



Increase Your Sales Team's Performance

Track Selling Versus Non-Selling Time

By Joseph DiMisa

Most sales reps will tell you they don't waste time. They put in their forty to fifty hours a week and work hard each and every day. Yet success doesn't equate with hours spent on the job; it's the activities you engage in that count.

Success is about working smart *versus* filling time. In sales, it is crucial to work smart each and every day. Many daily activities may not have a clear and immediate short-term payoff in terms of a sale. Yet sales representatives need to be incredibly efficient with their time and try to engage only in activities that either will stimulate a new sale or support one they've made.

A rep's sales clock registers two types of time: selling time and non-selling time, characterized by these activities:

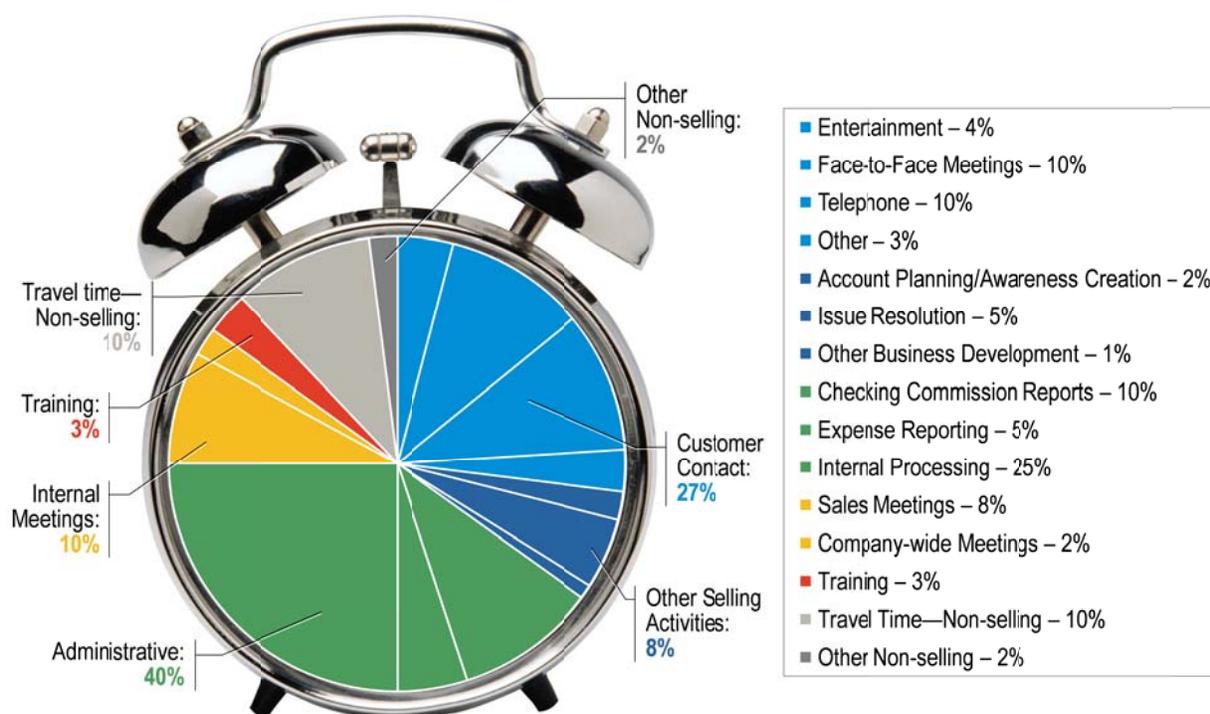
- **Selling time** is spent on direct customer contact—face-to-face meetings, entertainment, or telephone conversations—or general sales planning, including account planning, developing other business, or resolving customer issues.
- **Non-selling time** is spent on activities not directly related to customers or prospects. This includes administrative tasks, internal meetings, training, travel, or other non-selling functions that do not involve direct contact or direct support of a customer or prospect.

The goal is to get reps spending as much time as possible on direct selling activities, while avoiding or reducing the time spent on non-selling activities.

