

Are UK organisations doing enough to help sales people become **resilient**?



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What is resilience?



70% of organisations DO NOT actively encourage employees to take care of their health

A resilient salesperson has the vital ability to adapt and bounce back when things don't go as planned.

A resilient salesperson doesn't dwell on failures; they acknowledge the situation, learn from their mistakes, and then move forward with positive energy.

And furthermore, they do this consistently, year after year, without "burning out"

Resilience is closely linked to wellness. It's a combination of psychological and physical factors that drives high performance and high fun.

Research shows wellness programs are no longer a 'nice extra' but essential in order to retain sales people, and ensure they are well equipped to cope with the demands of a high pressure job.

Our survey reveals UK companies are doing badly at managing their sales teams' health and wellness, for example, not having a modern health policy. Also, they are not providing the necessary corporate culture to stimulate sales team resilience, probably hurting revenues in the process.

Our model of resilience



In designing the research, we created a model of sales person resilience based on known contributors to wellness. We investigated these via 12 simple questions in the survey.

4 options were possible for each question. The 4 options ranged from *proactivity by the organisation to improve wellness*, through to *the organisation reducing wellness/resilience*.

23 UK organisations took part in the research between February and March 2013

In this report, we examine these areas and how organisations are doing today in helping sales people build them.

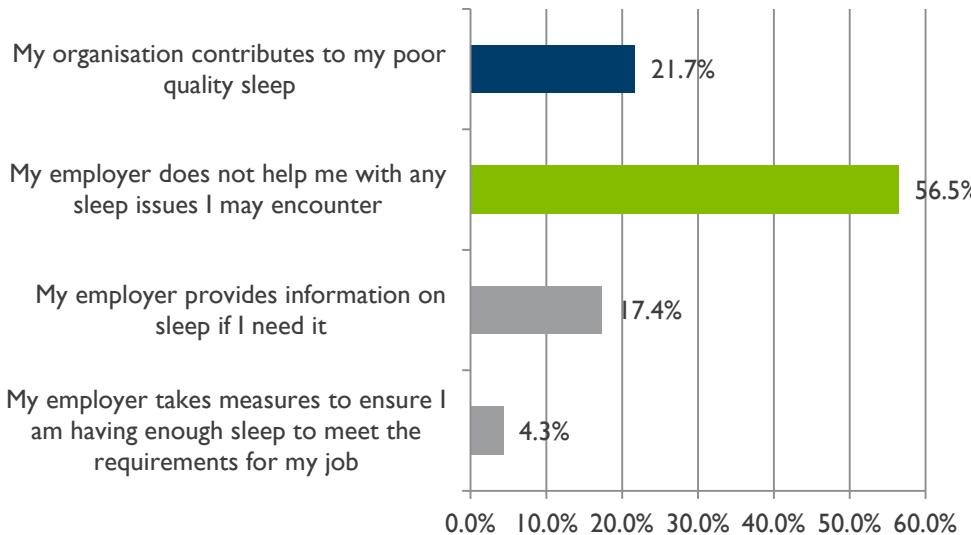
The sales job is unique: Either on the road or on the phone, it's easy for sales teams to be 'forgotten' by the HQ, or simply to be under continual pressure to perform.

In addition, the mobile 'always on' nature of sales makes wellness practices challenging to say the least. And how can sales teams eat healthily when they only have 5 minutes for lunch at the service station?

The Results: What are the areas that should be addressed?



Sleep management: A top priority



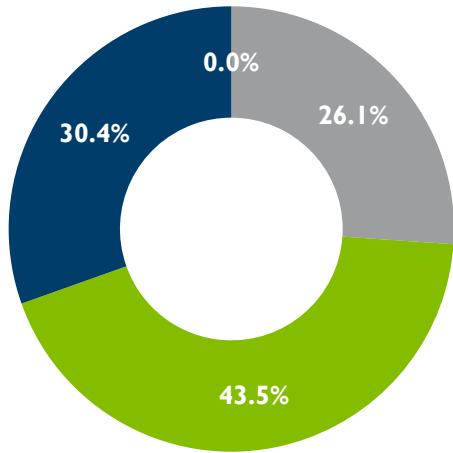
This is a familiar sign we see on UK motorways. Territory based sales people typically spend an average of 20 days per year physically driving. How many of these people are risking their lives and those of others by driving tired? Are employers doing enough to ensure their sales people are safe on the road? Our survey revealed **less than 5% of employees said their organisation takes measures to ensure they are getting enough sleep** to meet the requirements of the job!!

