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Introduction

The following research project is based on the computing infrastructure company, [REDACTED] – located in [REDACTED]. The research will take place over the course of three weeks and will include qualitative and quantitative studies

[REDACTED], Inc. has been in the business of helping our customers satisfy their computing requirements since 1989. The one consistent message that has been our driving force has been to help clients to align the vast array of technology with their business objectives. We simply try to understand their project and their budget to provide the technology that matches (www.[REDACTED].com).

This mission of the company is what the employees at [REDACTED] strive to do. In order to do this consistently the company needs to have employees that are constant and successful.

In order to complete this research correctly and in a timely manner I scaled down the number of participants to a minimum and this was my pre-test for the research. I focused primarily on the sales people, known throughout this research as Account Executives, and the sales managers, known throughout this research as Vice Presidents in the company. However, other positions in the company were assessed in order to avoid bias. One other role that was briefly examined was the Sales Associate, this position prospects new clients and find leads for the Account Executives, much like a telemarketer. [REDACTED] is a diverse company where every position is integral to the success of the company.

Business Analysis

Throughout [REDACTED] there are many positions and many different roles, each role just as important as the next. The company thrives, however, by selling its hardware and services. With the economic situation that the United States in it is necessary to sell and be as profitable as possible. This is where the research problem stems from. How, in the economic state that we are in, can the Account Executives succeed to make themselves and the company profitable? To

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answer this question [REDACTED] will be researching the following issue: In order to make recommendations for future improvements, [REDACTED] endeavors to research the existing roles, responsibilities, recurring activities, required skills and training needs of the hierarchy of sales positions within the company.

[REDACTED] is actually divided into two parts. There is [REDACTED] which provides the hardware for the customers, headed up by the Vice President of Hardware Sales. There is also [REDACTED] which provides maintenance and consulting for the customers, headed by the Vice President of Support Sales. Currently there are six Account Executives on the hardware side and six Account Executives on the support side. These twelve people along with the Vice Presidents from each division cover the entire country via the phone primarily and also on site meetings.

Sales are good, but can be better; there is always more to learn, train, and observe. The issue here is that [REDACTED] wants to ensure all of the Account Executives are successful, but that is not always the case. Everyone is different and everyone does things in their own custom way. This research intends to figure out a standardized way to ensure the success of the Account Executives and the company as a whole.

The main purpose or objective of this research was to be able to make recommendations to the company. I wanted to determine if it is indeed possible to develop a process to ensure success for all who enter the sales hierarchy within the company. There is also much opportunity to be had with the actions and results of this research. I hope to bring to light new ideas and concepts to better the salespeople and the company. From this research I hope to find more ways to maximize profit and use the employees and company's time effectively.

Methodology

The primary research methods that were employed in this study were both qualitative and quantitative. For the qualitative I used depth interviews and for the quantitative I used surveys. It is extremely important to get information of both fashions to ensure I do not miss the point of the research project. If I only took one type of research then there may be much left to the unknown. However, in cases regarding sales and marketing, many times the qualitative research is more of a primary and the quantitative, secondary.

In a book by Russell W. Belk, *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Marketing*, he goes very deep into the reasons and philosophical understandings of depth interviews when relating to marketing. As a brief example he states:

A depth interview with an executive of an organization can be a particularly useful tool for discovering the 'cause and effect maps of managers' (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). Depth interview research is usually directed towards answering the question why something occurred, and towards theory building rather than theory testing (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Sometimes it is useful to study individual-level phenomena with interviews with executives, but depth interviews with executives are also valued for their ability to gain key insights into more organizational-level phenomena (see Marschan-Piekkari et al., 2004). We take an individual-level approach in our research to offer some reasoning on why some sales executives may be more successful than others (Belk, 2006).

I applied these ideas towards this research and it shows that the qualitative should be primary and the quantitative will follow.

Qualitative Methodology

To be as concise as possible, for the qualitative portion of the research I relied solely on the inter workings of the company. For this qualitative research I conducted a series of five depth interviews with employees at [REDACTED] with different positions throughout the hierarchy.

The depth interviews were conducted by myself, David M. Gervon, in face to face settings with no outside interferences. All of the interviews were conducted at low selling hours

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as not to impede on sales throughout the company. The setting was in one of two places; either in the employee's office or the small conference room at [REDACTED]. I recorded each interview and took notes during the process. The notes took aided me in prompting further analysis of each question asked. The interviewer and interviewee sat directly across from one another. These interviews were a sample for the larger research study to be conducted at a later date. For a detailed look at the questions asked please see the interview guide in Appendix A.

Once the interview was underway, there was no real time limit. Most of the interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes, while one lasted 45 minutes and one lasted a full hour. The varying lengths of the interview stemmed from the fact that the questions were asked in an open ended fashion. This way I was able to collect a sufficient amount of data to analyze.

Difficulties arose in preparation and during the interview process. In preparation for the interviews, many employees were asked to participate or be interviewed. The upper management agreed with no qualms. However, it was difficult to get the lower level employees to participate. This is understandable, knowing that most of the employees here are salespeople and they need to be on the phone selling. After a few attempts I did get the participants and they did comply.

During the interview there were not many difficulties that were engaged. The biggest issue was having the interviewee stay on track with the questions at hand. That being said, it was interesting to see the different tangents that the participants went to. This being a qualitative study, I listened to the tangents and then brought the subject back on track. I found that the depth interviews were a good way to promote free thinking and some of the off track thoughts actually aided in the quantitative research, meaning I used some of the ideas to formulate questions for our survey.

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The sample, as stated prior, was chosen from different employees in the company. The participants were the Vice President of Services Sales, the Vice President of Hardware Sales, the Vice President of Operations, and two Account Executives – one from the hardware division and one from the services division. This gave us a controlled, yet various mix of employees to work with.