A Sibson Consulting productivity study shows that average-performing sales reps spend only about 35 percent of their time in direct selling, but devote a whopping 65 percent to non-selling activities. In contrast, high-performing reps allocate their time in the exact opposite way—65 percent selling and 35 percent in non-sales activities. Top reps don't wait for leads to fall into their lap; they make sales happen. They spend time creating awareness, which in turn will generate sales.

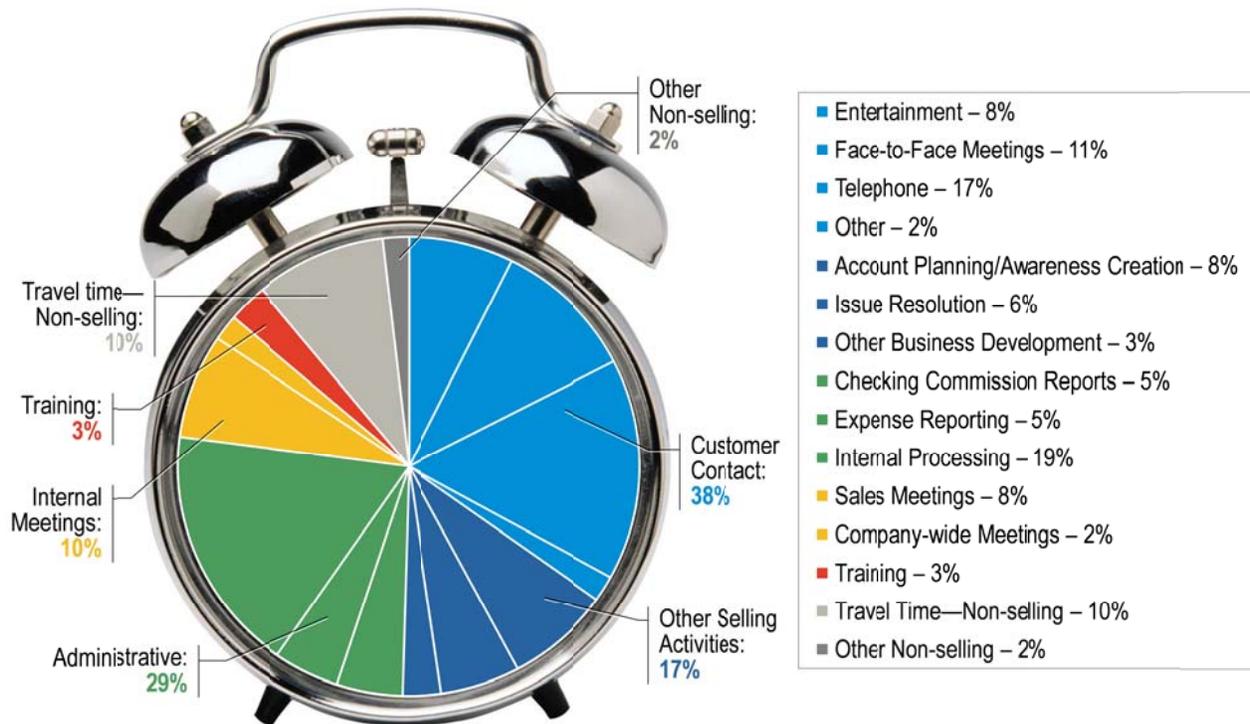
Figure 1 breaks down the “time clock” of an average sales performer. Such average performers spend only 27 percent of their time on customer contact while forfeiting 40 percent to administration. This is one of the primary reasons they are less productive than top sellers.

**FIGURE 1: AVERAGE PERFORMERS’ TIME CLOCK—
35% SELLING; 65% NON-SELLING**



In contrast, the time clock of a top performer (see Figure 2) shows an emphasis on direct customer contact. Top performers spend about as much formal meeting time with customers as average performers do, but devote double the time to entertainment and telephone contact. They also spend twice as much time on account planning and awareness activities that stimulate interest in their products or services. Most telling is the meager 20 percent given over to administration—less than half of their average counterparts. Given their high sales quotient, logic might suggest that their administrative demands would be higher. Not so—working efficiently and effectively is their priority.

