we asked, "I vary my sales style from customer to customer based on his/her needs" (evaluating customers' needs, a specific basis of adaptation). This procedure was repeated for each of the ten specific facets of adaptive selling. This methodology added novel specificity and applicability to our research, beginning to answer the question of *how*, with hopes of producing practical managerial insight that can be used to help organizations attain an enduring, competitive advantage.

Overall, our analysis yielded two distinct categories of significant results: direct effects and total effects. First, our direct effects indicate that four bases of adaptation (customers' needs, personality, communication style, and body language) have positive effects on two adapted behaviors (salesperson's argumentation and communication style). Second, placed in the context of our initial hypothesis, we tested which bases of adaptation ultimately manifest in generic adaptive selling scores. Our results indicate that three bases of adaptation (customers' needs, personality, and body language) impact total effects on the generic adaptive selling scale. Ultimately, our analysis suggests that when evaluating generic adaptive selling, salespeople factor in their adaptation of their argumentation and communication style in response to customers' needs, personality, and body language. However, they do not factor in their adaptation of their product recommendation or body language in response to the customers' social status, communication style, or relationship length.

## Real Estate Implications

Prior research has shown that adaptive selling is essential to salespeople, including real estate agents. To quantify these adaptations, this existing body of research has largely utilized generic survey scales to capture the extent of these selling adaptations. However, the generic nature of these scales makes it difficult for salespeople and managers to practically translate findings into actionable sales advice. Otherwise stated, while research suggests adaptive selling is a core ingredient of sales success, the question of *how* salespeople should alter their behavior, in response to varying customer attributes, has remained unclear. One probable and significant implication of this shortcoming is that salespeople may become convinced of the effectiveness of fruitless adaptive selling approaches,<sup>7</sup> meaning, a salesperson may make repeated behavioral adaptations that appear to be successful in one customer interaction; and over time, the salesperson will likely develop the misconception that this fruitless adaptation drives selling success. In reality, however, the success may be due to other adaptations made simultaneously yet overlooked on behalf of the salesperson. Exposing such misconceptions may significantly advance managerial practice, and it is vital for real estate professionals to recognize and actively combat this fallacy.

Our research strongly indicates that salespeople use the adaptive behaviors of argumentation and communication style in response to the bases of adaptation including customers' needs,



personality, and body language when responding to generic adaptive selling scores. As such, seller training that capitalizes on advancing skills in recognizing these three bases of adaptation and developing appropriate responses regarding these two adaptive behaviors will likely contribute to enhanced sales success. Additionally, managers should consider investing in emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills training to increase the likelihood

that an organization's salespeople can successfully identify and respond to these facets of adaptive selling. These recommendations offer specific managerial insight that capitalizes on the genuine benefits of adaptive selling, likely contributing to greater sales success, organization-wide, and leading to the development of enduring, competitive advantage.

## Recommended Reading

Alavi, Sascha, Johannes Habel, and Kim Linsenmayer (2019), “What Does Adaptive Selling Mean to Salespeople? An Exploratory Analysis of Practitioners’ Responses to Generic Adaptive Selling Scales,” *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 39(3), 254-263.

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Dr. Sascha Alavi’s (Dr. rer. oec. – Ruhr-Universität Bochum) research focuses include business and management research in the area of marketing and sales, and more specifically, leadership, sustainability, and digitalization. His research has appeared in leading academic journals including the *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *Journal of Service Research*, *Journal of Marketing*, and *Journal of Retailing*, among others. Dr. Alavi has received the *Dissertation Award for Excellent Research in the Retail Sector*, the *IMU Research for Practice Award*, and several *Best Paper Awards*, among others. Dr. Alavi previously worked for the Sales Management Department at The University of Bochum (Ruhr-Universität Bochum).



