



MIND THE MOTIVATION GAP

YOU THINK YOU KNOW
WHAT MOTIVATES
YOUR TEAM,
BUT DO THEY AGREE?

We asked more than 200 sales professionals which tactics work and what needs improvement.



You think you know what motivates your reps, but do they agree?

Motivating a sales team is challenging in the best of times. During the last three years, however, leaders have had to do so even as they navigated global calamity and workforce changes.

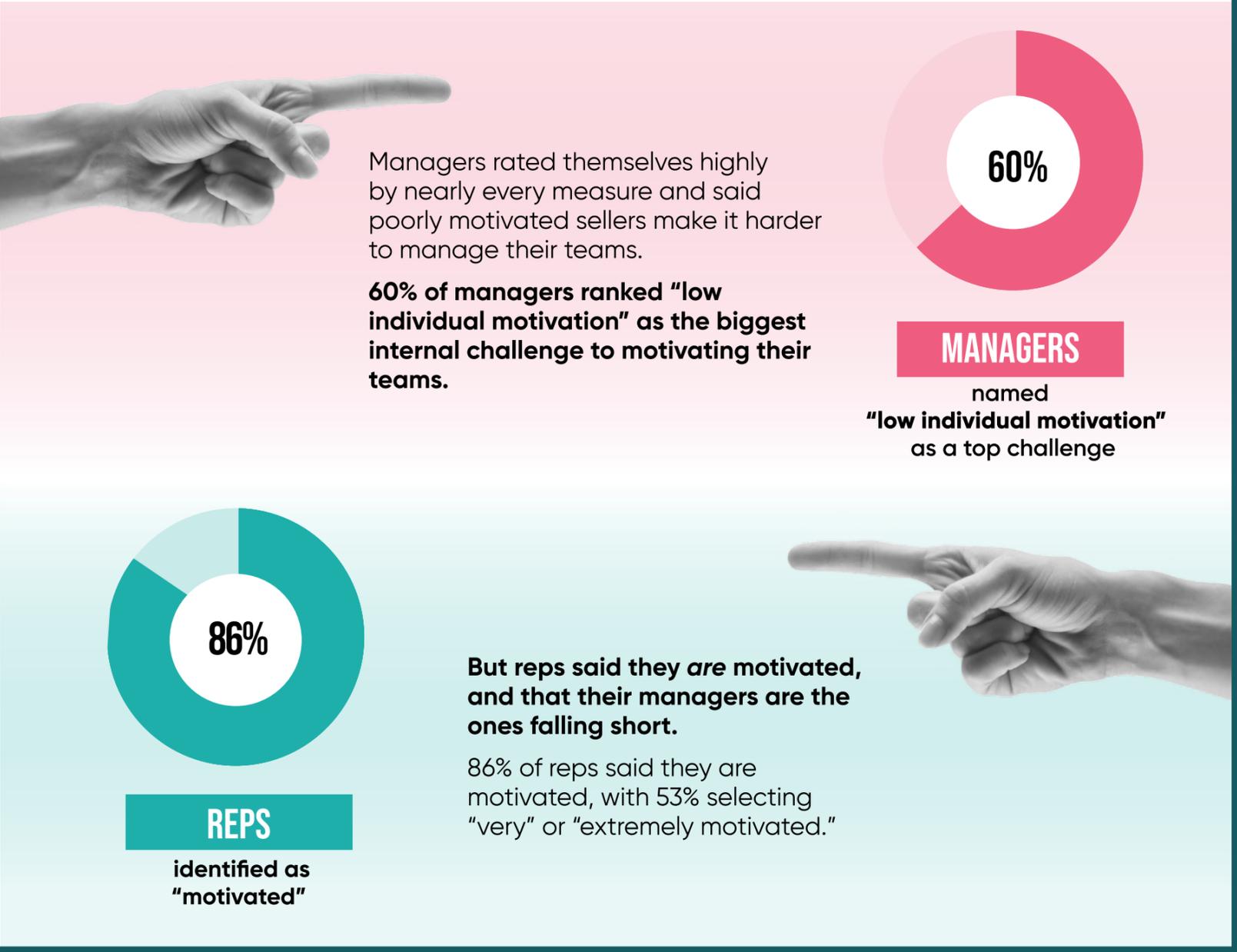
Sales reps have been on a similar odyssey, striving to hit goals while grappling with burnout, new priorities, and economic uncertainty.

Now, in the second half of 2023, we are settling into a new normal. Hybrid work has been normalized, and, despite a hazy economic outlook, workers are happier than they've been in decades. Given this momentum, SalesScreen decided it was time to examine how well sales leaders and managers motivate their sellers.

We surveyed more than 200 sales professionals to understand how managers communicate with their teams, which tactics they use to motivate reps, and how often they recognize their hard work. Then we asked reps how effective those efforts really are.

We found a startling perception gap between managers and reps.

We asked leaders and managers which challenges are creating the biggest difficulties when managing and motivating their sales reps.



