

# Does Happy at Home Mean Happy at Work? Life Satisfaction and Sales Performance

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## ABSTRACT

Individuals involved in sales, especially high pressured sales jobs such as car sales, provide a unique group of respondents with whom to explore research on the relationship between life satisfaction and sales performance. Previous research has shown that stressors negatively affect a salesperson's performance; however, an individual's overall life satisfaction and personal wellness may positively contribute to his or her sales performance. It was expected that sales people who have a positive state of multidimensional life/work satisfaction will be able to more adequately handle undue sales stress and, in turn, perform better at work. Each participant was given a survey that asked about the type of daily pressure he feels through work, his degree of life satisfaction, and his current lifestyle habits. In addition, the participants completed a self evaluation on sales productivity. The obtained results did not support the initial hypothesis, and it appears that a car salesperson's state of multidimensional life/work satisfaction does not have a significant impact on his or her performance at work. However, the significant positive correlations between life satisfaction and total wellness, along with total wellness and participants' ability to manage stress, indicate that sales people who develop a healthy 'wellness lifestyle' can deal with their stress more effectively and possess greater life satisfaction. Though these results failed to support the proposed hypothesis, dealerships and sales people will both be aided by understanding more about traits or methods that may contribute to greater life satisfaction and total wellness.

## INTRODUCTION

Sales people represent a significant proportion of employed individuals in the United States. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2006), automobile dealerships provide approximately 1.2 million jobs per year. Car salesmen account for 37 percent of automobile dealership employment (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006). Sales are also considered the major source of income for a majority of other industry-related companies (Cespedes, 1990).

In the U.S., work occupies a good portion of an individual's time and can influence a person's well-being (Warr, 2007). Stressful work can lead to diminished self-esteem, decreased job performance, withdrawal, and increased substance abuse (Schwab et al., 1986). Individuals involved in sales, especially high pressured sales jobs such as car sales, provide a unique group of respondents with whom to explore research on the relationship between work and life satisfaction. Using a sample of auto salespersons, this study explored the relationship of life and work satisfaction.

Work stressors in service-related professions can take many forms. For example, workers encounter many daily stressors, such as customer expectations, competition from local and global sources, rapidly changing technology, continuous market place change, increasing prevalence of Internet usage, and less differentiation in products and services (Jones et al., 2000; Jones et al., 2005). Research indicates that salespeople experience even higher levels of work stress, in particular such stressors as role overload, use of coercive tactics, and high-pressure managers.

Role overload is the extent to which persons are overtaxed cognitively as a result of being under time pressure and having too many commitments and responsibilities; this overload effects job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intent (Jones, Chonko, Rangarajan, & Roberts, 2007). Role overload is more expected in sales due to the high pressure nature of the job (Jones, Chonko, Rangarajan, & Roberts, 2007).

Salespeople have also been found to be pressured to perform coercive sales tactics (McFarland, 2004). In many job settings, employees are threatened to meet a deadline or quota, and for a few companies, salespeople may feel that the only way to sell something is by lying, pressuring, or coercing a customer into purchasing the product. Some managers condone or even pressure this sales tactic under the false delusion that it works. McFarland (2004) demonstrated that salespeople who are forced to use coercive sales tactics have increased levels of physical and

mental stress which have been associated with negative consequences. Some managers still believe that the benefits of their salespeople using coercive sales tactics outweigh the costs. However, it is essential to take into consideration the extra costs associated with increased stress which can lead to poorer performance, decreased health, absenteeism, lower satisfaction, and higher turnover rates (McFarland, 2004).

Yet another factor that has been shown to affect sales performance and can be a substantial stressor is the type of managerial style used at the employee's place of business. Managers are important to any employee under their supervision. Churchill et al. (2000) showed that not only do managers give direction and guidance to their workers, but they also wield influence on the salesperson's motivation, satisfaction and performance (as cited in Avlonitis & Panagopoulos, 2007). For example, an undercover reporter for Edmunds.com (Phillips, n.d.) posed as a used car salesman. He described his manager as a fear-inducing person, who pushed his employees to make money, "What the customer didn't realize was that the poor car salesman or woman was not really the enemy. The real enemy was the manager sitting in the sales tower cracking the whip. Suppose for a moment a customer told us they were "only looking," and we said, "Fine, take your time," and went back into the sales tower. Now we find ourselves looking up into the steely eyes of the sales manager." (Phillips, n.d.)

As shown in the example above, if a certain manager puts intense, negative, pressure on a sales employee, the employee could feel increased undue stress, which he or she may not be able to cope with depending upon his or her overall life wellness.

### *Life Satisfaction and Sales Performance*

Stressors negatively affect a sales person's performance; however, an individual's overall life satisfaction and personal wellness may positively contribute to their sales performance. Consequently, for employee well being and workplace productivity, it is important to ascertain factors associated with salespeople's ability to effectively deal with workplace stress. A 'wellness lifestyle' could help salespeople develop more effective coping strategies. In order to demonstrate a wellness lifestyle, the employee should take responsibility for his or her own health, become aware of the influence of environmental and nutritional factors on his or her personal health, become knowledgeable of stress management techniques, become physically fit, partake in healthy social relationships, and pursue a satisfying spiritual life (Porter, Kraft, & Claycomb, 2003).

As previously mentioned, the current study was designed to explore the impact of overall life satisfaction on sales performance. It was expected that sales people who had a positive state of multidimensional life/work satisfaction would be able to more adequately handle undue sales stress and, in turn, perform better at work.