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Dr. Johannes Habel's (Dr. rer. oec. – University of Bochum, Germany) research interests include the psychology of personal selling and sales management, as well as the digital transformation of sales. His research has appeared in leading academic journals including the *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, and *Journal of Service Research*, among others. Dr. Habel serves on the Editorial Review Board of the *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management* and *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*. He received the *2020 Marvin Jolson Award for Best Contribution to Selling and Sales Management Practice* and five teaching awards from 2016 to 2020. Prior to his time at the University of Houston, Dr. Habel taught at the Warwick Business School (United Kingdom) and at ESMT (Berlin, Germany). Prior to his academic career, he worked as a management consultant with Booz & Company and as a radio news anchor.

**Dr. Kim Linsenmayer**

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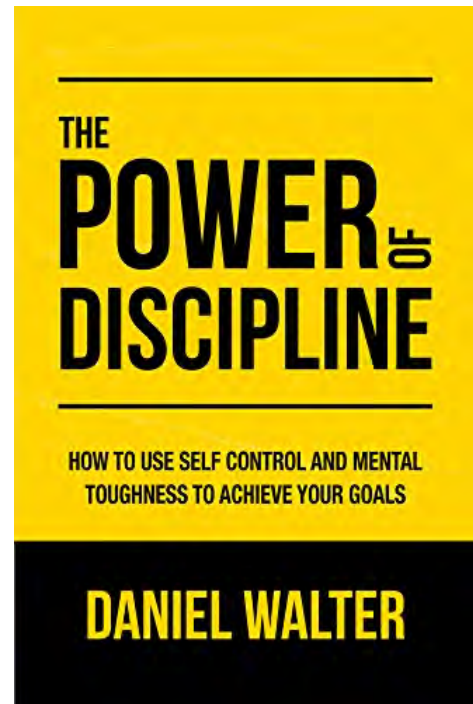
Dr. Kim Linsenmayer's (Dr. rer. oec. – Ruhr-Universität Bochum) research interests are centered around the theoretical and empirical investigation of success factors in sales management and personal sales. Her research has appeared in leading academic journals including the *Journal of Marketing* and *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*. Dr. Linsenmayer has received significant accolades and awards, including the *2020 Marvin Jolson Award for Best Contribution to Selling and Sales Management Practice*. Prior to her academic career, Dr. Linsenmayer served as a Trainer and Coach for Leadership Accelerators and a Communicator Change Processes and Digital Transformation specialist for The Berner Group.

## INSIDER: The Power of Discipline

Corrie A. H. Penraat, MBA

Did you know only about 10% of New Year’s resolutions are achieved? Research cites the biggest reason people fail is a lack of self-discipline. In Daniel Walter’s *The Power of Discipline: How to Use Self Control and Mental Toughness to Achieve Your Goals*, he shares the biological argument of self-discipline, its benefits, and how you can quickly begin increasing self-discipline at home and in the office.

Self-discipline is the key to personal fulfillment and accomplishing your goals. By strengthening this one skill, the ordinary can become extraordinary. Challenge yourself to take responsibility for where you are and where you hope to be in 5, 10, and 15 years both within the real estate industry and in your personal life. You don’t have to be the most talented or most intelligent agent—simply begin taking small steps each day forward toward building healthy habits and strengthening self-discipline.



### THINK POINT #1: The Science of Discipline

Most people are under the assumption that when you are born you are either gifted with self-discipline or you are not. Walter says that self-discipline, however, is a learned skill. When you choose to exercise willpower and delay gratification, neuroscientists can detect higher levels of brain activity in the prefrontal cortex. When you make healthy choices, this area of the brain is strengthened like a bicep as you lift weights. On the flip side, neural pathways are weakened when one gives in to impulsivity and immediate gratification. With this type of purposeful reprogramming, discipline is a skill you can develop if you are willing to put in the work.

One’s level of focus directly affects the ability to make use of self-discipline. The ability to focus is determined by “executive functions” including working memories, cognitive flexibility, and impulse control. Discipline, for this reason, will require goal setting and distraction filtering. Write down your goals in your real estate career for the next month, year, and five years. Begin removing distractions that pull you away from these goals. You will not be able to master self-discipline without first addressing focus.

