

Don't overthink it: Trusting first impressions increases sales

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They say you never get a second chance to make a first impression. When it comes to selling, that might be a good thing, suggests a new study in the *Journal of Marketing*.

"Salespeople can make accurate intuitive judgments of a customer's needs, and those judgments can significantly increase sales," write authors Zachary R. Hall (Texas Christian University), Michael Ahearne (University of Houston), and Harish Sujan (Tulane University). "In fact, when a salesperson deliberately rethinks first impressions of a customer, he or she might lose a potential sale."

To reach those conclusions, the authors observed the interactions between [salespeople](#) and customers for four months at several locations of a national mattress store; those observations were supplemented with in-depth interviews with the sales associates and customers. The salespeople were paid a commission, so they were motivated to sell. The authors measured two things: the "intuitive" judgments and the "deliberative" judgments of the [sales force](#). The "intuition" of the sales force was determined by the accuracy with which they ranked, in order, each customer's top needs before interacting with him or her.

Salespeople who did not deliberately rethink their intuitive judgments performed consistently better than salespeople who deliberated and then incorrectly revised their intuitive judgments. For the most successful salesperson-customer interactions, salespeople benefited from being skillful at both intuitive and deliberative accuracy. In the current study,

when salespeople made both [judgments](#), their performance improved by more than 130%.

"The study showed that while skilled deliberation is useful, overthinking can reduce performance. Results also show that empathy improves intuitive accuracy. By encouraging salespeople to focus empathetically on a customer's posture and physique, as well as their tone of voice and concrete emotions, empathy training holds real promise for improving intuitive accuracy and overall sales," the authors conclude.

More information: Zachary R. Hall, Michael Ahearne, and Harish Sujan. "The Importance of Starting Right: The Influence of Accurate Intuition on Performance in Salesperson-Customer Interactions." Forthcoming in the *Journal of Marketing*.

Provided by American Marketing Association

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