Quantitative Methodology

In order to conduct this quantitative research a survey was administered to ten employees at [REDACTED]. Each employee is an Account Executive or Sales Associate at a particular level in the company. Meaning there were some Sales Associates, some Account Executives, some Sr. Account Executives. Using this variation of participants was very important to the research. This sample was able to gauge a range of employees of whom some have traveled through the entire sales hierarchy, some were just beginning, and some were right in the middle. Depending where an employee is in the organization, different thoughts and ideas can be obtained from them. The participants however remained anonymous to the study, meaning I knew who they were, but not whose answers were whose. This was done by placing a collection folder at my desk.

The survey was passed out on a Wednesday morning and collected either that afternoon or the next day. Ideally I would have liked to administer this survey all at once with all the participants in the same room, but in this work environment that was not a likely circumstance. The reason for this is that every person surveyed is also a sales person. Therefore, anytime away from their desk is a potential loss in sales or profit. There was a small amount of difficulty getting the employees to comply, but when I explained to them that this research may benefit the entire company as a whole no one refused.

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The entire survey was ten questions long. Each question was concise and used a Likert scale to rate the answers. The questions started out simplistic and progressed throughout the survey. The reason for this is that I did not want the participants to be thinking about the past questions when trying to answer the current ones. Please see Appendix B for the Full Survey. After all of the surveys were returned, the data was analyzed and put into tables, graphs, and charts.

Qualitative Results

The depth interviews produced many results and various data for analysis. The results showed a combination of different roles in the company, daily activities, strategies, interventions, training procedures, skill sets, barriers of success, and relation to the economic state of the country.

There were four main roles observed in the depth interviews. It was interesting to see the self analysis of each individual position. When each participant was questioned about their role they explained that they do not have only one duty within the company. The Vice Presidents of Sales are also revenue generators, trainers, mentors, and involved in marketing. The Vice President of Operations deals with human resources, facilities, contracts, legal issues, accounts receivable, marketing, and the website. The Account Executives, not only are sales people but also provide other aspects for the company. The Services Account Executive sells services, consulting, hardware and software support. He also manages accounts and facilitates resources to the customer, which is a very important task. The hardware Account Executive interviewed focuses mainly on the sale of hardware (servers, storage, and networking). However, he also manages the purchasing division, approves sales orders for the hardware division, and provides the cost of spares for the services division.

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Each role seems to have similar strategies in planning out and initiating their multifaceted day with the exception of the Vice President of Operations, who is not involved in sales. The other two Vice Presidents have extremely busy multitasking days. Both remark about how it is incredibly important to have a “to do” list and be able to prioritize the day throughout. Being “bag carrying sales mangers” as the Vice President of Hardware Sales stated, they have a quota as well. In order to fulfill their quota and assist the Account Executives they must stay on track.

The two Account Executives differed in their style of attacking the day at hand. The Hardware Account Executive stated that he really has no planning involved he resolves any nightmares left on voicemail or email from the night before, makes some sales calls, and leaves the rest of the day open for anything else that comes his way. Something should be said to the effect that this particular employee does have other tasks that take up that remainder of the day. On the flip side, the services Account Executive plans everything out, he states “if you don’t have some goals and directions there is no way to measure success, so you need some type of list”. That being said he also mentioned that about 70%-80% of his list “goes out the window”.

Interestingly enough, with the various versions of a typical day, all of the participants including the Vice President of Operations agree, for the most part, on the way an Account Executive *should* plan their day. They all state that there should be some type of to-do list and that this should be utilized through the contact management system, Goldmine. If utilized correctly, Goldmine will produce the to-do list along with give a list of companies to call. All of the participants also agreed that paperwork should be done at the end of the day after 3pm to ensure all time zones have been covered. There was also mention by a couple of the participants that everyone is different and a salesperson needs to find the correct strategy that works for them.

The assessment of an Account Executive varied in response from what should be done and what actually is done. It was interesting to see the participants who said that the Account Executives should be assessed one way but they are actually assessed in another. The Vice President of Services believes that the sales people should be given goals and he should check to make sure that they are achieving the goals. He stated that he really has not been on top this and that it would change in the upcoming year. He also provided me with the knowledge that there is a common complaint that he, as a Vice President, is pretty unavailable due to projects that he gets involved in. Whether they are his problems or an Account Executive's he believes that this cuts the amount of time that he can spend with his department.

The Vice President of Hardware Sales had somewhat of a different take he wants his salespeople to be happy. He assesses on two factors do they bring enough profit to satisfy themselves with enough on their paycheck and do they have enough calls in the pipeline so they can eat the next month and so on. In this fashion he is basically telling his sales people to set their own goals contrary to the Services Vice President wanting to set them himself.

The Vice President of Operations does not agree with the way he believes the Account Executives are assessed. He explained that there is a lot of emphasis on call volume and he does not see a correlation here. In his role he also manages the phone log and he says typically the guys with the highest sales have the least amount of calls. The Account Executive on the hardware side agrees with this. He states that it's all about the numbers, "if the sales are there and you are paying for yourself and others then you are an asset and phone records are irrelevant". The services Account Executive agreed with the fact that the bottom line is sales. He did also state that there are not enough goals and encouragement to reach those goals, which goes right inline with his boss' comments regarding goals not being set and/or achieved.

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When the topic of interventions, meaning training and one-on-one meetings there was pretty much a consensus as to how this should be done. All agreed that keeping up on product knowledge is a must; reading technology books and magazines and having training from appropriate vendors. However, the hardware side of the house seemed to say that they have ample training, while the support side says that more is needed. Interestingly enough the services Vice president mentioned that he just implemented a bi-weekly training schedule for the department. All agree that the company's time is utilized best by selling and the trainings should come at off selling hours, be it early morning, lunch, or late in the day.

