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**A GOOD SELLER FROM
CUSTOMERS' POINT OF VIEW**
How to develop sellers with Human Resource
Management?


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A good seller from customers' point of view. How to develop sellers with Human Resource Management?			
Abstract			
<p>The aim of the thesis was to find out what a good clothing store seller is like from customers' point of view and moreover, to make suggestions to Seppälä Oy how to develop their sellers with Human Resource Development by taking the valued characteristics into account. In the thesis was researched what the characteristics of a good seller are and how a good seller differs from others.</p> <p>The theoretical framework of the thesis is based on the top seller, selling and Human Resource Development. The research was conducted by using quantitative and qualitative methods. As a quantitative method, a survey was conducted in a paper form for the consumers of a clothing store. The topic of the survey was a good seller in a clothing store and it was made to find out what the customers value and expect from sellers. The qualitative method consists of two interviews: a semi-structured interview through email to HR manager of Seppälä Oy and a theme interview conducted orally with the store manager of Seppälä Oy. The aim of these two interviews was to gain information about Seppälä Oy and its ways of selling and developing sellers. Moreover, suggestions were given to Seppälä Oy as to how to develop their sellers' with Human Resource Management based on the survey results.</p> <p>From the research results it can be seen what characteristics of a seller customers value and how important the characteristics are. Moreover, from the results it can be seen what characteristics of a seller are disturbing from customers' point of view. Based on the research results development suggestions were made to Seppälä Oy's Human resource Development.</p> <p>The research revealed that the characteristics of a good seller in a clothing store are mostly the ones that are learnable. They can be easily taught and developed with proper methods. The respondents value the most the know-how and the ability to listen to customers. Based on the research results, disturbing characteristics were found as well, such as forcing products to customers, being pushy and the inability to listen to customers.</p> <p>The development suggestions made to Seppälä Oy based on the research results are divided into different themes as in the theory part. The suggestions were given to recruitment, training, coaching, mentoring and benchmarking. The main development areas of Seppälä Oy are recruitment and training.</p>			
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CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION.....	1
2	SEPPÄLÄ OY.....	3
2.1	Introduction of the commissioning party.....	3
2.2	Seppälä's values.....	4
2.3	Selling at Seppälä Oy.....	4
2.4	Human Resource Management and Development at Seppälä Oy.....	5
3	SELLING.....	7
3.1	Selling is influencing.....	7
3.2	Sales process and sales ladders.....	8
3.3	Generation of the sales profit.....	10
3.4	Customer service.....	11
3.5	Customer oriented selling.....	12
4	A SUCCESSFUL SELLER.....	13
4.1	Characteristics of a successful seller.....	13
4.1.1	Attitude.....	15
4.1.2	Skills of closing the sales.....	15
4.2	Knowledge of human nature.....	17
4.3	Sociability and social skills.....	19
5	HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT.....	22
5.1	Recruitment and selection.....	22
5.1.1	The goal of recruitment.....	24
5.1.2	Sellers psychological profile in recruitment.....	24
5.2	Training.....	26
5.2.1	Benefits of training.....	27
5.2.2	Unsuccessful training.....	27
5.2.3	Transfer of learned skills.....	28
5.3	Mentoring.....	29
5.3.1	Spontaneous mentoring.....	30
5.3.2	Organized mentoring.....	30
5.3.3	A good mentor.....	31
5.4	Coaching.....	32
5.5	Benchmarking.....	34

6	RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION.....	36
6.1	Quantitative research	36
6.1.1	Data collection of the quantitative method	37
6.1.2	Analysis of the quantitative data.....	38
6.2	Qualitative research	39
6.2.1	Data collection of the qualitative method	39
6.2.2	Analysis of the qualitative data.....	40
7	RESEARCH RESULTS.....	42
7.1	Background information of the respondents.....	42
7.2	Survey results independent of the age, city, occupation and gender of the respondents.....	43
8	CONCLUSION OF THE GOOD SELLER.....	56
9	DEVELOPMENT SUGGESTIONS TO SEPPÄLÄ OY	61
9.1	Development suggestions for recruitment.....	61
9.2	Development suggestions for training.....	62
9.3	Development suggestions for coaching and mentoring.....	65
9.4	Development suggestions for benchmarking.....	66
10	CONCLUDING REMARKS	67
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	69

APPENDIX

- 1 Interview questions to HR manager of Seppälä Oy
- 2 Interview themes to store manager of Seppälä Oy
- 3 The paper form survey

1 INTRODUCTION

The subject of my thesis is a good seller and how to take the characteristics into account in Human Resource Development. I chose this subject because I have had lots of experience in customer service as well as in the sales field and I wanted to get deeper knowledge of the characteristics of a good seller from customers' point of view. To go even further I wanted to get a view on how companies can use this knowledge in Human Resource Development (HRD). My interest towards Human Resource (HR) does not have the same background as in customer service, but I have got the interest in HR from school and my previous work places.

The commissioning party was easy to choose. Especially now, after the huge changes in the commissioning company. I have always been interested in fashion and since my mother has been working at Seppälä Oy for over 15 years, I chose them. I know many employees at Seppälä and it was easy to contact the owner and after that the HR manager of Seppälä Oy. Seppälä Oy is always willing to help employees and their families, in this case me and my thesis.

The aim of the topic, good sellers' characteristics from the customers' point of view, is to find the kinds of features and habits that good sellers, in a clothing field, have and how the good sellers stand out from others. The research questions are: 1) what a good seller is like from customers' point of view, 2) how to develop sellers' with HRD by taking the characteristics of a good seller into account?

The topic of my thesis is topical and important for Seppälä Oy. They always want to hear their customers' opinions and new development ideas. Through the customer service, Seppälä can add value to their customers, get regular and loyal customers and mostly increase their sales. The objective of my thesis is to give suggestions to Seppälä; what is needed to be a good seller in a clothing store from customers' point of view, and how to develop their employees properly by taking the valued characteristics into account with the potential to succeed in sales. In this research, it is important to take Seppälä's values into account as well as the selling takes place at Seppälä.

The research was carried out with a survey questionnaire for Seppälä's possible customers to gain their opinion on a good seller. I also interviewed Seppälä's HR manager

and one store manager to get knowledge of their current situation and their way of work. To get a deeper sight, I used benchmarking as my tool to see how other organizations in the same field manage their sales and customer service. In addition my family background helped me to understand the topic in a better way.

2 SEPPÄLÄ OY

2.1 Introduction of the commissioning party

The fashion company Seppälä Oy's story began in 1930 when founder Edward Seppälä opened his first store in Kouvola. Since then Seppälä Oy has had huge changes in their businesses. In 1980 they started mail ordering in Finland as the first clothing company and in 1984 Seppälä internationalized their company when they opened the first store in Hannover Germany. In 1988 Stockmann corporation bought Seppälä and at that time fashion store Seppälä had 54 stores and 1200 employees. After Stockmann bought Seppälä, they opened 70 new stores in 1999-2000 and since the year of 2000, Seppälä expanded to Estonia, Sweden, Latvia, Russia and Lithuania. (Seppälä 2015.)

Seppälä brands have also had some changes over the years. In 2012 Seppälä started to reform their brand. In the same year Tiia Vanhatapio made a new collection for Seppälä Oy. In 2013 they renewed their store concept for a brighter, clearer and more modern layout. (Seppälä 2015.)

The biggest change happened in 2015, when Stockmann sold Seppälä Oy to Eveliina and Timo Melentjeff. Therefore Seppälä Oy is a family business once again, which will be built and developed with its customers. Seppälä's main office is located currently in Helsinki, where all the decisions are made. Seppälä has closed all stores in Russia, Germany, Latvia and Lithuania as well as 36 stores in Finland. Currently Seppälä has 87 stores in Finland and 20 in Estonia. (Seppälä 2015.)

After the newest changes, Seppälä launched their new collection and concept: a new suitable clothing for Finnish people. Finnish people need more looseness in all places. New owner Eveliina Melentjeff saw a good opportunity to save Seppälä and she has so much passion for what she does. Seppälä's main customer target markets are Finnish middle aged women, which led for the change in their collection. (Seppälä 2015.)

In the background is Edward Seppälä's thought of offering fashion to everyone who enjoys it – with an own style, as a trendsetter and mostly inexpensively. (Seppälä 2015.)

2.2 Seppälä's values

Seppälä lives and works through its values, it makes them who they are right now. The values are used in stores, offices, designs, sales, etc. As an accountable company, Seppälä carries the liability of social responsibility, they care about the environment as well as their employees and the economic situation. And the accountability is not limited to an external factor, but also for Seppälä's own doings- they carry out responsibilities of their work and outcomes. (Seppälä's HR manager 2015.)

Seppälä is proud of its achievements and is ready for a change, because they care. Everything what Seppälä does, begins with their customers. Seppälä wants to inspire customers and share their love for fashion. As a value of customer oriented approach, it is not constricted only for a customer who visits the store, but it extends to inner customerships since all people are each other's customers. At Seppälä, they are always pursuing the best possible results. Quality does not confine only to their products, but also to quality of work; they always do their job in the best possible way, because the result is created by the quality. Everything that Seppälä does, has a goal to get the best possible result. From a clear goal, arises a good result. Every employee at Seppälä knows that the result oriented approach is connected strongly with making profit, they want to succeed. Last but not least is that at Seppälä they value each other. Everyone is treated as equals and with respect, all employees value their work, co-workers as well as themselves, and not forgetting their customers. At Seppälä they know that together they are more. (Seppälä's HR manager 2015.)

2.3 Selling at Seppälä Oy

After Stockmann sold Seppälä, the selling has also changed. Before Stockmann sold Seppälä, they had several different directions and training sessions how to sell "correctly". Seppälä even had "a five steps of sales" – guideline for their employees. Today their focus is to sell through the values. (Seppälä's HR manager 2015.)

Now, after the strict chain directions and guidelines, the store managers of Seppälä Oy have an even better opportunity to influence their own store activities and operations.

The store managers can choose, by themselves, their local campaigns, events, budgeting, etc. This way each store can listen to their local customers, their needs and wishes. (Store manager of Seppälä 2015.)

Every Seppälä store has thought themselves, as a team, what the values mean in their store, how the values are shown to customers, what they mean in their own job, etc. It is important to have a clear view and a similar attitude towards selling in each store in order to offer the best possible service to customers. (Store manager of Seppälä 2015.)

2.4 Human Resource Management and Development at Seppälä Oy

Seppälä Oy gives a lot of power to their store managers. In addition to sales, the store manager has the right and the power to recruit sellers to their “own” store. Help and support is given by the regional manager if needed. (Seppälä’s HR manager 2015.) This way the manager sees immediately how the applicant fits into the store, if she/he is what they need or want, if they can add value, etc. and no need to go through a wide system of recruiting. Sometimes the store manager can also ask from the co-workers’/sellers’ or even from other store managers’ an opinion about the possible new employee. (Store manager of Seppälä 2015.)

Seppälä continuously strives to improve its operations. When it comes to recruiting, Seppälä’s HR manager conducted an interview with some of the store managers to seek what characteristics they pay attention to. This way the HR manager can help the store managers to look for the right characteristics. From the last interview there were several characteristics that the store managers pay attention to: first impression, external appearance, attitude, cheerfulness, openness, willingness to learn and develop, preparation for the interview, interaction skills and genuine interest towards the job. In the interview situation, many of the store managers will ensure the sale esprit for example by asking the interviewee to sell a pen to the interviewer. (Seppälä’s HR manager 2015.)

The same goes with the training; the focus is to train the store managers, who will then train and mentor employees/sellers. Seppälä uses many tools and processes to support the stores. Seppälä has a few guidelines for their store managers to guide them how to familiarize a new employee into the task and into Seppälä’s ways. Store managers, es-

pecially the new beginners, have their regional manager and "a godmother store manager" as their own mentor. This way Seppälä can easily help and mentor their employees, using a quite fast method. (Seppälä's HR manager 2015.) At Seppälä they have safety training sessions for the whole store, where they go through the necessary matters. Moreover, the store managers conduct a monthly meeting with their employees/sellers to go through the past month; the cons and pros. (Store manager of Seppälä 2015.)

Leadership has been Seppälä's focus area in 2015. It does not only mean the supervisors' work, but also that how everyone manage and lead themselves. Currently Seppälä has these 360 evaluations, which means that every store manager makes their own development plans. The support and help will be given by the regional managers and the organization itself. Moreover, Seppälä is using "store manager -day" as a training method for the store managers. Next year Seppälä will invest in store managers' special professional degrees. (Seppälä's HR manager 2015.)

Since the store managers has a power to mentor and train their employees, they use different methods. However, there is one important method which Seppälä uses for everyone: sharing success stories of sales on intranet. This way everyone can read and be inspired by other sellers' stories, and from this, think if they can do something in a better way (in their own store), and maybe even conduct similar events, campaigns, etc. (Seppälä's HR manager 2015.)

3 SELLING

Sales is associated a lot with delusions. On many occasions it is thought to be forced. Practically forcing and selling based on achieving profit, are far from each other. Selling is leading the customer psychologically in a wanted direction, in a way that the customer does not feel the product is sold by force. Workable selling is that the seller makes the customer want the product. (Rope 2003, 10.)

Sales is sometimes known as learned sales pitches and sales techniques. As a matter of fact selling is not a technique but know-how skills. (Rope 2003, 10) By reassuring the customer about the product, the seller has to know the customer's background as well as be aware of the products and services inside the company. In a customer encounter, the aim is to create a good connection and a trust between the seller and customer. The seller has to sell the benefit that the customer is expecting. (Alanen, Mälkiä & Sell 2005, 18-19.)

Selling needs a good foundation in order to succeed in sales. A good product, a seller's modern tools and an existing marketing potential will guarantee that the seller is responsible of other aspects for making profit. Customers can see and feel sellers' attitude, excitement and know-how and based on that the customers' will confirm the trust. (Alanen, Mälkiä & Sell 2005, 24-25.)

3.1 Selling is influencing

In sales work, the seller must enjoy the work and be greedy to look for this enjoyment. If the seller is coming to work or near the customer, in a state of mind that he/she is forced to do it or needed to do it in order to get money, the seller is hardly able to do any actions that are needed to do in order to achieve profit. Selling is influencing, so if the person is not influenced by the task, it does not go anywhere. (Vuorio 2011, 118.)

