



## Ambiverts make the best salespeople

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HARRY MILLS

### The problem

Sales decision makers mistakenly believe that extroverts make the best salespeople. New research shows ambiverts who are roughly equal part extrovert and introvert outsell extroverts by 23%.

### What to do about it

Hire more ambiverts. Ambiverts sell more than extroverts because they know how to walk the fine line between asserting and holding back.

### Why it matters

Extrovert dominated sales team talk too much and listen too little. The result: disenchanted buyers and lost sales.

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## There is no evidence that extroverts make the best sellers

One of the most common myths in sales is that extroverts make the finest salespeople. Most people assume that to successfully move customers you need to be an extrovert: sociable, assertive and enthusiastic. Studies show extroverts gravitate towards sales. Sales managers are so convinced extroverts sell more that they actively search for extroversion as a trait where they recruit people. Not surprisingly extroverts are more likely than introverts to be selected as sales managers.

The problem is writes Daniel Pink, the author of *To Sell is Human*, that there's almost no evidence that extroverts are the best sellers.

Adam Grant, an organisational psychologist and a professor at Wharton Business School wasn't convinced extroverts make the best sellers. So, Grant collected three months of sales records and put 340 salespeople through a batch of personality tests including one that measures where people sit on the introversion-extroversion scale.

## Ambiverts outsell extroverts

Grant's findings: when it came to closing sales, ambiverts, people who are roughly equal parts extrovert and introvert performed best. Over a three month period the ambiverts made 29% more in sales revenues than introverts and 23% more in revenues than extroverts.

Surprisingly, Grant found the two extreme personality types, extroverts and introverts, closed roughly the same percentage of sales.

Contrary to the widely held stereotype that the best salespeople are extroverts, being too extroverted can actually damage sales performance. Extroverts can be too pushy and drive people away.

A McKinsey study of European and American customers found "the most destructive behaviour of salespeople was an excess of assertiveness and zeal that led to contacting customers too frequently."

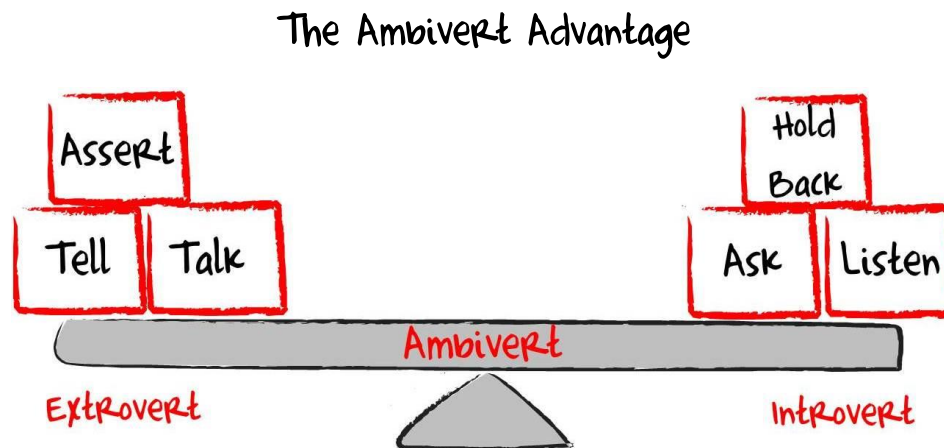
Daniel Pink, author of *To Sell is Human* says, "extroverts often stumble over themselves. They can talk too much and listen too little which dulls their understanding of others perspective."

## The ambivert advantage

Grant says "the ambivert advantage stems from the tendency to be assertive and enthusiastic to persuade and close, but at the same time listening carefully to customers and avoiding the appearance of being overconfident and excited."

In other words, ambiverts know how to walk the fine line between asserting and holding back.

The good news is most of the population are ambiverts. So there is a much larger pool of potential sales stars out there than most sales leaders believe with the right personality trait. According to Grant, “if most people are ambiverted rather than introverted or extroverted, the logical conclusion is that most people are well suited for selling.”



### What you need to do

These findings means we need to rethink the personality traits that define a successful salesperson and reconsider some of our traditional assumptions about hiring and training.

When hiring we should select for ambiversion. When interviewing or checking out referees we need to question for evidence that the candidate knows how to balance assertion and holding back.

Sales trainers need to point out the dark side of extroversion. Pink says “extroverts need to practice the skills of an introvert.” Most of all, extroverts need to be trained to talk less, ask more questions and listen harder.

If you have introverts in your sales force you should train them to role play an extrovert. An introverts diffidence and over tentativeness often shows up as passive body language. So get your introverts to consciously smile, sit forward when presenting and confidently punctuate their verbal points with more hand gestures.

Finally, the training departments should re-examine the mix of skills they stress in training. Ask: Do we place enough weight on questioning, listening and being less assertive.

**Harry Mills** is CEO of The Aha! Advantage and the author of 11 books on sales, marketing, persuasion and influence. This article is an adaption of a chapter from Harry's book *The Aha! Advantage: The New Science of Sales Success*.

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