As far as one on one meetings between the Account Executives and the Vice Presidents, everyone also agrees that this is necessary to the development of an Account Executive. The results of how the time should be spent varied from 30 minutes a day with an individual one hour meeting bi-weekly to on half hour per quarter. The difference lies in what stage the Account Executive is in. The more senior members of the company are more self-reliant and do not need as much time. However, from the Vice President's point of view, no matter how seasoned the Executive is they still need face time with their manager. There is something to be said here regarding emails, emails are not a substitution for one on one meetings, they can be a precursor, but not a replacement.

In speaking of these face to face meetings and the development of Account Executives, the next topic almost came out on its own. I wanted to look into what can stop an Account Executive from success. Whether it is from the beginning stages or throughout their career, it seems that there are many factors involved here. It appears that it takes a particular type of individual to last and be successful at [REDACTED]. Each participant had different responses, but they all agreed that there are strong barriers that arise.

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The Vice President of Services spoke of the culture of the company. Being that he has been employed at [REDACTED] for over ten years and worked his way up, this was something to listen to. He spoke about the environment on the sales floor and the lack of work, or “screwing around” that sometimes goes on. He also spoke to the fact that there is not always enough time for the sales managers to be on the sales floor, which may be attributing to this culture. Furthermore, he spoke of the new sales people getting thrown into that environment and they get jaded pretty quickly; sales people on the floor will tell the negatives instead of being solution oriented – not a lot of development time for new hires. He did mention a personal resolution to spend more time developing the sales people that are currently employed.

The other participants did not have as much to say in length of the barriers, yet what they stated was still of importance. The Vice President of Hardware spoke of bad habits that people have and that it was unclear to him as to if they are possible to break. The services Account Executive spoke about time; not enough time and time is money – no time equals no formal training program. The hardware Account Executive basically said you are either ready to go or not, focusing on the motivation and intelligence of the Account Executives, which the Vice President of Operations pretty much agreed with.

One of the biggest topics on everyone’s mind, in this study or not is our current economic situation. When asked how the company can still thrive and be successful most answers were the same. [REDACTED] is a company when the economy is bad business can be good. The company needs to get their name out so that people know that [REDACTED] is a company that can help in a tough financial situation. To do this [REDACTED] needs to hire telemarketers, improve the website, and increase ad-word on Google. Hard work will also help promote success. All of those factors aside the primary way that [REDACTED] will shine through this economic struggle is by selling

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services which in turn saves companies money from their existing vendors and sell refurbished equipment. The services Account executive explained, “There is a lot of opportunity because the perceived risk of our services compared to the rewards have gone down. The customers we work with have to save money and cut their budgets and we can capitalize on that”.

Quantitative Results

The survey produced many results for analysis. Some of the questions that were answered had common answers and others were a bit more scattered. To see an overall analysis in a bar graph please see Appendix C. To see a more detailed analysis of the common threads in pie charts please see Appendix D. The graphs use the same data. The pie charts, however give you the most detail per question. For an initial summary of the data please see the chart on the next page.

Summary of Data

[REDACTED]	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The Account Executives receive ample training at [REDACTED].	0%	0%	50%	50%	0%
The Vice Presidents of sales spend enough one-on-one time with the Account Executives.	20%	20%	40%	20%	0%
There is a specific skill set that one has in order to enter the company and be successful.	30%	40%	10%	10%	10%
Account Executives are assessed in concise fashion.	30%	20%	30%	20%	0%
Goldmine, the contact management system at [REDACTED], is used to the fullest of its capabilities.	10%	10%	0%	60%	20%
There is fluid communication throughout the sales hierarchy at [REDACTED].	0%	10%	20%	50%	30%
Without proper time management and prioritization an Account Executive or a Vice President is destined to fail.	10%	40%	10%	40%	0%
It Takes motivation and intelligence to succeed at [REDACTED].	50%	40%	0%	10%	0%
[REDACTED] creates a positive sales environment.	10%	30%	20%	40%	0%
Given the current economic situation, [REDACTED] still has the potential to thrive and be profitable.	40%	60%	0%	0%	0%

Conclusions and Recommendations

From this research project there were many conclusions realized. These conclusions combine the results of the qualitative and quantitative studies and aided me to provide recommendations to increase productivity and profitability through out the company. From these studies there were five main conclusions that could be seen clearly.

First of all there needs to be more training throughout the company. When people receive more training they are more knowledgeable about what they are selling. In turn they seem more confident over the phone or in person and this will benefit the sale. Along the lines of training another conclusion that I found is that it seems that the Vice Presidents may need to spend just a little more time with the Account executives. It appears that some people get enough face time, but most do not. I recommend bi-weekly training and additional 30 minutes a week face to face time per person

A major issue that was revealed through this study concerns the content management system that the company uses called Goldmine. Goldmine is a database where all of the customers, emails, phone numbers, scheduling, etc...can be stored. This can be utilized to put the Account Executives entire day in order. It has been discovered that this system is not used properly or to the fullest of its capabilities. I highly recommend to [REDACTED] that a retraining on this system be pushed out to the entire company. I also recommend that management insist that Goldmine be used properly and more effectively.

I also discovered, strange enough to a sales corporation, that the communication throughout the company is not at a high level and must be improved upon. I recommend bi-monthly meetings with people from each division and one person from each position within that division to brainstorm ideas and problems throughout the company. This time may also be used

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for positive reinforcement of existing ideals and activities throughout the company. I believe that this will produce better communication, not only in these meetings, but throughout the work day as well.