This is a serious safety issue: Driver fatigue accounts for up to **20%** of serious road accidents on UK motorways and monotonous roads. Sleepiness reduces reaction time, concentration and quality of decision making (1)

78% of people said their organisation provided no help or actively contributed to their poor quality sleep. Sleep is a critical determinant of health, lack of it negatively affects behaviour and productivity (1). If you sleep <6 hours per night and have disturbed sleep, there is an increased risk of developing or dying from heart disease (48%) and a stroke (15%)(2).

It is imperative all organisations have a policy on driving safely

Stress management needs to be improved



- My employer has developed a programme to help to manage stress
- My employer encourages me to seek my own stress management techniques
- My employer does not get involved in stress management awareness
- My organisation actively contributes to my stress levels

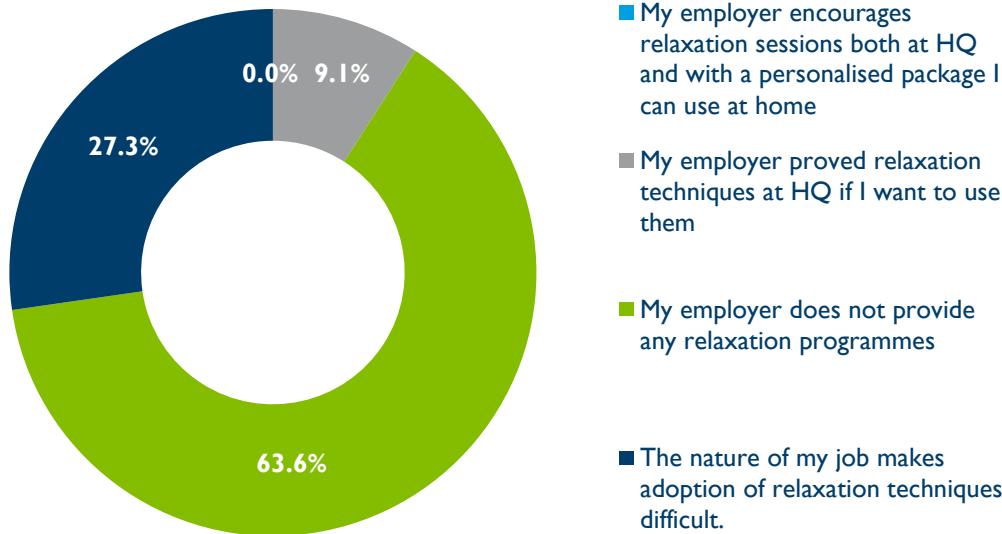


The largest cause of long term illness in the UK is stress (3). Stress is probably the most important psychosocial risk in organisations now (4) **our survey reveals 30% of sales people stated their organisation actively contributes to their stress levels.** Although stress is not an illness in itself it can cause serious health issues if it is not addressed (5)

A recent BHF study revealed people who have highly demanding jobs and little freedom to make decisions are 23% more likely to have a heart attack compared with those without work stress. (6)

Organisations need to be aware of their responsibilities towards preventing employee stress: Help can be provided in the form of social support, establishing realistic goals, cohesive teams, participative management and sharing rewards (4). Effective line manager coaching is also vital, as is practising de-stressing routines “off line”.

Relaxation, a core resilience skill, is lacking



Our survey revealed 0% of organisations encouraged relaxation at HQ and provide a personalised package for use at home.

27% said the nature of my job makes adoption of relaxation techniques difficult. Why is this? It could be time or money or a consequence of our western culture. Many Japanese companies start the day with relaxation techniques, such as, Thai Chi, Qigong or yoga. Not only is this believed to increase morale and group unity but also raises energy levels and promotes good health. This is something western organisations could advocate, as sales people need to be encouraged to participate in relaxation programs if they are expected to perform well in such high pressurised roles.