Note that self-discipline, like other strenuous workouts, can eventually cause fatigue. If you are required to say no to the same tempting piece of cake 10 times in the same day, you may eventually falter. The priority of our brain is survival. When we continually face temptation, our

brain biologically begins to crave immediate gratification. The easiest way to beat this is by removing yourself from temptation and reducing stress. Discipline is about “doing what you know you’ve got to do even when you don’t feel like it.”

### **THINK POINT #2: Get Comfortable with Being Uncomfortable**

Self-discipline is not comfortable. Choose to embrace discomfort and resist the urge to take the path of least resistance. Each day, plan to step outside of your comfort zone so that the feeling becomes familiar. The more you confront fears and discomfort, the more quickly you will realize that there is no reason to be afraid. When you can distance yourself from these types of urges, they will lose their power to influence your behavior.

Understanding urge surges is a great first step in overcoming feelings of discomfort and fear. An urge is defined as, “physical and mental impulse to engage in habitual behavior.” Psychologist Alan Marlatt first compared urges to ocean waves; the urge swells up but eventually crashes like a wave. The average length of an urge if you fight it will only last 20-30 minutes. Urge surfing is simply the concept that you can ride an urge till the intensity passes. Urges teach us to resist temptation and ride out the feelings of discomfort.

Urges can only overtake you if you give into them or fight them. Distraction is not enough. Instead, realize where the urge is coming from. Like the urge music gives you to tap your foot, urges usually are felt in some part of the body. Walter stresses that once you have located the urge, focus your energy on observing the sensations you are feeling. Focus on your breath for two minutes. Visualize the urge as a wave swelling and falling as the urge intensifies and then eventually dies. Pay attention to how you are feeling now that the urge has passed. Discipline is all about conquering short-term pains for long-term gains. As you master the practice of discomfort, you can slowly begin to change habits.

### **THINK POINT #3: How to Build Self-Discipline**

Habits are daily activities you perform without even thinking. Just as brushing your teeth before bed requires little to no effort, Walter’s aim is to make the actions you need to achieve your real estate goals become just as natural. The only difference between successful and unsuccessful people are the habits they follow each day. Set a healthy routine and stick to it. Everything you do should aim toward improving your mental, physical, and spiritual wellbeing.

Your morning routine, in particular, is of great importance because it sets the tone for your entire day. Get out of bed when your alarm goes off, exercise, and eat healthy before heading to the office or meeting your first client for the day. Take note of your bedtime habits as well! Turn off your phone, avoid caffeine and nicotine, and get a minimum of eight hours of sleep each night.

Set goals, create small actionable steps, and celebrate milestones along the way. Soon you will begin building momentum. Stay organized as you tackle your goals. Organization will help you improve productivity, decrease stress, have higher levels of energy and enthusiasm, and encourage a positive self-image. Rome was not built in a day, just as your aspiration in real estate will not happen without a diligent daily pursuit.

## **Conclusion**

Walter concludes with a simple call to action saying, “your life is a reflection of the decisions you have made, and if you want a better future, it’s essential for you to start making better decisions.” Self-discipline is a lifestyle and a part of a person’s character. All of the talent, skill, or intellect in the world will not promise you a successful and fulfilling life. Self-discipline is an inevitable predictor of how far you make it in life. The choice is up to you, so how far will you go to master self-discipline and take your real estate career and personal life to the next level?

## **Recommended Reading**

Walter, Daniel (2020), *The Power of Discipline: How to Use Self Control and Mental Toughness to Achieve Your Goals*, Pristine Publishing: Coppel, Texas.