The final conclusion reached is one of utmost importance. Every person surveyed agreed that [REDACTED] can thrive and be profitable even given the current economic situation. The reason for this actually came first from the qualitative study, but was reinforced through the quantitative research. [REDACTED] provides solutions to customer's problems within their budget. This is a company that provides maintenance at up to half off the manufacturer's price and also sells refurbished and remarketed equipment, which is at a lower cost to the customer. The company strives to find the lowest prices and still provide the best value to the customers. In a time where everyone needs to save whether it be personally or corporate [REDACTED] is there to provide a solution. That being said I recommend that the Account executives stress the features and benefits of the company to each and every customer on every sales call.

Validity of the Research

As stated earlier, on the interest of time, this research was done using a sample size of participants. However, I believe this research to still be of a valid nature. To ensure validity I will need to interview more people throughout the company and also survey every employee that has not been interviewed. This would increase my participants by approximately 75%. The reason I believe that this sample size proves the research to be valid stems from the idea that my sample size represents the company accurately. In order to accurately represent the company I tried to choose participants from as many aspects and levels of the company as possible, within reason. That being said, I would like to expand this research to include the accounting, purchasing, and engineering departments. I would also like to add two or three more researchers

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to the project as well. I believe that if the research is expanded to include more participants and more researchers, then the research as a whole will provide positive recommendations to benefit the entire company.

Appendix A: Interview Guide

RESEARCH TOPIC: In order to make recommendations for future improvements, [REDACTED] endeavors to research the existing roles, responsibilities, recurring activities, required skills and training needs of the hierarchy of sales positions within the company.

- ❑ Describe your role in the company?
- ❑ Describe your typical day?
 - What factors go into planning a typical day?
- ❑ How should an Account Executive plan their day?
- ❑ What strategies (assessment, improvement process, etc..) and interventions (training, one-on-one meetings, etc..) are used throughout the hierarchy of sales?
 - Of these strategies which would you say are key to the development of an Account Executive?
- ❑ What is involved in deciding how/when to have training on new products/services?
 - How much time should be spent on training?
- ❑ What barriers, if any, do you encounter when trying to develop an Account Executive into a successful salesperson?
 - How do you overcome these barriers?
- ❑ In your opinion, how much one-on-one or face time should be allocated between the VP and Account Exec.?
- ❑ What is your belief concerning the skill sets of new employees; are there certain skill sets one must have to enter this company and prove successful, if so what are they?
- ❑ In a failing economy as we currently are in, what can be done to promote success throughout [REDACTED]?
- ❑ Is there anything that you would like to add?

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Appendix B: Survey

I appreciate you taking the time to complete this survey. Please answer all questions honestly; the names of the participants will be kept anonymous. This data will be compiled with depth interviews which have been previously conducted. After all of the data is compiled and the research is complete you will have an opportunity to see the results of the project.

Thank You,



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In order to make recommendations for future improvements, [REDACTED] endeavors to research the existing roles, responsibilities, recurring activities, required skills and training needs of the hierarchy of sales positions within the company.

1. The Account Executives receive ample training at [REDACTED].
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

2. The Vice Presidents of Sales spend enough one-on-one time with the Account Executives.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

3. There is a specific skill set that one has in order to enter the company and be successful.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

4. Account Executives are assessed in a concise fashion.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

5. Goldmine, the contact management system at [REDACTED], is used to the fullest of its capabilities.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

6. There is fluid communication throughout the sales hierarchy at [REDACTED].
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

7. Without proper time management and prioritization an Account Executive or a Vice President is destined to fail.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

8. It takes motivation and intelligence to succeed at [REDACTED].

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

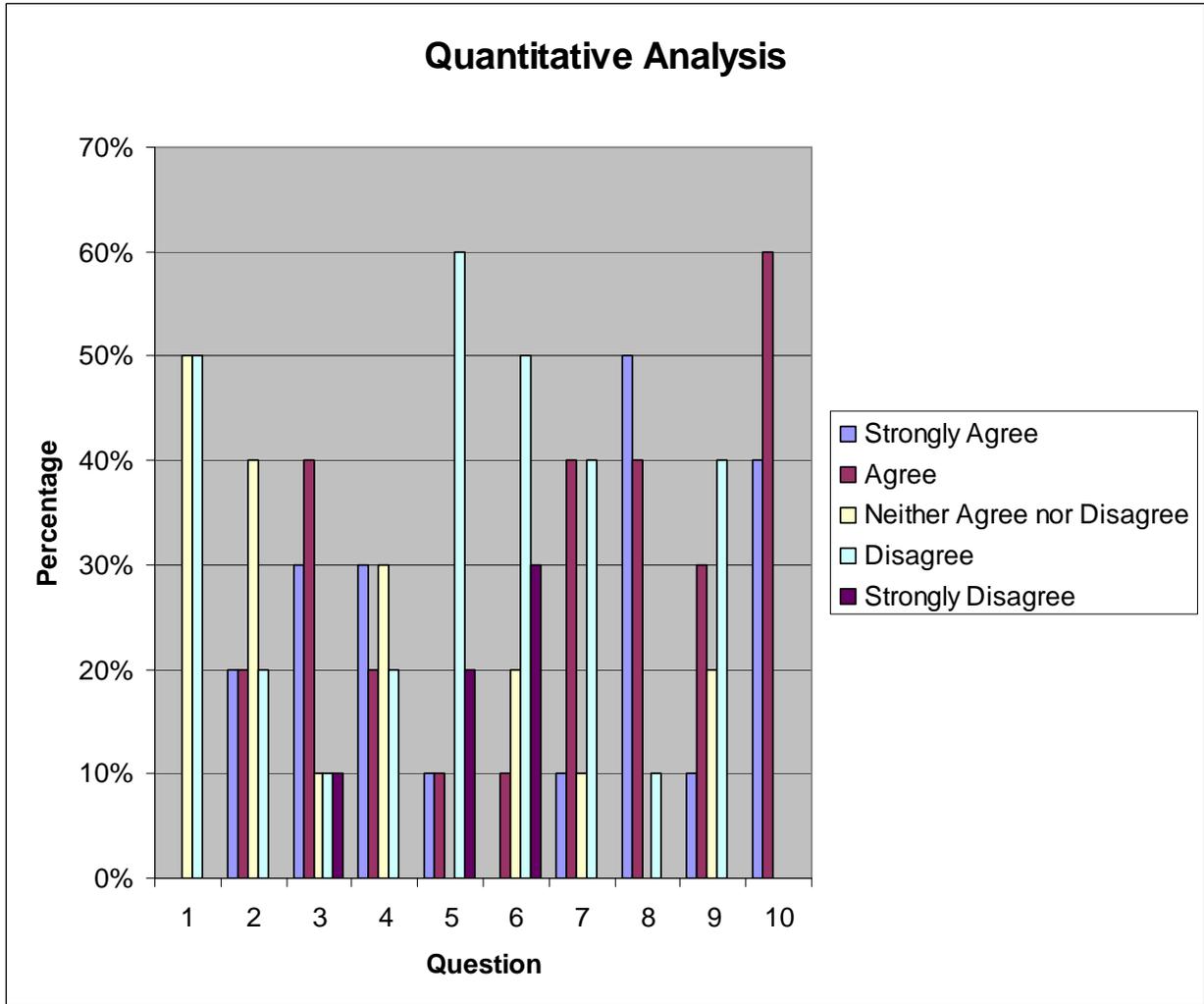
9. [REDACTED] creates a positive sales environment.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