Advice: Proactively manage relaxation

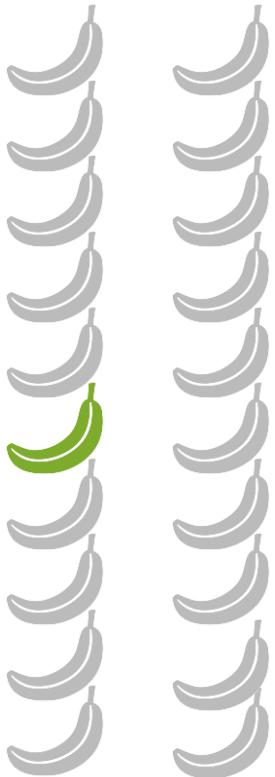


What do flossing teeth and relaxation have in common? Teeth are flossed to eliminate bacteria, which can be associated with heart disease if left to build up. Likewise if stress is not dealt with on a regular basis then it just builds up. We attempt to deflect it with TV, work, keeping busy, alcohol etc. But it is still there affecting the clarity of our minds, and we tend to ignore it until we become ill.

Thai chi and other mindfulness / meditation methods help balance modern life and internal awareness. Like the flossing, we ignore our gum health until we visit the dentist and have to have work done. Tackling our stress head on with Thai chi or meditation helps us to become conscious of our state of being and will reduce our stress. Meditative type exercises produce more T lymphocytes which means a healthier immune system to help us to fight infection. It also reduces the amount of cortisol produced by our adrenal glands; cortisol production is increased during stress and if prolonged can have significant physiological changes.

While it could be impractical for sales people to start meditating when they are stuck in a traffic jam, practising mindfulness on a regular basis can help to prevent stress. Mindfulness, once practised and mastered can be used anywhere, even during a stressful sales meeting. It can also help to alleviate sleep problems. This is what we term “strong metacognitive skills” – the ability to direct our minds in the most productive way according to the task at hand.

Nutrition should be positively nudged by employers



Less than 5% of organisations make it easy for their sales people to eat healthily

The UK government program “CHANGE FOR LIFE” recommends we eat 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day (7). **Less than 5% of organisations make it easy for their sales people to eat healthily and over 65% of organisations did not have a policy on healthy eating.**

Unfortunately our culture of fast food does no favours for the busy salesperson who is out on the road at lunchtime. He/she stops at the local garage and what is the choice for lunch?

A pasty or a sandwich accompanied by a bag of crisps and a chocolate bar. Is this a suitable lunch to keep this salesperson awake and on top form for his/her important afternoon client meeting?

Heavy lunchtime meals result in an afternoon slump, hardly what is needed for that important meeting. Instead a grazing approach, which includes fruit, vegetables nuts and seeds is more beneficial, not only for general health but also to prevent dips in energy levels.

To ensure the salesperson is at his/her peak performance for a sales meeting, stimulants need to be kept to a minimum, these include, caffeine, sugar, refined foods and alcohol. This will help to improve memory and mental performance, including concentration.

Organisations can help to nudge their employees to eat more healthily by increasing awareness and having a policy, even if it is to ensure everyone has a healthy lunch at headquarters when the monthly sales meeting takes place. We are all familiar with the words eat less saturated fat, less salt, less sugary foods...and we all know they contribute to an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes and some cancers. But we still continue with the same old habits. If organisations do not lead the way then how are their sales people ever going to reach their full potential and develop long term resilience?

Remember! Optimal nutrition = improved mental clarity, mood, concentration, protection from disease, increased immunity, improved sleep and expanded life span (8)

The Results: Where are we getting it right?



1

There is some good news...well done UK plc!