The main things about influencing and enjoying the work, are social skills and how naturally a person can interact with customers. Everyone of us has bought something without any reasons, because the seller has been so nice. The seller has to find out the customer's need(s) and/or interest(s) as well as how well he/she can personalize the

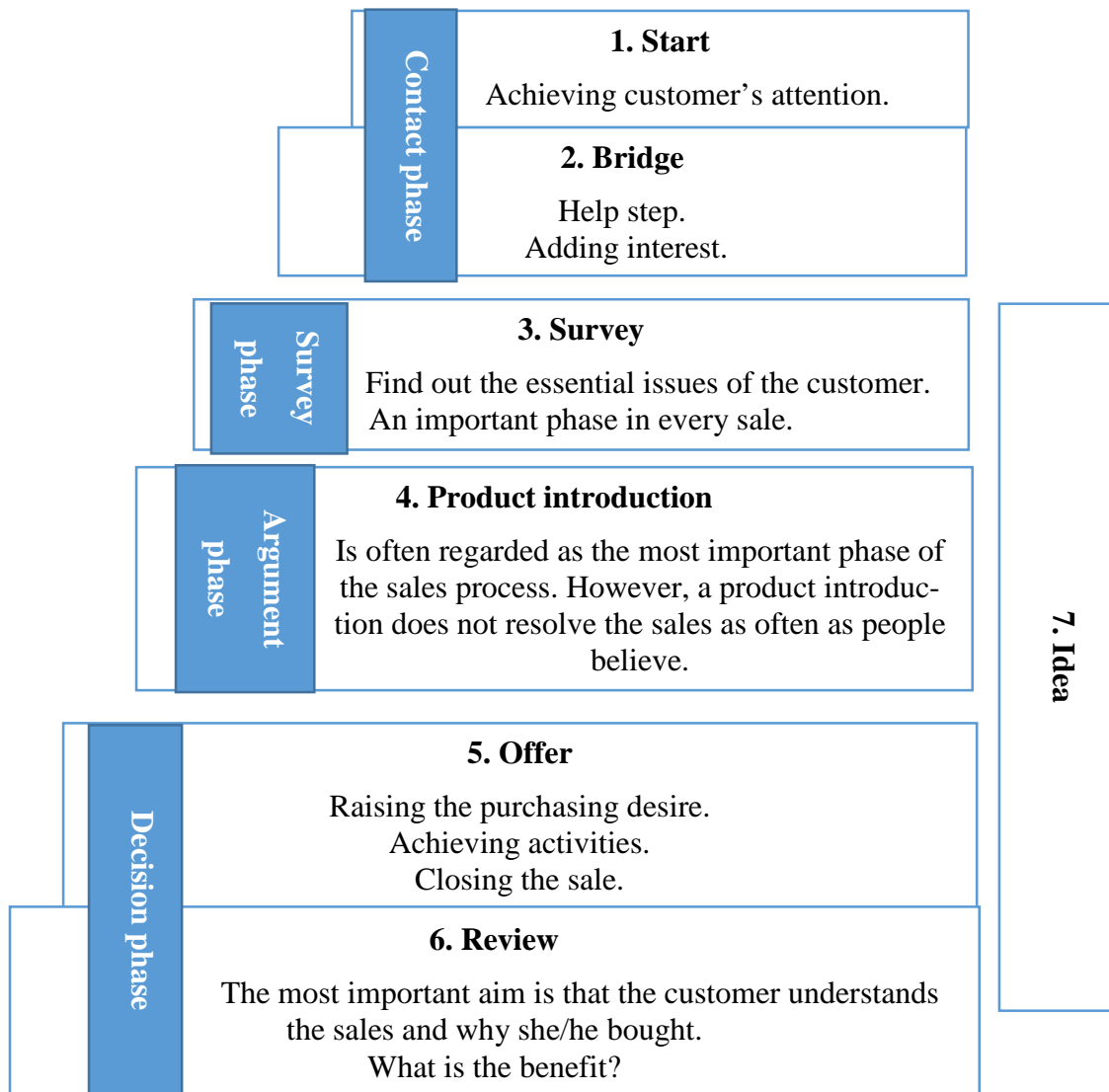
argument just for this particular customer. Another important factor is believing in yourself. When these issues, based on a mental side, are straight and a seller knows well the qualifications of products, a seller can honestly influence customers' purchasing decisions. (Vuorio 2011, 119.)

People have become more aware of the possible choices and can easily compare them, for example through the internet. In this case a seller's role and willingness to serve is more emphasized. The better a seller can personalize the features, the closer a positive purchasing decision is. (Vuorio 2011, 119.)

3.2 Sales process and sales ladders

An upscale and an extensive sale is based on following the sales process, the goal is reached step by step. This way a seller will avoid going into a pitfall. (Vuorio 2008, 40.) The sales process should be highly homogeneous. It is the key element for the customer satisfaction which comes from defined routines that every employee obeys in a company. This way, there will be a common approach and a customer always knows what he is getting. (Rubanovitsch & Aalto 2012, 30.)

The importance of reviewing the sales ladder is that, it will help sellers to control the sales process but also the sale is developing into the right direction; closing the sale. (Vuorio 2008, 58.) Sales people need to remember to lead the sales ladders and not the other way around. Sellers need to think fast and act in a controlled manner. Picture 1 shows the six-ladder system of sales. But to be exact there is one more ladder, the seventh ladder, idea. It is followed through in different phases of sales, starting from the survey phase. (Vuorio 2008, 40-41.)



PICTURE 1. Sales ladder (By Vuorio 2008, 42.)

In picture 1 the first two ladders, the start and the bridge, are contact phases. At the starting point, before any actions, it is really important that a seller takes into account two issues, who is the decision maker and when is the right time to make a contact with the customer so that the customer is really listening. If the customer does not have a focus on the seller, they cannot make any impact on the customer. If these two are not in order, everything else is unnecessary. (Vuorio 2008, 43-44.)

The next step, the bridge, is known as the help step or the support tool. It is the shortest phase of the sales ladder. At its best, the bridge, generates interest in the seller as well as in the topic. It is not necessary to use, but it softens the movement to the next step. (Vuorio 2008, 44.)

The third step is the survey. This phase is important, since the seller has to make the survey questions to find out essential issues, needs and wishes of the customer. The best are open questions, because then the customer's answers are narrative. They usually start with the question word *what*, *how* and *what kind of*. The seller should avoid questions that can be answered in one word. Also the seller should avoid too much of leading the customer, in order not to make the customer feel like the seller is trying to manipulate them. The aim is to have an interactive conversation and to make a deeper connection with the customer. (Vuorio 2008, 45-46.)

In the argument phase comes the product introduction. In this phase, the aim is to tell the facts. A good seller does not need to lie! In the product introduction, it is good to remember that it is not necessary to tell all the elements of the product, only the ones that the customer wants to know. This is based on the survey phase, what the seller has already figured out. (Vuorio 2008, 46-47.)

Closing the sales includes the offer and the review phases. In the offer phase, the last word should not be the price, therefore it is not the last thing that the customer remembers. In practice this means: benefit- price- benefit. Basically in this the seller makes an offer. After the offer, the seller can ask the transaction by making a request. The review phase is for making sure that the customer knows what he/she is doing, and why make the purchase. It is necessary when the answer of the customer is positive and the transaction has happened. (Vuorio 2008, 47-49.)

The last phase of the sales ladder is idea. It differs from others, since it rides along with the phases starting from the survey phase. The idea is the reason why a customer makes a purchase. The seller figures out the customer's needs, issues and wishes in the survey phase. Moreover, he uses the idea in the product introduction and closing the sales. A personalized idea cannot ever be sold to the customer, if the seller does not listen passably, what the customer told about himself. (Vuorio 2008, 51.)

3.3 Generation of the sales profit

Success in sales is measured by sales profit, which is shown in turnover. The sales profit can be followed from number of customers, market shares, product mix, customer distribution, margins, number of sales or number of pieces. (Alanen, Mälkiä & Sell 2005, 16-17.)

If the customer comes back to the store in the purpose of buying from the same seller, it tells a lot from the customer's satisfaction and the stability of customer relationship. The seller's own know-how, excitement, ability to create a good atmosphere and ability to maintain the interaction with the customer has an impact on the sales profit. (Alanen, Mälkiä & Sell 2005, 16-17.)

There are several issues that impact profit in sales:

- Product
- Price
- The company's good reputation and functional backgrounds in sales
- Resources
- Company has active sales making culture
- The sales are led actively and are invested
- Customer base and technology for making sales easier
- Active marketing communication
- Sellers are competent and experts
- Seller's own features gives the the base for skilled selling.

Selling is always an active work. This means that the seller is doing the sales spontaneously. (Rope 2009, 50-51.) A forcing and pressing style of selling is not going to end up in a positive customer relationship. Achieving sales profit is mostly at its best when the seller can lead the customer into the buying process so that the customer feels like he/she is leading it. (Rope 2003, 95.)

3.4 Customer service

A customer service is communication between two or more people; a social interaction. It is helping the customer and serving him/her so that the customer is as satisfied as possible with the given service. (Kangas 1994, 8.)

Typically in the customer service situation, the customer and the needs, expectations and wishes are in the centre. Also the aim is to find the customers' matters and to help them personally. If the customers' needs and expectations cannot be fulfilled, the customer needs to get the feeling he/she is helped actively no matter what. The situation is not easy. The seller has to be able to exert himself in new situation, with a new customer and his needs and wishes. And occasionally, a customer cannot even recognize them. Every situation is different, so it is necessary that the seller can find what is needed for a certain customer. Important is that this happens politely, discussing equally with the customer, without expecting any favors. (Kangas 1994, 8-9.)

3.5 Customer oriented selling

There are different types of selling, but the goal is the same, to get the product or service to be sold. When the world has changed, it is more and more going in the direction of customer oriented selling. (Vuorio 2011, 128.)

The characteristics of customer oriented selling:

- The desire to help customers make satisfying decisions.
- Helping customers to estimate their needs.
- Offering products which will satisfy the needs.
- Describing products precisely.
- Avoiding deceptive or manipulative influence tactics.
- Avoiding the usage of high-pressure sales techniques.

An important aspect of the customer oriented selling is an ability to read the emotions and actions of any customer. The seller can use this information in the selling situation. It allows the seller to adapt the content and delivery styles to the customer according to emotional responses. (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 269-270.)

In order to use the customer oriented selling, companies should train and develop their employees, culture that the vision is focused on understanding the customer as well as creating value for them as being the central philosophy. Companies should use methods which measure the customer satisfaction with the sellers' interaction, the support given to customers, etc. (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 270.)

4 A SUCCESSFUL SELLER

This chapter explains what a successful seller is like and it also introduces the needed characteristics of a successful seller based on the selected books.

4.1 Characteristics of a successful seller

Sellers are required to have a good concentration skills, desire, skills to discuss and negotiate as well as self-confidence. Stress control skills are also good to have. It can be so that after a friendly and an easy customer, comes a negative and a rude one, or the other way around, then the atmosphere will change in the situation. Occasionally, the atmosphere and the feelings can change even on one sales occasion. The seller has to be ready to adapt to the situation, forget the past and start all over again to be ready for the next customer. (Vuorio 2008, 22.)

Tuija Rummukainen, 2004, has made research to get knowledge of the key characteristics of a top seller by interviewing over 80 top sellers. In her research, the average sales people differentiate from a top seller in eight characteristics or skills which are seen in picture 2. From these characteristics not only one will make a top seller. There are not many people who have all of these characteristics and have the capability to use them. In the research of Rummukainen, many of the interviewees had six to seven characteristics as capacity and in all of the interviews there were two characteristics that came up: "attitude" and "skills of closing the sales". (7-8.) In an article of Suomen Lehdistö, Tuija Rummukainen (as an interviewee) explains that "skills of closing the sales" is technically the easiest to learn, but mentally hard for many people. Basically it is the right moment to finish the sale, an ability to read the signals and courage to ask a crucial question. (Lappalainen 2010.)



PICTURE 2. The characteristics of top seller (By Rummukainen 2004, 8.)

When looking at this picture 2, all of these characteristics can be learnt. People can develop and improve these skills themselves, if wanted to, thus a person can be learnt to be a top seller. These key characteristics cannot be put on order of importance, all have an important part of the sales process. (Rummukainen 2004, 9.)

One interesting aspect is that these eight key characteristics have not been changed for the last hundred years or so, even though the world and tools of sales have changed. Furthermore, all these characteristics apply in any sales work and can be seen in all over the world. Sales are made between two persons, even though money, production, invoicing, etc. are handled between companies. (Rummukainen 2004, 9.)

In the article of Suomen Lehdistö, the interviewees wonder why companies are not trying to share top sellers' knowledge and methods in a better way. Companies should pay attention to their top sellers' actions, what are they doing differently. Average sellers could follow a customer encounter with a top seller. Moreover, top sellers could be used as a mentor and creating good energy. (Lappalainen 2010.)

4.1.1 Attitude

In principle, selling is service work. Service attitude as a background of sales means that the seller has to see a wide picture of a job description and take a stand to act on customers' terms in all possible positions. Naturally, when working in a sales field, the seller has to have a positive attitude towards the sales. Eventhough a person would have all the other characteristics to work as a successful seller, without a positive attitude towards the sales, the person is not ever going to think a sales role, and from this cannot be interested in selling neither seek for it. A service attitude always contributes to the sales. (Rope 2003, 113-114.)

Sellers' own mindset and attitude has a huge affect on sales results; it can make either plenty of profit or damage. Top and average sellers' approach and attitude differ mostly in three basic issues. Successful sellers are proud of the fact that they can sell. They appreciate the profession and want to be good at it. The average sellers or sellers that are not successful in sales, do not appreciate sales work or are even ashamed of their profession. The top sellers want to develop themselves and excel in selling. The second issue, where the top seller has a different attitude than an average seller, is the attitude towards the sold products or services. The top sellers appreciate their own products or services, imperspective of what they are selling. Frequently, the top sellers' excitement sticks to customers' mind and customers can have this called "buying frenzy". (Rummukainen 2004, 14-15.)

The third fact, attitude towards the adversity, might be the most important factor of these three issues of attitude. Every sales work contains adversity and setbacks, and it does not matter how good a seller a person is. However, top seller's reaction is different from one another. They will analyze the situation: *what happened and why, what could have I made differently and how to continue from this on?* The top sellers take a responsibility for their doings and results. (Rummukainen 2004, 16-17.)

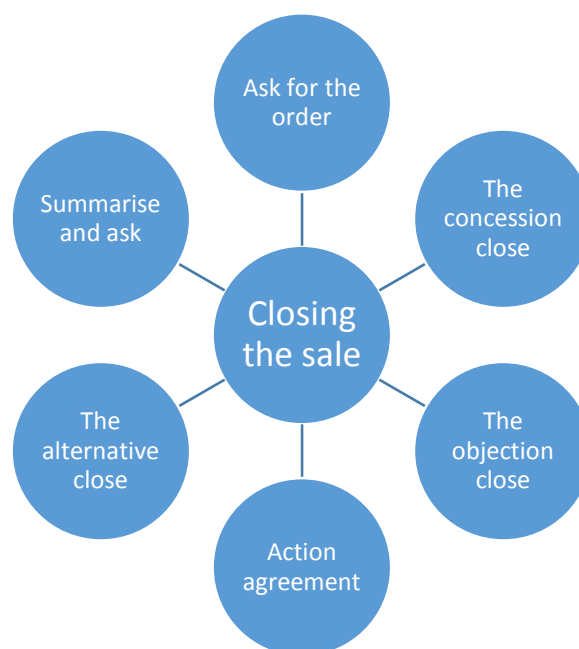
4.1.2 Skills of closing the sales

The characteristic of closing the sales is a skill to read and listen to the signals of purchases, and after that a skill and a courage to ask for the sales trade. When the sales is closed, the co-operation between the seller and the customer can begin. By developing

the skill of closing the sales, the seller can grow his own sales profits faster. For many sellers, closing the sales is the most stressful and scariest part of selling. The fear might have an effect on why many sellers are left out without a clear decision and ending. (Rummukainen 2004, 90.)

The seller can suggest closing the sales, if the customer shows willingness to buy. These are called buying signals. Sellers' should follow signals and catch them immediately. Body language signals can be seen, for example when a customer touches a product and explores it carefully or when a customer shows an interest towards the conversation, and takes so called better listening positions. Sellers should be careful, when reading these signs, in order to courage customers just at the right time. Couraging customers does not mean pushing, but the aim is to strengthen customers' positive view of the product. (Pekkarinen, Pekkarinen & Vornanen 2006, 78-79.) Top sellers have a selling frenzy. They are awera of the situation all the time and observing buying signals. This can be one reason why selling is so easy at the top. The timing is crucial. (Rummukainen 2004, 91.)

Closing the sales -questions for the customer sould be the ones that the customer can answer positively. Sales trade has not been made if the customer answers: that sounds good. (Rummukainen 2004, 92.) There are number of closing techniques which a seller can use. These techniques can bee seen in picture 3. (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 290.)



PICTURE 3. Closing the sale (By Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 290.)

The simplest technique, *ask for order*, includes asking directly from the customer. It means to keep silent after the order has been asked with the closed question. *Summarise and ask* for the order is a technique that allows sellers to remind buyers about the main points. This will lead to the moment of making the decision and after that the next step is actual buying. Again *the concession close* involves the final push towards agreement. *The alternative close* technique is used when the seller can assume that the customer is willing to purchase. The seller gives two alternative choices for the customer: *red or blue? Cash or credit?* This has been used in sales for many years and therefore should be used with care. *The objection close* technique involves the use of an objection as a inspiration to make a purchase. The last technique is *the action agreement*, which can be inappropriate to try to close the sales. When the sale is agreed, firstly the seller should never show emotions and secondly, the seller should leave as quickly as possible. The longer the seller will stay around, the bigger the chance to change the customer's mind. (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 291-292.)