**FIGURE 2: TOP PERFORMERS' TIME CLOCK—
65% SELLING; 35% NON-SELLING**



Find Ways to Create More Time

Non-selling activities “contaminate” a sales rep’s time. To join the top-performer ranks, reps must purge their day, week, and month of as many “contaminants” (non-selling-time activities) as possible, and focus instead on revenue-producing actions. If a task won’t help a rep meet, service, or sell a customer, that task should be replaced with activities that will.

The following behaviors and actions can free up time to focus on revenue production.

Adopt a Personal Planning Process

A personal plan can sharpen a rep’s focus on selling time. They should plan each day purposefully, so they know what they need to accomplish. Four steps can help reps stay on track and keep their goals in sight:

1. *Identify personal goals* (personal growth, earnings, and so on) that correlate with job success. Reps should be specific about what they personally want to accomplish in their job, establish time commitments (for example, I will invest X number of hours each week), identify specific objectives around the accounts (for instance, I want to generate X amount of revenue from ABC account), and then detail the activities that must be accomplished to make those goals happen. It’s important to establish objectives for customer retention, penetration of existing accounts, and/or new account acquisition.

2. *Understand the territory and ensure that personal goals track with sales quota and other sales accountabilities.* If reps' goals don't align with their job expectations, they need to realign their goals as appropriate to position themselves for success. For example, start with the results that must be accomplished. Break those down into daily goals. Then identify the specific activities required to meet these daily goals. If the activities won't yield the required results, realign them until they do. For example, if a rep wants to generate \$1,000 a day, every day of the week, make sure the target leads to the monthly quota. Or if the goal is to generate \$20,000 in commissions by the end of the operating period, determine how many daily sales must be generated. Then see if that goal aligns with the accounts and daily commitments.
3. *Commit time to each step in the sales process* for each week, month, and quarter. Allocate time to prospecting for new business and servicing existing customers. Reps should also determine stretch goals that would make them top earners.
4. *Specify how to achieve the goals.* Clarify the message, approach, and process to contact all potential customers. This is the step in which reps determine their personal sales strategy for achieving growth goals based on market opportunities.

Shorten Time Spent on Non-Sales Calls

How easy is it to waste time on a phone call? The key is to resist the urge to keep talking to anyone who is not a customer, a lead, or involved in sales support. Set time limits, so calls average less than five minutes. Then, limit the number of non-sales calls to a maximum of 18 a day. It's a good limit—18 five-minute calls take up an hour and a half of the workday. Ninety minutes is a reasonable amount of time to spend on non-sales calls. Lower-performing reps tend to spend an additional four minutes on each call and increase their number of calls to 25; consequently, they lose almost four hours to non-sales calls—half of their day, assuming they work eight hours—nearly 20 hours per week, or two weeks every month.

When internal, non-sales calls must be made, it's best to call at times when the party will be available and not distracted so issues can be resolved quickly. Predetermine the items to cover, and check them off during the call. This simple cheat sheet will outline all essential points, keep the call focused, and dissuade the other party from engaging in a lot of “yada, yada, yada.”

If a call doesn't require personal interaction, then send an email or text message. To prove how much time a rep can save, ask them to count the number of non-sales calls they make in a day, time those calls, and then determine how much of the time was actually time well spent. Then help reps develop methods for cutting their non-productive phone time.

Don't Waste Time in the Office

For direct sales reps that travel to customer sites, time in the office can be distracting. When in the office, encourage reps to not get caught up in meaningless chitchat. They should set a goal to spend as much time as possible with customers and prospects, not with coworkers.

Use Travel Time Wisely

The airplane, train, or car can be the best place to gain time. Depending on the nature of the sales role, travel time can take up a big percentage of the week. The productivity study cited earlier revealed that top reps spend about 15 percent of their time traveling. That equates to a little more than an hour a day, or six hours a week. Over the course of the year, it adds up to about 300 hours in all. Travel time actually can be substantially higher for reps that travel out of region or state (600 or more hours per year).

Imagine the productivity if reps resisted texting friends and family and used some of this time to do paperwork or expense reporting; return phone calls; or even prospect via Wi-Fi. They would gain valuable hours and have little interruption.

