Gartner for Sales Leaders

How to Motivate and Retain Your Sales Team

3 Ways to Focus Seller Energy on Growth
Your Sellers Are Not Okay … But They Could Be

Sellers are exhausted. Nearly 90% of them say they’re burned out, according to a recent Gartner Seller Motivation Survey of more than 900 B2B sellers, and more than half say they’re looking for a new job. Chief sales officers (CSOs) are aware of the issues and are trying to hold on to sellers who can thrive in today’s disruptive environment by emphasizing initiative, persistence and the ability to overcome setbacks as critical characteristics for their team members. These attributes define “seller drive,” which our research finds to be associated with higher quota attainment and lower burnout.

CSOs typically look to cultivate drive with compensation, recognition and organizational culture. But these approaches don’t seem to be working in today’s environment. In fact, 59% of sellers say their leadership “doesn’t understand what really motivates sellers like me.” So what does motivate sellers? Our research found that a lack of drive isn’t the problem. Instead, the bigger issue is drag. To help sellers, CSOs need to understand drag and how to address it.

89% of sellers feel burned out

54% are actively looking for a new job

59% think management doesn’t understand how to motivate

67% feel leadership is overly optimistic and disconnected from seller reality

Source: Gartner
Seller Drive vs. Seller Drag

Drive is motivation toward work, and it manifests as feeling engaged, ready to act, mentally alert and persistent in the face of obstacles. Sellers, and their leaders, want drive, because it’s associated with higher quota attainment and lower burnout. Given its benefits, there’s good news in the fact that 76% of sellers have high drive. Meaning, they are likely to agree with five statements about their level of engagement and persistence at work. That’s right — three out of four sellers already are driven. So what’s the problem?

The challenge is drag, or demotivation away from work. It manifests as the tendency to procrastinate, feel bored, avoid work, struggle with focus and go through the motions. Sellers experiencing drag achieve lower quota attainment, have higher burnout, are more likely to express intent to leave and have shorter expected tenures than those who don’t. And here’s the bad news — only 17% of sellers report low levels of drag.

76% of sellers report high drive

17% of sellers report low drag

Source: Gartner
Reducing Seller Drag Is Key

About a quarter of all sellers experience high drag, and more than half experience medium levels of drag. Improving their experience could have an outsized impact on seller performance, given that sellers experiencing low drag on average achieved quotas that were around 70% higher than sellers with high drag. Low-drag sellers were also less likely to be job hunting — with only 7% of them actively looking — compared to 70% of high-drag sellers.

**Sellers With Lower Drag Achieve More Quota**

Difference in Mean Quota Attained Based on Hypothetical Seller Quota

Illustrative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Drag</th>
<th>Low Drag</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean Quota Attainment for High Drag</td>
<td>$4M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypothetical Seller Quota: $5M USD

**Lower Drag Means Less Active Job Hunting**

Percentage of Sellers Actively Job Hunting by Level of Drag

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drag Level</th>
<th>Seller Quota Attainment</th>
<th>Active Job Hunting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Drag (n = 240)</td>
<td>$4M</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Drag (n = 512)</td>
<td>$5M</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Drag (n = 154)</td>
<td>$6.76M</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gartner

Source: 2022 Gartner Seller Motivation Survey

n = 906 Sellers
The Four Main Causes of Seller Drag

Seller drag comes from multiple sources, some of them consistent with the challenges employees face in any role. They include having a lack of development opportunities, feeling like a “cog in a machine,” a lack of clear manager feedback and a high burden of non-value-added administrative tasks. Each makes it less likely that a seller will meet their quota and more likely that they’ll be looking for new employment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Drag</th>
<th>Impact on Quota Attainment</th>
<th>Impact on Active Job Seeking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Development Opportunities</td>
<td>-35%</td>
<td>+51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling like a Cog in a Machine</td>
<td>-34%</td>
<td>+44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vague, Unactionable Manager Feedback</td>
<td>-27%</td>
<td>+31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Burden</td>
<td>-23%</td>
<td>+27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources of Drag Impact Performance and Attrition

Maximum Impact (via Drag) of Drivers on Quota Attainment and Likelihood of Active Job Seeking

- Likelihood of Attaining Quota
- Likelihood of Active Job Seeking

n = 687 Sellers; 747 Sellers
Source: 2022 Gartner Seller Motivation Survey
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Three Ways to Reduce Seller Drag

CSOs who adopt a laser focus on reducing drag can improve seller engagement and motivation — regardless of the business context. There are three effective ways to reduce drag. But before we dive into each of them, CSOs be warned: These three actions can effectively reduce drag and by doing so, improve seller motivation. But they only work for sellers who are at least moderately satisfied with their compensation. As it happens, 80% of sellers are satisfied, and only 24% think their compensation is not fair. But if sellers in your organization fall in that 24%, your first efforts should focus on compensation fairness. Once that is done, you can tackle drag in the following three ways:

- Diagnose and address sources of seller drag
- Create career growth opportunities
- Empower sellers
Diagnose Sources of Drag

Drag manifests in different ways and can have different causes depending on the organization, the individual seller and even individual roles. To successfully tackle it, CSOs should work to identify high-impact causes and take steps to address them.