## **About the Author**

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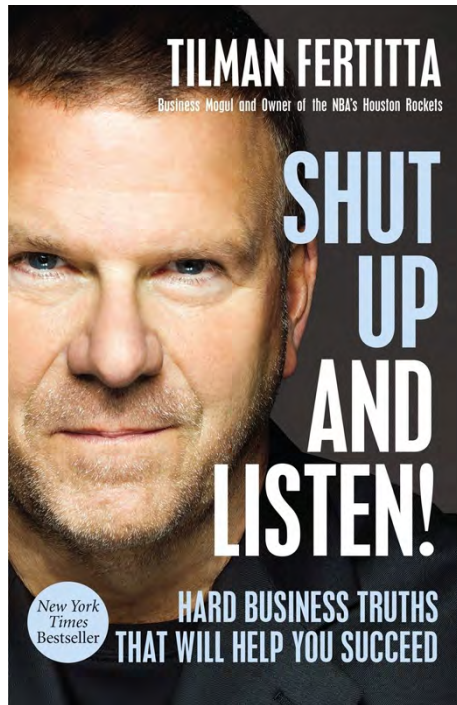
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Corrie Penraat earned her MBA in Data Analytics from Baylor University and a Bachelor of Science in International Business from Grove City College. Her past work experience includes roles for non-profits such as World Vision and Samaritan’s Purse. Corrie currently serves as an Associate Technical Specialist for The Walt Disney Company.

# INSIDER: Shut Up and Listen!

Kristen Koehler, MBA Candidate

How does one go from opening a single restaurant in Katy, Texas, to amassing a conglomerate of the most famous restaurants, casinos, hotels, and amusement parks in the nation? The answer lies



with his belief that you should never, *ever* stop worrying about your business. In his book, *Shut Up and Listen!*, Tilman Fertitta emphasizes that even when you think your business is performing at its best, there is always something lurking around the corner that could make your business obsolete.

As a business leader, Fertitta cautions readers to fear nothing but to *worry* about everything, because you never know what could change your business's success. As a successful business owner and host of *Billion Dollar Buyer* on CNBC, Fertitta has seen his fair share of businesses fail. More often than not, these businesses fail because they did not see what was coming to take their success. In other words, they didn't check their blind spots. Fertitta categorizes these blind spots into five sections and provides details regarding what they are and strategies to ensure that your company is prepared to eliminate them. Whether your

company is currently at the top of its game or recovering from a setback, Fertitta cautions his readers, in the nicest way possible, to shut up and listen to how you can help your business find success.

## BLIND SPOT #1: Hospitality Matters

Every successful business recognizes that hospitality matters. The first blind spot occurs because businesses fail to perceive hospitality as a priority. Instead, companies that are likely to fail place hospitality on the back burner and forget to put their customers first. Fertitta states that businesses can avoid this shortcoming by simply talking to their customers. When you talk to your customers, you understand their needs and what they want to get out of your product or service. You should make every customer feel as if they were your only customer. In business, all of your employees must follow the same belief that the customer always comes first. All it takes is one employee who doesn't show hospitality to ruin the customer's positive experience. No matter what business you're in, you should always put customers first and show them hospitality.

Fertitta offers a straightforward solution to integrate hospitality into your business: never say no to your customer. At every level of your business, your employees should understand the importance of saying yes to your customers. As a business leader, your company must recognize that without customers, your business success is limited. In addition to keeping your customers happy by never saying no, your company should also focus on catering to the largest number of people possible. Fertitta states that focusing on the masses, not the classes of customers, is another strategy that businesses should adopt to maximize the hospitality of their organization. Your product or service should have as much breadth as possible to attract the largest target audience possible. Hospitality can bring your business great success, or it can cause you to alienate your customers and ultimately reduce your growth opportunities. Taking care of your customers by talking to them, never saying no to them, and creating as many of "them" as possible will significantly increase your company's ability to grow.

### **BLIND SPOT #2: You'd Better Know Your Numbers**

Fertitta knows his company's numbers down to the decimal point. Why? Because according to Fertitta, knowing your numbers is by far the most important piece of advice he gives to any aspiring entrepreneur. When business leaders know the numbers of their business, it allows them to understand the entire business process. They know what is coming in, what is going out, and the interaction between them, which is crucial to a business's success.

