

# sales myths

# DEBUNKED

**BARRY TRAILER** /// Sales Mastery

## THE MYTH: PEOPLE BUY PEOPLE

**THE TRUTH:** This tip for selling comes from a 2020 TEDx talk: How to achieve anything in life by learning how to sell. Sounds promising. A variation on this myth is, “People buy from people they like.” While it’s fair to say buyers, people in general, would rather do business with people they like than people they don’t like, giving this too much credence has led sellers to try to ingratiate themselves with buyers, rather than engage them. Selling is not, and has not been, a popularity contest. If you doubt this for a moment, answer this question—when the CFO asks the head of Purchasing or the Project Lead why this \$500K purchase was made with this supplier, how many times will you hear, “Mainly, because I liked them better.” Yeah, no.  $\Delta$

Rana Kordahi, TEDxCQU, May 2020 [www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKedDUV8M00&t=6s&ab\\_channel=TEDxTalks](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKedDUV8M00&t=6s&ab_channel=TEDxTalks)

## THE MYTH: YOU ARE YOUR NUMBER

**THE TRUTH:** This should be labeled the “Big Lie” because it is both not helpful and not accurate. Traditional sales management takes the simplistic view, “Good number, good rep. Bad number, no doughnut.” This is out-of-date and has been for at least 30 years. Your number is a reflection of what you do and how well you do it. The “it” in this case is the work of selling. Yes, achieving your number is important. No one is saying it doesn’t matter and no one is saying companies shouldn’t be tracking your progress—and compensating you for it. But it is not YOU. Just like your car, home, cool glasses, sharp clothes are a part of your world, take them away and YOU are still here. Like them, your sales achievement reflects your talent, persistence, and sales success.  $\Delta$

## KEEP IN MIND

Your local university sales program may offer sales research to help you debunk your own myths. Refer to our 2022 listing to find a university program near you.

**JASON JORDAN** /// Management Consultant

## THE MYTH: YOU NEED 3X YOUR QUOTA IN THE PIPELINE

**THE TRUTH:** One of the most pervasive myths in sales is that a sales force needs to maintain a sales pipeline that’s at least three times (or 3X) the size of their annual quota. So if you’re annual quota is \$1 million, you should keep at least \$3 million in your pipeline ... Or so the story goes. In reality, this is only the case if you have a 33% win rate and a 365 day sales cycle. In that case, your \$3 million pipeline would indeed yield \$1 million exactly one time per year. But what if your sales cycle is only 6 months long? Then the same pipeline will yield \$2 million. Or what if your win rate is 50%? Then the same pipeline will yield \$1.5 million over the course of a year. The ideal size for an individual’s sales pipeline is determined by quota IN ADDITION to the win rate and cycle length. And it differs for each seller. Telling your entire sales team that they need 3X, or 4X, or any-X is oversimplified and does a disservice to individual sellers.  $\Delta$

## THE MYTH: SALES COACHING IS MOST VALUABLE FOR YOUR AVERAGE PERFORMERS

**THE TRUTH:** An interesting sales myth is that the biggest bang for the coaching buck comes from pointing it at average-performing salespeople. The argument goes that your top sellers don’t have as much upside, and your bottom sellers are either on the way in or on the way out. Therefore, spend your precious coaching time with the average sellers, who have demonstrated some competence and still have room to run. But level of performance is not the best filter for where to invest your time. In reality, your effort is best invested with sellers who want to be coached! Some sellers crave coaching and are eager to implement new strategies and tactics. Others reject coaching like it’s career-ending poison. No matter their level of achievement, coach those sellers who are responsive to it and will put it into practice. Otherwise, you’re wasting your time... and theirs.  $\Delta$

**LORI RICHARDSON** /// Women Sales Pros

## THE MYTH: SALES IS ABOUT BEING COMPETITIVE, RUTHLESS, AND MONEY FOCUSED

**THE TRUTH:** Stories about a certain persona for salespeople persist. The characteristics include competitiveness, ruthlessness, being money focused, aggressive and non-caring about buyer success. As a woman in the field of professional selling for over 35 years, I can vouch for the fact that I’ve heard this myth over the years, and it persists. It has changed to be more narrowed as company leadership everywhere steps up and widens their outreach to include more women and those who are not the typical sales hire. Smart company leaders have embraced a sales style that is focused on collaboration, empathy, strong listening skills and an ego-less approach. It happens that women excel in these areas. The leadership who resists in adapting to a world where diverse buyers want inclusive selling teams will be left in the dust. Where does your company, its’ leadership, and your sales team fall in this wave of change?  $\Delta$