Top sellers are asking a lot of closing the sales questions in every sales presentation. If the first answer from the customer is negative, the top seller continues sales presentation proficiently seeking for the next signal to ask the next closing question. (Rummukainen 2004, 93.)

The top sellers prepare themselves for closing the sales, by practicing several different closing questions. They recognize the issues that different questions should be asked from different customers. The most important fact is that a top seller is craving to close the sales; they have a passion for selling. And it is essential to show it to customers. (Rummukainen 2004, 97.)

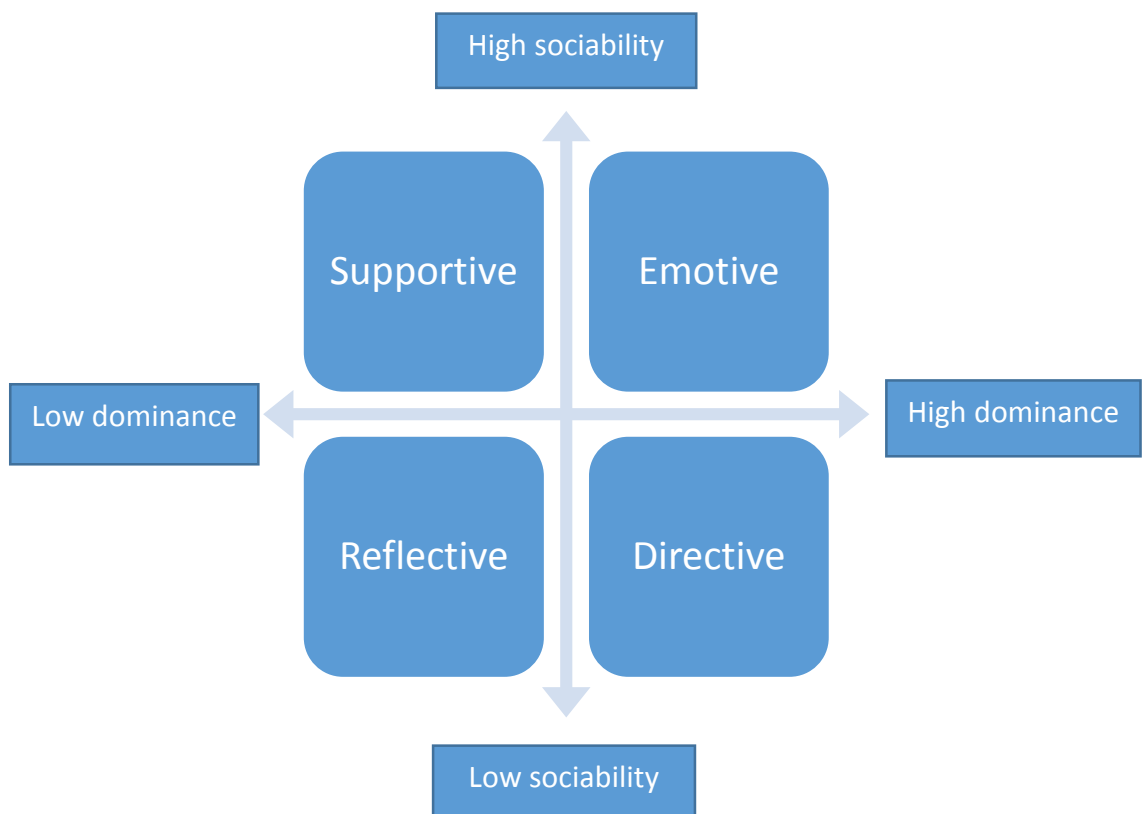
4.2 Knowledge of human nature

In the sales work, sellers meet new and different people everyday and each meeting is individualized. Everyone has their own way of behaving, they have their own characters, feelings and social skills. These characters brings fascinating and memorable moments to the purchasing events. The seller should feel the energy and a sense the atmos-

phere to understand the customer. With all other characteristics, a top seller can understand, notice and control different feelings that the customers are sending. This is emotional intelligence. (Illikainen 2014.)

Even though every individual is unique and different, the world has recognized that it is possible to categorize people into four different personality types based on psychographics. Each type has their own propensity and values, and this can help people to understand why someone does what they do as well as offer an insight into how to interact with them in the best possible way. (Stern 2014.)

The way a person interacts with others, has a strong influence on its personality. It affects the communication style which again affects how other people understand a certain person. A knowledge of one's own style can be demonstrative, whether a person wants to reflect a certain image, or it just happens naturally. (Stern 2014.) In picture 4 can be seen different personality types.



PICTURE 4. Four different personalities (By Savolainen 2015.)

The styles are organized in quadrant along two axes, sociability and dominance. The horizontal axis demonstrates the level of dominance which an individual indicates. Again the vertical axis demonstrates the level of sociability which individuals show in their behavior. Just in business alone it affects everything from marketing to leadership, human resource and management. (Stern 2014.)

An emotive personality appears quite active. They are mostly very social, outgoing and even take a social initiative. Emotive people express their emotional opinions and feelings very easily and they encourage informality as well. (Savolainen 2015.)

A directive personality appears quite busy all the time. They like to maintain the control, but might give an impression of not listening. Directive people do not show emotions, therefore they display a rather serious attitude. (Savolainen 2015.)

A reflective personality seems to be difficult to get to know. They control their emotional expressions and usually tend to express very measured opinions. Reflective people displays preference for order. (Savolainen 2015.)

A supportive personality appears quiet and also reserved in many situations. They listen attentively and like to observe. They do not like to show power and even try to avoid it. Supportive people make thoughtful decisions in a considered and a measured way. (Savolainen 2015.)

When knowing the personality styles of your coworkers and customers, it can give a better insight into how others think and act. It can also help to maximize the value of interaction with others, as well as minimize the misunderstandings or miscommunication that can be a result from the encounter of different styles. (Stern 2014.)

4.3 Sociability and social skills

Sociability is an innate temperament feature, when again social skills can be learnt. Sociability indicates how interested an individual is in others' company and how self-explanatorily an individual wants to be with others instead of being alone. Even though the contacts are made easily and fast, it does not mean that the individual has good social skills. (Parvinen 2013, 101.)

Social skills are based on social survival models, which again are culture-bound and mean skills to survive in social situations. Social skills come from experiences and through education, and end up in a test when an individual cannot exploit a common sociability or is in an abnormal behavioral situation (for example comes into a language barrier situation where the normal sociability is hard). Common good social skills are trustworthiness, helpfulness and sense of duty. Sociability means a *want* or a *desire* to be with other people, again social skills means an *ability* to be with other people. These two are not connected in any way. Sociability supports the acquisition of social skills but does not guarantee the existence. (Parvinen 2013, 101.)

In psychological tests it has been detected that people are repeatedly getting into difficulties with interactions, where they are more social than their social skills allow. In spite of how social sellers are, this can be seen on every level. Quiet and reserved sellers can be very popular in the customer base; if they have a passingly good social skills for being a shy person. Again very social sellers might not succeed, even though they have relatively good social skills. They can be annoying and over social, because in a pressure they have to control their character or develop precisely excellent social skills. (Parvinen 2013, 102-103.)

For the seller a major problem is not the oral/speaking skills, but the listening and enquiry skills; which are part of oral/speaking skills. Good oral skills can make impact skills better, help to see the doings and make the listener to be impressed by your matter. (Vuorio 2011, 40-42.) As a seller, it is essential to remember to respect the listener and remember to whom you are speaking, as well as what the goal is. (Vuorio 2011, 47-48.)

Sellers are responsible for the interaction. Trust as well as convincing customers are made with the communication. A person may modify the communication style for a certain customer, with a pitch, a voice rhythm, a volume, an articulation and voice dramatics. With these a person conveys a vision of the personality, social style and liability, which all have an impact on customers' actions and attitudes. (Vuorio 2008, 116.)

All the things that sellers say, are important and meaningful. A seller is trying to make an impression on a customer so that there will be a desire for buying and a customer will make a decision but also will act in a certain way. When a seller talks, the oral and

other communication has to complement each other. It is important to understand that in sales work saying the same thing by using the same words or signs can make significant different affections. (Vuorio 2008, 18.)

Sellers should show, with their reactions and actions, that they are genuinely interested in customers' communications. Sellers' should avoid answering only with: yes, okay, is that so, etc., because these do not sound professional or good, especially when repeated too often. It is essential to find a positive or at least a neutral expression to the product. The most important part is that the seller should not speak over the customer. Communication with the customer is at its best when both are on the same level. (Vuorio 2008, 35-36.)

5 HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

The fifth chapter consists of the theory of Human Resource Development (also known as HRD). In the HRD part, I will take into consideration; training, coaching, mentoring and benchmarking as employee development techniques. Also there will be deeper look at recruitment and importance of right employee selection.

HRD has a major part in Human Resource Management (HRM) functions. It is a structure for helping employees develop their personal and organizational skills, abilities and knowledge. It does not only consist of training and development, but also of individual career planning and development activities and performance evaluations. (Mondy; Noe; & Premeaux 2002, 214.)

5.1 Recruitment and selection

When a company attempts to recruit and select a new salesperson, store managers can find themselves in a strange and unaccustomed situation. Now the store managers are not in the seller's role but in the buyer's role. It is essential that this situation is conducted effectively since the future success of the salesforce depends on an infusion of high-level personnel. (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 414.)

The interviewer is directing its expectations towards the applicant's work performance but in addition he is also interested in a human factor; the applicant's humanity. Applicants should match to those professional expectations, which are directed to him/her, and also manage the given working role. An applicant should also fit into the managers' expectations with his/hers personal features. A new applicant is expected to be hard-working, enthusiastic, have a desire to learn, communicative, friendly and get on with everyone and a new worker cannot make others work harder. There can be found four different important factors: a professional know-how, a personality, a motivation and a personal chemistry. With these four factors there are a number of smaller factors which are related to these. For different interviewers, there might be different factors that are more important than others. But in every interview there is one crucial question: is that person suitable for us? (Markkanen 2009, 43-45.)

Galbraith, Kiely and Watkins examined the characteristics that attracted salespeople into selling and what they valued most about their work. These can be seen in table 1.

TABLE 1. Characteristics that applicants are most interested in and value the most (By Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 415.)

Most interest	%	Most value	%
Working method	60	Independence	40
Independence	13	Earnings	18
Earnings	12	Provide a service	14
Company status	5	Freedom	11
Good training	4	Dealing with people	8
Promotion chances	2	Job satisfaction	6
Professional status	2	Status	3
Exclusive territory	2	Promotion prospect	1

When looking at this table it can be seen that working method and independence are more important than earnings as the attraction for entering selling. The conclusion is that sales managers should understand the reason why people are interested in selling in their field to develop effective recruitment strategies. (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 414-415.)

Motivation is a factor which is part of every recruitment, and the interviewer cannot ignore it. A person's actions always have a motivation in the background, it is directed towards the goal. In recruitment it is important to find out the motivation of the possible employee on three different levels:

- What made a person apply for this job? (Orientation)
- What motivates in working life, so in which condition the performance is at its best? (Action affection)
- What makes a person to stay and keep on going on the task? (Goal oriented/commitment)

In everyone can see motivation, goal oriented behavior, which leads to an individual's important experiences. Therefore it is not enough that the interviewer is only asking

where the applicant has been motivated. The interviewer also needs to find out an applicant's accomplishments. (Markkanen 2009, 56-58.)

5.1.1 The goal of recruitment

Recruitment is aiming towards to find and hire a person who meets the expected criterion for the open task. With the questions an interviewer is collecting information about an applicant's characteristics, way of acting, attitudes, etc., but the result of processing cannot stay on the individual based level of component. The aim is to see a wide picture of an applicant. (Markkanen 2009, 21-22.)

If the goal has been defined as comprehensive, it is extremely hard, time taking and requires know-how skills, when examining someone's personality. Recruiting an applicant is only a scratch of human nature. When focusing on the clues and flashes that are characters for the applicant's way of feeling, thinking, wanting, attitude, goals, handling the success and failure; it is helping the interviewer to see the applicant as a person. (Markkanen 2009, 53.)

An optimal situation is to meet the objectives of the interviewer and applicant. A buyer is making a needed purchase and a seller a profitable trade. This way both are satisfied. For making an example of a result, it can be compared to soccer as a team play. In soccer there are not just a one correct way to take the ball into the goal; the result is the resolve; not the fancy tricks during the game. The overall goal is to select and hire the best new employee as possible. A manager's success in recruitment is leading towards to a right selection and a successful employment relationship. (Markkanen 2009, 22.)

5.1.2 Sellers psychological profile in recruitment

In working life, psychological personal evaluation methods can be divided into three different sections: job interviews, different test methods and simulations. Each one of the methods includes different techniques, approaches and assessment tools. Even though all of the personal evaluation methods have their own ways and methods, they all can be compared with each other and considered together. Moreover, it has been shown that all of the methods have an ability to predict job success. Different personal evaluation methods suit for different evaluation situations. Each has its own strengths

and weaknesses, that should be determined in relation with the personal evaluation goals. (Niitamo 2003, 20-21.)

Job interviews themselves as a personal evaluation method has not been questioned so much, however scientific researches have shown that the interviews are not precise and cannot make predictions. If an interviewer does not know interview methods, the interview can be as precise as coin throwing. (Hunter & Hunter 1984.) But it has to be remembered that the personal evaluation should not be made without an interview. Together with other methods the interview creates an overall picture of the applicant. (Niitamo 2003, 41-42.)

Psychological test methods form very multifunctional personal evaluation measurement groups. In working life, the used methods are divided into three different measuring tests: ability, personality and working style. The ability tests are mostly intellectual and perceptuomotor tests. Again the personality tests measure behavioral features, motives and ways of thinking, and they can be divided into form templates or so called projective personality tests. Lastly, the working style tests include different working style measuring tests, that are aimed to determine for example leadership styles, learning styles and the role of teams. (Niitamo 2003, 44.)

The simulations, as the personal evaluation method, are most likely the least known method. They have not been studied as much as the other methods. The most used and well known simulations types are:

- representation exercises: the assessed is being asked to conduct an oral presentation, speech or some other presentation
- bilateral interaction simulations: based on the real life interaction situations, such as complaint situations or director-subordinate interaction situations.
- simulation of multi-directional interaction as group discussions: leaderless group discussion which is conducted to evaluate communication and decision-making skills.
- decision-making simulations
- simulations of the whole organization.

Simulations brings at its best samples of authentic actions which include thoughts, feelings, choices and values. (Niitamo 2003, 105-115.)

5.2 Training

After recruiting and hiring the best individuals to work for the company, the next step is to train the salespeople properly. It is important to train them to deal with the challenges of the job. HR managers and sales managers need to make sure that their salespeople have the skills and abilities to be successful. (Erffmeyer, Honeycutt & Tanner 2014, 198.) A crucial success factor of businesses is training employees correctly and for many companies it is even more important than the recruitment. (Horowitz & Jacques 1992, 143.) Personnel development is an essential, and probably in every organization, a continuous aspiration. Developing and training employees is an investment which needs to be made by HR professionals with tools to provide recommendations. Regardless of employees working hours and contract, they can achieve more, become more satisfied, when employees are encouraged and supported in their work responsibilities. (Nieto 2006, 163-164.)

In selling it is crucial to offer sales training to sellers. The aim of the sales training is to improve sellers' performance. It includes all the matters of selling that could enable sellers to be more effective and better in the selling process. Sales training offers an important information for example about the best sales arguments, it strengthen and also it corrects the knowledge about the products. (Donaldson 2007, 206-207.) Most companies provide training sessions to their new employees. More experienced salespeople receive training sessions to update their knowledge about new products and other market developments. It is crucial to identify the training needs in the company and determine the objectives of the training. Moreover, the areas need to be identified in which salespeople need training and also who needs the training sessions. (Erffmeyer, Honeycutt & Tanner 2014, 203.)