32%

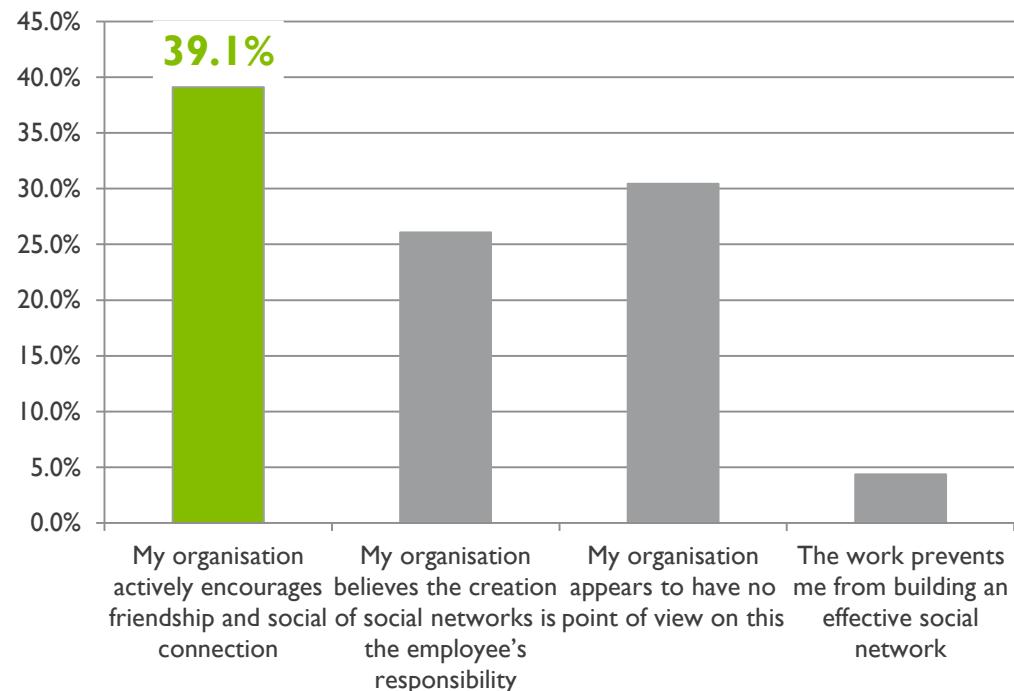
68%

43%

of management encouraged their employees to develop a sense of purpose

68% Of organisations help to adapt employees thinking style to meet problems and obstacles

39% encourage Social connection



Not bad and room for improvement...

17% of organisations provide help to stay physically active however over 70% provide no help at all



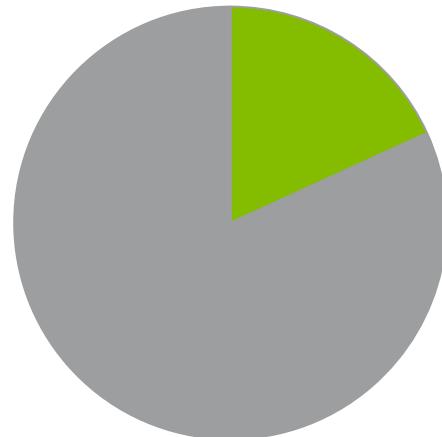
28% of organisations provide health checks for their employees



50% of Organisations are not helping employees to think positively



18% of organisations provide time management training with follow up to ensure their employees' work load is well organised



Conclusion: If people are a business's most important asset, start building resilience today

As we have seen 70% of sales people stated their company does not actively encourage them to take care of their health. Creating employees who take personal health responsibility can be facilitated by their organisation.

Healthy people = healthy profits. More UK companies are recognising the importance of maintaining a healthy team which results in business benefits; greater staff engagement and productivity, reduced absenteeism and reduced staff turn over. (8)

Companies may argue they do not have the resources to provide such expensive programs and they need their people out there selling in these tough economic times.

However, well-run employee wellness programmes can have **a return of investment as high as 6 to 1, as presented in the Harvard Business Review (9)**

The average days off work per person is 4.5, this figure is decreasing, but presenteeism is on the increase, whereby workers go to work whilst ill, due to increased job insecurity. (10,11)