LEADERS AND MANAGERS

think they're crushing it.

REPS

aren't so sure.

Despite their challenges, leaders and managers hold themselves in high esteem. When asked to evaluate their management and motivational performance, they gave themselves high marks across the board. Sales reps were far less enthusiastic.

For example, 71% of leaders and managers agreed with the statement, "I know how to motivate my team to perform their best," and 76% agreed that, "I know how to motivate each individual rep." (Ironically, 78% of managers who pointed to low individual motivation also said that they know how to motivate individuals.)

Meanwhile, sales reps told a very different story. Only 40% agreed with the statement, "My manager knows how to motivate me." 19% said they "disagree" or "strongly disagree." Responses to questions about recognition and guidance also resulted in very different evaluations.



76% MANAGERS

SAID THEY UNDERSTAND HOW TO MOTIVATE INDIVIDUAL REPS

40% REPS

SAID THEIR MANAGER KNOWS HOW TO MOTIVATE THEM



My reps know I value them

68%

FEELING VALUED

53%

I feel valued by my manager

I recognize my reps

79%

RECOGNITION

58%

I feel I am recognized when I perform well

I provide guidance

77%

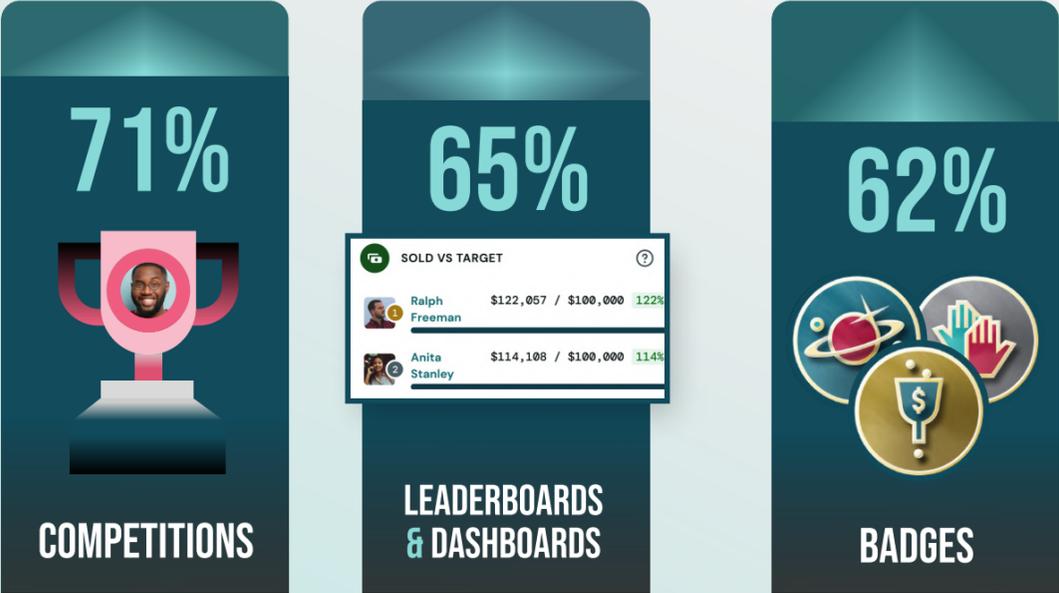
GUIDANCE

50%

My manager provides guidance

