2023 Uniphore Virtual Selling Report

The impact of buyer engagement and sentiment on deal outcomes

uniphore · corporate visions
science backed. revenue forward.

Table of Contents
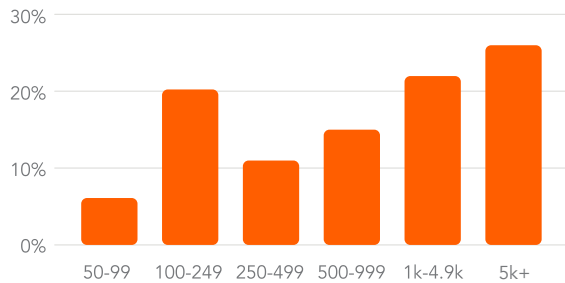
uniphore

corporate visions
science backed. revenue forward.

Study Methodology

529 B2B buyers

Approximately how many employees work at your company?

Bar chart showing: 50-99 ~6%, 100-249 ~20%, 250-499 ~11%, 500-999 ~15%, 1k-4.9k ~22%, 5k+ ~26%

Do you make purchasing decisions at work?

Yes, I hold a budget
25%

Yes, I influence purchasing decisions
36%

Yes, I have the final say
39%

117 B2B sellers

Approximately how many employees work at your company?

Bar chart showing: 50-99 ~7%, 100-249 ~21%, 250-499 ~12%, 500-999 ~16%, 1k-4.9k ~23%, 5k+ ~27%
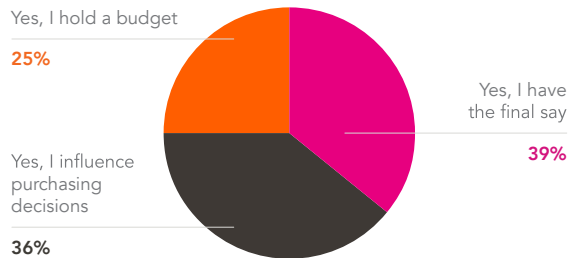
What is your level of job seniority?

Senior Leader
10%

Team leader
54%

Individual contributer
36%

100% of respondents work at companies headquartered in North America.
Responses were collected via online survey between March and April of 2023.
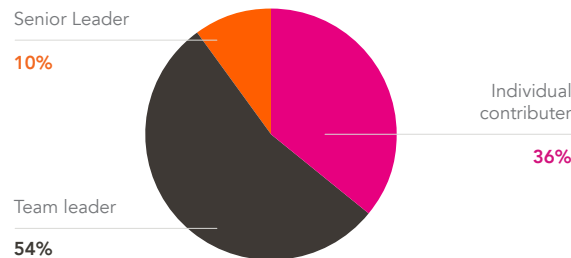
Uniphore conducted a survey of B2B buyers and sellers. The majority of respondents work at companies with **5,000+ employees**.

Participants included executives, managers, and individual contributors across diverse industries such as financial services, technology, healthcare professional services, and retail. This variety allowed us to compare and contrast responses.

We secured respondents through market research firm Researchscape International.

For more details on methodology, please see the Technical Appendix.

Executive Summary

Facilitating high buyer engagement and positive buyer sentiment throughout the sales process is essential: **Buyers with the highest levels of engagement and positive sentiment were most likely to say, "We purchased the product or service"** (pages 19 + 22).

But, the virtual selling environment creates unique challenges. There are four forces that make selling over video more difficult than selling in-person (pages 6-9), and those forces are taking a toll on account executives. 58% of sellers say, "I feel less confident when selling over video."

Sales orgs have adopted new tools in an attempt to solve sales challenges such as low productivity, poor performance, and high turnover of top talent. But despite this investment, 34% of sellers struggle to meet quarterly revenue expectations (page 14). Salesforce found that less than three out of 10 sellers expect their team to hit hit quota this year.[1]

As you'll see, *specific* **seller actions and behaviors impact engagement and sentiment levels** (pages 20-24). Top-performing sellers display both emotional intelligence and business acumen throughout the sales process.

Don't have time to read the full report? Skip ahead to read our recommendations for sellers (page 28). We hope you'll share these recommendations with your team—and that the insights within this report help you on your journey to overcome *your* sales challenges and win more deals in a virtual selling environment.
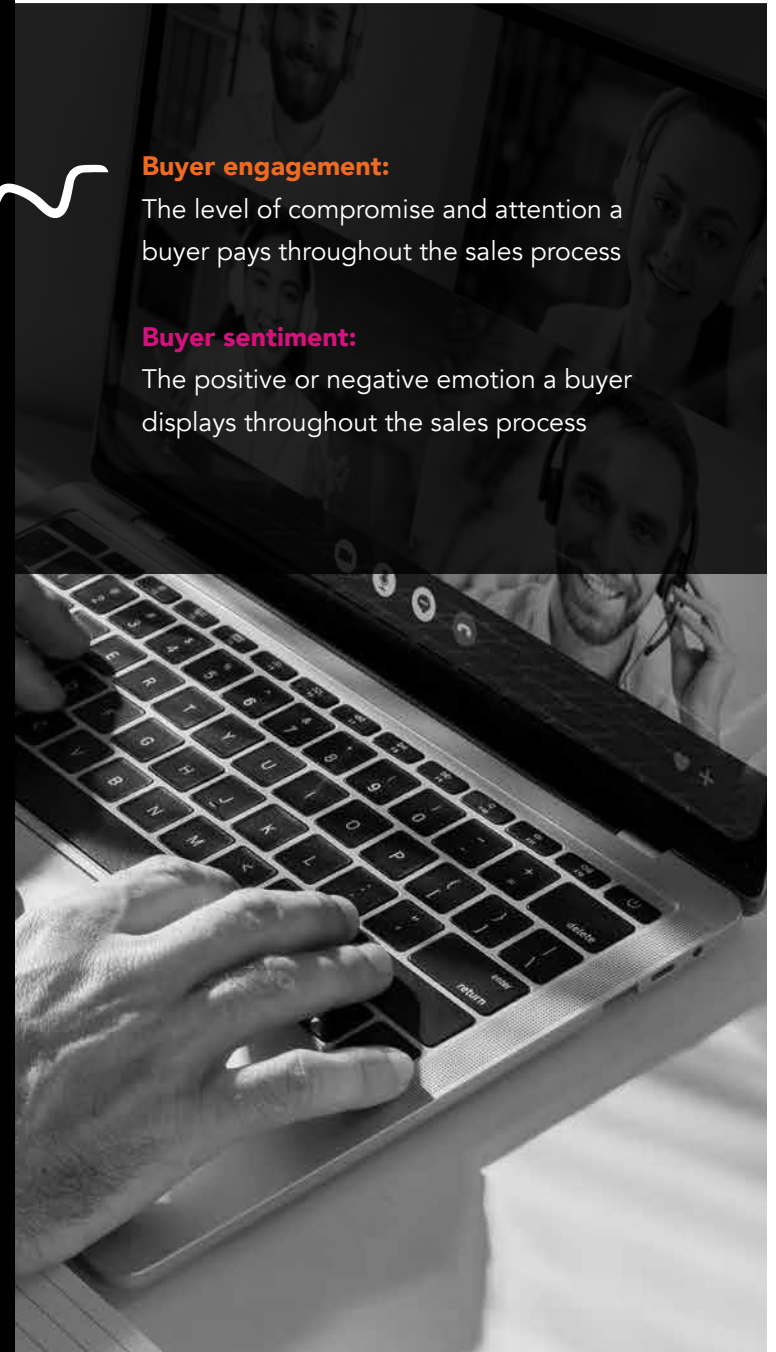
Buyer engagement:
The level of compromise and attention a buyer pays throughout the sales process

Buyer sentiment:
The positive or negative emotion a buyer displays throughout the sales process

[1]https://www.salesforce.com/news/stories/sales-research-2023/

Navigating the virtual selling landscape

Four forces that make virtual selling difficult

1. Low visibility

Virtual selling with video conferencing technology reduces life-sized buyers to tiny faces framed in gallery view, making it hard to see non-verbal buyer reactions. Sellers may miss non-verbal cues entirely when presenting slides or looking into the camera to give the illusion of eye contact.

83% of sellers agree: "I share my screen to present slides."

68% of sellers agree: "I find myself presenting to the camera/green light."

64% "of sellers agree: "I can't see buyer facial expressions and reactions."