Sales training can be internal or external. In internal training the main idea is that it is for a particular organization and the trainer can be a member of the organization or a person outside of the organization. In external training the idea is that there might be participants from many organizations and it is held in a neutral environment. Therefore the trainer is external and is not from any of the participating organizations. External training can give new thoughts and bring some changes in the organization. Nowadays organizations are more interested in the value of training. Organization should think

about the expenses, travelling costs, loss of working time, etc. when thinking which training suits the best. Also return on investment (also known as ROI) should be taken into consideration; will the organization get long-term benefits and gain profit from training employees? (Virolainen 2015.)

Training is created to provide learners with the skills and knowledge needed in their current jobs. To meet the needs of customers, companies must continuously improve their overall performance. Technology and improved processes have been a huge help for businesses to meet the challenge. Nevertheless, the most important competitive advantage is the personnel. They must remain experts, efficient, talented, etc., throughout continuous training. (Mondy, Noe & Premeaux 2002, 215.)

5.2.1 Benefits of training

From training the company can benefit a lot. Training enhances skill levels and it will lead to a greater customer orientation. It also improves the motivation and self-confidence of employees, which will both improve sales performance. (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 450.)

Training should reduce costs of an organization by training in self-management, planning the journey and using technology in a better way. When employees are well trained, it will lead to a better understanding of customers, meeting their needs and giving a higher level of a service, which means a reduction of a customer complaints. Training also shows employees that a company is willing to invest in them, which will raise moral and loyalty. When employees are trained, a needed support from management will decrease and in that way they can manage their own activities. Confidence and success which supplement a higher level of skills developed during training lead to a higher job satisfaction. From this it can be seen that sales should be higher and costs lower, resulting higher profits. But a management team of a company must accept that benefits which come from training might not show instantly; it will take time. (Jobber & Lancaster 2012, 450.)

5.2.2 Unsuccessful training

Based on the ES Research, up to 90 % of sales training does not last more than 120 days. Nevertheless, many companies are spending lots of money, even billions of dollars, on trainings every year. Even with a huge amount of money spent on sales training, companies will not get long-term effects with it, at its best it will give only a short-term increase in performance. (Schultz & Doerr 2012.)

When sales training fails behind it is usually a very common and foreseeable reason. To avoid mistakes and failing a company should encourage its sellers for a successful training initiative that can lead to increased sales performance as well as long-term revenue growth. There are seven reasons why the sales training might fail. Below can be seen the reasons:

1. Failure to identify the needs of a training and define business.
2. Failure to create sales knowledge
3. Failure to assess individuals' drivers and detractors of sales success
4. Failure to set a sales process and methodology in place
5. Failure to give out an engaging training
6. Failure to strengthen training and make it stick
7. Failure in evaluation, accountability and ongoing improvement. (Schultz & Doerr 2012.)

Before making any mistakes and learning from them, avoid the failures others have made and build on their successes. (Schultz & Doerr 2012.)

5.2.3 Transfer of learned skills

Since the knowledge and skills are different they need different training methods. Reading a book about some matter is not the same as learning how to do it. For example a book about swimming can give knowledge but is not helpful when the boat sinks and a person is not able to swim. While many people have skills, they do not have the knowledge. Based on this Jack Kondrasuk concludes that classroom training is effective, because he only measured the changes in knowledge. When taking skills into account in classroom training, in order to stimulate a skill, the learner has to perform using role-plays or some similar methods. But sometimes they can be seen as artificial more closely by older learners and in addition the lack of time in the average programs. Based

on this many companies have changed their skills training sessions outside of the classroom into the actual actions where the situations are realistic and it enables the learner repeat practices over an extended period. (Rackham 1979.)

According to the research of how learned skills transfer, up to 87 % of learned skills can disappear after classroom training. That is a huge amount of money lost. New skills learned can feel uncomfortable to use, therefore it does not bring instant results. If a person feels uncomfortable, he/she might easily continue to use the old way of working. In order to get through this unnatural phase and feeling a person needs to get familiar with the new skill and continue to use it. This way a person will have a better performance and gain the expected reward. (Rackham 1979.)

5.3 Mentoring

Mentoring is a method where an organization can get closer to their set goals. Learning must be a natural part of life. It is important to control, develop and benefit from the organization's resources. (Juusela, Lillia & Rinne 2000, 9.)

As in other developing methods, a fundamental element of mentoring is learning. Mentoring is one of the many methods of development and guidance. Other developing supporters, besides the mentors, are professional trainers, coaches, tutors, supervisors, instructors and facilitators. Professional trainers and instructors have a main focus on the professional and concrete information sharing as well as teaching. Again coaches, supervisors and facilitators have a focus on bringing up a learner's thoughts and know-how. A mentor's role and task is placed in between these two methods. Mentoring is more flexible and is depending more on the situation and the needs of a learner. (Kupias & Salo 2014.)

Mentoring is a process where a mentor and a learner work together in order to recognize the learner's hidden skills and characteristics as well as to develop them together. The main idea is to support the learner in the process. When mentoring is organized by the company, the aim of the process should fit with the company's target. (Juusela, Lillia & Rinne 2000, 15.)

Elements of learning such as learning skills, enhancing learning, taking responsibility for one's learning, learning from experience, learning together, know-how and sharing information are keywords of mentoring. Above all, mentoring promotes taking responsibility for a person's own learning. (Juusela, Lillia & Rinne 2000, 9.) Mentoring is a development of an interaction. It can also mean an action, which has a certain aim and follows certain principles. Mentoring as a method is a series of processes, which contributes to relation development, its action and support. (Juusela, Lillia & Rinne 2000, 14.) It is important to remember that mentoring should not be defined as familiarization/introduction to an organization. Familiarization should have its own forum in an organization, with mentoring as a support tool. (Kupias & Salo 2014.)

5.3.1 Spontaneous mentoring

In mentoring, an experienced person, a mentor, teaches a person with less experience and a will of development. A mentor does not need to be a professional, it is enough to bring his/her own know-how and experiences into the action. (Kupias & Salo 2014.)

Spontaneous mentoring situations are happening all the time. The more people have colleagues and friends around themselves, the bigger opportunity there is to get a spontaneous support also in form of mentoring. Also, the stronger the information and know-how sharing atmosphere there is in a workplace, the bigger possibility there is to receive and give a spontaneous mentoring. (Kupias & Salo 2014.)

In spontaneous mentoring, generally a learner will choose his/her mentor by asking help. Mentoring may happen only once, but spontaneously it can generate a long, many years lasting mentoring relations. Requirements for a successful mentoring are the quality of interaction between a mentor and a learner as well as a need of mentoring. Usually an organization does not know about spontaneous mentoring, therefore it does not have a place in an organization. (Kupias & Salo 2014.)

5.3.2 Organized mentoring

There can also be an organized mentoring in the company. Many organizations are arranging mentoring programs for their members or employees. There will be a mentor

from in- or outside of an organization for their members or employees. (Kupias & Salo 2014.)

More and more organizations have identified usefulness of a mentor in developing personnel. Mentoring has established its place in many organization as one of the personnel developing method among other methods. Commonly an organization's HR professional is leading the planning and action itself. (Kupias & Salo 2014.)

In organized mentoring there can be either facilitated mentoring or planned mentoring. Planned mentoring programs most commonly last about a year, and have training or other guidance as a support tool. It has a beginning and an end, which are defined beforehand. (Kupias & Salo 2014.)

Commonly the mentoring program coordinator evaluates the compatibility of a mentor and a learner and sets mentoring partners. This is an important phase, because one of the success factors of organized mentoring is the compability and cooperation between a mentor and a learner. Usually a mentor and a learner compose together a mentoring contract; with the aim, rules and preliminary plan. (Kupias & Salo 2014.)

5.3.3 A good mentor

An essential factor of a good mentor is to be ready to share know-how. A person who has this kind of ability is most commonly a good mentor. Another factor is that a mentor has to be interested in learning. Important elements can be for example the desire to help another to learn and grow – as well as learn himself/herself. A mentor does not try to hide his/her know-how jealously, but is offering it actively for other's use. An important factor is to have good interaction skills. A good mentor believes in two-way communication and can create good questions, but is not rushed to give an answer. A good mentor is actively and genuinely listening, as well as capable of giving supportive feedback. He/she can give facts in appropriate situations and brings suitable amount of own views and thoughts. (Juusela, Lillia, & Rinne 2000, 30.)

A good mentor enjoys appreciation. It means that a mentor is honored on some level and he/she enjoys it, for example of his/her wide network and connections. A good mentor can also step aside and is a genuine person. Good mentors are very different

types of persons with their individual strengths, faults and flaws. A common factor is that they all have the courage to act genuinely as themselves. (Juusela, Lillia, & Rinne 2000, 30-31.)

5.4 Coaching

The main idea of coaching is to develop employees' skills and abilities, and of boosting performances. It is a useful way and it can help companies to deal with issues and challenges before they will cause severe problems. (Mind Tools Editorial Team 2015.)

A coaching session is usually a discussion between the coach and the coachee (person being coached), and has a focus on helping the coachee to discover answers for themselves. Nevertheless, people are much more likely to commit to solutions that they have figured out, rather than those which are forced on them. (Mind Tools Editorial Team 2015.)

Sometimes coaching is seen as a correcting and an improving tool, only used when something is wrong. However, in many companies coaching is thought to be a positive and a certified method to help others observe their goals and ambitions, and then achieve them. (Mind Tools Editorial Team 2015.)

Even though coaches in the workplace may have similar skills and tools as a counselor, psychotherapists, gurus, teachers, trainers or consultants, they are not the same. Professional coaching is conducted by qualified people who work with a client to improve their performance and effectiveness, as well as help them achieve their full potential. Coachees or organizations can hire a coach. However, in this situation coaching works best when everyone understands the reason for hiring a coach. Also the organization or coachees have to set the expectations what they want to achieve from coaching. (Mind Tools Editorial Team 2015.)

In some cases managers and leaders in the organization can work as a coach and be as effective as an externally hired coach. An important factor is that the managers have to stay within the sector of their skills set and maintain a structured approach, so they can add value, and to help develop their employees' skills and abilities. One key challenge

for many managers, as being a coach, is to separate the role of a manager from the role of a coach. (Mind Tools Editorial Team 2015.)

When a person has learned a new skill through training, the only way to keep a new skill going is with coaching. Through coaching a person needs to be reinforced and encouraged to use a new skill, moreover, it has to happen within a certain time period in order to see positive results. There are not that many people who can maintain a newly acquired skill without coaching. Basically training is useless without a proper follow-up coaching. (Reckham 1979.)

Benefits of coaching

Coaching can offer lots of benefits for organizations of all sizes, especially small businesses. It provides employees a way to connect, learn and grow within the company and along their own career paths. Coaching is usually provided when a new or a current employee can benefit from personal guidance of a certain job, processes or responsibilities. (Long 2015.)

On many occasions, coaching can provide loyalty between the employees and the organization. It helps employees feel comfortable with management and also encourages open interaction, which leads to a positive work experience. Organizations can decrease costs by coaching effectively, and not having to recruit and train new employees continuously. (Long 2015.)

Coaching allows individuals to solve issues and concerns with a relationship of trust and confidence. This can lead to reducing frustrations on a personal level and enhance the job satisfaction of the individual, offering a benefit for the organization. (Long 2015.)

On top of developing employees, coaching can enhance the function of a team, a department and the whole organization. Coaching enables managers to identify the weaknesses and strengths of each employee. Again this allows the organization to keep the whole team to work proficiently when employees are on vacations or on sickleave. (Long 2015.)

5.5 Benchmarking

Benchmarking is a systematic method which aims to collect data, compare and improve operations. It is learning from a good example or a role model. The goal is to benefit from another's success. (Hotanen, Laine & Pietiläinen 2001, 6-8.) Benchmarking is the process where a company measures its current business operations and compares them to companies that are best in the practices. A survey in 1991 showed that benchmarking is increasing and is expected to grow. However there are still many companies that are not familiar with it. (Mittelstaedt 1992, 301.)

There are five different types of benchmarking methods which can be used in any organization for different situations. Internal benchmarking means that it happens inside the organization, by looking within the same division or other division. Usually an internal benchmarking has a focus on the low level operational matters. Another benchmarking method is competitive benchmarking, which means that certain competitors are comparing their actions between each other. Very similar method is shadow benchmarking which also is a competitor-to-competitor comparison but it is made so that the other partner is unaware of the other's actions and that they have so called a shadow. Industrial benchmarking occurs in similar but not identical functions within the same industry, and is often focused on the leaders. Finally the fifth method is transnational benchmarking which means that an organization is comparing their specific processes that are the same to another organization's processes, for example how they handle their order entry or manage telephone sales systems. The comparison is usually made to against organizations that are leading the markets. (McGonagle & Fleming 1998.) It is crucial to remember that benchmarking is about learning process, not just about a comparison and particularly not about copying. (Hotanen, Laine & Pietiläinen 2001, 49.)

In a clothing store business a research was made to H&M store in 2011. The aim was to benchmark another clothing store, Zara, and evaluate their strategic management and collect information to improve H&M's strategy and performance. Zara was chosen because of its similarity to H&M. They both are successful apparel companies and are popular world wide. However, they have difference business strategy to conduct a business performance. An overall conclusion of the research was that H&M should courageously take inspirations from Zara and learn from its actions. For example H&M

should develop its own supply chain management to make the production process faster and reactive, such as Zara. (Huiru 2011, 24, 50 & 53.)

6 RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION

This chapter covers the used research methods in the research for Seppälä Oy. The chosen methods are quantitative and qualitative research. The methods suit for the research purpose, moreover, they complement each other. The quantitative method was used more than the qualitative method, because of the research type. The reasons for choosing these methods for this research are explained in this chapter.

6.1 Quantitative research

As a quantitative method, I selected survey to find out what a good seller is like from a customer point of view and what customers value in the customer encounter, as well as in what kind of clothing stores they will rather shop.

The main purpose of a research is search for facts through a purposive investigation. It is an “organized inquiry”. A research looks to find solutions to unexplained phenomena, to solve the uncertain proposition and to correct the defective facts. (Krishnaswami & Satyarpasad 2010, 2.)

Quantitative research is based on the quantity or the number. The result of the research is introduced through monetary or numerical terms. (Krishnaswami & Satyarpasad 2010, 5.) The researcher does not need to focus on the necessary calculations, since computers and computer programs execute them. Before the development of the technology, the quantitative research was mostly calculating the results. Nowadays the researcher’s main job is to understand the results after the mathematical calculations and explain them to the reader. Even though the researcher does not need to do the calculations, it is important to comprehend the methods in order to understand why the machines give certain numbers and results as well as to interpret them diversely and correctly. Quantitative research is based on statistics which refers to conclusion of numerous independent events. Results and facts are demonstrated by numeric means or with charts and figures. All researches can be divided into two groups: a theoretical as an analytical research or an empirical research. Quantitative research represents an empirical research method. It aims to discover the possible consistencies and compositions between the individual cases. When the same phenomenon recurs multiple times, the researcher tests whether there are any relationships between the variables and if it can

be generalized to concern the whole population. This means that the researcher creates a pattern on the basis of a number of individual cases. (Valli 2015, 15-17.)

6.1.1 Data collection of the quantitative method

I conducted a paper form survey in Finnish for the potential customers of Seppälä Oy and consumers in the clothing field. A paper form survey was selected because then I could easily monitor the results/get the surveys immediately and also get the best possible respondent group for this survey. The age distribution was from 15 to 65 years old, so on other extremity to the other. The respondents were from seven different cities in order to get answers from all over Finland. The aim was to get the knowledge of what they value in a good seller, moreover, what is thought to be a disturbing action. Based on the results I gave suggestions to Seppälä Oy how they can use this knowledge in HRD; such as in recruitment and in training. Before launching the survey I verified it with the HR manager of Seppälä. I received some improvement ideas from the verification. The questionnaire received 58 answers (43 female and 15 male), the goal was over 45. The amount of participants was good. The questionnaire was composed of seven questions, others multiple choice and two open questions. (APPENDIX 3.) The time for doing the survey was two weeks.

