

# Sales Management: How Relationship Preferences and Selling Styles Impact Sales Performance

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What does your company need most:

- More **new** business?
- Increased penetration of **existing** accounts?
- Some of **both**?

The talents required to do a great job of prospecting for new business (**hunting**) differ from the talents required to effectively manage relationships with existing accounts (**farming**). And, there can even be differences between farmers. Some are best suited to dealing (reactively) with customer requests, while others have the gumption required to (proactively) prospect for **incremental** business within existing customer accounts.

When we describe a salesperson as a "hunter", a "farmer", or an "account manager", what does the label mean in terms of salesperson responsibilities? To answer this question, it helps to recognize that the "hunter", a "farmer", and "account manager" labels describe:

- The type and depth of **relationships** a salesperson prefers to develop with customers, and
- The **selling style(s)** that seem to produce the best results for a specific sales position

Let's look more closely at several of the most common relationship preferences and selling styles.

## Relationship Preferences

We will begin by examining three relationship preferences:

**1. Hunter:** The Hunter role is focused on finding and securing **new business**. Once a new customer has been secured, the Hunter prefers to **hand off the customer to another salesperson** (a Farmer/Account Manager) for ongoing service. The Hunter will then go pursue additional new business.

**2. Farmer/Account Manager:** The Farmer/Account Manager does not secure many new customers. This sales role is **focused on deepening and broadening existing customer relationships**. When Farmers do secure new customers, it is often the result of **referrals** from existing customers. In some sales team models, Farmers may hand off any referrals to Hunters to pursue.

**3. Hybrid:** The Hybrid salesperson can be successful in either a Hunter or Farmer role. They are effective at securing new business and deepening customer relationships. However, **it is very rare for both relationship preferences to be completely equal**. Most Hybrid salespeople prefer one role to the other.

Hybrid salespeople that prefer the Hunter role are likely to have **more churn in their account bases and higher rates of new account signups**. Hybrid salespeople that prefer the Farmer role will prospect effectively for a period of time. However, as soon as they have secured a sufficient number of accounts, they will **happily focus their full attention on Farming these accounts**.

## Selling Styles

There are four primary selling styles:

**1. Consultative:** Consultative salespeople have a talent for **asking questions, picking out important pieces of information from the answers, identifying possible needs, and relating the needs to potential solutions**. All of this is done "on the fly" while their prospects or customers are still talking. Consultative salespeople can be equally effective as Hunters, Farmers, or Hybrids.

**2. Relationship:** Relationship salespeople **build close, personal relationships** with their prospects and customers. They **win business by earning trust**. They can be effective Hunters, but usually prefer to be Farmers. Relationship salespeople are especially well suited to sales roles that require **calling on the same customers repetitively** (where the customers place multiple orders over time).

**3. Hard Closer:** Hard Closers are what most people think of when they describe someone as "a used car salesperson". These salespeople are **very aggressive** and don't readily take "no" for an answer. They are **much more interested in making sales than they are in building long-term relationships**. They are Hunters to the bone.

**4. Display:** Display salespeople usually **work in department stores or similar environments**. The goods they sell are on display, and **customers come to them**. Their primary responsibilities are answering customers' questions and processing orders. From this standpoint their role is more similar to Customer Service than it is to Hunter, Farmer, or Hybrid sales roles.

**These selling styles are not mutually exclusive.** It is entirely possible for an individual's selling style to include components from two or more of the above selling styles. Here are two examples:

**Example #1:** Some salespeople have **both relationship and consultative talents**. They excel at building relationships with prospects and customers AND asking insightful questions, picking out important pieces of information from the answers, matching prospect problems to specific products and services, etc.

**Example #2:** Some Consultative and Relationship salespeople have **selling styles that include some Hard Closer elements**. They are very aggressive at moving opportunities through the sales cycle and closing sales.

## Conclusion

Once you define what your company needs most from its salespeople, take a close look at your salespeople's relationship preferences and selling styles. How could each salesperson's capabilities be best applied to help your company achieve its sales goals? Should the sales team be "split" so that **different salespeople focus on different responsibilities**?

If you assign each salesperson responsibilities that fit with their relationship preferences and selling styles, you should **maximize the return** you receive on your sales team investment.