2. Subdued sellers

The archetypal sales rep drips confidence and charm. But when in-person account executives transition to a virtual selling environment, they may lose their ability to "work the room" using body language and eye contact. As a result, more than half feel less confident selling over video.

69% of sellers agree: "I can't use body language like I would in person."

65% of sellers agree: "I can't make eye contact like I would in person."

58% of sellers agree: "I feel less confident when selling on a video call."

3. Buyer untruths

Not all buyers are fully transparent about what they're thinking and feeling. When sellers don't know their buyers' fears, needs, and motivations, they struggle to steer the conversation in the right direction.

50% of sellers agree: "Buyers don't always tell you what they're thinking."

24% of sellers agree: "Buyers say things they don't mean."

4. Mass distraction

Buyers are busy. When sellers manage to get buyers on a video call, there's a good chance they're multitasking. And when buyers turn their cameras off, sellers are fighting with a distracted buyer.

29% of buyers say: "I was multitasking at times during the video call."

27% of buyers say: "Some of my co-workers were multitasking during the video call."
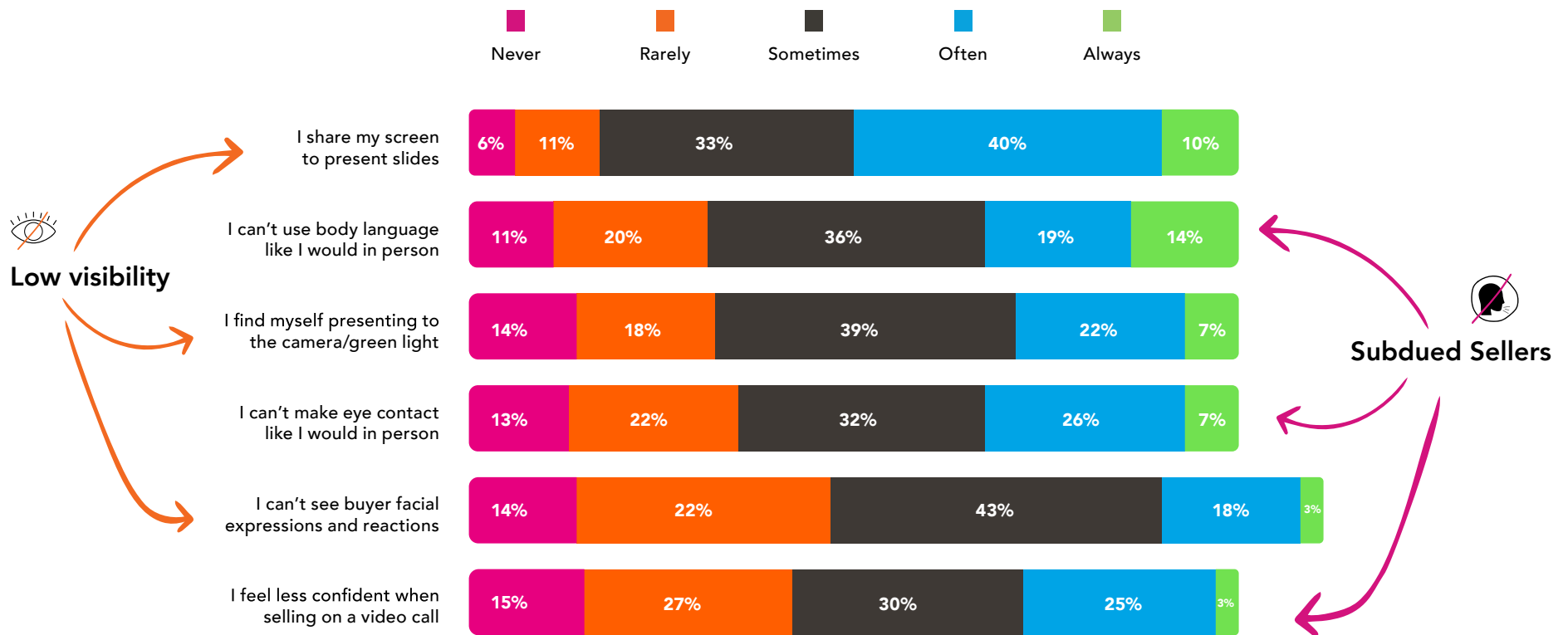
26% of buyers say: "Some of my co-workers kept their cameras off during the video call."

Navigating deals through a dirty windshield

Driving becomes more challenging when visibility is reduced. Likewise, selling becomes more challenging when video conferencing technology, like WebEx, Zoom, or Microsoft Teams, prevents account executives from getting a clear read on buyer expressions and reactions. Sellers are flying blind in this new world; they are missing non-verbal cues that indicate negative sentiment, and so they present on, never pausing to explore what might be causing sentiment to decline. Additionally, sellers feel stifled when presenting over video as they can't use body language and eye contact to persuade the buying group as they would if selling in-person. It's no wonder that 58% of sellers feel less confident selling over video.

How frequently, if at all, do you experience the following when leading video sales calls?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

Low visibility

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
I share my screen to present slides	6%	11%	33%	40%	10%
I can't use body language like I would in person	11%	20%	36%	19%	14%
I find myself presenting to the camera/green light	14%	18%	39%	22%	7%
I can't make eye contact like I would in person	13%	22%	32%	26%	7%
I can't see buyer facial expressions and reactions	14%	22%	43%	18%	3%
I feel less confident when selling on a video call	15%	27%	30%	25%	3%

Subdued Sellers

Gaining traction when buyers withhold information

Sellers aren't just contending with a dirty windshield, they're also contending with slippery road conditions. Buyer behavior exacerbates the problems that video meeting technology creates. Buyers often say things they don't mean. Also, buyers don't always disclose their full thoughts and feelings. These buyer untruths, however non-malicious, prevent sellers from gaining understanding and creating traction: **if sellers don't understand buyer wants and needs, they'll struggle to build rapport, keep buyer attention, and successfully move deals forward**.

Which of the following external challenges have you or your company experienced within the last 12 months?

Buyer untruths

Challenge	%
Buyers don't always tell you what they're thinking	50%
Keeping buyers attention	48%
Building trust and rapport with buyers in a virtual environment	47%
Earning buyers' attention	44%
Keeping prospects engaged in a virtual environment	34%
Reading non-verbal cues in a virtual environment	31%
Understanding buyers wants and needs	31%
Buyers say things they don't mean	24%

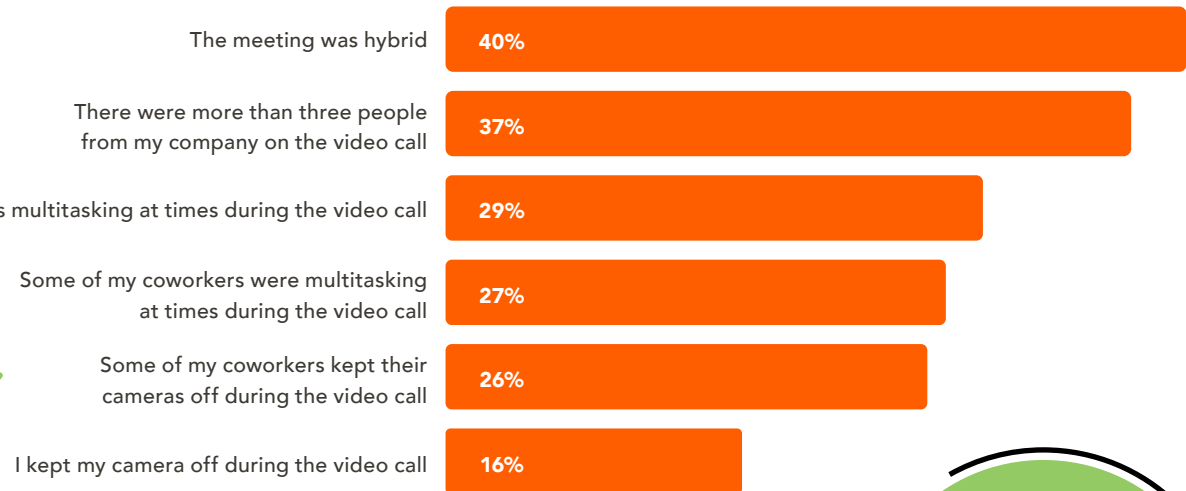**56%** of sellers agree: "Rapport is critical to closing business."

