

# 2024 STATE OF MENTAL HEALTH IN SALES

REPORT

In Partnership with



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# WELCOME

## MESSAGE FROM JEFF

When I started working in sales back in 2010, I was calling clients from a stack of 400 paper leads. CRMs were brand new, and the sales enablement market was still in its infancy. Within the last decade, the sales industry has witnessed the most significant technological advancement in its history. Teams are now selling faster and working harder than ever before. Unfortunately, we are approaching a point of diminishing returns on these technologies. Companies have built the equivalent of a “Ferrari tech stack” for salespeople, but have forgotten about the driver’s role in all of this. If the salesperson operating this tech stack is experiencing burnout, anxiety, fatigue, depression, or any other mental health challenges, mistakes will be made and performance will suffer.

We are now on the cusp of a new Renaissance period for sales. Today, organizations perceive their salespeople as corporate athletes and understand the critical role that mental health and wellbeing play in helping their “athletes” perform at their best. We created this report to offer new insights and build awareness around the importance of mental health within sales. I hope it helps salespeople and company leaders break outdated norms and access the tremendous performance benefits of putting the health and wellbeing of salespeople over their bottom line.



**JEFF RISELEY – FOUNDER**  
**SALES HEALTH ALLIANCE**

## MESSAGE FROM RICHARD

I woke up frozen in the fetal position. I literally could not move. My arms felt like they weighed 1,000 pounds, my legs, even more. I had been burning the candle at both ends for years as a salesperson and sales leader. I’d made great money, bought a house, and a car. And I was still miserable. In sales we are often taught to never share your emotions of disappointment. Only be positive. When you get to work you can leave your personal life at the door and let work be your happy place so you don’t have to think about that part of your life. How a company treats employees matters. The company employees the “whole being”, always. With the support of family and friends I was able to start my internal healing. We offer this report to help people and organizations work to being truly supportive of one another.



**RICHARD HARRIS**  
**HARRIS CONSULTING GROUP**

## EDITOR’S NOTES

Although we set out to do research and create a report specific to salespeople, we know that this is not a one-size fits-all community. We included data from various titles, roles, genders, identities, and cultural backgrounds. In some instances, we simply did not have enough statistically significant data to break some topics down further. We always strive to support everyone as their whole being and their whole self. We are aware that different cultures, gender, and backgrounds may influence the topic of mental health. In some cases, there were not enough respondents to determine a correlation between gender, cultural background, and mental health. We hope to gather more data for areas in the future reports.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The sales department is the heart of any company. Without it, products don't get sold, and business grinds to a halt. No amount of marketing, HR, or personnel selection can replace a robust and effective sales team. Despite the importance of sales to a company, research shows that sales team members are among the most stressed and unsatisfied corporate workers.

In the third annual industry report, we'll introduce the latest sales mental health research and illustrate how its implications affect your company's bottom line. The report will also present findings from our survey of 513 respondents. Their responses provide first-hand insights into the most critical determinants of a mental health in a successful sales workplace in 2024. And yes, they've changed.

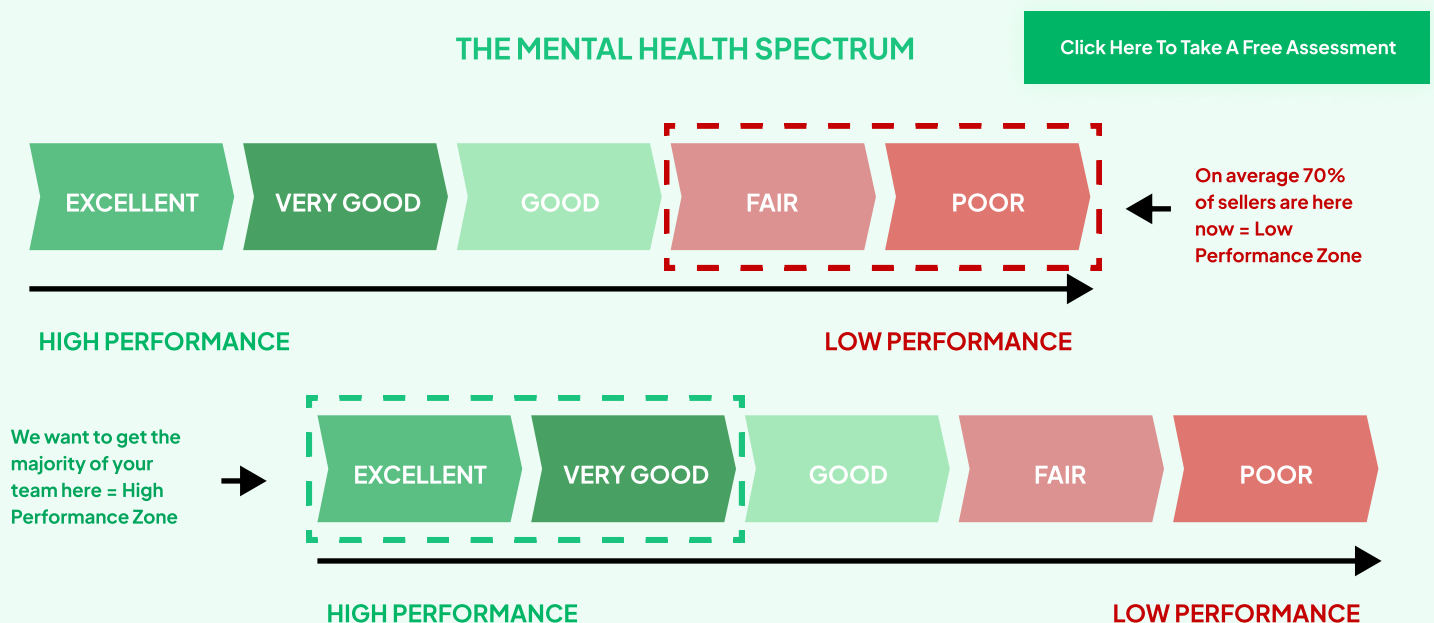
We collected this data over four weeks between October and November, 2023. The data shows a correlation (not necessarily causation) between one's mental health and ability to achieve sales targets. It also illustrates the specific support structures that leaders and organizations can implement to foster a mental health-oriented culture.