Collecting information and data for quantitative research from the whole population can be slow, expensive and laborious, therefore the sufficient data can be received by making surveys for a smaller subpopulation. The subpopulation must be chosen carefully so that it would represent the whole population. Representativeness is guaranteed when the subpopulation is picked randomly and so that every person in the population has the same possibility to become an examinee. It is important that different steps in the survey are clearly instructed in order to maintain the quality of the research. (Pahkinen 2012, 11-13.)

Commonly quantitative research uses questionnaires as a method to conduct a research. A questionnaire is a measuring object which suits for example for opinion surveys and feedbacks. A questionnaire operates on its own and it includes questions and options for answers and it can be compared to an interview form. There are some factors that should be considered in a questionnaire such as: are the respondents representing the population, are there enough answers, are the questions being answered thoroughly, did

the questions measure the researched subjects and was the timing of the questionnaire right. (Vehkalahti 2008, 11-12.) However the survey can be tested beforehand to find out whether the questions are understandable as well as the overall functionality of the survey form. (Pahkinen 2012, 219.)

6.1.2 Analysis of the quantitative data

Since the survey was a paper form survey, it allowed me to calculate many of the results without computer programs, just by using a paper and pen. It was easy to divide the results into different piles based on the theme, count them in order to see how many respondents I have in each group and what they have answered. I calculated with a tally for example what the most valued character of a seller in a clothing field is. I analysed some of the survey results by making an Excel document. This way I double checked my own calculations and came to the results that my conclusions are valid and reliable.

The results are discussed in five different ways: independent of the age, gender, occupation and hometown as overall results, then dependent on the age of the respondents, dependent on the hometown of the respondents, dependent on the gender and at last dependent on the occupation. This way I saw if there were any background variables; whether there are any differences in the results in the different groups (age, gender, occupation and hometown). I analysed the data with diagrams and figures in order to make it clearer and more visual. This way I could easily see what the respondents have answered and make conclusions based on the diagrams and figures.

In quantitative data analysis it is common to try several different methods before finding the answers to the research problems. The methods of analyzing the data can be measurements, hypothesis testings, researching the correlation between the variables and average testing. In order to analyse the data effectively, it requires familiarization and knowledge of the facts. The ease of statistic programs can easily lead to misuse, if the familiarization has not happened properly. (Heikkilä 2014, 174.)

There are five common steps in analyzing the survey. Firstly the theory is constructed and after that on the basis of the theory, hypotheses are made. The third step is to define the concepts and the next step is to collect the empirical data. When the empirical data is collected, the final step includes the testing of the hypothesis. (Babbie 1990, 239.)

The statistic programs are made to analyze the statistical data. Therefore they are suitable for the quantitative research data processing and analyzing. There are many statistic programs such as SPSS, Excel and SAS, but the data collection method, research data, necessary analyzing methods and the researcher himself determines the suitable program to process the data. (Heikkilä 2014, 118.)

6.2 Qualitative research

I chose a qualitative method to interview two workers at Seppälä Oy to find out about their business situation and their way of working. These are not seen in the results, but in the commissioning party introduction phase. Also I had a qualitative part in my survey to find out what kind of good and bad customer service experiences interviewees remember, moreover, why they return or do not return to a certain clothing store.

Qualitative research is used to find the behavior of the people who are being researched. It is used extensively to confirm of the results. For example the consumer behaviours, employees attitudes, the changes in the fashion of the consumers, etc. are analysed in qualitative research. (Krishnaswami & Satyarpsad 2010, 5.) Qualitative research is also suitable for the activity developments, social problem explorations and for the alternative searches. Qualitative research is commonly limited to a small amount of cases, but the aim is to analyse them very accurately. The examinees are selected discretionarily and no statistical generalizations are attempt to make. (Heikkilä 2014, 15.)

6.2.1 Data collection of the qualitative method

I chose to use a semi-structured interview for the HR manager of Seppälä Oy. (APPENDIX 1.) The interview with the HR manager of Seppälä Oy was conducted through email in the middle of October. Before the interview I met the HR manager in Kotka on 18th of September. The purpose of the meeting was to plan the topic and to agree on what is our aim of this research is. The meeting increased the credibility of the email interview because then I knew whom I am really talking to and can conduct the interview through email. This was the best way to conduct the interview for both of us. I also interviewed one of the store managers of Seppälä Oy to get a closer look at their

work. This interview happened face-to-face at the end of October and was an open interview, by using only the certain themes to guide it. (APPENIX 2.)

In qualitative research the data is collected in a less structured way than in quantitative research and the data is most commonly in text format. Examples of qualitative data are interviews, letters, diaries, observations and autobiographies. (Heikkilä 2014, 15-16.) These methods can be used alternatively, contemporaneously or in different combinations according to the research problem and resources. In interviews, it is important to get information about the topic as much as possible. The benefit of an interview is its flexibility. The researcher has a possibility to repeat questions, correct misunderstandings, clarify the sentences and communicate with the informant. In addition the researcher can write down, not just what the informant is saying, but how the informant is saying it. These kinds of opportunities the researcher does not get for example in post questionnaires. The disadvantages of an interview are the money and time. Interviews are expensive and it takes time to collect the data. (Heikkilä 2014, 71-74.)

6.2.2 Analysis of the qualitative data

The interviews I conducted with the HR manager and the store manager of Seppälä Oy can be seen at the beginning of the thesis, the part where I introduce the commissioning party. The interviews had to be conducted in order to get to know Seppälä's ways of selling, recruiting, and developing their sellers. From the information I made a development suggestion to Seppälä Oy.

I made a transcription of both interviews and marked the important points to highlight the main issues. I left the unnecessary parts out and then categorized the main issues into different themes. One of the interview was a theme interview so categorizing the data was easy. After this I made the conclusions based on the main issues of the interviews. These parts can be seen in the commissioning party introduction part. I also had two qualitative questions in my survey. They were open questions where the respondents had a possibility to explain their experiences in their own words. From these questions I also marked the important points to highlight the main issues. I left the parts out that were not repeated many times and were somewhat unnecessary. After this I made conclusions based on the main issues.

The basic method of analysing the qualitative data is content analysis. The main steps of the content analysis are: measuring the interesting factors, combing through the data, and separate and mark all the interesting points. When the marked points are collected and separated from other data, they can be themed or categorized. Thematising the data means that the qualitative data is split and categorized based on the different themes and topics. This way it is possible to compare the occurrence of certain themes in the material. The idea is to seek from the material a certain view which represents themes. If the data collection was conducted with a theme interview, categorizing and splitting the data is relatively easy because the interview themes have already parsed the data. After this the last step is to write a conclusion based on these points. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2011, 91-93) Generally in the qualitative research the data collection and data analysis occur, at least partly, at the same time. There might not even be a clear line between these two. However before any official data analysis can begin, the available data has to be in a certain format so that the analysis is possible. Most commonly notes and interviews are transcribed. (Metsämuuronen 2008, 47-48.)

7 RESEARCH RESULTS

This chapter discusses the results of the questionnaire. The chapter consist of the background information about of the respondents and after that the results which are divided into different themes, to see how the respondents answered based on their age, gender, city and occupation.

7.1 Background information of the respondents

The main customer segment of Seppälä Oy is middle-aged women who are looking for clothes that fit for Finnish people. Seppälä also has another customer segment of young adults. The survey was divided into four different categories: background information, good sellers' characteristics, purchasing event, and a positive and a negative experience in a clothing store.

The survey received 58 answers, most of the respondents were women 43 (74 %) and again the number of men was 15 (26 %). Moreover, most of the respondents belong to the age group of 15-25 years (36 %) or to 46-55 years (36 %), the third largest group was 36-45 years (12 %), fourth largest group was 26-35 years (9 %), and the rest were 56-65 years or over 65 years (7 %). The occupation question was divided into six different options: an entrepreneur, senior position, a higher official, an employee, a student or something else, what? Almost half of the respondents were employees (47 %), and the second largest group was students (26 %). The third largest group was higher officials (14 %), fourth the senior position (7 %), fifth largest respondent group was "something else" which contains a retiree, an unemployed and a lower official (5 %) and the last group was entrepreneurs (1 %).

After this the respondents were asked where they are living currently, to see if this affects the valued characteristics. The respondents were from Kotka, Helsinki, Tampere, Joensuu, Kouvola, Lappeenranta or from Mikkeli. Most of the respondents were from Kotka (60 %) because it was the easiest for me to ask people from Kotka, the city where I am from. The second largest group was from Mikkeli (19 %) and the third group from the Helsinki metropolitan area (11 %). After this comes Kouvola (4 %) and Tampere (4 %), then Lappeenranta (1 %) and Joensuu (1 %).

7.2 Survey results independent of the age, city, occupation and gender of the respondents

The survey concentrated on the sellers' important and valued characteristics in the clothing store from a customer point of view. The respondents were requested to choose three important characteristics of a clothing store seller: what is important and what they value the most. The results of the survey showed that the know-how (20 %), the friendliness (16 %) and the situational awareness (15 %) are the three most important characteristics of a clothing store seller. Moreover, the respondents were also requested to choose one out of the three important characters. Figure 1 shows the most important characteristic from a customer point of view.

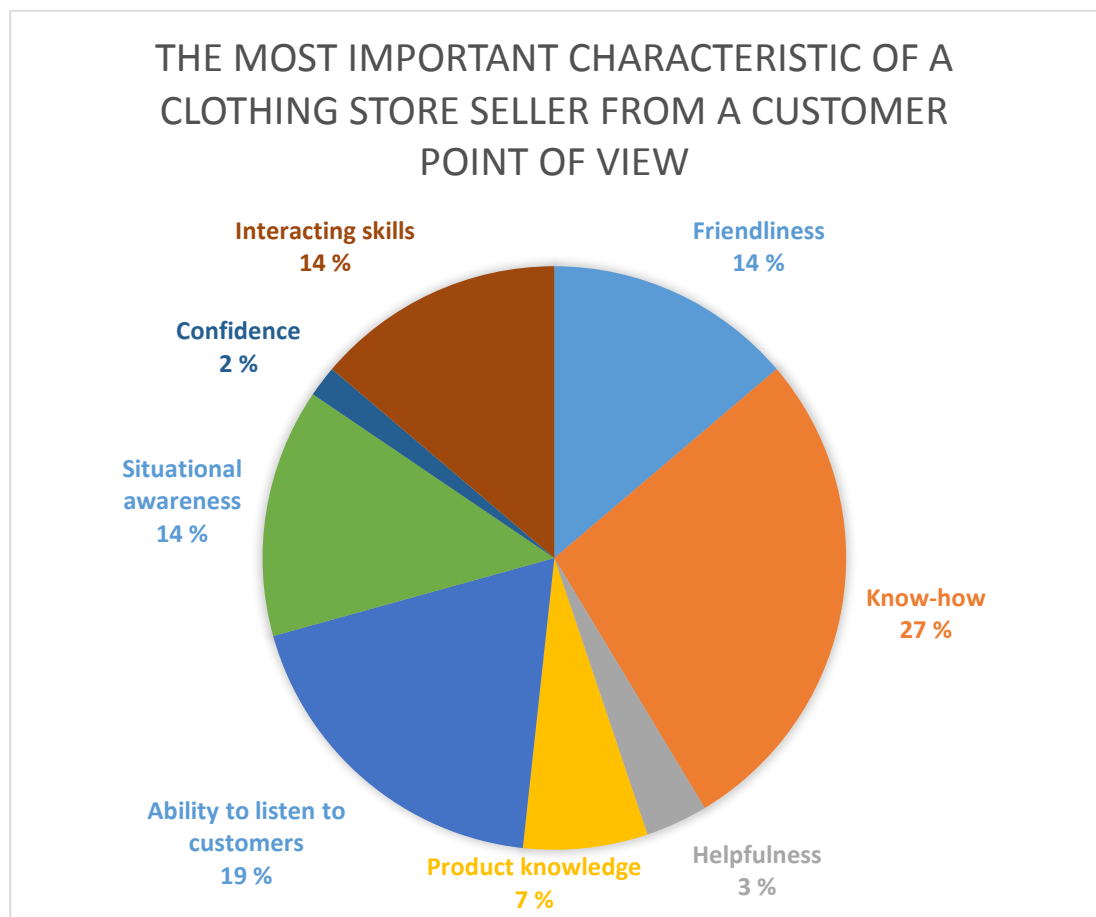


FIGURE 1. The most important characteristic of a seller.

From figure 1 it can be seen that the most important character of a clothing store seller is the know-how (27 %). These calculations are not dependent on the respondents' age, gender, city or occupation. Almost 1/3 of the respondents think that the know-how of a clothing store seller is the most important factor. The know-how in this case means the

knowledge of clothes: which clothes match well together, washing instructions, current fashion, etc. The second most important character of a clothing store seller is the ability to listen to customers (19 %). From a customer point of view sellers' appearance, professional product presentation skills or achieving additional sales are not the most important characteristics (these were not chosen at all). The things that matter the most are knowing the store and the products as well as the knowledge of human nature, the communication skills and the friendliness.

In the survey the respondents were requested to choose what kind of a clothing store they will rather shop in. There were three options A, B and C. A represents a clothing store where a customer gets personal service from the seller from the beginning until the end of a purchasing event. B represents a clothing store where a customer gets personal service on request; the seller has a focus on store decoration and managing a store. Again C represents a clothing store where a customer can seek the needed products by himself/herself without any personal service. Most of the respondents would rather shop in store B (60 %), where they have their own space but help is given if requested. The second most popular option was store A (36 %), where they get personal service from the beginning until the end of the purchasing event. Only 4 % would like to shop in a clothing store like C, where the customer does not get any help. The overall result is that most of the respondents would rather shop in a store where they have a private space to shop but the seller is paying attention to them and offering help from request.

Respondents were requested to mark the number from one to five after each claim what best describes their opinion. Below can be seen the claims and the results. Table 2 shows more positive claims, which shows the percentage of how important the claims are from the customers point of view.

TABLE 2. The importance of positive claims of a seller's actions (n=58)

	1= not important at all	2= not so important	3= important	4= very important	5= extremely important
The importance of an instant availability of a clothing store seller (if needed)	0 %	7 %	17 %	41 %	35 %
The importance of helpfulness of a clothing store seller: a seller approaches and takes the customer into account spontaneously.	0 %	12 %	35 %	31 %	22 %
The importance of a recommendation of multiple choices from a clothing store seller	1 %	17 %	28 %	38 %	16 %
The importance of a greeting at the very first encounter	0 %	1 %	1 %	18 %	80 %
The importance of a smile of a seller	0 %	1 %	14 %	30 %	55 %
The importance of an active involvement from a clothing store seller until the end of a purchasing event	7 %	22 %	35 %	24 %	12 %
The importance of the appearance of a clothing store seller (makeup, clothes, hair, etc.)	3 %	7 %	24 %	49 %	17 %

Table 2 shows the positive claims and respondents' opinion on how important they are. The red color represents the one that got the most answers from the respondents. From the claims it can be seen that the respondents answered almost unanimously to the claim of importance of a greeting, that it is extremely important. This shows that it is crucial for the seller to greet customers at the very first encounter. Secondly more than half of the respondents answered that it is extremely important that a clothing store seller smiles. Also a clothing store seller's appearance, availability and recommendation skills are very important. Table 3 shows the results of a negative claims which shows the percentage of how disturbing the claims are from the customers' point of view.