Contending with distracted buyers

The final element adding complexity to the modern selling landscape is mass buyer distraction: **29% of buyers admit to multitasking on sales calls**. But, let's be honest, more than just 1 in 3 buyers are answering messages, searching online, or reviewing emails during a video meeting. Self-reported data about one's own shortcomings must be taken with a grain of salt. One study of Microsoft employees showed that people multitask on remote meetings as a coping mechanism to deal with the stress of back-to-back video calls.[1] Interestingly, Microsoft found that the odds of multitasking increase alongside the number of call participants added. Unfortunately, sellers can't police the number of call participants, so they must do everything in their power to build relationships with every person in the buying group.

Which of the following statements are true?

Mass Distraction

Statement	%
The meeting was hybrid	40%
There were more than three people from my company on the video call	37%
I was multitasking at times during the video call	29%
Some of my coworkers were multitasking at times during the video call	27%
Some of my coworkers kept their cameras off during the video call	26%
I kept my camera off during the video call	16%

71%
of sellers agree:
"**Building relationships with every person in the buying group is important.**"

Reducing buyer temptation to multitask

While sellers can't prevent buyers from multitasking, there may be ways to decrease their temptation. A Corporate Visions study of 500 B2B sales reps[2] found that 77% of sellers believe their clients would multitask less if their video cameras were on; yet 82% of sellers rarely or never ask their buyers to turn their cameras on. Why? One reason may be that they don't want to ruffle decision makers' feathers. Our data reveals that **C-suite executives are most likely to keep their cameras off during sales calls**.

Think about the last sales process you participated in. Which of the following statements are true?

"I kept my camera off during the video call."

- VP — 11%
- SVP — 12%
- Manager — 12%
- Individual contributor — 15%
- Director — 18%
- C-suite executive — 31%
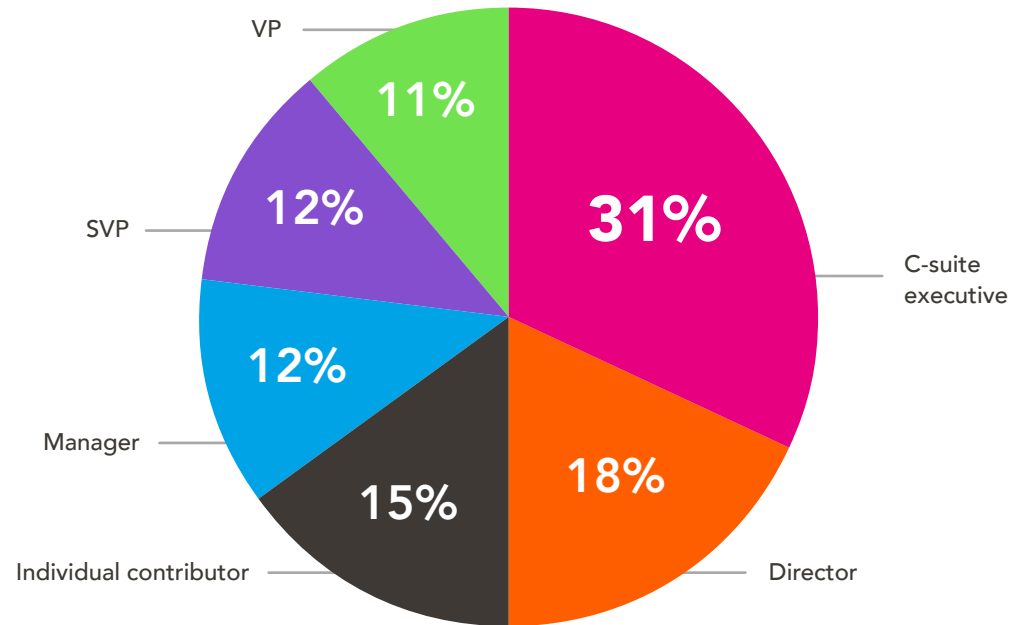
What a buyer has to say:

"

I've definitely avoided telling a sales rep what I'm thinking or feeling. I think the main reason is I'm scared they'd just immediately object to my hesitation, rather than actually listen. Especially over video, I feel like it's harder for reps to empathize. For example, if I explain I don't have budget, they'll probably just whip out an ROI calculator and make it seem like I'm not good at my job for missing out on all the ROI. Instead, when I've had reps listen and ask WHY I don't have budget—and maybe WHEN would be a good time to follow up—I've trusted them more and was more likely to be honest going forward.
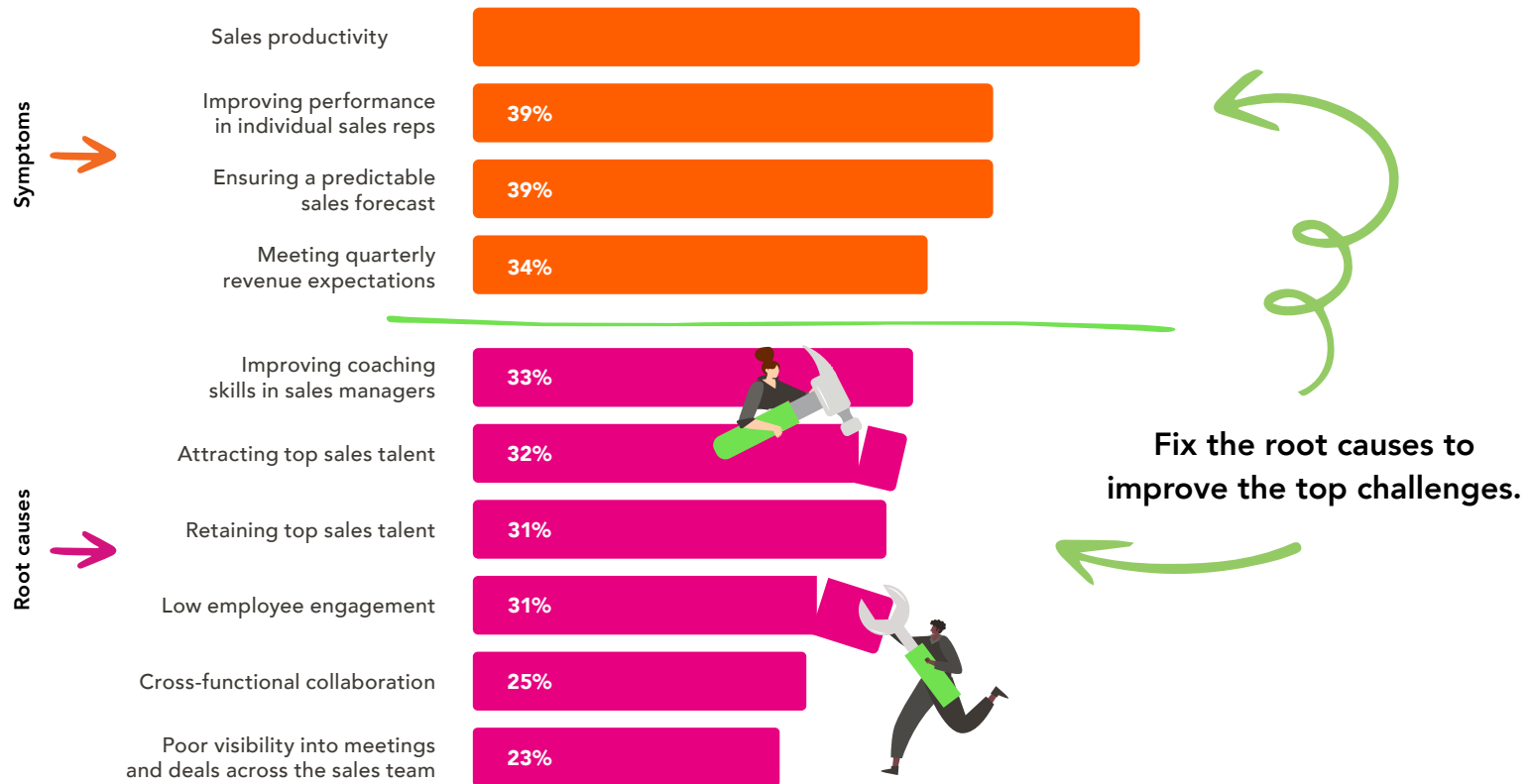
- __Natalie Marcotullio__, Head of Growth and Operations at Navattic.

"

Companies prioritize symptom fixes
(to their detriment)

The top four internal challenges below have *always* been a problem. Leaders work hard (and spend lots of money) to solve these "big problems," yet they persist because they're *symptoms*. Don't treat symptoms; treat the root causes. For example, improving coaching skills in sales managers will positively impact sales rep performance. Likewise, improving employee engagement will cause sales productivity to increase; engaged sellers give more discretionary effort than disengaged sellers. Improve cross-functional collaboration—particularly between sales, ops, and sales enablement—and all four top challenges will improve.