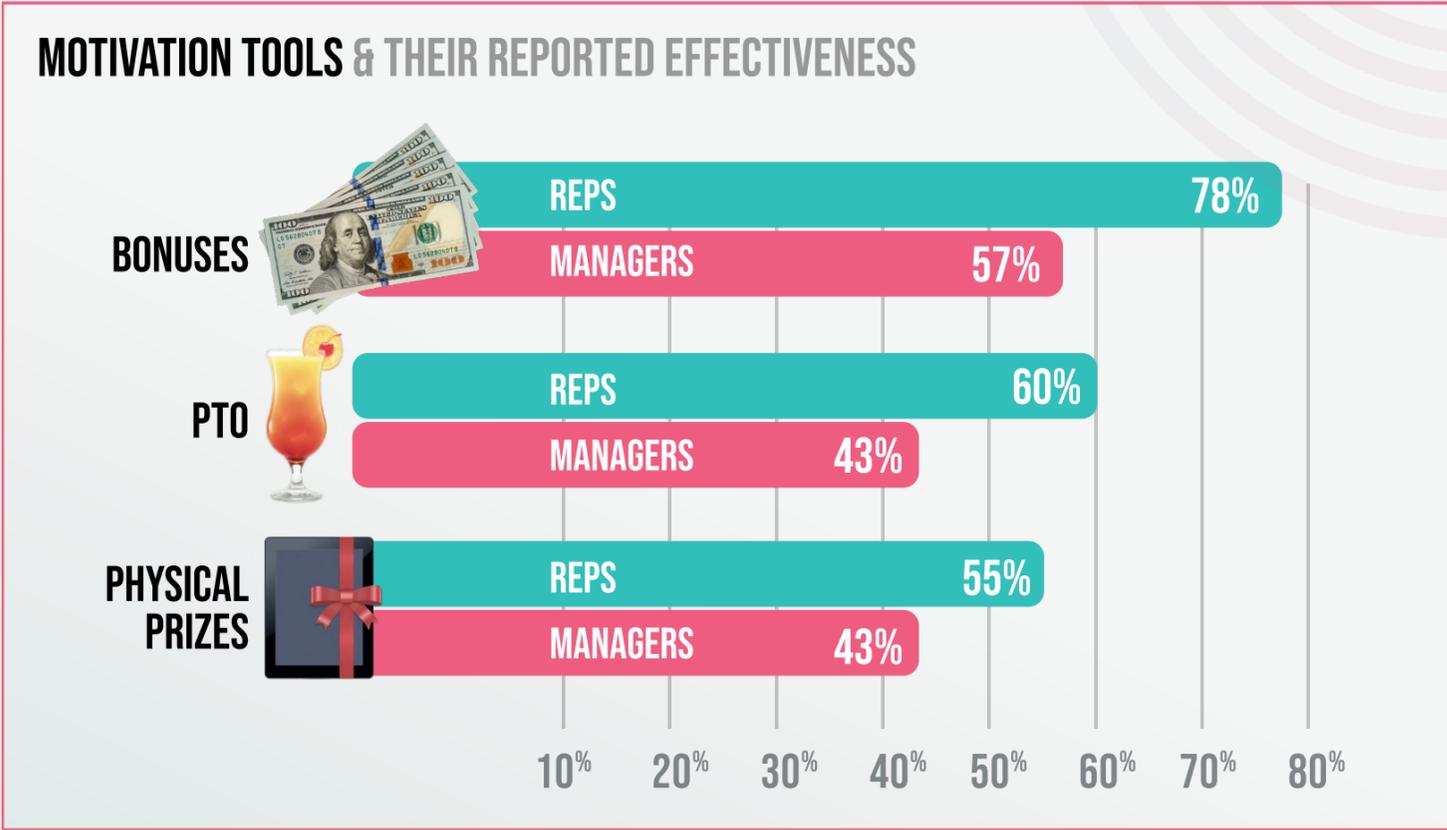
69% of managers say they have the tools they need to motivate reps, but they overlook the power of tangible rewards.

True to form, 69% of managers agree they have the tools they need to motivate their sales reps. They say gamification elements—leaderboards and dashboards, competitions, and badges that mark milestones and achievements, are among the most effective.



Much of this tracks. When asked what motivates them to perform their best and reach their day-to-day goals, sales reps ranked individual goal progression (46%) and being able to track their progress in real-time (61%)—as one does on a dashboard—as top motivators. Likewise, 61% of reps said being recognized regularly inspires them to work harder. Badges that call out achievements do just that.

Managers did seem to overlook several obvious motivators—tangible rewards. When asked what tools and rewards were the most effective motivators, reps unequivocally ranked one-time bonuses, additional paid time off, and physical rewards as good reasons to amp up their efforts.



Old-fashioned incentives like President’s Club status, travel, and job promotions are ineffective short-term motivators.

**IMMEDIATE REWARDS
INSPIRE EFFORT
IN THE MOMENT.**

Managers challenged by low motivation also grapple with low team morale.

