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.
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

- **Hypothetical Seller Quota: $5M USD**
  - Mean Quota Attainment for High Drag: $4M
  - Mean Quota Attainment for Low Drag: $6.76M

**Lower Drag Means Less Active Job Hunting**

Percentage of Sellers Actively Job Hunting by Level of Drag

- **n = 906 Sellers**
  - Source: 2022 Gartner Seller Motivation Survey
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.

### Sources of Drag Impact Performance and Attrition

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Likelihood of Attaining Quota</th>
<th>Likelihood of 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>

n = 687 Sellers; 747 Sellers

Source: 2022 Gartner Seller Motivation Survey
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:

1. Diagnose and address sources of seller drag
2. Create career growth opportunities
3. 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.

Seller Career Development Lattice

Jared’s Career Path

Illustrative

Source: Gartner
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.

### Principles for Successful Seller Empowerment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meaningful Work</strong></td>
<td>Ensuring that empowerment opportunities for sellers are perceived as worthwhile and impactful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Guardrails</strong></td>
<td>Establishing boundaries that limit risks associated with seller innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exportability</strong></td>
<td>Leveraging the output of successful seller insights</td>
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</tbody>
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Source: Gartner
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.

**Watch Webinar**

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

**Download Template**

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

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