Which of the following internal challenges have you or your company experienced within the past 12 months?

Symptoms

Challenge	Value
Sales productivity	
Improving performance in individual sales reps	39%
Ensuring a predictable sales forecast	39%
Meeting quarterly revenue expectations	34%

Root causes

Challenge	Value
Improving coaching skills in sales managers	33%
Attracting top sales talent	32%
Retaining top sales talent	31%
Low employee engagement	31%
Cross-functional collaboration	25%
Poor visibility into meetings and deals across the sales team	23%

Fix the root causes to improve the top challenges.

Why sales leaders must look beneath the surface

Likewise, when asked which *external* challenges are most important to solve, respondents selected symptoms over root causes. However, if sales orgs can solve any or all of the seven root causes on this list, they'll be far more likely to earn—and keep—buyer attention. Historically, limitations of available sales tools have prevented sales organizations from tackling these root causes. But today, new solutions integrate with video conferencing technology to allow companies to analyze non-verbal buyer cues, enabling sellers to understand key moments that impact buyer sentiment and engagement.

Which of the following external challenges are most important for you to solve?

Symptoms

Earning buyer's attention

Building trust and rapport with buyers in a virtual environment

Keeping buyers' attention (beyond the first meeting)

Root causes

- Buyers don't always tell you what they're thinking
- Reading non-verbal cues in a virtual environment
- Understanding buyer wants and needs
- Identifying next steps
- Sensing buyer sentiment in a virtual environment
- Keeping prospects engaged in a virtual environmen
- Buyers say things they don't mean

Examining the bloated sales tech stack

Tech stacks quickly become bloated as sales leaders attempt to solve challenges—or rather, fix symptoms—with technology. In some cases, tools cause *more* friction. Many tools provide lagging indicators, whereas *leading* indicators would better equip sellers to pivot while there's still time to influence outcomes. Companies have increased sales technology spend over the last 5-10 years; CRM and sales intelligence tools are top-purchased software categories. Companies have built ops and enablement teams around this technology, yet sales orgs are still inefficient at closing revenue. In fact, 34% of sellers struggle to meet quarterly revenue expectations. And other studies paint a darker picture. Maybe it's time to think about doing things differently. Maybe, rather than jumping to buy more technology, we should take a step back to understand what buyers really want—and *then* find an appropriate solution.

Which tools in your tech stack are critical to your success?

Legend:
- ■ Not at all important
- ■ Hardly important
- ■ Somewhat important
- ■ Very important
- ■ Critical

Lagging indicators (arrows pointing to Email tool, CRM, Sales engagement tool)

Tool	Not at all important	Hardly important	Somewhat important	Very important	Critical
Email tool		4%	18%	45%	31%
CRM			22%	43%	33%
Video conferencing software		4%	23%	49%	21%
Sales engagement tool		6%	24%	42%	28%
Messaging platforms		9%	28%	50%	13%
Conversation intelligence tool		5%	40%	30%	25%
Gifting platform		27%	18%	46%	9%

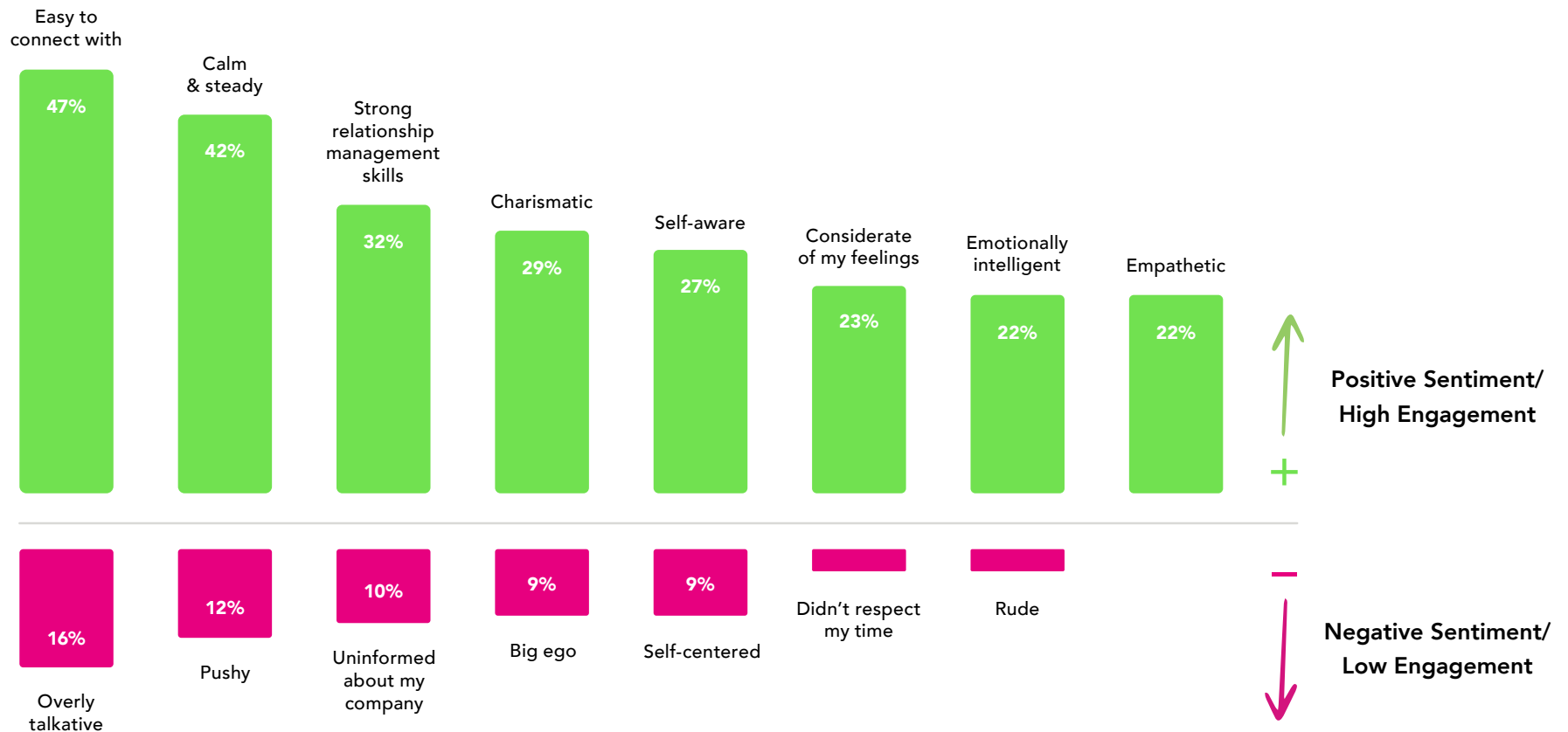**34%** of sellers **struggle to meet quarterly revenue expectations**

Positive vs. negative seller behaviors

Despite ineffective technology and the many challenges presented by the virtual selling environment, sellers are doing the best they can. Buyer responses indicate that negative seller behaviors are the exception, not the rule. Positive seller behaviors improve buyer engagement and sentiment, while negative seller behaviors deplete buyer engagement and sentiment.

Think about the last sales process you participated in. Which of the following items describe the sales account executive who helped you?

Behavior	Value
Easy to connect with	47%
Calm & steady	42%
Strong relationship management skills	32%
Charismatic	29%
Self-aware	27%
Considerate of my feelings	23%
Emotionally intelligent	22%
Empathetic	22%

Positive Sentiment/ High Engagement +

Behavior	Value
Overly talkative	16%
Pushy	12%
Uninformed about my company	10%
Big ego	9%
Self-centered	9%
Didn't respect my time	(no value)
Rude	(no value)

Negative Sentiment/ Low Engagement −

What a sales expert has to say:

"

If sales are down, you can't just make sales go up; that's not something you can action. The root causes of sales being down are actionable. When you see the sales train go off the track, look to understand where it actually started going off the track. For example, if keeping buyers' attention beyond the first meeting is a problem, the instinct might be to say, 'call them more and get it scheduled!' But you'd be better off examining exactly what reps are doing in those meetings. It's not uncommon for salespeople to come out of a meeting feeling good because they're extroverted human beings who feel happy when they get to talk. But you might find out they're not listening to the buyer or responding to the buyer's cues. Now you have an actionable problem you can fix.