The biggest takeaways from this report are:

1. The mental health of salespeople continues to get worse with 70% of sellers now struggling. An increase of 7% from last year and up 11% from the year prior.
2. We once again identified 13 factors sales leaders can use to help improve the mental health and mental performance of their team through a thriving culture.
3. Unfortunately, there was a tremendous regression in attention and investment into these core areas, which had a direct impact on the mental performance of sellers.
4. Only 15% of sellers strongly agree or agree that their company was actively prioritizing initiatives focused on wellness and burnout prevention in 2023.

## MENTAL HEALTH = MENTAL PERFORMANCE = SALES PERFORMANCE

It is crucial to recognize the difference between mental health and mental illness. Just like physical health and physical illness, they are related, but not the same thing. An organization that focuses on mental health isn't only aware of mental illness. Instead, it implements a strong company culture and system that supports healthy living and provides resources to help people who encounter mental illness.





Our ongoing goal in publishing this annual report is to share insights, break down stigma, and drive positive change surrounding mental health. We want to help people acknowledge that their mental health matters and provide guidance to organizational leaders who can help their company remove the mental health stigma by creating an inclusive, supportive workplace.

Our data shows that leaders who prioritize vulnerability and open conversation form effective connections and create higher engagement. As a result, their teams can experience better mental health and increased productivity, which drives sales goal attainment.

We are thrilled to share this message for the second consecutive year and look forward to continually updating the data regularly.

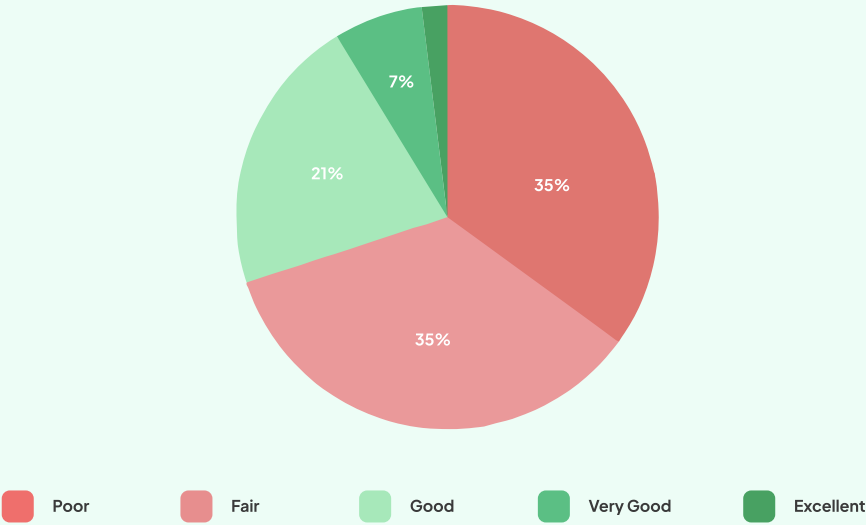
Thank you to everyone who took the time to respond to this survey and share how you are doing – every voice counts.

## WHAT’S CHANGED

In the aftermath of the global pandemic, the societal landscape in 2023 has evolved, yet the challenges for sales teams remain significant. **The mental health crisis among sales professionals, once intensified by the pandemic, continues to be a major concern.**

**This year a staggering 70% of salespeople are struggling with their mental health, underscoring a deepening crisis in this field.**