Start by gathering information from sellers to understand their experiences. Leverage one-on-one interviews, anonymous surveys, group feedback sessions and other techniques. Analyze the information to surface key sources of drag. Keep in mind that sellers may highlight different challenges that stem from the same root cause. For example, one seller might say they don’t have time for personal development, and another might say they often have to work late to get paperwork in on time. Both could mean that sellers are handling too many accounts. Once you have identified high-impact sources of drag, you can solicit ideas from sellers on how to address them.

There likely will be multiple sources and multiple potential solutions. Prioritize the ideas to implement, and set clear goals and metrics so you will know if a tested idea has impact. Share the results with sellers, and revisit your list of sources and ideas to continuously remove barriers to success for your sellers.
Create Development Opportunities

The second strategy for reducing seller drag is to directly tackle the No. 1 cause of seller drag identified in our research — a lack of development opportunities.

Ensure that sellers have a clear idea about the potential career paths in your organization by:

• Providing a holistic view of available roles and paths to advancement in the organization. Creating a career lattice can help.

• Standardizing and publicizing competencies, experiences and benefits across roles so that sellers can pursue personal development that aligns with their career aspirations.

• Allowing sellers to test-drive new roles through rotational or development programs.
Empower Sellers

Empowering sellers counteracts that second-biggest source of drag — feeling like a cog in a machine — which was reported by more than half of sellers.

Seller empowerment involves encouraging sellers to make their own decisions about how to solve customer problems and improve sales processes. There are three key principles of empowerment:

- **Meaningful work.** Empowerment opportunities must be worthwhile and impactful. Meaning, they have a visible impact on the customer or on other sellers, and they address an unsolved need for the customer or the organization.

- **Guardrails.** Boundaries are in place to limit risks to the organization from seller innovations. This includes a process to define when and how sellers can innovate, equip sellers with the skills to innovate and establish a process for approving innovations.

- **Exportability.** When seller innovations are successful, the organization has a mechanism to export them to other areas. For example, by creating a product brief that defines the problem and the solution and allows cross-functional stakeholders to collaborate on creating a formal product.
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How Gartner Helps Sales Leaders Increase Seller Motivation

To keep sellers engaged and motivated through current and future disruptions, sales leaders must diagnose sources of drag within their organization, build out clear seller career paths and design opportunities that empower sellers. Gartner has everything you need to start turning insights into action.

Example: How Gartner supports you as a client:

Diagnose your current state

- Use the Seller Time Spend Assessment to evaluate how and where sellers are spending time across the sales process to pinpoint seller burden and where high-performers focus their efforts.
- Use the Frontline Sales Manager Diagnostic to identify the strengths and weaknesses of sales managers throughout your organization.
- Diagnose sources of drag in your organization using the Lever Sellers as Co-Investigators Case Study.

Develop your plan

- Join a live executive retreat to dig into the complete findings of this study, and work with other sales leaders through interactive exercises designed to equip you with the best practices for motivating your sellers.
- Schedule an inquiry with a Gartner expert to discuss seller motivation and craft an approach specific to your organization.
- Use the Sales Turnover Cost Calculator to quantify the cost of seller turnover to build a business case for increased investment in seller engagement.

Execute and drive change

- Establish opportunities for career advancement using the Seller Driven Career Progression FedEx Case Study.

Diagnostics and benchmarks

Expert inquiry

Live events

Case studies and best practices

Document reviews

Guides and toolkits

Expert research

Peer connections

Webinars and online learning events

Guides and toolkits

Expert research

Peer connections

Webinars and online learning events
Reduce Drag to Motivate Sellers

There is no one cause of drag and no one solution to addressing it. In fact, most sellers experiencing drag feel it coming from multiple sources. Recognizing that traditional ways of motivating sellers are missing the mark, and taking a holistic approach to addressing the sources of drag your sellers face, can help retain talent and keep them focused on delivering value to the customer.
Actionable, objective insight

Explore these additional complimentary resources for sales leaders:

**Webinar**
Increase Sellers’ Motivation, Hunger and Energy to Close More Deals
Learn how to motivate sellers and identify ways to reduce drag in your sales force.

**Template**
One-Page Sales Strategic Planning Template
Develop your sales strategic plan with this one-page template.

**Podcast**
The Gartner Sales Podcast
Experts highlight important implications and unexpected findings for senior sales leaders.

**Conference**
Gartner CSO & Sales Leader Conference
Get expert advice, actionable insight and tools to stay ahead of change.

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