- **Jim Speredelozzi, SVP of Revenue at The Predictive Index**
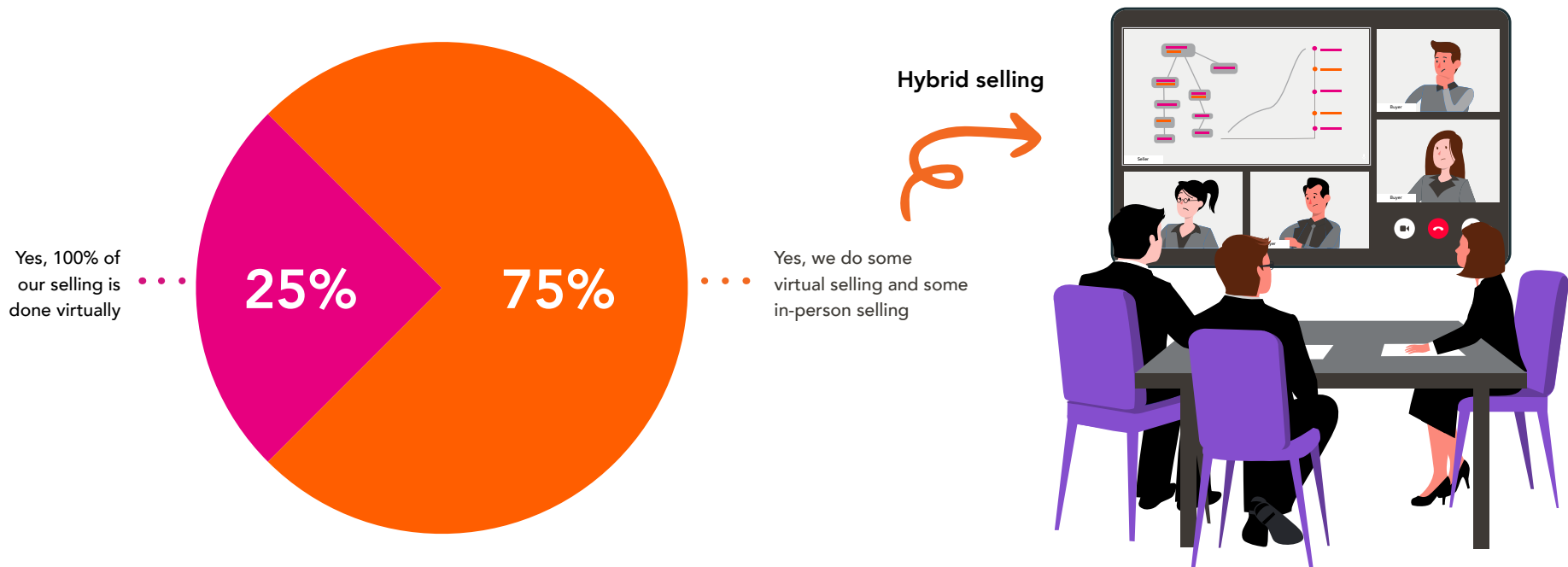
"

Understanding what buyers *really* want

Buyers prefer virtual meetings

Buyer preferences ensure that virtual selling is here to stay. Today's buyers not only expect to interact with sellers over video conferencing technology, but they also prefer it—provided all parties are virtual. Scientists at Corporate Visions fitted buyers with Galvanic Skin Response (GSR)[4] sensors to measure emotional arousal across four different sales settings: face-to-face, hybrid, phone, and virtual. GSR signals confirmed that buyers in the virtual group showed the most excitement. However, when some members of the buying team are virtual and others are in-person with the sales rep, excitement dips; buyers in the hybrid group showed the least excitement. Remember, 40% of the buyers we surveyed said their last meeting was hybrid.

Companies have not sufficiently trained and enabled all account executives to be successful selling over video. Unless leaders close this skills gap—and attack the problem at its root—they will continue struggling to meet quarterly revenue expectations.

Does your company conduct remote sales calls over video?
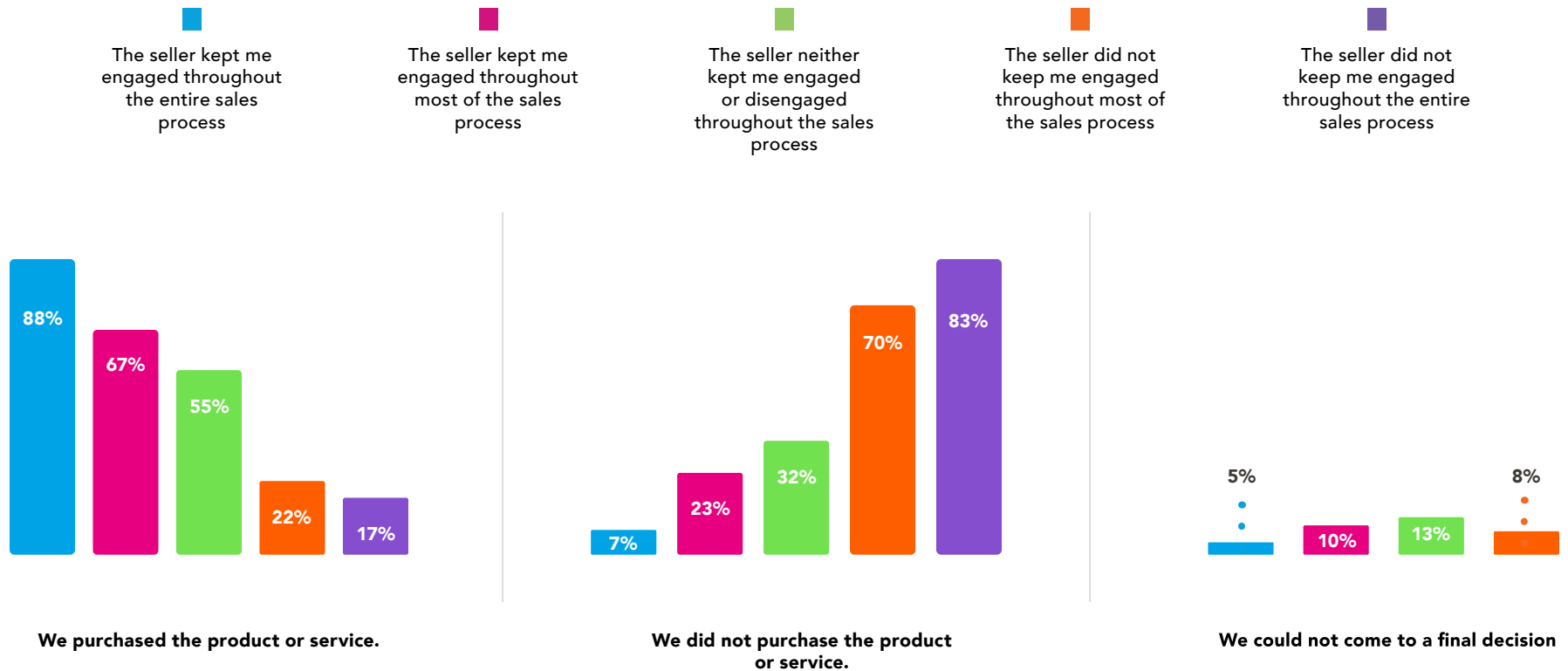
Yes, 100% of our selling is done virtually

25%

75%

Yes, we do some virtual selling and some in-person selling

Hybrid selling

[4]https://corporatevisions.com/resources/remote-selling/report-does-hybrid-live-up-to-the-hype/