Specifically, start-up businesses must focus on their working capital. Working capital is being able to fund their business's processes with assets that can quickly be turned into cash and liabilities that end in a twelve-month time frame. Many businesses begin by assuming that they will get paid by their customers on time when it is often a month-long process, if not longer. Therefore, businesses need to look toward other options to fund their short-term operations. This is where loans and lines of credit come into play. Although sometimes difficult to get approved, these are two excellent sources of readily available cash for businesses. Generating cash for your business is extremely important to keep your business going; yet there is one component of company costs that businesses commonly overlooked. Businesses forget to minimize their property lease costs. Property leases are known for long contracts and subleasing provisions, and often account for a large expense for businesses. When first signing a property lease, Fertitta suggests hiring a commercial real estate attorney to help negotiate the best possible package for your business. As an emerging entrepreneur, managing your company's working capital in the form of cash management, borrowing, and property leases can help your business succeed from the very beginning.

### **BLIND SPOT #3: The 95:5 Rule**

Most moderately successful businesses are good at doing 95% of what they do. Fertitta contends that it's the remaining 5% that truly determine whether the business will be highly successful or not. The problem is that most companies do not know what their 5% is. How does a business

find its 5%? Fertitta emphasizes that it all comes back to company culture. When you establish a culture that is always looking for the 5%, your employees will follow suit. More often than not, the 5% is located in small details that your employees can quickly fix before customers even notice them. Therefore, creating a company culture that focuses on the small details can differentiate between moderate and extreme business success.

As a business leader, it is your job to help your company be successful. Previously, business leaders were told to work on their weaknesses, but Fertitta suggests that instead you should focus on your strengths. Your strengths are what differentiate you from your competitors, and by maximizing your strengths, you can leverage them for the good of the business. How can you best build your strengths? Overall, analyze your company's 5% by creating a culture that focuses on details and helping you, as a business leader, continue to build on your strengths in a manner that promotes your company's success.

#### **BLIND SPOT #4: See the Opportunity, Seize the Opportunity**

Successful entrepreneurs take opportunities that others don't. It is imperative for entrepreneurs to seize opportunities as they arise, and it is also important to remember that not all businesses will see overnight success. Therefore, it will take time, capital, and patience for entrepreneurs to see the full benefits of the opportunity they seized.

Fertitta brings business leaders back to his key takeaway: businesses should worry about everything. Whether you are an entrepreneur or an executive at a Fortune 500 company, you have to remember that when things are going well for your company, one event could quickly flip your business's success in the opposite direction. In contrast, when your business is performing poorly, it can quickly turn towards the better again. As a business leader, you have to be prepared for both situations.

#### **BLIND SPOT #5: Live Your Leadership**

According to Fertitta, it's easy to be a leader when times are good. But true leaders emerge when times are bad. During the bad times, people need a leader more than ever, and if you can ease their fears and help your company grow through the hard times, not only will your employees be grateful, but they will also admire you.



Fertitta states that two qualities determine a good leader in his experience: the ability to listen and to teach others. Whether

listening to customers, employees, or other business leaders, those who are most successful take the time to listen to everyone. In addition to listening, influential leaders are also able to share their knowledge with their subordinates. When a leader encourages those around them to continuously choose to ask questions and pursue creativity, employees will innovate on your and the company's behalf.

## **Conclusion**

Tilman Fertitta offers one final piece of advice that coincides with his original thought that as a business, you should be worried about everything. Someone or something is coming for your business's success, and leaders have to change their plans in order to remain on top. All in all, businesses must analyze their blind spots and use Fertitta's advice to help their business become (or remain) successful for a long time to come.

## **Recommended Reading**

Fertitta, Tilman (2020), *Shut Up and Listen! Harvard Business Truths that Will Help You Succeed*, Harper Collins Leadership.

## **About the Author**

### **Kristen Koehler, MBA Candidate Baylor University**

Kristen Koehler is graduate student from El Paso, Texas. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in Medical Humanities with minors in Biology and Business Administration from Baylor University. Kristen is seeking an MBA with a concentration in Healthcare Administration and plans to pursue a career in the healthcare industry. She is currently completing her administrative residency with Carondelet Health Network in Tucson, Arizona.





## Keller Center Research Report

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