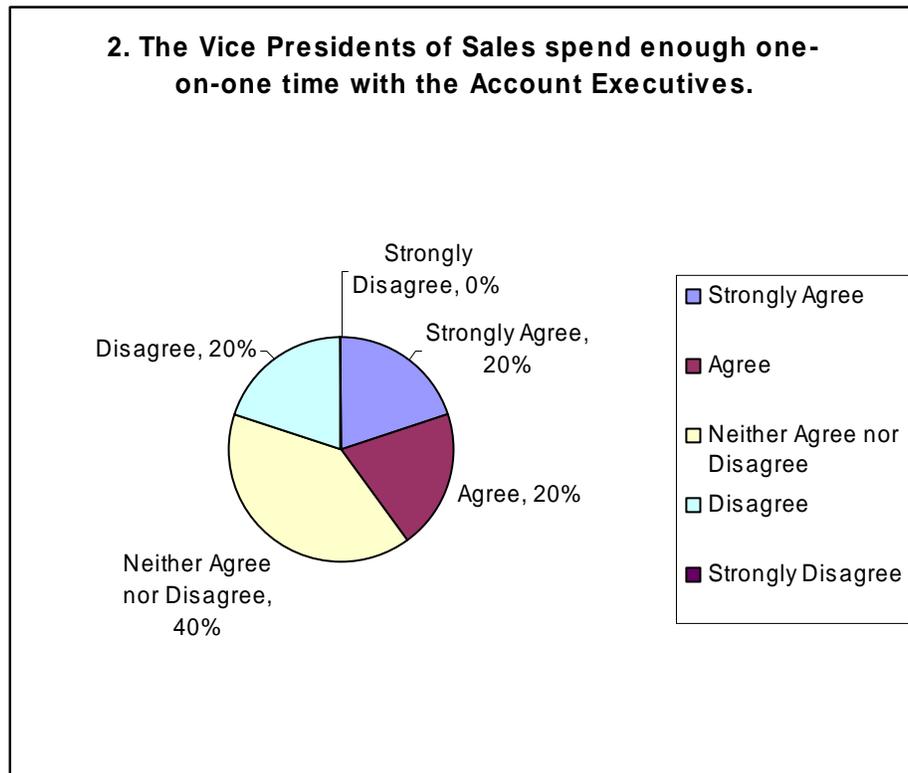
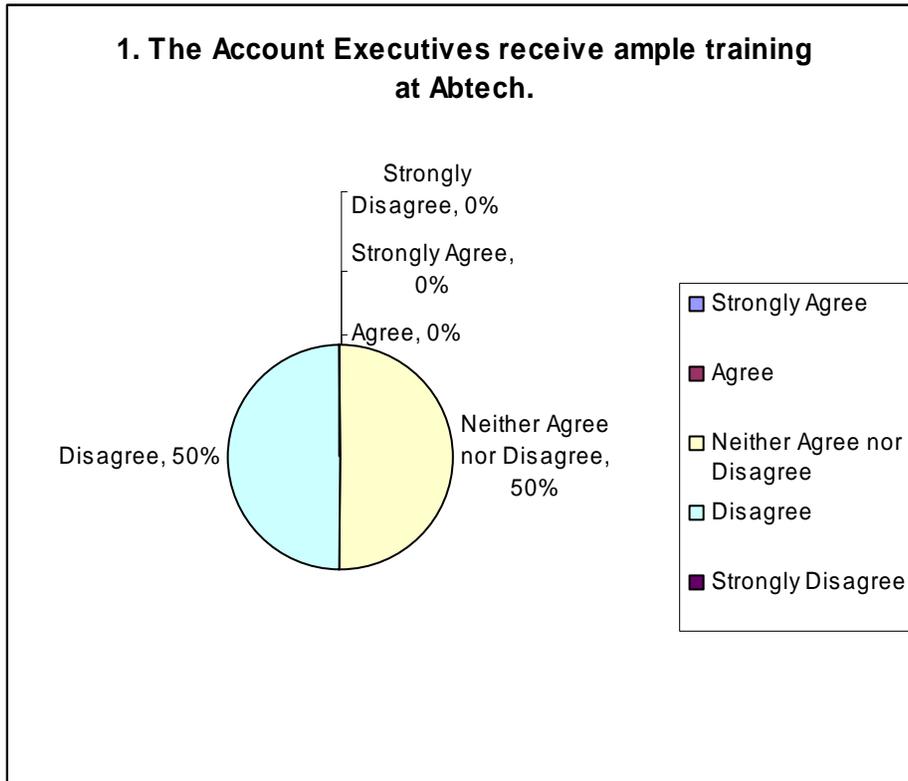
10. Given the current economic situation, [REDACTED] still has the potential to thrive and be profitable.