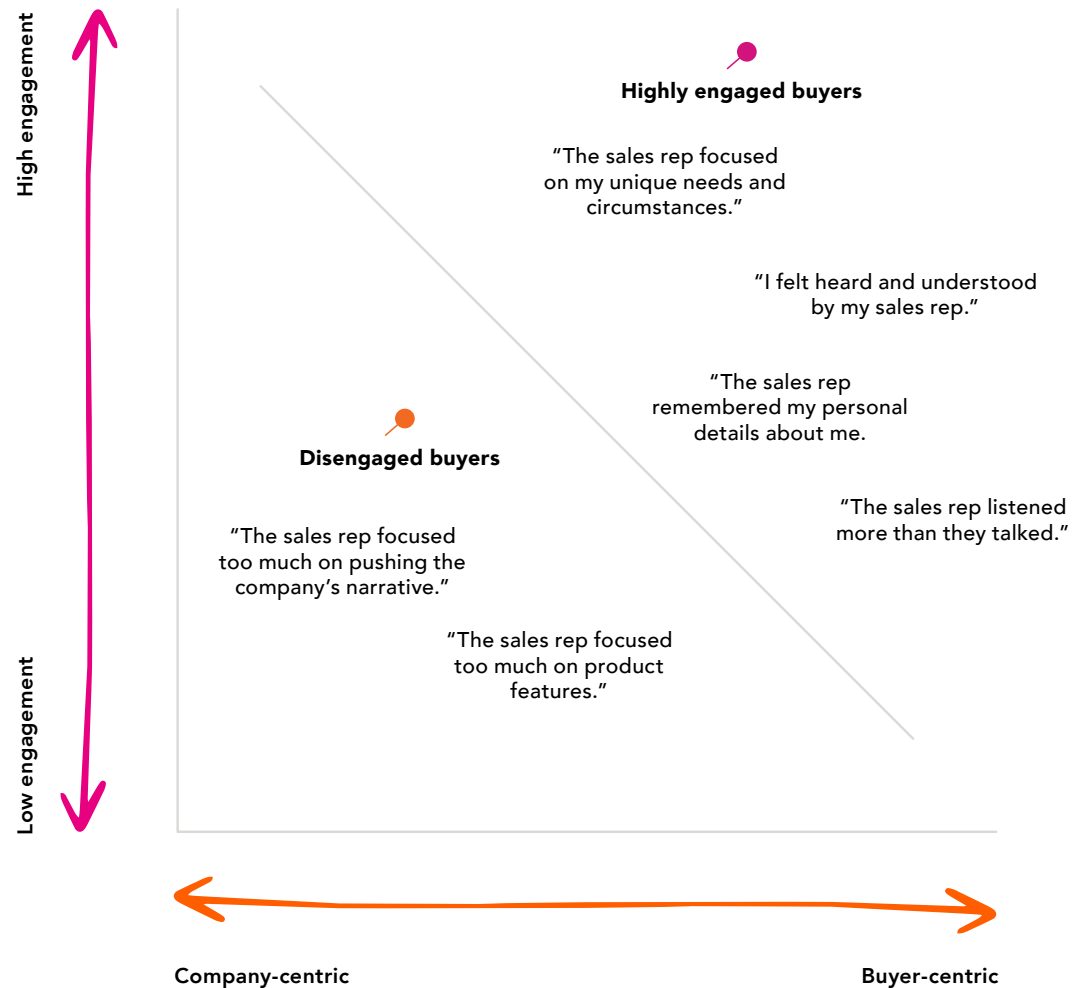# The impact of buyer engagement on deal outcomes

As you can see, sellers who keep their buyers engaged throughout the entire sales process are *most* likely to see positive deal outcomes, while sellers who fail to keep their buyers engaged are *least* likely to see favorable deal outcomes.

Think about the last sales process you participated in. Which of the following statements are true?

- ■ The seller kept me engaged throughout the entire sales process
- ■ The seller kept me engaged throughout most of the sales process
- ■ The seller neither kept me engaged or disengaged throughout the sales process
- ■ The seller did not keep me engaged throughout most of the sales process
- ■ The seller did not keep me engaged throughout the entire sales process

We purchased the product or service.

- 88%
- 67%
- 55%
- 22%
- 17%

We did not purchase the product or service.

- 7%
- 23%
- 32%
- 70%
- 83%

We could not come to a final decision

- 5%
- 10%
- 13%
- 8%

Specific actions that impact buyer engagement

Think about the last sales process you participated in? Which of the following statements are true?

High engagement

Low engagement

Highly engaged buyers

"The sales rep focused on my unique needs and circumstances."

"I felt heard and understood by my sales rep."

"The sales rep remembered my personal details about me.

"The sales rep listened more than they talked."

Disengaged buyers

"The sales rep focused too much on pushing the company's narrative."

"The sales rep focused too much on product features."

Company-centric

Buyer-centric

Specific seller behaviors that drive high buyer engagement

Of the buyer pool, 38% agreed that "the seller kept me engaged throughout the entire sales process." Flip this statistic on its head and it's deadly: two out of three buyers did *not* feel engaged throughout the last sales process they participated in.

Even more telling, when we cross tabulate this item with the question about seller behaviors, we see a relationship between high engagement and specific seller behaviors. The buyers in the *most* engaged group were significantly more likely to describe their seller as easy to connect with, calm and steady, charismatic, empathetic, and considerate of my feelings. Buyers in this group were also significantly more likely to say their seller had strong relationship management skills.
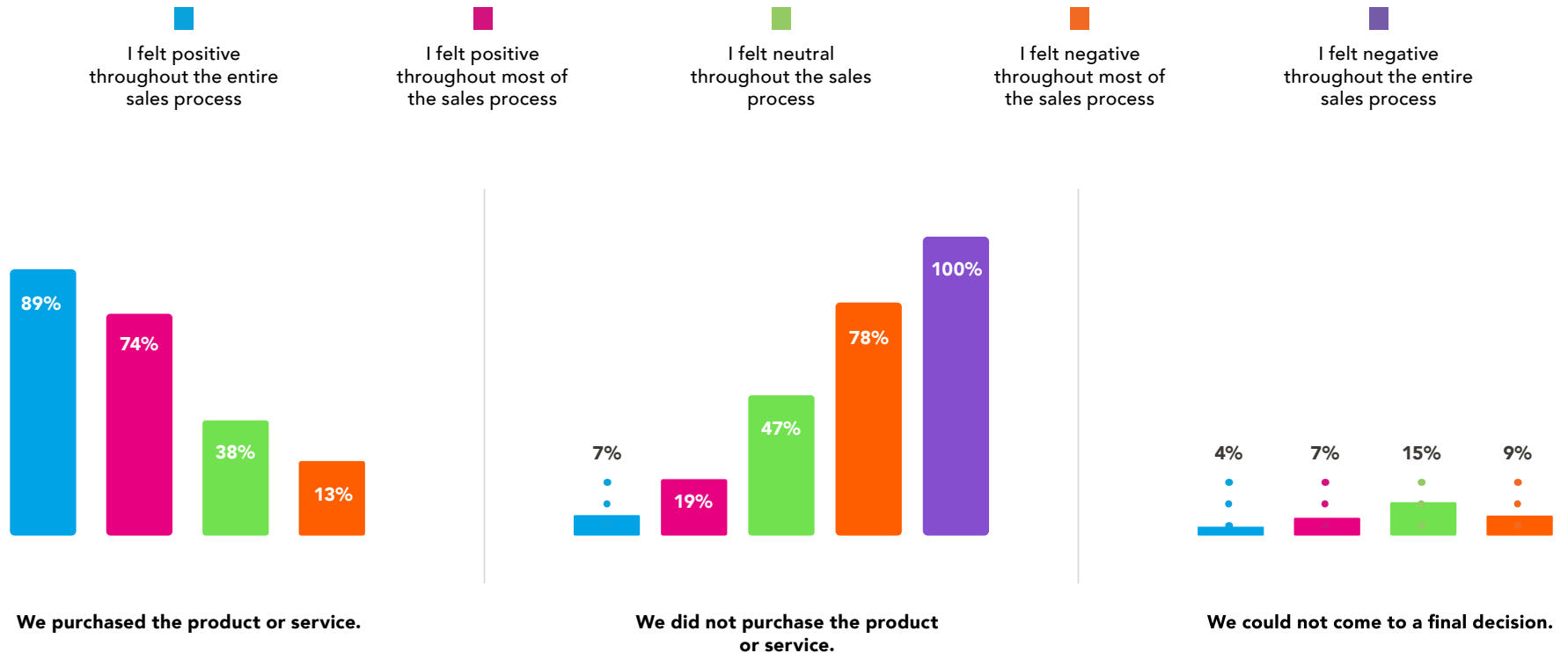
Seller behaviors cited by the most highly engaged buyers:

55%
"Easy to connect with"

52%
"Calm and steady"

42%
"Strong relationship management skills"

36%
"Charismatic"

28%
"Enthusiastic"