TABLE 3. The disturbance of negative claims of a seller's actions (n=58)

	1= not disturbing at all	2= not so disturbing	3= disturbing	4= very disturbing	5= extremely disturbing
The disturbance if a clothing store seller forces products	1%	1%	8%	33%	57%
The disturbance if a clothing store seller is being pushy	1%	0%	8%	15%	76%
The disturbance of a seller's product ignorance	0%	0%	16%	36%	48%
The disturbance of a not knowledgeable seller	0%	0%	14%	40%	46%
The disturbance of a seller's uncertainty	0%	9%	31%	36%	24%
The disturbance of a seller's shyness	3%	16%	46%	16%	19%
The disturbance of a seller's inability to listen to customers	0%	0%	1%	27%	72%
The disturbance of a seller who is not approaching or paying attention to customers spontaneously	1%	14%	33%	26%	26%

Table 3 shows the negative claims and respondents' opinion on how important they are. The red color represents the one that got the most answers from the respondents. Five out of the 58 respondents answered to the negative claims that all of them are extremely disturbing and three respondents thought that 7/8 of the claims are extremely disturbing. From these claims it can be seen that they all are disturbing on some level but the most disturbing factors are if the seller is being pushy or is unable to listen to the customer.

Moreover, more than half of the respondents think that when a seller is forcing products upon them, it is extremely disturbing. In addition the clothing store seller should know the products in the store and have know-how.

At the end of the survey the respondents were requested to answer the two open questions, one with a positive purchasing event experience and another one with a negative. First of all, almost all of the respondents were repeating the factors that came out in the first question (important characteristics). The most important characteristic from the respondents' point of view was *the know-how* and this came out also in the last section of the questionnaire. The respondents repeatedly answered that they usually return to the store where the seller knows the current fashion, what matches up well together, washing instructions, and also can give good advice and tips for example what kind of jewelry looks good with the dress. Moreover, the seller should take into account customers' needs, size, body shape, age, style, etc. in order to give the best possible service, advice and examples. Another matter that many of the respondents answered was that it is important that the seller pays attention to a customer and greets at the very first encounter.

The respondents wrote that a good seller is helpful and can give honest opinions (does not try to sell something that does not look good or fit, etc.) A seller in the clothing store should be able to listen to the customer and what he/she is looking for as well as see if the customer even need any help. If the customer does not need help, then it is essential to give him/her privacy. Moreover, it is crucial that a clothing store seller knows the products in the store: available sizes, place of the products, if they have what the customer is looking for, and so on. The respondents explained that they got fast service (seen as a good thing) and it was a win-win situation for both. It was mentioned many times that if the store does not have the product(s) for the customer, a good seller knows to recommend some similar options and give advice where the customer could find the products (even if it is another store). Many of the respondents made a comment that they usually return to the store if the seller told them about the on going sales or some future offers/sales. Last but not least, the respondents wrote that a good seller has a smile on his/her face and creates a relaxed atmosphere.

Many of the respondents supported their opinions from the previous questions and really opened their hearts. The main point that came out from the survey was that the

respondents do not go back to the store if the seller is being pushy and is forcing the products on the customer (without even greeting at first). The respondents also do not use the clothing stores where the seller is walking behind them and telling about the products/offers/sales/etc. even after telling that the help is not needed. Moreover, if the seller is coming to the fitting room without asking or listening it makes the customer feel embarrassed and annoyed. The sellers of a clothing store must have a good situational awareness. Also if a seller is trying to offer clothes that are not even the customer's style or are for younger/older people, cannot give proper advice and the wanted clothes, they will not go back to the store. This was also told in a different way; if the clothing store seller has no clue about what size is good for a certain customer or the seller is under or over estimating customers' wealth based on their looks, then it creates an awkward situation and the customer will not return to the store.

Many respondents explained an opposite experience from the positive experience. For example about the greeting at the very first sight; if the sellers are not greeting the customer and noticing the need for help, many of the customers would leave the store and go to another one. Moreover, even if it is important to smile from the customers' point of view, an artificial cheerfulness is not recommended. From the respondents view it is essential for the seller to know the products and to have other needed information about the clothes, or they rather use another clothing store to look for clothes. Also, if the seller points out, without checking, that the store does not have such a product and does not even try to help the customer to find a similar kind of a product, more likely the customer will leave the store. Some respondents answered that the clothing store seller can create the kind of an atmosphere where the customer is not welcomed or wanted, such as situations where the seller is behind the cashier talking to a coworker without paying attention to customers, showing the rush or a bad day to customers, hiding behind the clothes or racks, or is not responding to customers' questions. These are the situations where customers will not return to the store.

One very shocking experience came out from this survey was that the seller, in an unnamed store, had accidentally given the wrong product to the wrong customer and did not even apologize to the customers. Moreover, the customers had to fix the situation themselves by exchanging the product on their own. These kind of situations are not accepted in any store and from the mistake like this the customer will not return to the store. It is crucial to remember that customers are the ones who bring in the profit.

Survey results dependent on the age of the respondents

In the age group of 15-25 years, the three most important characteristics of a clothing store seller were *the situational awareness, the know-how* and *the friendliness*. And the most important characteristic was *the situational awareness* (21%). In the age group of 26-35 the three (in this case four) most important characteristics were *the friendliness, the product knowledge, the ability to listen to customers* and *the interacting skills*. They all got 20%, so there cannot be seen the single most important characteristic of a seller. In the age group of 36-45 the three (in this case four) most important characteristics were *the know-how, the product knowledge, the helpfulness* and *the situational awareness*. There were two most important characteristics and both got 19%: *the know-how* and *the product knowledge*. Again in the age group of 46-55 the three most important characteristics of a clothing store seller were *the know-how, the ability to listen to customers* and *the friendliness*. And the most important characteristic was *the know how* with 23%. The age group of 56-65 chose *the know-how, the helpfulness* and *the ability to listen to customers* as the three most important characteristics. From this age group the most important characteristic of a seller cannot be seen because all of these three got 22%. The last age group was over 65 years old, and there was only one respondent in this age group. The three most important characteristics were *the friendliness, the know-how* and *the situational awareness*. This respondent chose as the most important characteristic of a clothing store seller *the situational awareness*.

Figure 2 shows the results of what kind of a clothing store the respondents would like to shop in dependent on the age of the respondents.

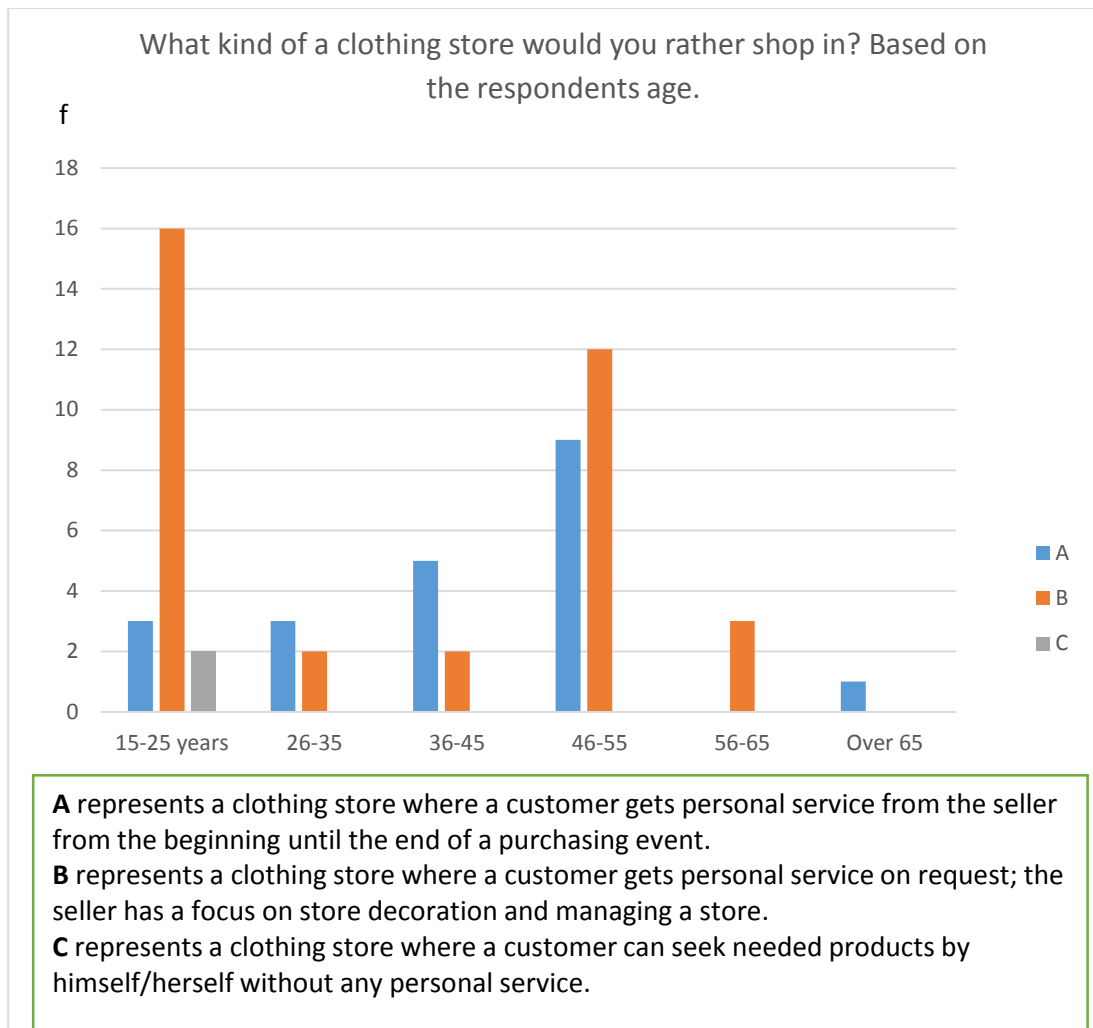


FIGURE 2. A clothing store where the respondents would rather shop in based on the age.

From the figure 2 it can be seen that the age group of 15-25 years likes to shop more likely in clothing store B, where a customer has its own space and gets personal service if needed (76%). Again the age group of 36-45 would more likely shop in store A, where they get personal service from the beginning until the end of a purchasing event (71%). From the age group of 26-35 and 46-55 there cannot be seen a major difference between the store A and B. The last two groups (56-66 and over 65) are quite small samplings so any assumption is hard to made.

Survey results dependent on the gender of the respondents

Figure 3 shows the most important characteristic of a clothing store seller based on the respondents' gender.

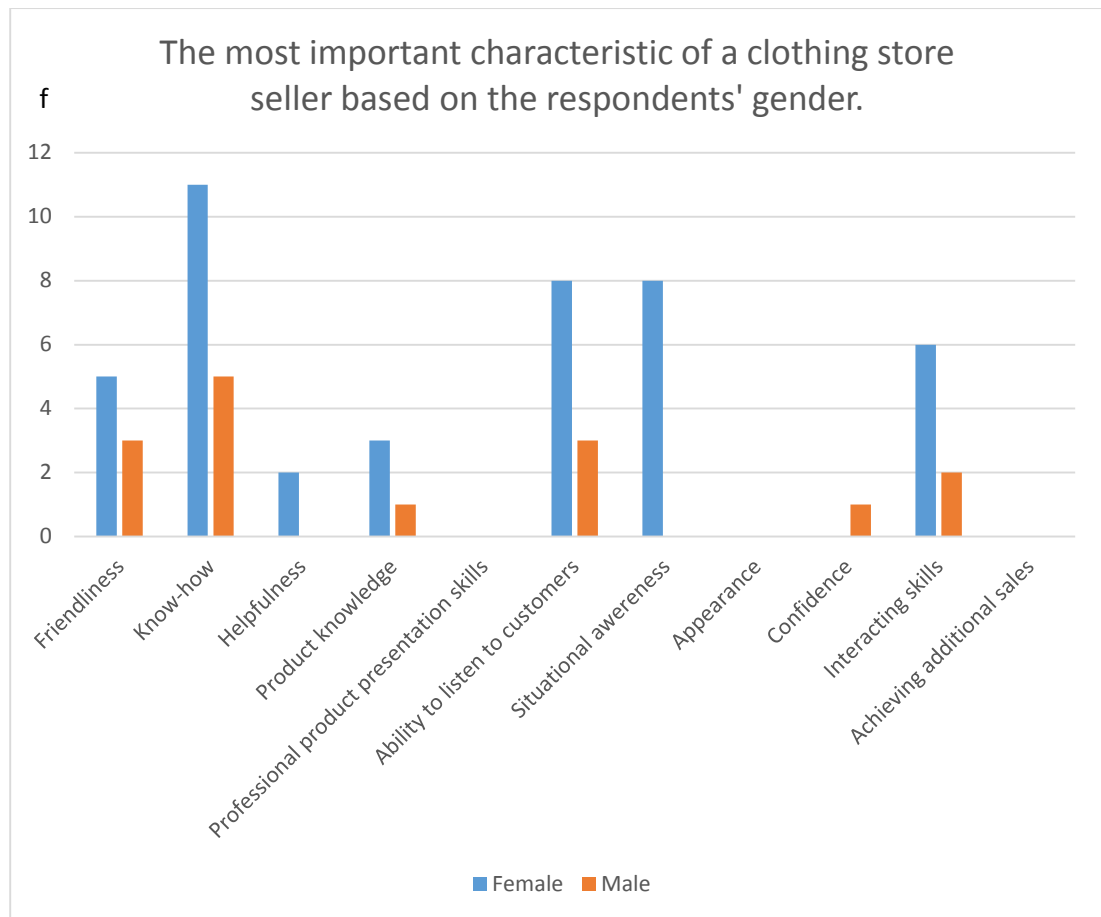


FIGURE 3. The most important characteristic of a seller based on the gender.

Figure 3 shows that 26 % of the female respondents answered *the know-how* as the most important characteristic of a clothing store seller and again 19 % answered *the ability to listen to customers* and other 19 % *the situational awareness*. 33 % of the male respondents answered that *the know-how* is the most important characteristic of a clothing store seller. Again 20 % answered *the friendliness* and other 20 % *the ability to listen to customers* as the most important characteristic of a clothing store seller.

Figure 4 shows the results of what kind of a clothing store the respondents would like to shop in dependent on the gender of the respondents.

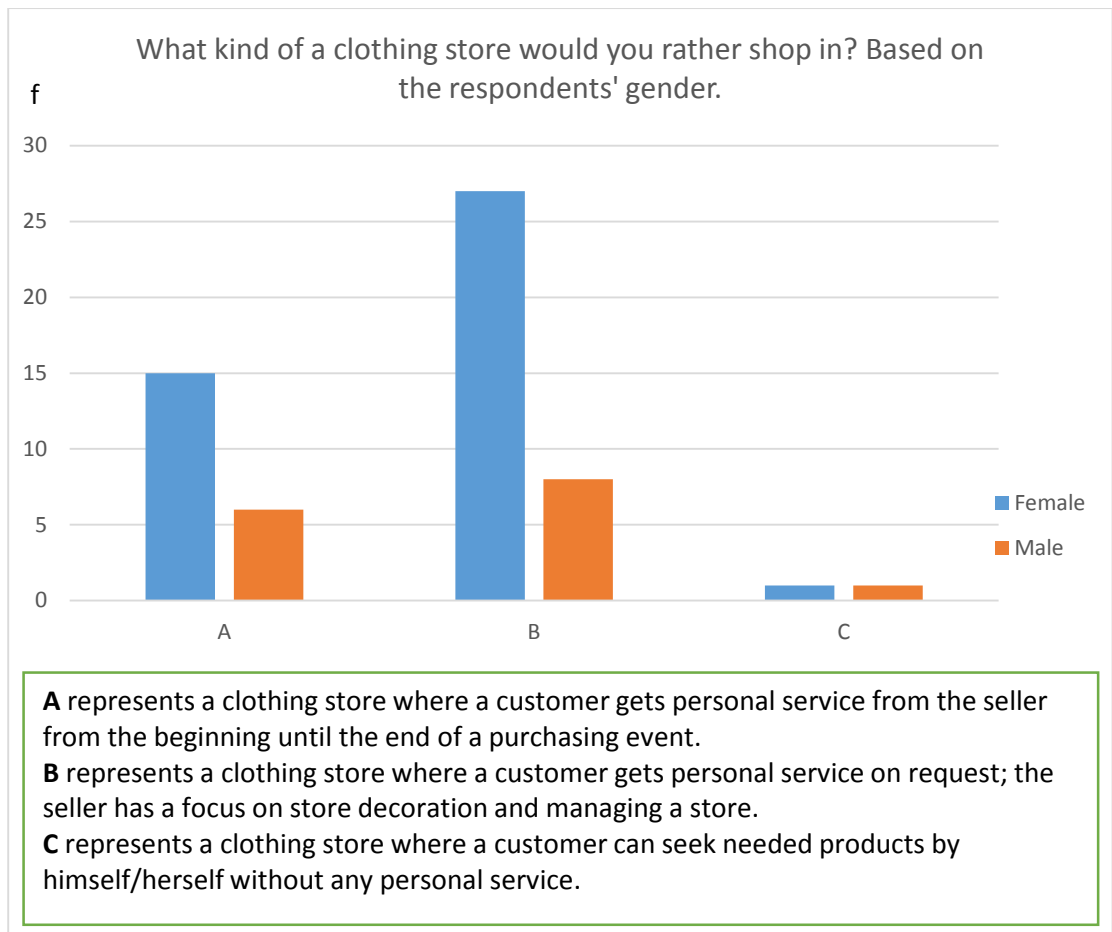


FIGURE 4. Clothing store where the respondents would rather shop in based on the gender.