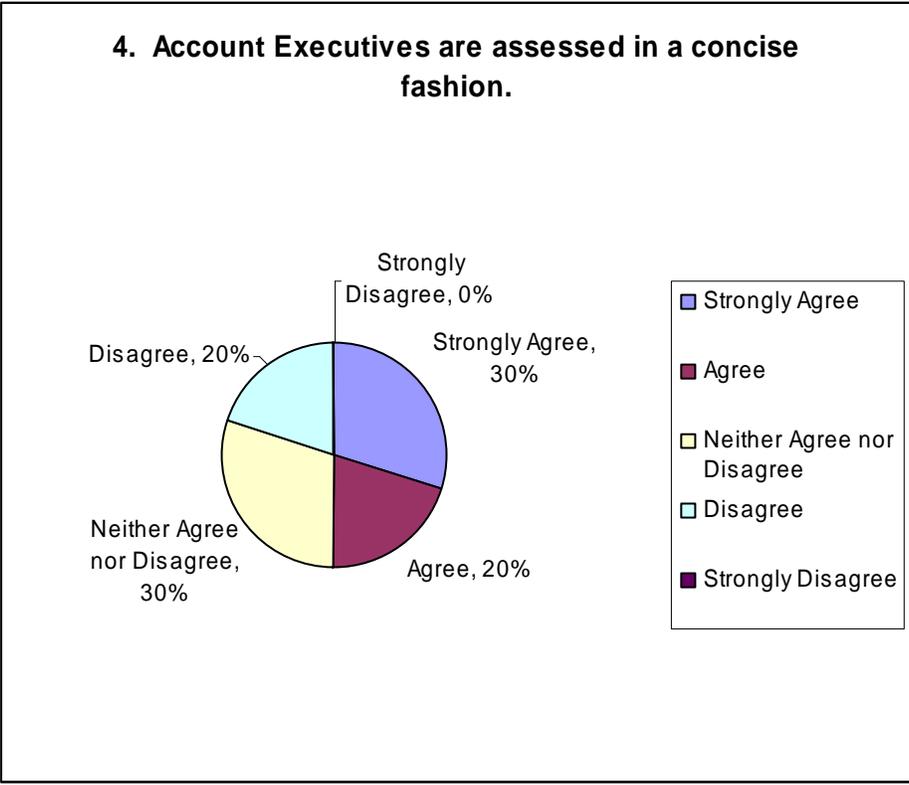
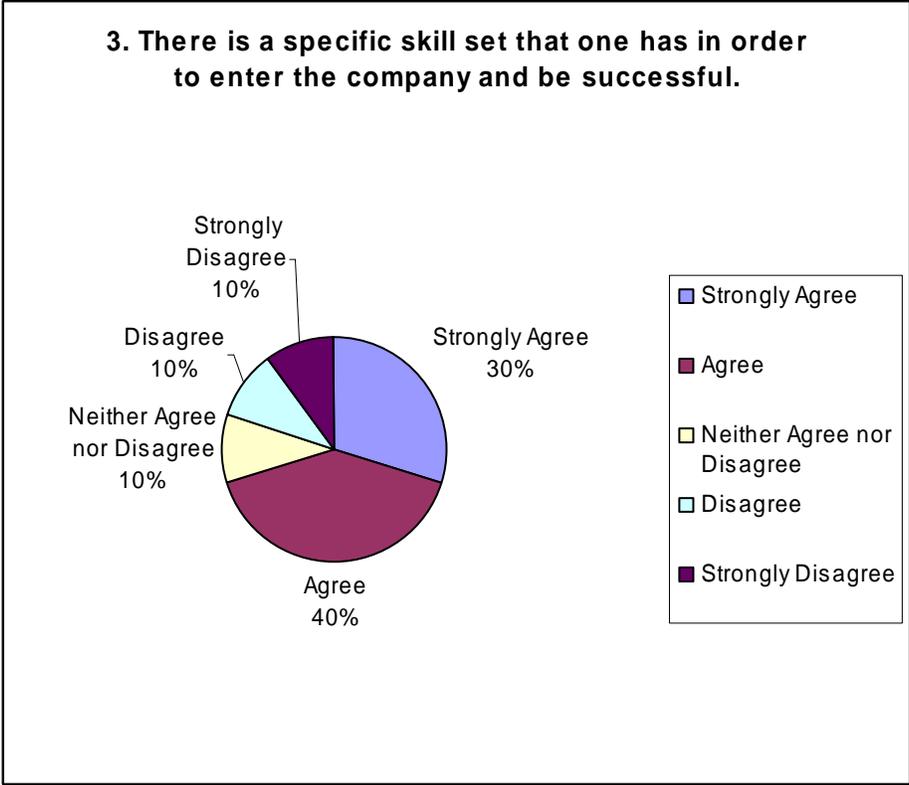
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