28%
"Considerate of my feelings"
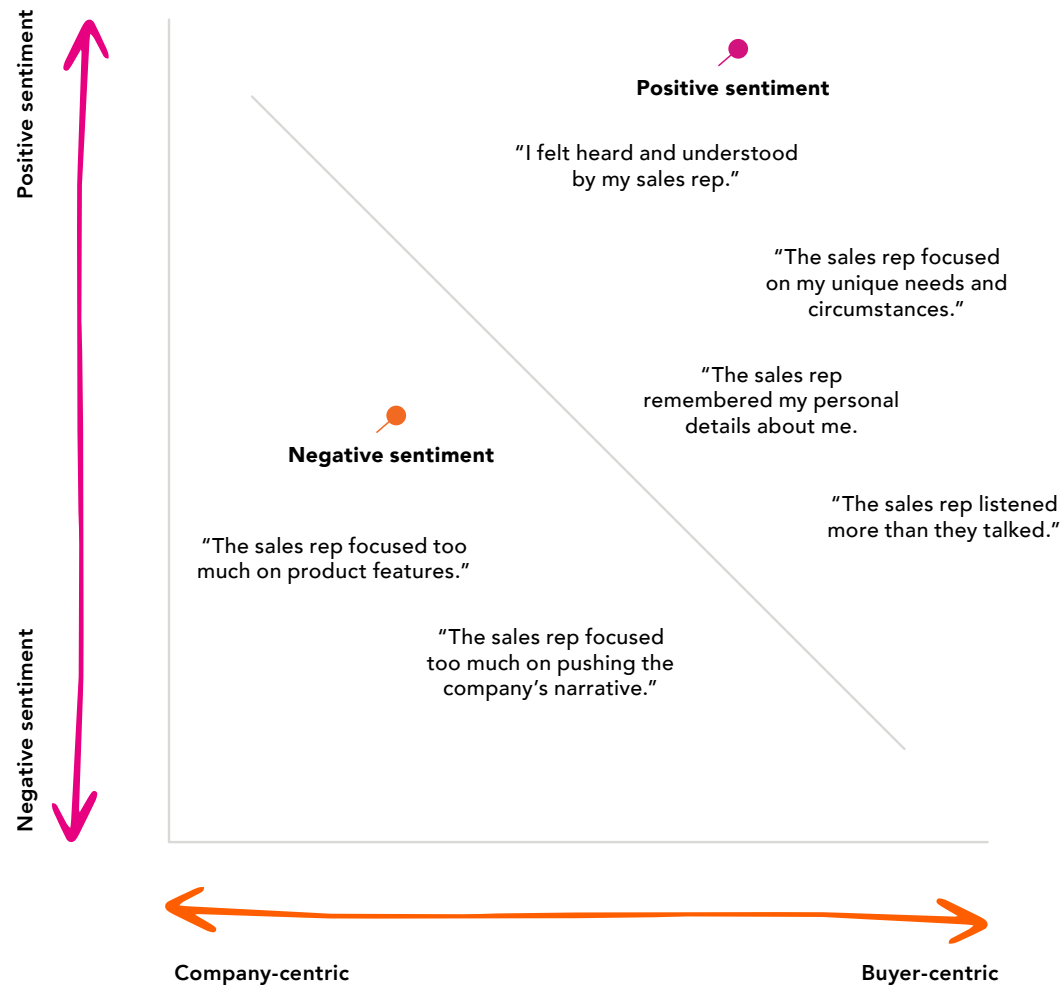
The impact of buyer sentiment on deal outcomes

As you can see, sellers who keep their buyers feeling positive sentiment throughout the entire sales process are *most* likely to see positive deal outcomes, while sellers who fail to keep positive buyer sentiment high are *least* likely to see favorable deal outcomes. In other words, buyers with *consistent* positive sentiment buy.

Think about the last sales process you participated in. Which of the following statements are true?

- ■ I felt positive throughout the entire sales process
- ■ I felt positive throughout most of the sales process
- ■ I felt neutral throughout the sales process
- ■ I felt negative throughout most of the sales process
- ■ I felt negative throughout the entire sales process

We purchased the product or service.
- 89%
- 74%
- 38%
- 13%

We did not purchase the product or service.
- 7%
- 19%
- 47%
- 78%
- 100%

We could not come to a final decision.
- 4%
- 7%
- 15%
- 9%

Specific actions that impact buyer sentiment

Think about the last sales process you participated in. Which of the following statements are true?

Positive sentiment ↑ ↓ Negative sentiment

Positive sentiment

"I felt heard and understood by my sales rep."

"The sales rep focused on my unique needs and circumstances."

"The sales rep remembered my personal details about me.

Negative sentiment

"The sales rep listened more than they talked."

"The sales rep focused too much on product features."

"The sales rep focused too much on pushing the company's narrative."

Company-centric ←————→ Buyer-centric

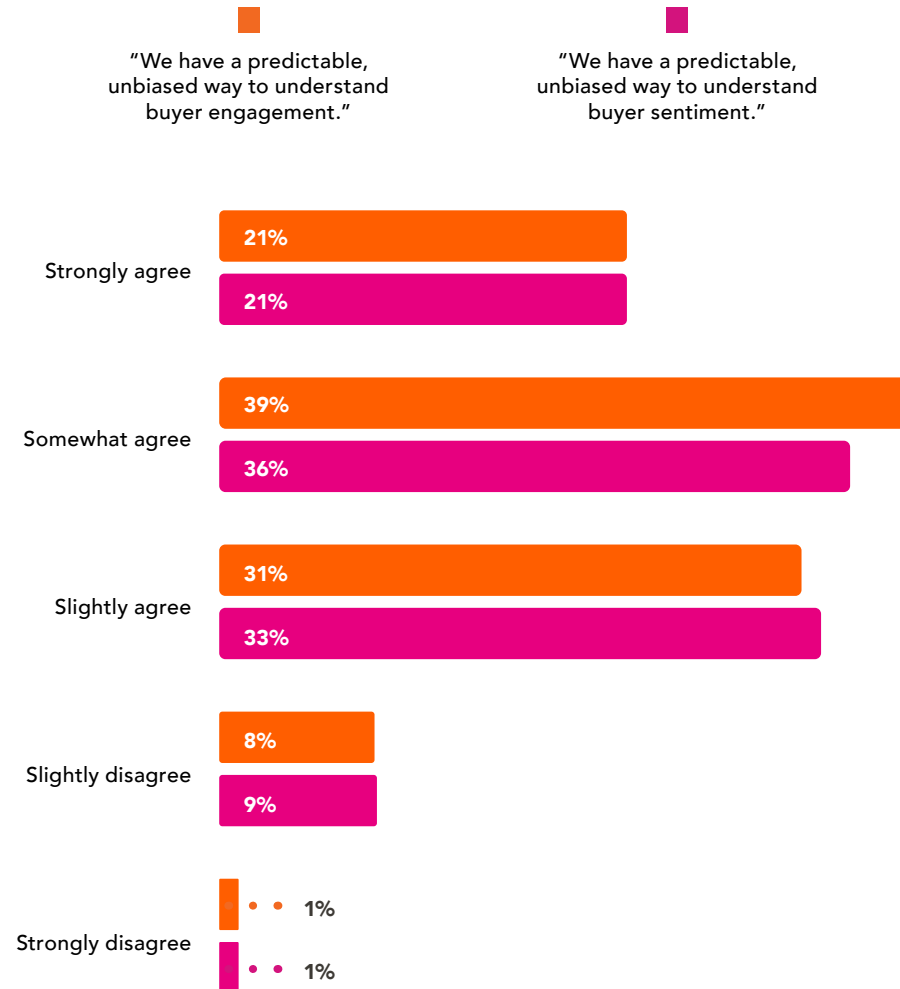# Specific seller behaviors that drive positive buyer sentiment

How exactly can sellers keep their buyers engaged? On the whole, 37% of buyers agreed that "I felt positive throughout the entire sales process." When we cross tabulate this item with the question about seller behaviors, we see a relationship between positive sentiment and specific seller behaviors. The buyers in the group that showed the *most* positive sentiment were significantly more likely to describe their seller as easy to connect with, calm and steady, self-aware, empathetic, and considerate of my feelings. Buyers in this group were also significantly more likely to say their seller had strong relationship management skills. What's interesting to note is that self-awareness is more likely to drive positive sentiment than high engagement. That's because sentiment is about the buyer's emotional state whereas engagement is about the buyer's willingness to pay attention and compromise. Buyers try to make logical decisions, but they're also human and driven by emotion.