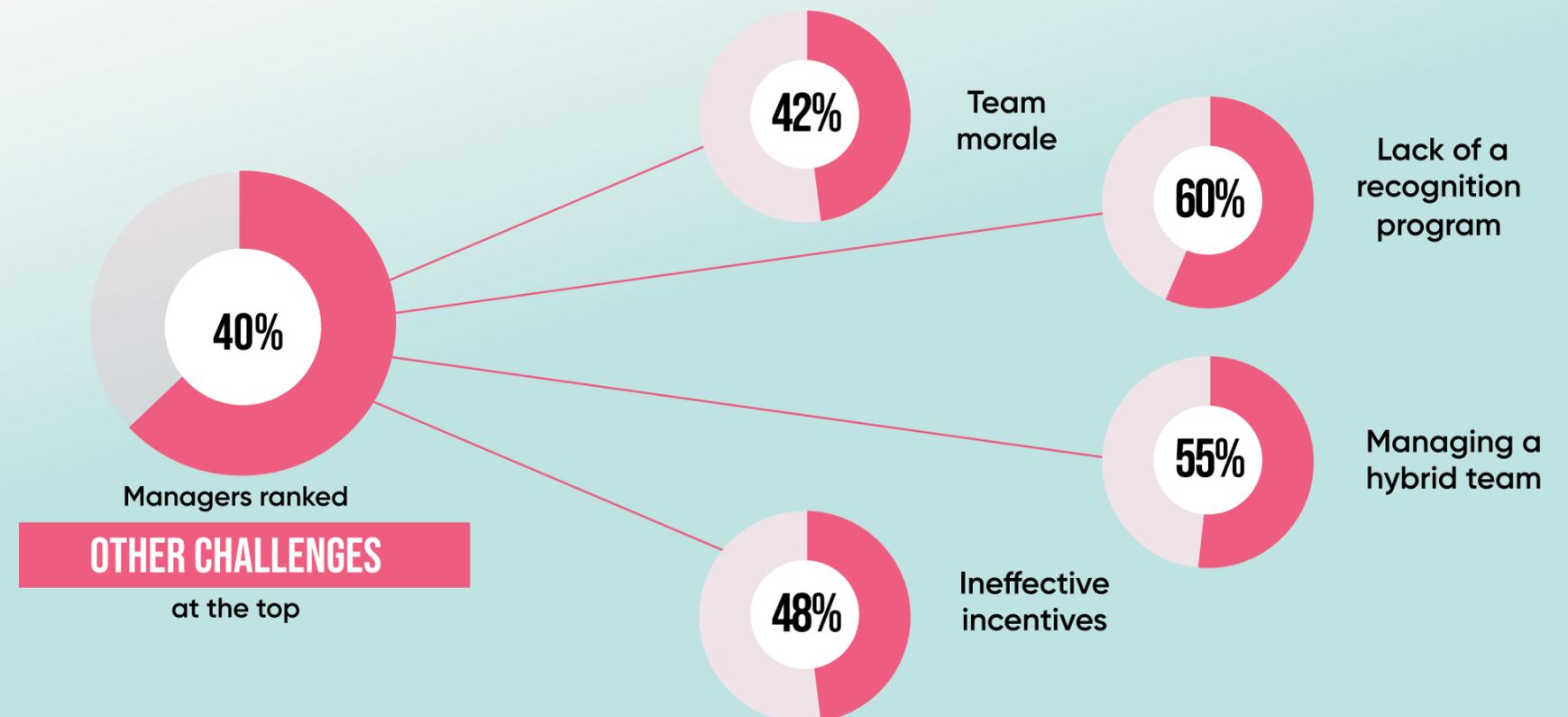
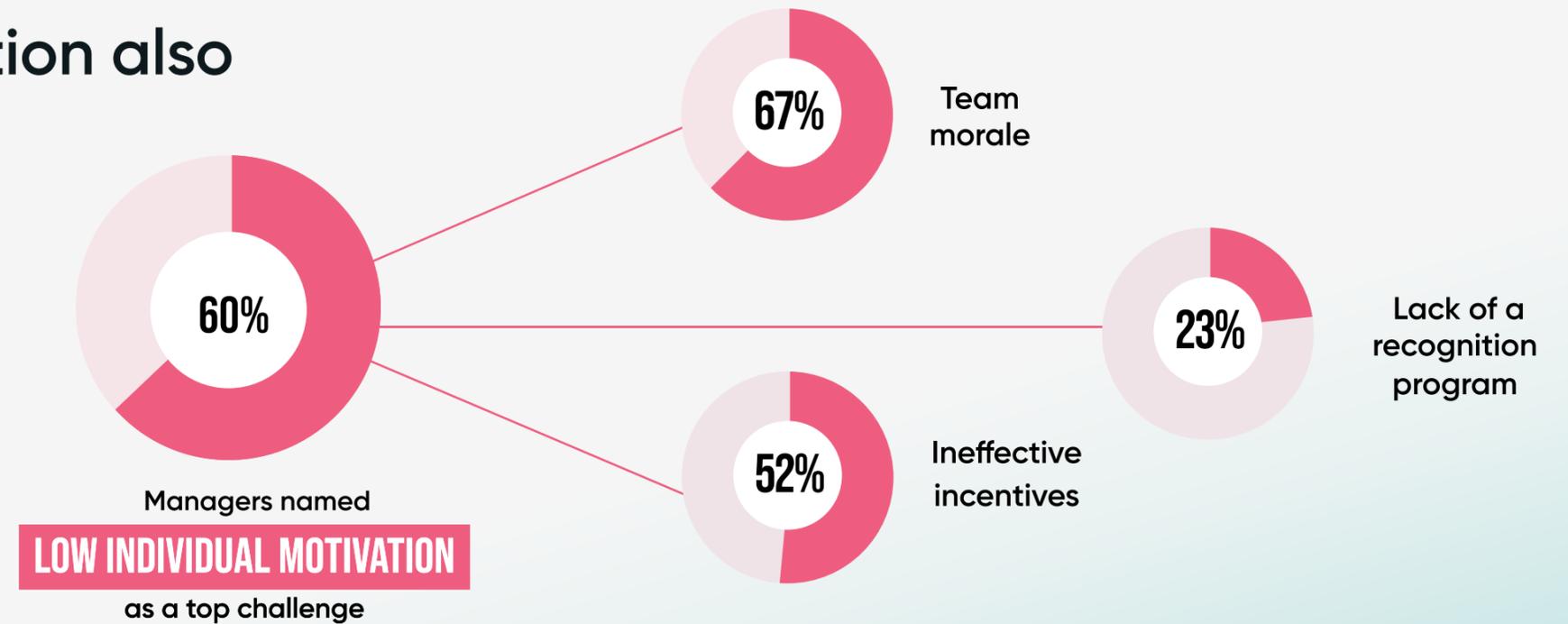
Are managers spending an outsized portion of their time and energy motivating poor performers? The data suggests the problem is bigger than just a few reps.