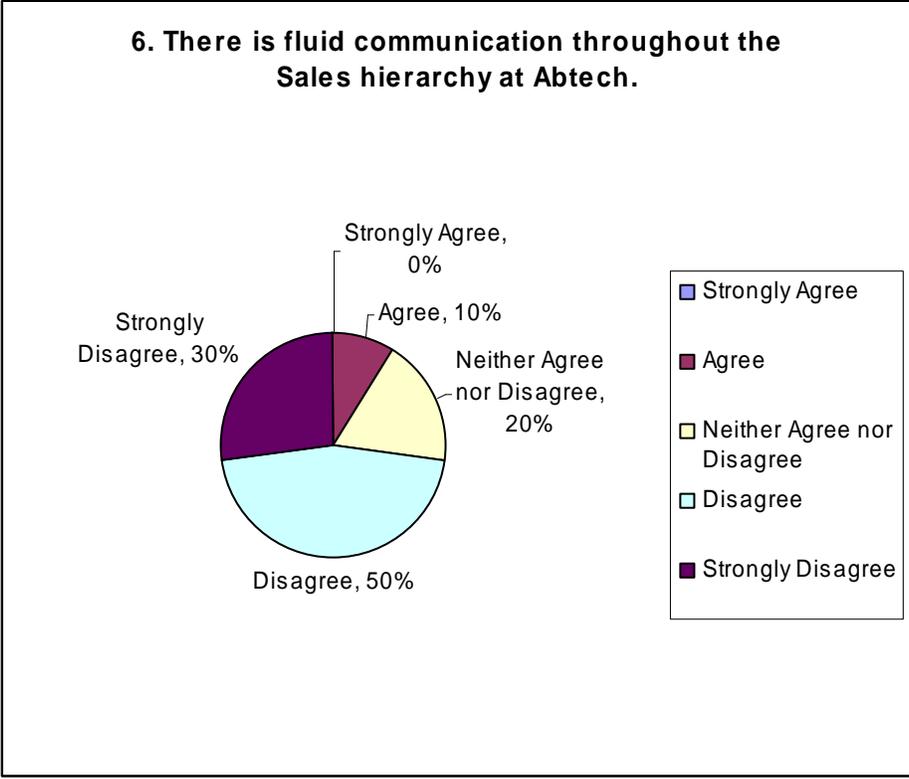
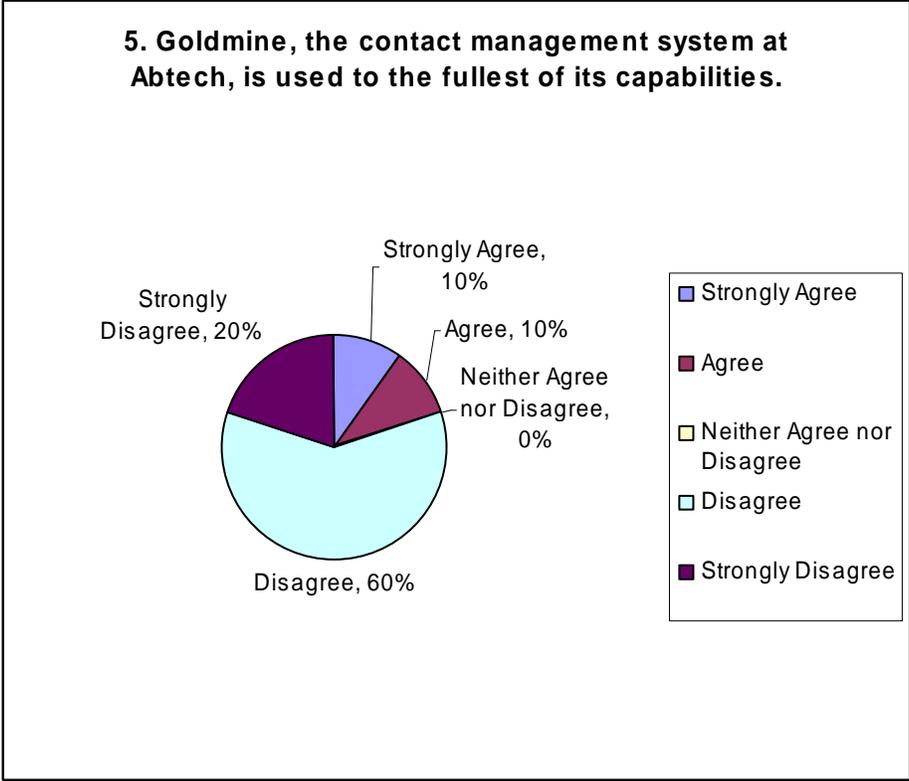
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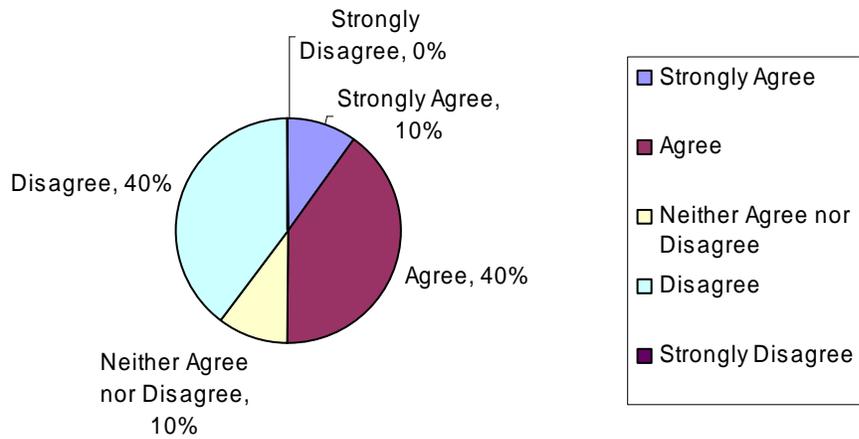
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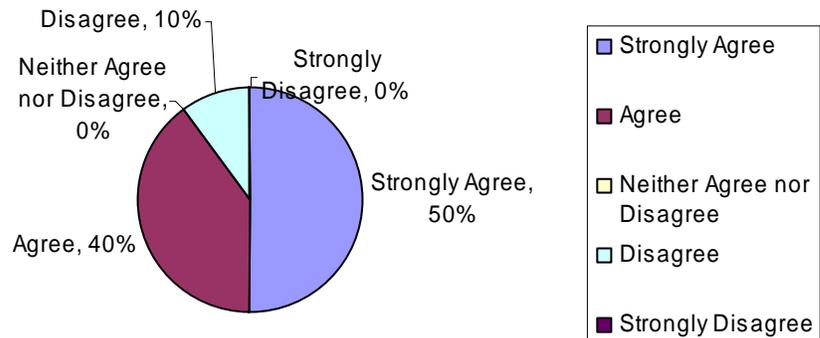