Seller behaviors cited by buyers who showed the most positive sentiment:

57%
"Easy to connect with"

48%
"Calm and steady"

42%
"Strong relationship management skills"

32%
"Self-aware"

27%
"Empathetic"

27%
"Considerate of my feelings"
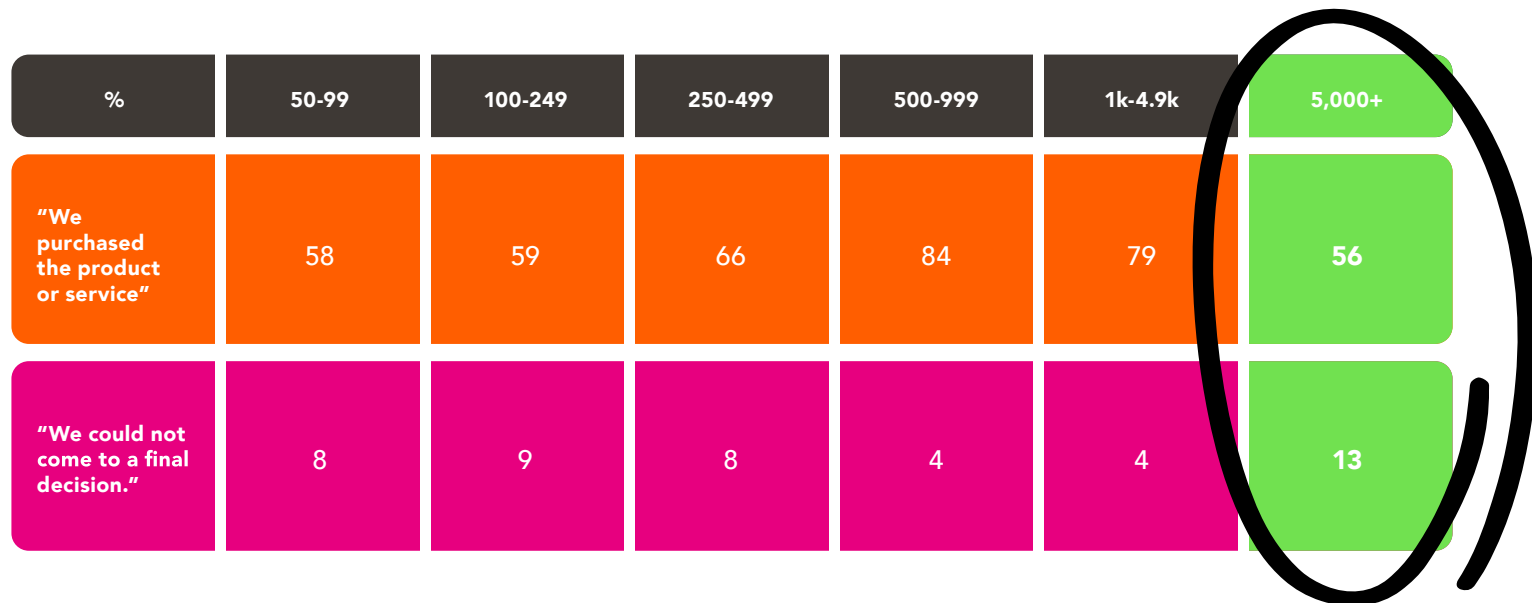
Measuring buyer engagement and sentiment

Most sellers somewhat agree or strongly agree that they have a predictable, unbiased way to understand buyer engagement and buyer sentiment. Engagement and sentiment are leading indicators that can help a sales team determine whether or not a deal will successfully move forward to closed won. Sales teams that can accurately measure buyer engagement and sentiment can build more predictable sales forecasts *and* pivot their presentation while there's still time to impact deal outcomes.

■ "We have a predictable, unbiased way to understand buyer engagement."

■ "We have a predictable, unbiased way to understand buyer sentiment."

Strongly agree
- 21%
- 21%

Somewhat agree
- 39%
- 36%

Slightly agree
- 31%
- 33%

Slightly disagree
- 8%
- 9%

Strongly disagree
- 1%
- 1%

The difficult nature of selling to the largest orgs

Companies with 5,000+ employees are not only least likely to purchase the product or service, they're also most likely to fail to come to a final decision. The risk-averse nature of leaders at large, hierarchical organizations could play a role here; corporate incentives and control processes discourage leaders from taking risks[5] like betting on new technology or a new process. Additionally, buying teams tend to be largest at the largest organizations—and it's difficult to align a large group of stakeholders around objectives, tactics, targets, and timelines.

Think about the last sales process you participated in. Which of the following statements are true?

%	50-99	100-249	250-499	500-999	1k-4.9k	5,000+
"We purchased the product or service"	58	59	66	84	79	56
"We could not come to a final decision."	8	9	8	4	4	13

[5]https://hbr.org/2020/03/your-company-is-too-risk-averse

What an **expert** has to say:

"

We don't have to solve for customers' confidence in us, but rather customers' confidence in themselves … If you start to root cause their objections, hesitations, and fears, you realize as a 5-, 10-, or 15-person buying group, they're not aligned about what they're trying to do in the first place. If you think about purchase decisions as having a set of dimensions and a hierarchy of dimensions: What are the strategic outcomes we're trying to achieve as a company or business unit? What are the specific, practical tactics that allow us to achieve those strategic objectives? What are the metrics we're going to use to measure progress against those tactics? And what's the timeline along which we'll do that? Objectives, tactics, targets, timelines. Your customer buying group must be aligned at each one of those levels.

- **Brent Adamson, Global Head of Research, Advisory, and Communities at Ecosystems**

"

Sellers dote on C-suite execs, but pay less attention to individual contributors

Even though the majority of sellers surveyed feel it's important to build relationships with every member of the buying team, the data shows that individual contributors are getting less attention—and feeling less positive as a result. While ICs don't have the same clout as the decision makers and budget holders, ICs—particularly high-performing ICs—can be highly influential. After all, they are the ones who will use the tool day in and day out. Involve them in the conversation.

Think about the last sales process you participated in. Which of the following statements are true?

%	IC	Manager	Director	VP	SVP	C-suite Exec
"I was offered a gift as an incentive to talk to the sale..."	13	18	17	14	0	31
"The sales rep remembered personal details about me."	19	26	26	21	62	40
"I felt positive throughout the entire sales process"	22	37	34	57	12	63

Recommendations for sellers

Based on our survey of 529 B2B buyers and 117 B2B sellers, we recommend that sales orgs take the following actions:

- Ask buyers to turn their video cameras on; it can reduce temptation to multitask. (*Page 10*)

- Determine which problems have underlying root causes—then focus on fixing those root causes. (*Page 12*)

- Improve collaboration between sales, ops, and sales enablement to improve productivity and performance. (*Page 12*)

- Adopt tools that integrate with video conferencing technology and enable sellers to read non-verbal cues. (*Page 13*)

- Avoid specific behaviors that drive negative sentiment and low engagement in buyers. (*Page 15*)

- Enforce fully virtual meetings where all participants, including the seller, are dialing in via video call. (*Page 18*)

- Coach and enable reps to build, or hone, the following skills: focusing on the buyers' unique needs and circumstances, ensuring your buyers feel understood and heard, remembering buyer personal details, and listening actively. (*Page 20*)

- Measure buyer engagement and sentiment throughout the sales process. (*Page 25*)

- Ensure buying team alignment around objectives, tactics, targets, and timelines. (*Page 26*)

- Build relationships with every person in the buying group; don't ignore individual contributors. (*Page 28*)

Technical appendix

Cross tab methodology

We cross-tabulated close-ended questions by all of the listed questions. However, we only report on cross-tabulations with statistically significant differences that may have some practical value:

- A statistically significant difference is one that cannot be attributed to chance at a 95% or greater confidence level: 19 times out of 20, the differences would exist in the target population.

- A practical difference, as we define it, is at least a 10 percentage point difference between two groups. While a two-point difference might,for large cell sizes, be statistically significant, it is unlikely to make any practical difference to most business plans.

- Demographic questions against demographic questions are typically ignored, as they offer little insight (e.g., older people are more likelyto be retired; Gen Xers are more likely to have children than millennial; those with college degrees have higher incomes than those who do not).

- Occasionally, for editorial reasons such as study length, or if a cross-tabulation seems redundant, we omitted it from this report.

- Rather than compare subgroups to other subgroups individually, we compare each subgroup to the aggregate of all other subgroups. This is easier to present and visualize than column comparisons, and differentiates at the low end as well as the high end. Since this approach uses the entire sample, rather than a subsample of two subgroups, it provides greater statistical power and reduces the chance that findings are false discoveries.