Managers and leaders who said they are most challenged by “low individual motivation” also picked “low team morale” as their second biggest problem. 67% put it in their top three.

In short, managers and leaders who point to “low individual motivation” as a key difficulty also seem to have a team wide morale problem on their hands.

By contrast, only 42% of other managers named morale as a top three problem. In fact, morale ranked lowest after “lack of a recognition program” (60%), “managing a hybrid team” (55%), and “ineffective incentives” (48%).

When freed of the immediate challenges of tackling motivation and morale, leaders and managers seem to have the bandwidth to look at the bigger picture. After all, it’s hard to think about much else when you’re beating the quota drum every day.



Pursuing goals is a powerful motivator for some reps, but not all.

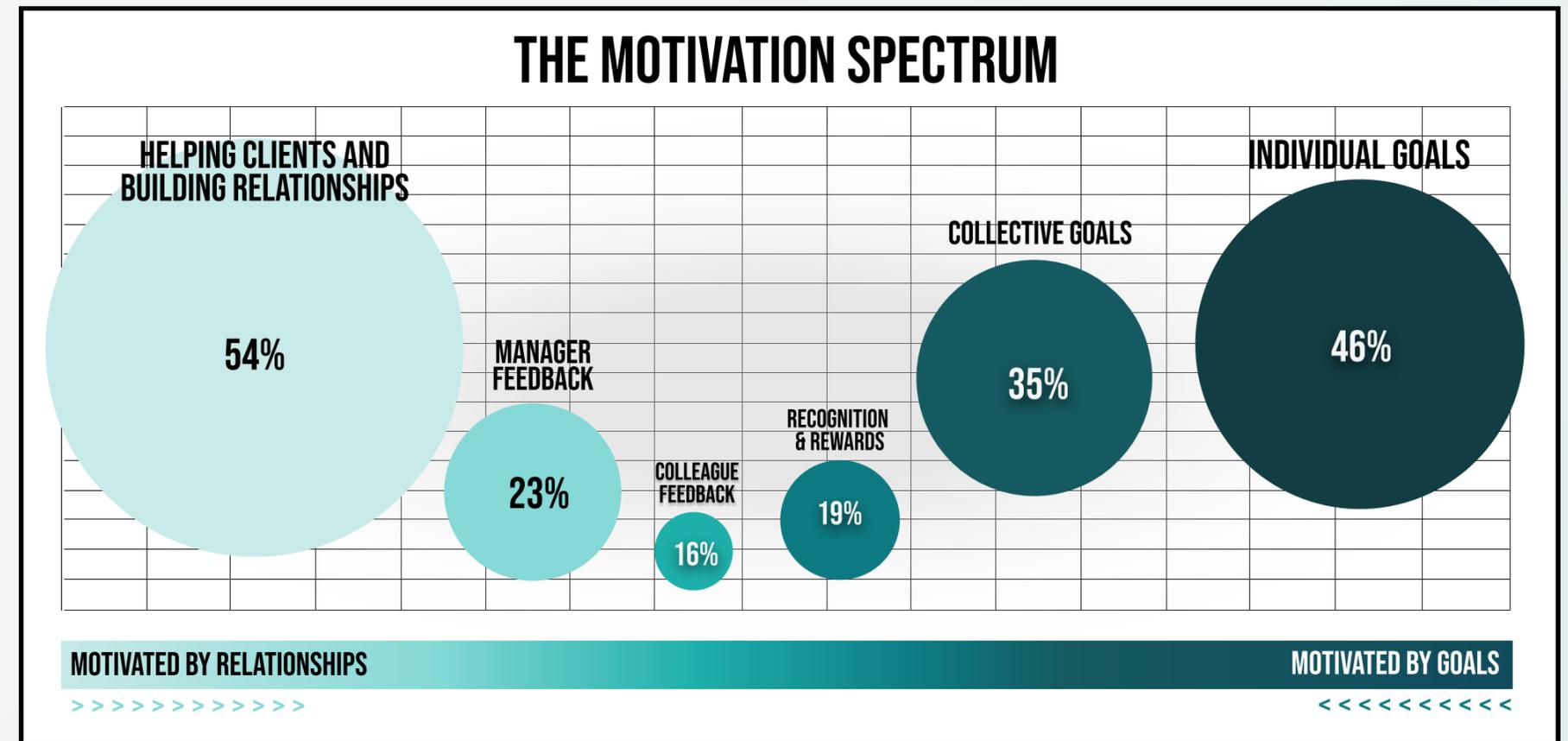
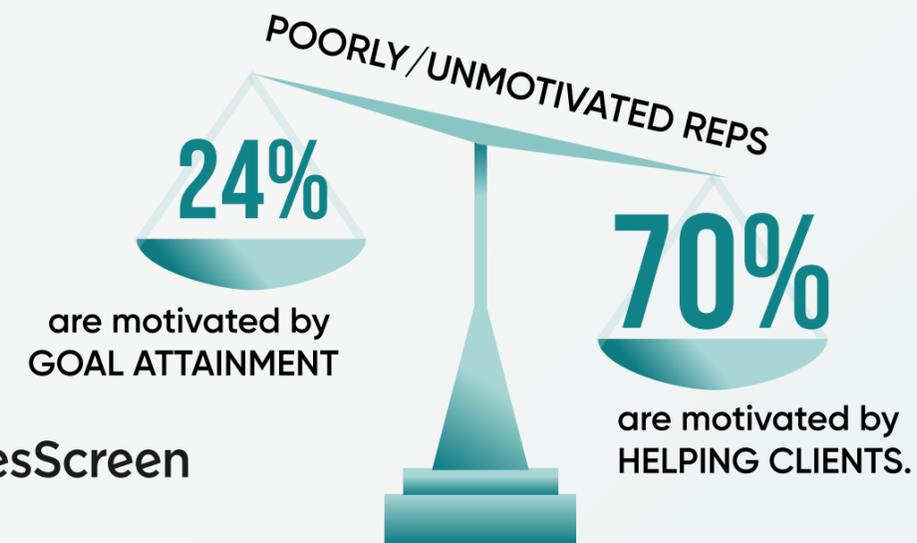
When it comes to intrinsic motivation—a drive to achieve that comes from within—engaged respondents were equally split between goal attainment and helping clients.