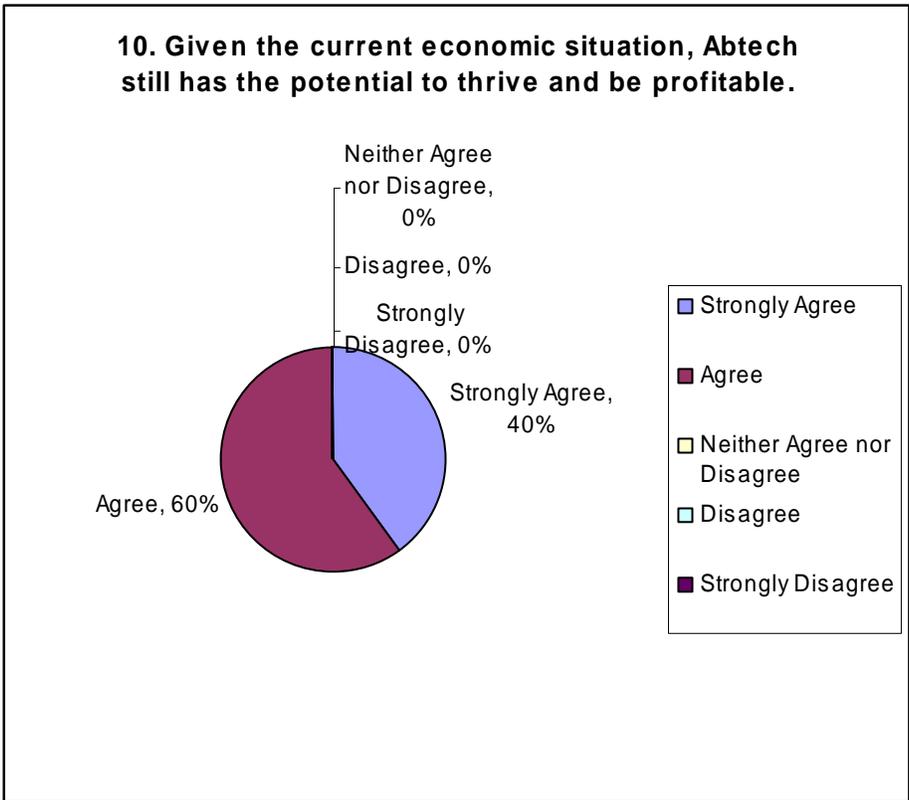
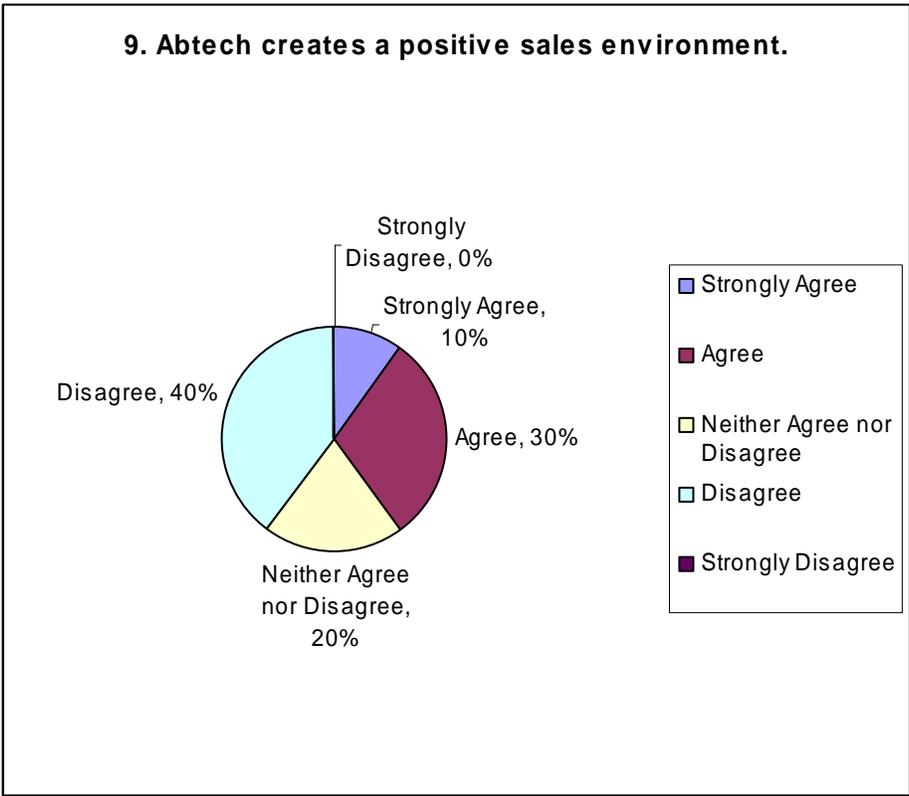


7. Without proper time management and prioritization an Account Executive or a Vice President is destined to fail.



8. It takes motivation and intelligence to succeed at Abtech.





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