## THE MYTH: WOMEN AREN’T INTERESTED IN SALES CAREERS—OTHERWISE THERE WOULD BE MORE WOMEN IN SALES

**THE TRUTH:** If women really liked sales, they’d do it—right? Wrong. Instead, the idea of a sales career is more of a “well kept secret” because many women coming out of colleges and universities where there are no sales programs have no idea about careers in professional selling. For several years, I assumed it was simply that sales had a bad name, thanks to movies like “Boiler Room” and “The Wolf of Wall Street.” It turns out that when 255 women in college and recent female grads were polled, 76% said they’d never heard of a sales career. Therefore, talk up your open sales roles. Show how you welcome diversity and inclusion to your sales team. Share the values of your company, and how selling is like serving and teaching. Help get the word out that sales is an admirable profession.  $\Delta$

**DR. JANE Z. SOJKA** /// University of Cincinnati

## THE MYTH: CONFIDENCE IS SYNONYMOUS WITH COMPETENCE

**THE TRUTH:** When I first started teaching college students how to sell, I realized that my most competent sales students, who happened to be women, were also the least confident. Replicating previous investigations, my colleagues and I found an inverse relationship between competence and confidence and found that gender played a role. Women tended to be competent in their sales abilities but lacked confidence. Men tended to be confident in their abilities to sell, but their sales competence needed work. Implications for the classroom mean that I’m teaching two separate skill sets. Implications in the workplace mean that recruiters should not assume that a confident college graduate has the skill set necessary to be successful nor should companies overlook graduates who lack confidence. Both confidence and competence are separate and teachable skills and both are required for sales success.  $\Delta$

## THE MYTH: ‘FAKE IT ‘TILL YOU MAKE IT’ MOTIVATES WOMEN

**THE TRUTH:** It’s time to take a look at the ‘fake it ‘till you make it’ words of advice. I hear those words given to my former students—many of whom are women—who are now engaged in the beginning stages of their sales careers. While faking it might work for men, faking it does not work for women. Women want to have confidence, knowing they can perform the task that is required. In fact, asking women to fake their abilities comes remarkably close to the imposter syndrome where individuals become fearful of being labeled as fakes. Women, and likely other out-groups, need confidence or belief in their abilities. Confidence is learned by practice. A wise sales manager can configure opportunities for entry level salespeople to gradually learn the skill set. Replace faking it with, paraphrasing Glennon Doyle, ‘you can do hard things’ which is emotionally and mentally healthier than pretending to be something you’re not.  $\Delta$

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**LEFF BONNEY, Ph.D.** /// Florida State University

## **THE MYTH: SALES MANAGERS ARE NEGLECTED IN TRAINING EFFORTS**

**THE TRUTH:** For years, the narrative was that sales managers are neglected in corporate training efforts. This might have been true 5-10 years ago, but research shows that sales managers do indeed receive training. A recent FSU research study showed 77% of sales managers said that they had received formal training in the last 24-months compared to 81% of sellers who received training in the same window of time. However, 56% of sales managers who had received training said that the training was NOT helpful for improving their performance compared to just 34% of sellers who said recent training was not helpful. Finally, 69% of managers said that “Coaching” was the topic of training. Perhaps the real issue going forward is not should sales managers receive training but what should we train managers on besides traditional coaching topics?  $\Delta$

## **THE MYTH: IT'S BETTER TO HIRE SOMEONE WITH EXPERIENCE IN YOUR INDUSTRY THAN IT IS TO HIRE A ROOKIE SALES REP**

**THE TRUTH:** In 2014, FSU published a study in the Journal of Marketing Education showing that students hired as sales reps out of a university sales program performed  $\approx$ 20% better than students who attended universities that did not have a sales program. This article has been frequently referenced as evidence that university sales education works. What is often overlooked in the study is comparison of students from university sales programs to people hired at the same time with industry experience. The results were interesting... new-hires with industry experience held a significant performance advantage over sales program new-hires for  $\approx$ 20 months. Then, the sales program new-hires overtook the industry new-hires in terms of performance. The morale of the story? New-hires with industry experience may produce a short-term advantage over sales program new-hires but the ceiling is much lower.  $\Delta$



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