This makes sense. Sales reps are social creatures with a vested interest in helping clients succeed, but they're rewarded financially for hitting their numbers.

However, when we divide reps according to how motivated they say they are, a clear correlation emerges. The more motivated the rep, the more effective they rated goal attainment. The less motivated they are, the more likely they were to choose helping clients.

Reps who identified as "extremely motivated," were the most likely to choose making progress on individual goals (56%) and least likely to choose helping clients (44%) of any other group.

Conversely, 70% sellers who identify as "poorly" or "not at all motivated" chose helping clients, a much larger proportion. Only 24% of those reps said goal attainment is a powerful motivator.



Managers should THINK BEYOND THE USUAL TOOLS to inspire the whole team

These results suggest that managers struggling with "low individual motivation" on their teams may do better to acknowledge that different sellers are motivated differently.

Remember how managers ranked gamification elements like dashboards and badges as effective? They are—for some reps.

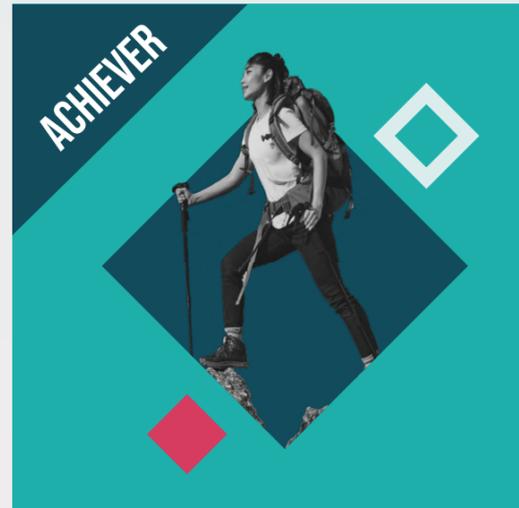
"Extremely motivated" chose goal-related motivations like making progress on goals (56%) or being the top seller (30%) in higher proportions.

These reps also said seeing their goal progression data in real time—a primary function of dashboards and leaderboards—as the most effective tool, followed by team wide competitions and markers of achievement like badges.

Managers might need to look beyond these traditional tools to find creative ways to motivate the rest of the team.