Leverage Colleagues and Co-workers

Many tasks (e.g., expense reports, prospecting, meeting follow-up, company and/or industry research) can be delegated to an AA, sales assistant, more junior sales reps, or other support roles. Encourage reps to relinquish some control, invest some time in training, and trust others to get the job done. In the meantime, they can focus on the selling activities that only they can do.

Reps need to think of delegation as an opportunity to help an AA or junior rep learn, grow, develop critical skills, and prepare for his or her next role.

Become a Mentor

Junior sellers can provide valuable support to more senior reps. Set up your organization so that more senior reps mentor junior sellers, teaching them the ropes, and also using the relationships to gain leverage. The best way to teach someone is to let him or her take on some of the job, such as prospecting new customers, creating contact lists and assisting with research and meeting preparation:

Be sure to share the recognition top sellers get with the folks who help them. Also, if a meeting goes well and others helped prepare the materials, give them feedback and acknowledge their contribution. Others will be more inclined to continue to help if they feel they are a part of the team's success. Everyone likes to be associated with a winner.

Properly Plan and Schedule to Maximize Contacts with Prospects

The more time reps can create for themselves, the more sales they can make. This may sound like a simple statement, but it is rather profound. While you really can't create time, you can remove items that are causing you to waste time, or organize your time.

Sales reps must adhere to the same principles. Top salespeople schedule their workweek according to their buyers' week to maximize the best use of their time. Effectively managing time in sales is not only about curtailing non-sales activities. Poorly timed business development

activities can be another time waster. Reps must figure out all the “whens,” including when to canvas a territory, when to pick up the phone, when to make sales presentations, and when to deliver the goods to the buyers.

A productive conversation requires a focused listener who is in the office and open to hearing what you have to say. Anecdotal evidence shows that prospective customers are more likely to make a purchase or take a sales call on Thursdays and Fridays. Earlier in the week, they are more likely to be traveling. On Friday, reps have a much higher percentage of finding buyers in the office, cleaning up matters from the week.

QUIZ: ARE YOUR REPS TIME WASTERS OR TIME INVESTORS?

Ask sales professionals to take the following quiz to find out whether they are wasting time or investing their time during their workweek. For each statement, note whether it is something done “Often,” done “Sometimes,” or done “Never.”

Question	Often	Sometimes	None
1. I like to socialize with my friends in the office.			
2. I give my friends my work e-mail address.			
3. I send non-work-related e-mails from my work e-mail address.			
4. I read the news and check stock quotes while at work.			
5. I go out of the office every day for lunch.			
6. I take lunch breaks that last more than one hour.			
7. I start getting ready to leave work before 5:00 P.M.			
8. It takes me a while to get started once I am at the office.			
9. I take many breaks during the day.			
10. I spend a lot of time on the phone that is not business related.			
11. I often schedule personal appointments or doctor appointments to fall during business hours.			
12. I attend many non-sales-related meetings during the day.			
13. I go to many training classes during the day.			
14. After a sales call, I head home rather than go back to the office.			
15. I try to combine a bit of sightseeing with all of my sales calls.			
16. I speak to my spouse more than twice a day while at work.			
17. I cut out early on Friday afternoons to play golf, run errands, or pick up the kids.			
18. I spend time at work thinking about all the personal things going on in my life.			
19. I spend time thinking about corporate politics or my standing in the company.			
20. I volunteer for non-sales-related functions that cut into my business development time.			

How Do You Measure Up?

For every:

- **Never:** give yourself 2 points
- **Sometimes:** give yourself 1 point
- **Often:** give yourself 0 points

40–31 points: Your ability to focus on selling activities and to block out items that can distract you from your mission is excellent. Keep the discipline, and continue to lead by example. More than likely, you consistently have strong results.

30–21 points: Your time management skills are good. However, you could be much more successful if you stopped doing the things that are draining your sales time and your earning power. Pick three items and, over the next week, commit to resisting them. Once you build your discipline in these areas, choose three more and work on those.

20 points or less: You must be unhappy in your job. Something either in your makeup or in the job is causing you to focus on the wrong things and is making you ineffective. You need to determine whether you want to stay in sales or start a new career. If you decide to stay put, then you need to rededicate yourself to selling.

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