Figure 4 shows that 53 % of the male and 63 % of the female respondents answered that they would rather shop in the clothing store B, where a customer gets personal service on request; the seller has a focus on store decoration and managing the store. Again 40 % of the male and 35 % of the female respondents would like to shop in the clothing store A, where a customer gets personal service from the seller from the beginning until the end of a purchasing event. Only one person from the female and one person from the male respondent group answered the C option, where the customer has to find the needed products on their own.

Survey results dependent on the hometown of the respondents

In figure 5 and 6 it can be seen what the respondents answered to questions two and three based on where they live currently.

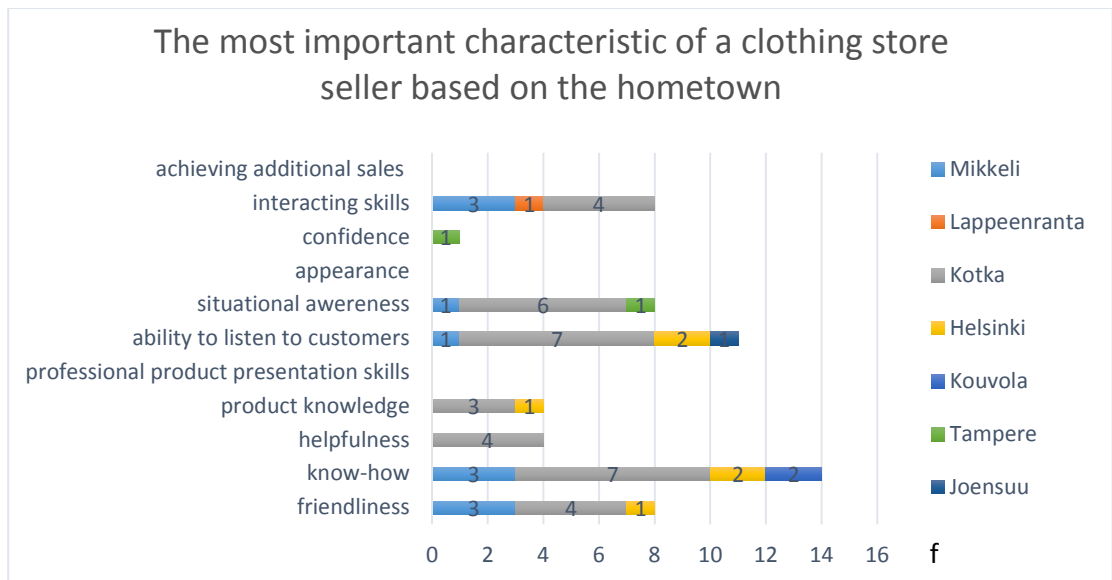


FIGURE 5. The most important characteristic of a seller based on the hometown.

In figure 5 the results are divided quite equally independent of where the respondents are living. For example the respondents from Kotka chose *the know-how* and *ability to listen to the customer* as the most important characteristics and situational awereness came second. The results from Kotka are divided into seven different characteristics. Also the results from Mikkeli are divided into five different charateristics and they all have quite the same amount of votes. The results from question three based on where the respondents are living are seen in figure 6.



FIGURE 6. Clothing store where the respondents would rather shop in based on the hometown.

From figure 6 it can be seen that the samples from Helsinki, Lappeenranta, Kouvola, Tampere and Joensuu are too small to conclude anything but based on Kotka the results are almost divided equally, but still quite many would like to shop in a store like A, where the customer gets personal service from the seller from the beginning until the end of a purchasing event. Then again the respondents from Mikkeli almost unanimously would rather shop in a store like B, where the customer has more space but on request gets personal service.

Survey results dependent on the occupation of the respondents

The most important characteristic of a clothing store seller based on the occupation of the respondents can be seen below:

- An entrepreneur: *the ability to listen to customers* 100%
- Senior position: *the know-how* 33%
- A higher official: *the know-how* 58%
- An Employee: *the know-how* 23% and *the ability to listen to customers* 23%
- A student: *the interacting skills* 33%

- Something else, what? (an unemployed, a retiree and a lower official): *the situational awareness* 100%.

Based on this, it can be seen that there are similarities in the answers. Three groups think that the know-how is the most important characteristic and again two groups think it is *the ability to listen to customers*. Moreover, *the interacting skills* and *the situational awareness* are also important. Figure 7 shows the results of what kind of a clothing store the respondent likes to shop in based on their occupation.

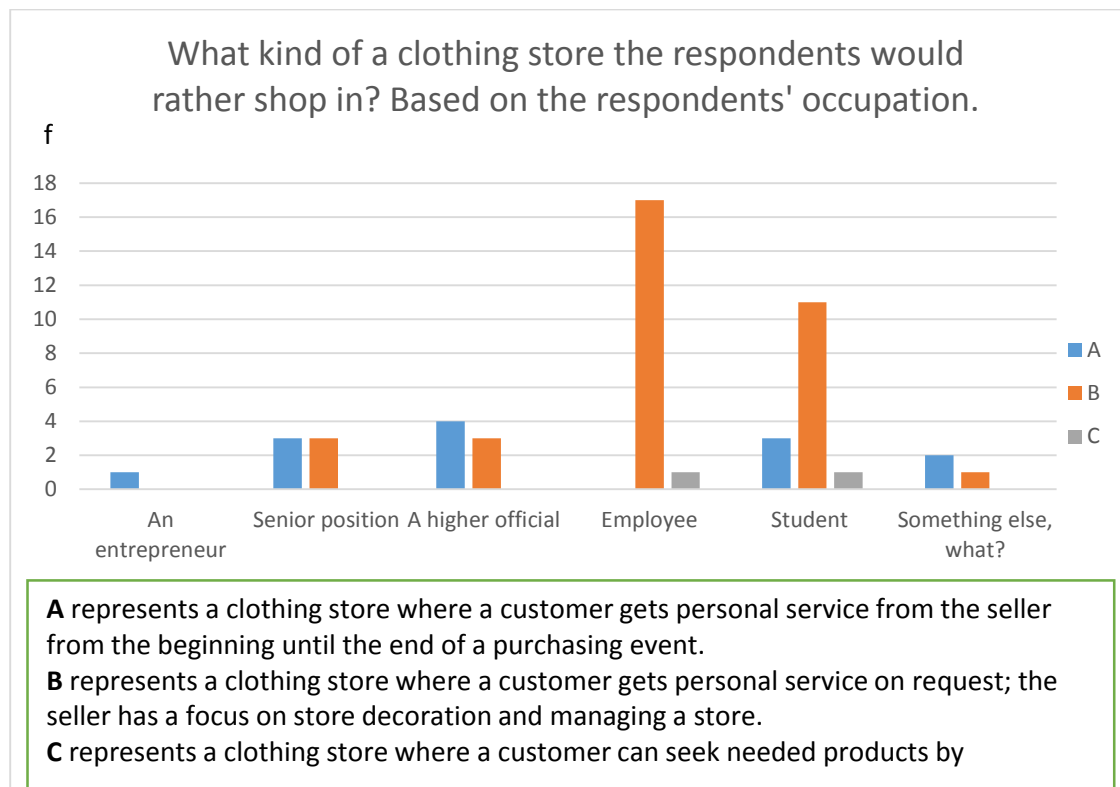


FIGURE 7. Clothing store where the respondents would rather shop in based on the occupation.

From figure 7 it can be seen that the employees and the students like to shop more likely in store B, where they get customer service on request. The results were divided evenly in the occupation of the senior position and then again only a small difference in the occupation of the higher official. The sample in the occupation of the entrepreneur and something else, what? were too small to make any assumptions.

8 CONCLUSION OF THE GOOD SELLER

In this chapter I will discuss the conclusion of the good seller based on the research results. In this chapter the research question one is answered: a good clothing store seller from the customer point of view.

From the survey I came to the conclusion that customers in the clothing field value the know-how of the seller most. The know-how means that a seller knows the products, the current fashion, what matches well together, washing introductions, can give advice to the customer, etc.

The good seller is a person who has the know-how of the field, has an ability to listen to customers without any prejudices or presumptions and has a friendly attitude. Moreover, the good seller needs to have an ability to read the situations so situational awareness as well as good interacting skills in order to communicate with the customers in a way that both are on the same page and get a win-win situations in the end. It is important to understand and find out customers' needs and styles, in order to give the best possible advice to customers and to sell products.

I have got the knowledge of how important or disturbing some issues are from the customers' point of view. The overall conclusion is that it is really important that the clothing store sellers are available when ever a customer needs one. The good seller is not hiding anywhere, genuinely wants to help customers and has a desire to sell despite what the product is. Also the importance of a smile and a greet are crucial. The good seller is genuinely smiling, the attitude is right and greets customers at the very first encounter. Moreover, the appearance of the clothing store seller is important on some level for the customer, they rather interact with the seller who has a clean and a stylish look. But for many customers it is not so important that the same seller is serving/helping from the beginning until the end of a purchasing event in clothing stores. The most disturbing matters are the ones where the seller is pushy and somewhat aggressive or forcing the products upon the customer. Furthermore, if the seller does not have the know-how or does not know the products in the store, customers think it is disturbing or extremely disturbing. And in addition, even a shy person can be a good and even a top seller.

The customers in the clothing field expect to get the privacy and like to shop more likely in a store where they can look around but on request the help is given. Secondly, customers like to shop in a store where the sellers are actively involved in customers' purchasing event. This shows that it is essential for the good seller to be able to read customers' mind from their signs and movements. It is crucial to know different personalities and the human nature.

The survey gave me an insight into what customers are really avoiding and again why they return to certain clothing stores. I got some shocking information and got good advice what customers want and do not want from the seller. Some wrote even the name of the store where they rather do not shop. This shows that the customers are openly telling about the bad experiences and also the good ones. This is why the sellers in the clothing field have to be at their best all the time. Even if the seller might have a bad day, it is not acceptable to show it to customers. Moreover, it is not good to show the rush because the customer will not understand it, they are there to buy the products. The good seller remembers that customers are extremely important and if showing them a negative atmosphere the word will spread really fast.

Based on the theory part and the survey, the things that impact on the sales profit are the know-how, the ability to create a good atmosphere, sellers' excitement and the ability to maintain the interaction. Moreover, achieving the sales profit is at its best when the seller can lead the customer into the buying process so that the customer feels like he/she is leading it.

Over all, the research revealed that the characteristics of a good seller in the clothing store are mostly the ones that are learnable. They can be easily taught and developed with a proper methods. The seller of a clothing store should be able to adapt to different situations.

The conclusions dependent on the age, the gender, the hometown and the occupation of the respondents

The conclusions from the results based on the age, the gender, the hometown and the occupation are divided into these four categories. Firstly, there are not a major differ-

ences between the age groups. The respondents answered somewhat the same dependent on their age. But one assumption can be made based on the results: the older the customers of a clothing store are, the more know-how and helpfulness they are expecting from the seller. Younger customers expect the seller to give them more privacy, have a situational awareness and an ability to listen to the customer. The youngest age group of the respondents 15-25 years would most likely shop in a store where they have privacy but upon request they get help and again the age group 36-45 would shop in a store where the seller is helping personally them from the beginning until the end of the purchasing event. The results in the two groups, 26-35 and 46-55, were divided quite equally. The last two groups, 55-65 and over 65, had small samples so any assumptions cannot be made.

Secondly, there aren't differences between the answers of the male and the female respondents. Both, the male and female respondents answered the know-how as the most important characteristic of a clothing store seller with 33% and 26%. Also, dependent on the gender the respondents would rather shop in a clothing store where they get personal service from the seller if requested, but have a privacy to look for the products. Thirdly, since most of the respondents were from Kotka and Mikkeli it is quite hard to see if there are any differences in the results. The results were divided quite equally irrespective of the respondents' hometown. For example the results from Kotka were divided into seven different characteristics so it is hard to make any assumptions based on this. The samples from Kouvola, Tampere, Joensuu and Lappeenranta were one or two and from Helsinki six. This way I cannot make any reliable assumptions based on the hometown. Lastly, there are not major differences between the occupations of the respondents. Half of the occupation groups answered that the know-how is the most important characteristic of the clothing store seller and two groups think that the ability to listen to the customer is the most important. Again some of the groups were quite small for making any reliable assumptions.

An overall conclusion is that the age, the gender, the hometown or the occupation of the respondents does not have any or have a small dependency to the results. I cannot make any reliable assumptions because of some of the samples were quite small. If I had wanted to see if there were any differences I should have collected more results.

Reliability and validity of the research

The theoretical framework is made with reliable sources of selected books and internet sources. The research results are based on the questionnaires I conducted. The questionnaire was really simple and as short as possible. I wanted that it can be done easily dependent on the age and does not take that much time from the respondent and that it is in a paper form. This way I guaranteed that almost all of the respondents will answer all of the questions and I will get the results as fast as possible without asking them back. Moreover, because of the paper form, I had the possibility to choose the respondents in a way to get the best possible group to answer the questionnaire. All 58 respondents answered the first five questions, but six and seven (the open questions) did not get a similar response. Ten of the respondents did not answer the sixth question and again 15 the seventh question. I think that they did not answer these questions because they were in a hurry and thought that writing takes time, or then the respondents really did not come up with any experiences. However many of the respondents answered all of the questions as requested, so I think that the survey is valid and reliable. The analysis of the research was relatively easy because of the number of respondents. Therefore I do not think that there were any mistakes when processing the questionnaires. I also double checked the results with Excel when writing them the tables and the calculations. All of the conclusions I have made in the research are made by me and they are based on the research and theoretical framework.

In qualitative research, the questions that come out in the discussion of reliability of the research are the truth and objectiveness. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2011, 134.) The research is estimated with the unity of the research. It includes the object and the purpose of the research which refers to what is being researched and why. Moreover, the researcher's commitment to the research; what is important to the researcher and what are the expectations of the research. Another factor is the data collection; the method and the technique of the research, and in addition the informants of the research; on what basis where they selected. The credibility is also based on the relation between the researcher and the informant, is it valid, and the duration of the research. The data analysis defines how the data was analysed and how to arrive at certain conclusions. The reliability of the research should be assessed and moreover, evaluated why is it reliable. Finally, the reporting of the research is assessed; how the data is combined and analysed. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2011, 140-141.)

The reliability of the research means the ability of the research to give non-random results. The less coincidence has affected the results, the more trustworthy it is. (Valli 2015, 139.) Sometimes the statistics are utilized to represent the wanted position so that how the case is wanted to look like. It has to be remembered that sometimes the researcher can give accidentally a wrong image of the reality, because of the lack of understanding the importance of the issues and used methods in describing the data. (Valli 2015, 147.)