Bartle's player types can help managers think about how to motivate

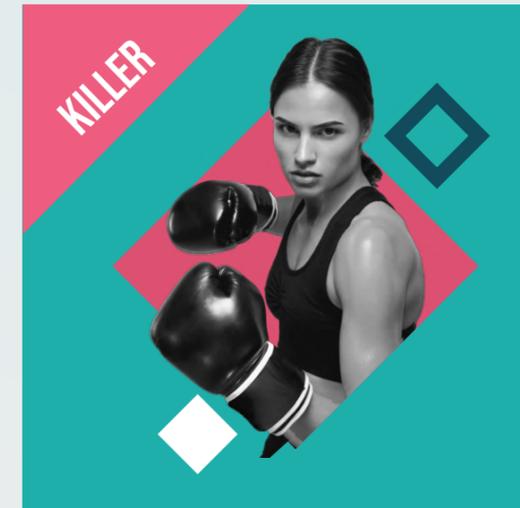
DIFFERENT kinds of sellers



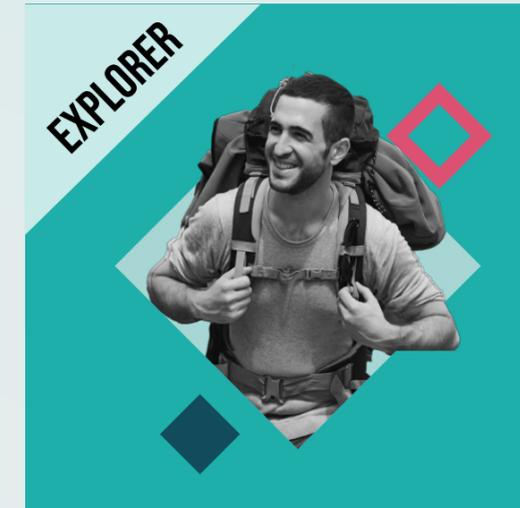
- Prioritizes personal success over winning
- Wants to accrue "points," level up, and build skills



- Enjoys helping others, sharing advice and experience
- Likes working on collective goals



- Born competitor
- Aims to be number one and beat their rivals in head-to-head competitions



- Prefers being "first," if not necessarily best
- Delights in prospecting in new territories and uncovering new, unusual opportunities

The 60% of leaders and managers who cited "low individual motivation" have a problem on their hands, but perhaps not the problem they think.

Too often sales leaders and managers think well-motivated reps are somehow innately better: more focused, harder workers, more talented. But those sellers may simply be wired to respond positively to the motivation framework that has worked in sales for

ages. If that's true, poorly motivated salespeople can be turned around—if managers can understand what makes them tick.

Bartle's player types is one of many frameworks for understanding what motivates different personality types. Coined in 1996 by game researcher Richard Bartle, the framework divides video game players into four types: killers, achievers, socializers, and explorers.

Because sales is an industry that runs on competition, territories, metrics, and rewards, it makes sense to apply that framework here.



ACHIEVERS **25%**

This group was most likely to say they are only "adequately" motivated (40%), with a much smaller percentage identifying as "extremely" motivated (17%), suggesting managers can do more to motivate the middle.

When intrinsic motivations don't align closely with goal attainment, traditional motivators become less effective. **For example, only 10% of Achievers, who focus on building skills and competing against themselves, say they feel "extremely motivated" to hit their goals every day.** About 20% rated themselves as "poorly" or "not at all motivated" to hit those goals, more than any other group.

"I focus on building my skill set and setting new personal records."

Achievers

"I enjoy working with colleagues on shared goals or helping them with their own."

Socializers



SOCIALIZERS **39%**

"Socializers," the largest segment, are also goal-oriented but value the social and collaborative aspects of their work highly. "Pursuing individual goals," was a popular motivator among Socializers (40%) but not nearly as popular as, "working with teammates to accomplish a collective goal" (60%).

Because they are motivated by these two desires, they respond to traditional sales motivation tools like leaderboards and bonuses. **But this group also responds to importance of collaboration and recognition as motivators.**

66% said they feel more motivated when they are recognized on an ongoing basis. 64% said seeing the impact of their work makes them feel more motivated. This group ranked team wide competitions and recognition (42%) as powerful motivators (46%). They also ranked gamification software as a more effective tool than other groups, perhaps because such platforms combine traditional rewards with social elements.

We asked reps "Which statement best describes you?"

"I aim to be among the top sellers every quarter."

Killers

"I love to land new clients and break into new verticals."

Explorers

KILLERS **14%**

As a group, "Killers" made up the smallest segment, but they have a dynamic profile. 82% identified pursuing individual goals as a top motivator, and 60% said having real-time access to goal progression data pushes them further. In addition, 41% cited competitions against coworkers, more than any other type of player.

It's no surprise that this group rated traditional tactics like leaderboards, competitions, and one-time monetary rewards as most effective at motivating them. These tools are widely used by sales managers and are very effective at motivating a certain kind of seller. 88% of Killers identified as "extremely" or "very" motivated.



EXPLORERS **22%**

Likewise, Explorers—sellers who aim to land new clients and break new verticals—reported being "extremely" or "very" motivated in greater proportions (55%), but 11% said they were "not motivated at all." This makes sense, considering that many managers set conventional pipeline KPIs that Explorers might find tedious and repetitive.

Neither Achievers nor Explorers were averse to the usual motivational tools and tactics. In fact, they also rated leaderboards, competitions, and bonuses as reasonably effective. (Explorers, true to their name, rated travel as a more motivating reward than other groups. Achievers preferred badges.)