## **METHODS**

### *Participants*

Thirty-seven car sales participants were solicited from three different branches of Zimbrick Car Dealerships in Madison, WI and four various dealerships in La Crosse, WI. Participants consisted of thirty-three males and four females. Most salespeople racially identified themselves as white (95%), with the exception of one Asian and one African American participant. Ages of participants ranged from twenty-six to fifty-three, and 24% of participants were single, 60% were married, and 16% were divorced.

### *Procedure*

Participants were given a survey that asked about their current lifestyle habits, the type of daily pressure they feel through work, and how they handle stress with a modification of the Wellness Evaluation of Lifestyle test by Myers, Sweeney, and Witmer (2000). For example, does the employee take responsibility for his or her own health, is he or she aware of the influence of environmental and nutritional factors on his or her personal health, is he or she knowledgeable of stress management techniques, is he or she physically fit, does he or she have healthy social relationships, and does he or she pursue a satisfying spiritual life?

Salespeople also received the short form of the Quality of Life Enjoyment and Satisfaction Questionnaire (Endicott, 1993) in order to measure participants' degree of enjoyment/satisfaction in various areas of daily functioning.

Finally, participants rated their own sales performance by the average number of units they sold and the degree to which the participants felt they reached managements' expectations.

## **RESULTS**

The descriptive statistics for participants' wellness, life satisfaction, and performance are given in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics for Total Wellness, Life Satisfaction, and Sales Performance

Descriptive Statistics			
Total Wellness Score	M =.736	SD=.081	N= 37
Life Satisfaction Score	M=.690	SD=.143	N=37
Overall Performance	M=.659	SD=.143	N=36

Consistent with previous research, Pearson’s correlation coefficient showed a significant positive correlation between the participants’ ability to manage stress and their ratings of total wellness,  $r(35)=.551$ ,  $p<.001$ , and overall life satisfaction,  $r(35)=.591$ ,  $p<.001$ . Results also revealed a significant correlation between life satisfaction and total wellness,  $r(35)=.541$ ,  $p<.001$ .

Results showed that there was no significant positive correlation between life satisfaction and overall sales performance,  $r(34)=.218$ ,  $p=.201$ . Thus, the data fail to support the proposed hypothesis.

However, an interesting trend in the data was found between life satisfaction and the salesperson’s perception of exceeding managements’ expectations,  $r(34)=.321$ ,  $p=.056$ . The correlation coefficients and p-values for total wellness, life satisfaction, average units sold, perception of exceeding managements’ expectations, overall performance, and ability to manage stress are given in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Correlation coefficients and p-values for total wellness, life satisfaction, average units sold, perception of exceeding managements’ expectations, overall performance, and ability to manage stress

		Total Wellness	Life Satisfaction	Average Units Sold	Exceeds Managements’ Expectations	Overall Performance	Ability to Manage Stress
Total Wellness	Pearson's Correlation	1	.541**	-.018	.294	.171	.551**
	Sig (2-tailed)		.001	.919	.081	.318	.001
Life Satisfaction	Pearson's Correlation	.541**	1	.064	.321	.218	.591**
	Sig (2-tailed)	.001		.713	.056	.201	.001
Average Units Sold	Pearson's Correlation	-.018	.064	1	.412*	.880**	-.135
	Sig (2-tailed)	.919	.713		.014	.001	.432
Exceeds Managements’ Expectations	Pearson's Correlation	.294	.321	.412*	1	.773**	.057
	Sig (2-tailed)	.081	.056	.014		.001	.74
Overall Performance	Pearson's Correlation	.171	.218	.880**	.773**	1	-.043
	Sig (2-tailed)	.318	.201	.001	.001		.803
Ability to Manage Stress	Pearson's Correlation	.551**	.591**	-.135	.057	-.043	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	.001	.001	.432	.74	.803	

\*  $p<.05$

\*\* $p<.001$

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between overall life satisfaction and sales performance for car sales people. The obtained results did not support the initial hypothesis, and it appears that a car salesperson’s state of multidimensional life/work satisfaction does not have a significant impact on his or her performance at work.

However, the significant positive correlations between life satisfaction and total wellness, along with total wellness and ability to manage stress, indicate that sales people who develop a healthy 'wellness lifestyle' can deal with their stress more efficiently, and possess greater life satisfaction. These results seem to support claims made by Porter, Kraft, and Claycomb (2003).

The unexpected and interesting trend in the data between life satisfaction and the salesperson's perception of exceeding managements' expectations suggests that regardless of the number of cars a salesperson sells, if he believes that he's exceeding his management's expectations, he'll show higher levels of life satisfaction. Additional research with a larger sample size should be done to further examine this trend.

This research study had several limitations that may have impacted the results. Most importantly, the sample size of only thirty-seven participants was very small, and the data lacks generalizability because the participants were mostly white males. Also, since the surveys were given at the participants' work settings, there may have been a time constraint for the salespeople. In addition, participants may have felt pressured in some way to answer dishonestly due to the close proximity of their managers. Lastly, since the salespeople were asked to evaluate their own performance, the data may have been skewed or inaccurate.

Further research should be done with a larger pool of participants away from the work setting. Obtaining incentives to offer car sales participants and administering surveys in different areas of the country may lead to more robust and generalizable results in future studies.

Though these results did not show a significant relationship between life satisfaction and sales performance, dealerships and sales people will both be aided by understanding more about traits or methods that may contribute to greater life satisfaction and total wellness.

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