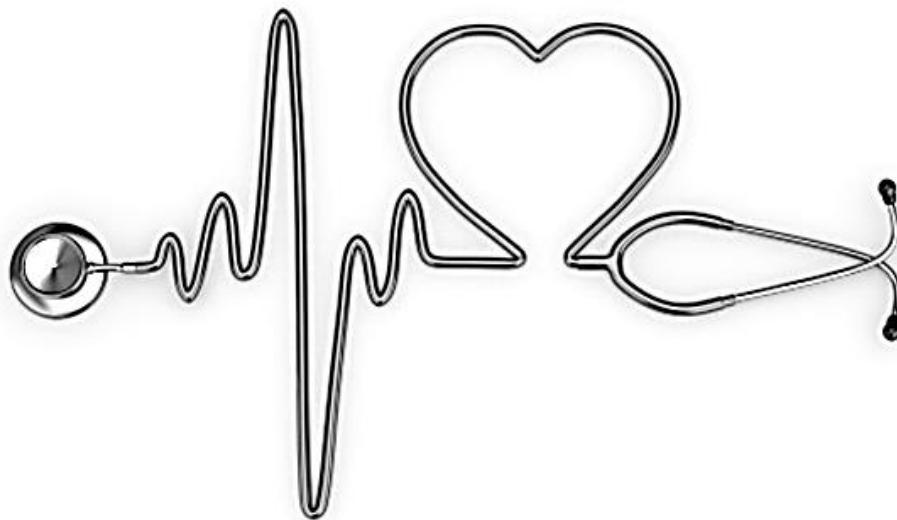
Companies also need to consider their ever increasing aging working population who need to remain healthy and safe. Adapting to this change will ensure they stay competitive in their industry. (12)

Conclusion: Act now please sales directors!

UK plc. cannot ignore the health of their sales team. Our survey from 23 different organisations reveals many inadequacies of the UK employer. It is currently a tough economic climate and every organisation needs to make a profit but surely not at the expense of their employees. Every organisation no matter how tight their budget can take small steps to contribute to the resilience, and by implication, health of their sales people.

Why don't you make it your aim to get the 'Best Place to Work' award for 2013 or 2014, which gives awards to not only the large organisations but also the medium and small.

The winner for 2012 was Admiral. To find out more visit <http://www.admiralgroup.co.uk/culture/awards.php>



Practical advice for organisations



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Dimension		How to use in a sales team	Tools / resources
Driving safely		Develop a policy e.g. do not drive tired, book into a hotel and the company will pay.	www.rospa.com
Stress		Encourage the practice of relaxation – attend a Thai Chi class or do regular mindfulness exercises at home instead of watching the TV. Learning deep breathing can be helpful in stressful situations and can be incorporated as part of a sales conference	Download app <i>MoodKit</i> to start managing and enhancing your emotions
Nutrition		Consider providing employees with healthy snack boxes for the days out on the road. These are available via mail order. Ensure corporate lunches consist of healthy options.	www.graze.com Download app <i>Livestrong</i> to aid weight loss
Exercise		Incorporate fun exercise sessions into monthly sales meetings. Provide employees with a membership to their local health club.	Download apps e.g. <i>fitbit</i> , <i>Addidas miCoach</i> , <i>Beeminder</i> to encourage progress

Dimension		How to use in a sales team	Tools
Sleep		Educate sales people to get ready for the next day so they can completely switch off. Avoid alcohol and caffeine six hours before bedtime. Take regular exercise during the day but not too close to bedtime	Download the app <i>Sleep On It</i> record sleep patterns
Positive thinking		Promote the adoption of the 'cup is half full' approach rather than 'half empty'. Sales managers should be on the look out for signs of "defeatist" thinking and coach a strong positive attitude	Download app <i>MoodKit</i> to improve your mood
Health		Organisations should develop a health policy for all of the sales team, e.g. make annual health checks compulsory.	Download app <i>Wellkom</i> – a general overall health monitor
Time management		Ensure all sales people attend a time management training session. Give sales people targets and goals that are realistic and achievable.	Use electronic calendar and reminders. Download <i>Evernote</i> , <i>any.Do</i> apps

About the researcher / references



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Helen Wilcox is a registered nurse who has deep experience in health promotion, critical care and clinical research. She has worked in both the NHS and several pharmaceutical organisations, Pfizer, Schwarz Pharma & Innovex. She is currently working on a programme to help sales people apply resilience principles in the field.

Research Led Sales Excellence

Selling Interactions designs and delivers sales development programmes for international organisations using its “research led sales excellence” approach.

This involves heavy investment in R&D to scan best practice, research topical issues and develop pragmatic solutions to help enhance the work of sales organisations.

The sales roles involves juggling a lot of balls: Client meetings, telephone calls, proposal writing, travel and the ever present pressure of sales targets, hence the reason for developing programmes to help.

Traditional well being programmes are often not easily transferrable to sales people, and resilience better captures what is required of today's sales people.

For more information about what Selling Interactions can do to help your sales team develop resilience, contact:

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