To motivate these reps, managers should look beyond traditional pipeline KPIs and set goals that better align with their motivational styles. Challenge Achievers to break their personal record instead of hitting a monthly quota. Or, since 75% of Explorers said they are motivated by "helping clients and building relationships," measure success based on the length and quality of their calls, instead of volume. Or, challenge them to upsell clients or break ground in new verticals.



Recognition isn't a short-term motivator, but it is a long-term investment in morale

Regardless of their player type or level of motivation, sales reps agreed that "recognition" was not an effective motivator for meeting day-to-day goals. But it may be a key ingredient for maintaining motivation over the long-term and building morale.

When asked how they had been recognized over the past three months, only 16% of motivated reps said they had not been recognized. This makes sense, since 79% of managers said they recognize their reps when they perform well, usually on a quarterly (31%) or monthly (30%) basis. Recognition is given publicly, one-to-one, via email and verbally, per managers and their reps.

Meanwhile, 71% of poorly or unmotivated reps said they had not been recognized at all in the past three months. **Feeling invisible or unvalued while toiling away is likely souring some reps on their job and sapping their motivation over the long term.** This may be at the heart of managers' morale problem, as discontent spreads quickly throughout an organization.

Notably, not all reps who go unrecognized feel unmotivated (63% said they are motivated), but they are more likely to feel unvalued or misunderstood. **As a group, reps who said they had not been recognized within the last three months were less likely to say they felt valued by their manager.** Only 34% said they felt valued, compared to 58% of reps who reported some recognition.

They're also less likely to say they feel supported by their coworkers—only 28% of "unrecognized" reps did. Conversely, 60% of "recognized" reps said they feel supported.

It would be too easy to label these unrecognized workers as poor performers or malcontents. But we can say this: 41% of sellers that go unrecognized fall into Bartle's Achiever profile, reinforcing the idea that managers may not know how to motivate certain kinds of sellers.

71% **UNMOTIVATED REPS**

said they had not been recognized in the past three months.

41% **UNRECOGNIZED REPS**

fall into Bartle's Achiever profile, reinforcing that managers may not know how to motivate certain kinds of sellers.



Bridging the Gap



So, as it turns out, sales managers are doing a fine job motivating many of their reps. Traditional goals and tactics do work for a large segment of sellers, but those pesky “low motivation individuals” remain a thorn in managers’ sides.

Managers who write these reps off as somehow intrinsically flawed and standing in the way of team goals may be scapegoating sellers who simply work differently. **Leaders may be better served by trying to understand what motivates these sellers and by broadening their organizations’ definition of success.** Wins like researching new territories, trying new strategies, and building solid client relationships are not as easily measured as traditional pipeline metrics, but that work has value.

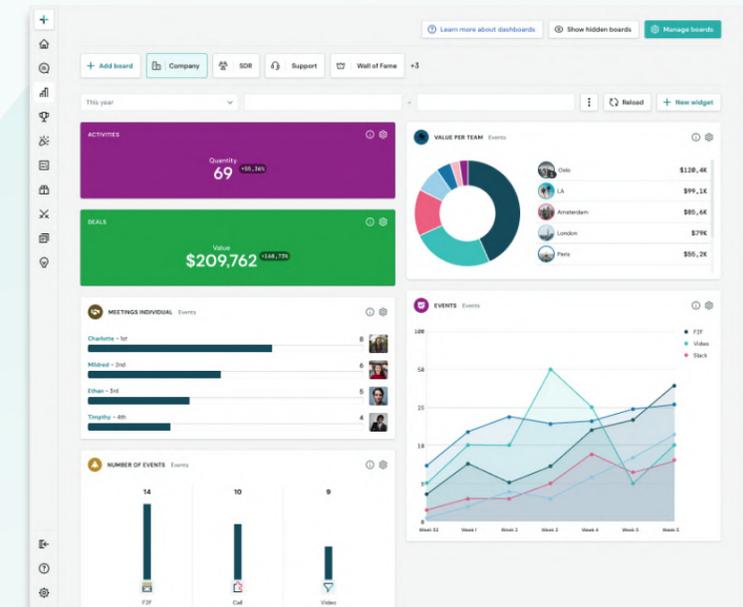
The new work for managers will be to develop a richer understanding of what matters most to each individual rep. When they do, they’ll be able to develop a diverse playbook that motivates every rep to reach goals that are meaningful to them and moves the team forward.

Methodology

In order to gain a better understanding of how sales managers communicate with and motivate their teams—and how sales reps respond to those efforts—SalesScreen conducted a survey of more than 200 sales professionals. For the purposes of this survey, responses were collected from respondents self-identifying as sales leaders (managing a department, multiple teams or a region), sales managers (managing a team of people), sales reps (individual contributors) or call center reps. Responses were then weighted by age and job function. The survey was conducted and answers collected in April 2023.

SalesScreen combines real-time data visualization and gamification, giving sellers unprecedented access to their KPIs which increases engagement and boosts productivity.

Gamification elements turbocharge performance, improve morale, and motivate sellers to go above and beyond benchmarks.



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