9 DEVELOPMENT SUGGESTIONS TO SEPPÄLÄ OY

This chapter will discuss how the characteristics of a good seller from customers' point of view can be seen in Human Resource Management, especially in the parts of Human Resource Development. The chapter considers recruitment, training, coaching, mentoring and benchmarking at Seppälä Oy. Moreover, practical suggestions are given to the commissioning party Seppälä Oy, together with the evaluation of the research and its consistency with the theory part.

I mentioned about Seppälä's HRM and HRD at the beginning of the thesis, that the store managers have the power to choose employees, train and coach them, etc. Moreover, Seppälä Oy is helping them on some level by offering the store managers training sessions and guidelines how to conduct a proper recruitment and selection, and after that train the new employees. In my opinion this is a good way and it seems to be working. However, the guidelines are minor for example for conducting a proper recruitment situation. Also Seppälä does not offer so many training sessions to their store managers and even less to their sellers. Below can be seen the development suggestions in different categories.

9.1 Development suggestions for recruitment

Now Seppälä's store managers have the power to recruit new employees and choose the ones who fit the store. This gives them a major responsibility as well as a freedom to get the best possible employee, who will fill the empty space. However, Seppälä's store managers might not have the ability and the knowledge to conduct proper recruitment situations and hire a good seller. Many of the store managers know the most common method: a job interview. For example, an interview is not the only method to evaluate a person's capability, but together with other methods the interview creates an overall picture of the applicant. Seppälä Oy could offer some kind of a guideline or interview question examples for the store managers, how to conduct a proper situation, use different methods and help them ask the correct questions in order to find out if the applicant suits Seppälä well, moreover, their store. The store managers could also add questions and personalize the recruitment situation as desired.

From the survey I came to the conclusion that the most important characteristic of a clothing store seller, from customers' point of view, is the know-how. This should be taken into account when recruiting new employees. The applicant more likely should have some kind of experience from clothing field or have a passion for the fashion. This way it can be assumed that the applicant knows on some level about the materials, what matches well together, washing instructions and the current fashion. Moreover the applicant should be able to listen to customers, have situational awareness and good interacting skills. These can be ensured by conducting a hypothetical case in the recruitment situation, also known as bilateral interaction simulations. For example having another employee to act a customer, explain needs and wishes, his own style, a purpose, etc. and then see how the applicant will manage the situation. Since there are also difficult customers in every field, it is advisable to make sure that the applicant has an ability to endure stress, by conducting other hypothetical situations or by asking some difficult questions.

In addition, psychological tests are a good way to find out the personality of an applicant and this way it can be seen if the applicant will be a good seller, and moreover, whether he/she fits Seppälä's manners and ways. Therefore, if a store recruits and hires a new employee who will be a permanent worker, Seppälä should offer the store managers help to conduct a psychological test to see if the applicant has what it takes to be a good and even a top seller at Seppälä Oy.

As referring to Niitamo 2003, it has been shown that all the recruitment and personal evaluation methods have the ability to predict job success, but it has to be remembered that different evaluation methods suit for different situations. Each method has its own strengths and weaknesses, which should be determined in relation with the personal evaluation goals.

9.2 Development suggestions for training

Currently Seppälä's store managers have the power to train their employees, and because of this it is crucial to remember to train them properly and continuously. Suggestion is that the store managers have a proper training session at least once a year, which only concentrates on the needed training, not the numbers or figures, etc. This way the

store managers can train their employees effectively and efficiently, with correct methods.

Since the employees are the most important asset of the company they should be trained properly and continuously, in order to meet the customers' expectations. Fashion, customers' needs and technology are constantly changing and clothing store sellers should be updated all the time. Training employees is a crucial factor and it has a connection to the sales profit. Training is an investment. No matter how much employees are working they can achieve and accomplish more from training. This is why Seppälä Oy should consider to have a (regional) HR professional who would conduct proper training sessions for the store managers and employees. Some of the store managers do not have the time and the ability to train new employees properly, especially the new store managers, and this is why it is necessary to train them as well as keep them up-to-date. It can be a support tool for the store managers' own way of training the employees.

Seppälä should also offer a guideline for conducting a proper training session. It should include directions of what is important, steps, etc. For example, during the training sessions it is necessary that the trainer gives feedback to trainees. Again after the training session it is important to conduct a follow-up and support the trainees so that they will start using the learned skills courageously. Moreover, a manager should give positive feedback to employees when they are applying the learned skills and encouraging others in workplace.

From the survey I found out that it is crucial to have an ability to read customers' body language and have situational awareness, because there is a golden mean what customers are expecting from sellers. For example the good seller knows when to step out from the situation and also knows when a customer really needs help. Moreover, it is important to have an ability to listen to customers' needs, opinion, etc. and interact properly in order to give the customer the wanted matter. This is why Seppälä should offer their store managers and employees training sessions where they teach them to read people's body language and signs to understand how to act in different situation in order to give the customers what they want and not to hurt anyone's feelings. The survey also showed the importance of the know-how, and because of this, Seppälä should offer their store managers and also employees some kind of a fashion training once a year where they would go through the current fashion, colors, what looks good on different

body shapes or skin colors, how to wash clothes properly and offer information about the materials. This could be done in the stores or even outside the stores. The employees would have a possibility to show what they know and then a professional could help them if needed. This way Seppälä can ensure that the sellers are up-to-date and can give the best possible advice to customers.

Even though the survey results showed that it is not necessary that a seller is with a certain customer from the beginning until the end of a purchasing situation, it is crucial to know how to close the sales correctly. The good seller knows that it is very important to end the sales in a way that both the customer and the seller get a win-win situation. Basically closing the sales is a skill to read and listen to the signals of a customer, moreover a courage to ask for the sales trade. When sellers develop their skills of closing the sales, they can grow their own sales profit faster. Seppälä should offer training sessions where they practice closing the sales with a role play or another similar method. Moreover, Seppälä should make a guideline of how body language signals can be seen alongside the training sessions. Based on the book of *Menestyvän myyjän käsikirja*, the body language signal is for example when a customer touches a product and explores it carefully. It should also be mentioned in the training session that encouraging a customer to buy a product does not mean pushing. Seppälä should also make a list of different closing the sales questions for their guide. After the training, the store managers should offer coaching sessions to the sellers after the training and to encourage them to use the learned ways.

The survey as well as the theory part showed that a product knowledge of a seller is crucial. The good seller knows what he/she is selling and has a desire to sell. By training the sellers at Seppälä, to have a better product knowledge, would improve the customer satisfaction and the customer service and in a sales situation, would be more successful. The aim of this training would be to teach the sellers with different clothing sections to know not just only one or two sections but the whole store. Moreover, make sure that the matters are being understood. During the training sessions the sellers should have a possibility to ask and find out about unclear matter, that are seen in sales work. The training would give better results if it occurs regularly. For example a training session held once a year would return the learned matters fresh in the memory and give new information about the products once again.

Based on the survey, Seppälä has an opportunity to conduct training sessions of important and valued characteristics, if they think it is necessary. But it should be remembered that the classroom training sessions are not the best possible to teach new skills. Seppälä should also give the results of a good seller to the store managers, this way they could share the information with the sellers and train, coach and mentor them as needed.

9.3 Development suggestions for coaching and mentoring

From effective coaching Seppälä can decrease their costs, because they do not have to recruit and train employees constantly. A coach for a new or even an old employee should not usually be a manager, because it can be hard for managers to step out from its role. Based on this, Seppälä should offer a coach from outside the stores, but inside the Seppälä, who could help the employees to be better, reach their goals, listen and offer them advice without any barriers. This should be offered once a year and even more if needed.

As the theory part shows, coaching has a huge part of successful training. With coaching, trained skills can become more natural and that is why Seppälä should offer a coach to their store managers and employees after each training session. Even though it may feel uncomfortable to use the learned skills it is crucial to start using them. The coach could help the learners to start using the learned skills and help them feel comfortable to try new ways. By reinforcing and encouraging their workers to try new skills and ways Seppälä has a possibility to gain positive results, moreover, not lose the money used for training.

Seppälä has its guidelines for familiarizing a new employee into the company but it has to be remembered that the familiarization should have its own place in the company, with mentoring as a support tool. Seppälä should recognize their top/good sellers based on the research results and use them as a mentor for other sellers that need help with some parts of selling. In addition good sellers can create a good energy around the stores by sharing their skills.

When it comes to mentoring, Seppälä should offer organized mentoring, if needed, which is led by a HR professional who is willing to help and has time for it. A mentor should be able to share his/her know-how, moreover, listen, support and guide the

learner. Again spontaneous mentoring can happen all the time, but Seppälä should offer the store managers a training session where they tell about mentoring and its features. The store managers can either be a mentor or train another employee to be a mentor. But it is crucial to remember that a mentor has to have good interacting skills, believe in two-way communication and to be able to listen to the learner. Moreover he has to give supportive feedback.

9.4 Development suggestions for benchmarking

Benchmarking or modelling a top seller is not used at Seppälä Oy, at least it is not a very common method. Since the store manager has the responsibility to guide their employees, some of them do not even know the tools and methods that are available. Like I mentioned before, it is crucial to train the store managers well, and this is one good reason as well. The store managers have to know different methods and tools in order to have the best sellers in their stores.

Seppälä Oy should offer their store managers training sessions where they give the tools of how to use new and different methods when developing their employees. For example, benchmarking and modelling are good tools to use when a new employee has been hired. This means that the store managers can choose an employee or him/herself to be a person whom a new employee follows, usually that person is a good or even a top seller; by surveying a good or a top seller a new employee can see an example of how to sell and make connections with customers.

Seppälä can also benchmark competing clothing stores by using a shadow or a competitive method to find the golden mean to serve their customers. These benchmarking methods can be used in other sections as well to improve the operations. But it has to be remembered whether the way they are doing things is the right way for the company. Moreover, not so successful stores/sellers can use other Seppälä stores to benchmark them to find out what the other stores/sellers are doing better.

10 CONCLUDING REMARKS

I started the thesis process in the middle of September 2015 and I have been doing it alongside my studies. At the beginning of December I finished my courses and this way could focus on the thesis. The topic of my thesis came from my interest towards Human Resource Management, selling and the commissioning party Seppälä Oy. The idea was discussed together with the HR manager of Seppälä Oy. From the research I wanted to gain knowledge of Human Resource Management and Development as well as to seek what the customers value and expect from sellers. I got deeper knowledge of the topic and was able to give development suggestions to Seppälä Oy.

I faced some challenges on the way of the process. It was hard to finalize my studies and at the same time do my thesis, but with the willpower and strength I got through the hard times. I made some deadlines for myself when I needed to be done with certain parts and it helped me to stay on time. I wanted to be done before January 2016 because of my upcoming trip to the United States of America and with the willpower I made it. The trip was also a graduation gift from my parents and a prize for myself so I had something that motivated me to finish it on time. Also my own interest towards the subject and commissioning party gave me a lot of energy. The whole thesis process took less than five months. It would have been very easy to make it much wider than it is, but I had to make some kind of a line where to stop and finish my work.

From the thesis, Seppälä Oy will get benefits for two divisions; sales and Human Resource Development (HRD). Seppälä will get the knowledge of what a good clothing store seller is like from customers' point of view, based on the survey results. This way the sellers of Seppälä can modify their own habits/ways in order to give the best service to their customers and get a win-win situation. Moreover, Seppälä can take the characteristics of a good seller into account in HRD. Based on the research results, I made suggestions for Seppälä; how to take the characteristics into account in HRD and develop their current Human Resource Development process.

This research can be continued by conducting further researches. The suggestion is that Seppälä Oy should figure out what the stores think about their processes in HRD and what a good seller is like from the sellers' point of view, to see if there are any similarities with the customers opinion. In addition, if Seppälä Oy uses my HRD suggestions

in their processes, the further research should find out if the new ways are working in a beneficial way. Since this was a first research in this area, it can easily be extended.

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APPENDIX 1.

Interview questions to HR manager of Seppälä Oy

What are Seppälä Oy' values and aims and how are they seen in practice?

Selling in Seppälä Oy? Principles related to sales and customer service.

Sellers recruitment in Seppälä Oy? What matters are emphasized in recruitment and personnel selection?

Human resource development in Seppälä Oy? For example mentoring, training and coaching.

Are top sellers exploited to another sellers guidance and training, how?

APPENDIX 2.

Interview themes to store manager of Seppälä Oy

Selling in the store; principles related to sales and customer service

Human resource development

Values

Functionality of current system

Kyselylomake

Tämä on Mikkelin ammattikorkeakoulun, tradenomiopintoihini kuuluvaan opinnäytetyöhön liittyvä kyselytutkimus, jossa aiheena on hyvä myyjä. Kysely on suunnattu vaateliikkeen asiakaspalvelutilanteisiin. Sen vuoksi haluaisin kysyä Teiltä muutaman aiheeseen liittyvän kysymyksen. Vastaaminen tapahtuu nimettömänä ja tuloksia käytetään ainoastaan opinnäytetyössäni.

Ikä (ympyröi) 15-25 26-35 36-45 46-55 56-65 yli 65

Sukupuoli

Nainen Mies

Ammatti (ympyröi)

Yrittäjä

Työntekijä

Johtavassa asemassa oleva

Opiskelija

Ylempi toimihenkilö

Jonkin muu, mikä? _____

Asuinpaikkakunta _____

1. Millaisia ominaisuuksia hyvällä vaateliikkeen myyjällä on mielestänne →
Alleviivaa 3 tärkeintä
 - ystävällisyys
 - asiantuntemus (esimerkiksi tietää mitkä tuotteet sopivat hyvin yhteen)
 - palvelualtis- myyjä lähestyy ja huomioi asiakkaan oma-aloitteisesti
 - tuotetietous
 - ammattimaiset tuote-esittelytaidot
 - kyky kuunnella asiakasta
 - tilannetaju (esimerkiksi huomaa jos asiakas ei halua apua)
 - ulkoinen olemus (siistit vaatteet, meikki, hiukset, yms.)
 - itsevarmuus
 - vuorovaikutustaidot
 - lisämyynnin aikaansaaminen
 - jokin muu, mikä? _____
2. Mitä näistä ylläolevista valinnoistasi arvostat eniten hyvässä myyjässä?
(Ympyröi yksi)

The paper form survey

3. Millaisessa vaateliikkeessä asioisitte mieluiten (ympyröi a, b, tai c vaihtoehto):
- a.) vaateliikkeessä jossa asiakasta palvellaan henkilökohtaisesti myyntitapahtuman alusta loppuun asti ja tarjotaan erilaisia vaihtoehtoja
 - b.) vaateliikkeessä jossa asiakas saa henkilökohtaista palvelua pyydettyään, myyjän työ kohdistuu tuotteiden esillepanoon ja myymälän hoitoon.
 - c.) vaateliikkeessä jossa asiakas itse etsii tarvittavat tuotteet ilman henkilökohtaista palvelua.

Ympyröi seuraavista väittämistä yksi numero joka kuvaa parhaiten omaa mieltä pidettänne, 1 = ei lainkaan tärkeää – 5 = erittäin tärkeää

4. Kuinka tärkeänä pidätte

- että vaateliikkeen myyjä on heti tavoitettavissa (tarvittaessa)
1 2 3 4 5
- että vaateliikkeen myyjä on palvelualtis – myyjä lähestyy ja huomioi asiakkaan oma-aloitteisesti
1 2 3 4 5
- että vaateliikkeen myyjä suosittelee erilaisia vaihtoehtoja
1 2 3 4 5
- että vaateliikkeen myyjä tervehtii heti ensi kohtaamisessa
1 2 3 4 5
- että myyjä hymyilee
1 2 3 4 5
- että myyjä on aktiivisesti mukana oston loppuun asti
1 2 3 4 5
- myyjän ulkoista olemusta (siistit vaatteet, meikki, hiukset, yms.)
1 2 3 4 5

5. Kuinka häiritsevästä pidätte että vaateliikkeen myyjä, 1 = ei lainkaan häiritsevää – 5 = erittäin häiritsevää

- tyrkyttää tuotteita asiakkaalle
1 2 3 4 5