IN 2023, 70% OF SELLERS ARE STRUGGLING WITH THEIR MENTAL HEALTH

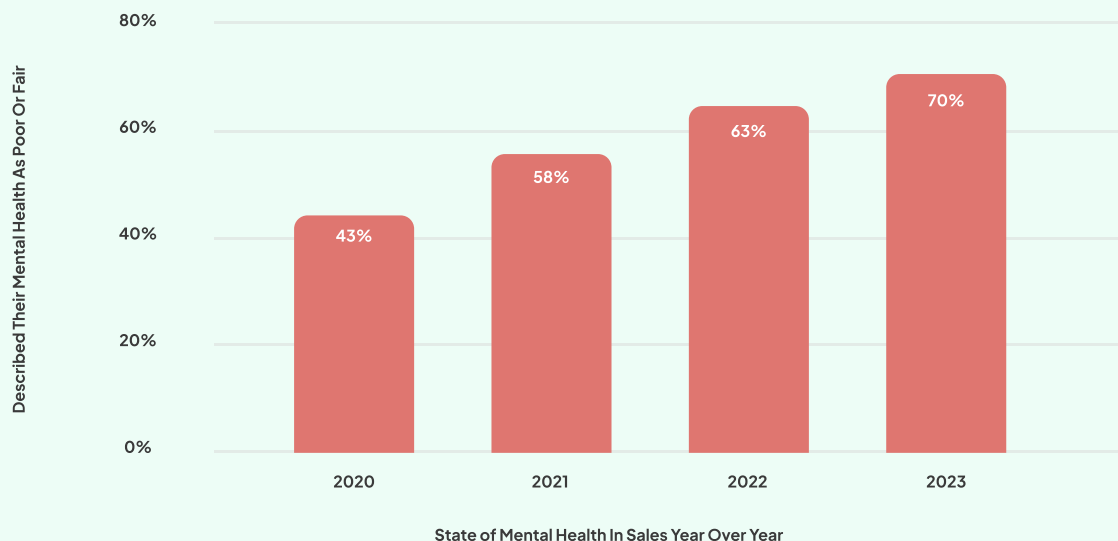


This trend is particularly alarming given the context of recent years. In May 2021, at the height of the pandemic, the mental health of sales teams was already severely impacted, with the majority of sellers and leaders deeming it the most challenging period of their careers. Our report from that time indicated that 58% of salespeople were struggling with their mental health.

However, what is unexpected is that, despite a gradual return to a semblance of normalcy, the situation has not improved. In fact, it has deteriorated further.

Our survey data from May 2022 already showed an increase to 63% of salespeople struggling with their mental health, a 5% rise from the previous year in 2021. The continued escalation to 70% in 2023 is a clear indication that the mental health crisis in sales is a persistent and growing issue, demanding immediate attention and action.

## THE GROWING MENTAL HEALTH AND MENTAL PERFORMANCE CRISIS IN SALES



## WHICH SALES ROLES STRUGGLE THE MOST

As we dove deeper into the data, we found that every single role in sales is struggling more with their mental health this year, compared to the data we collected last year.

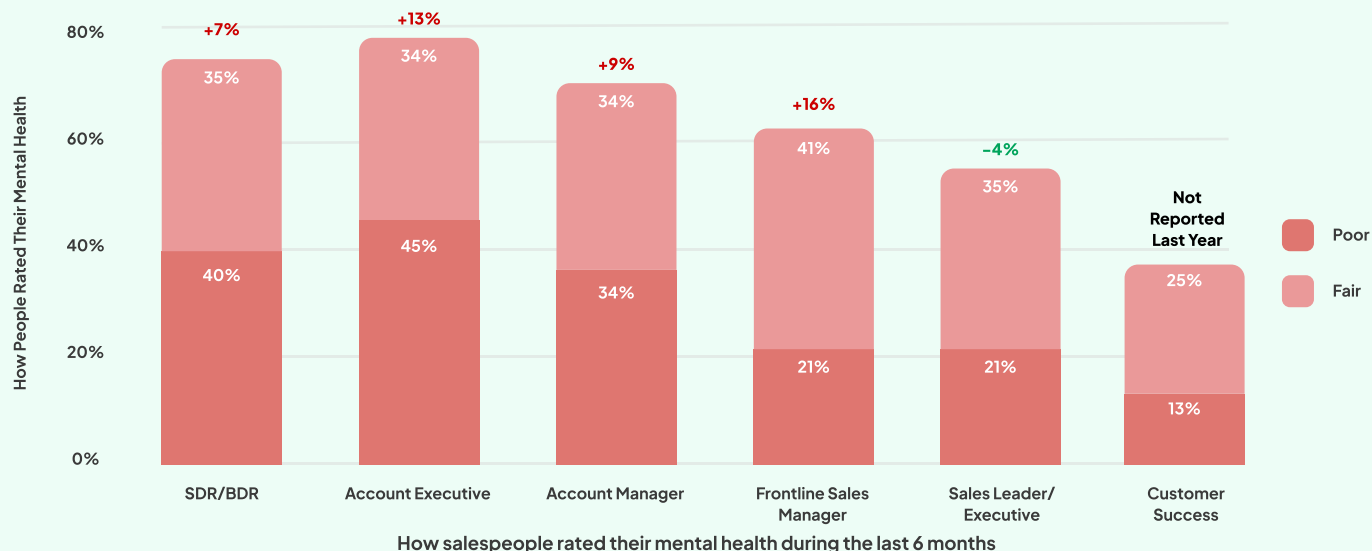
- **7% YOY Increase** - 75% of SDRs/BDRs rate their mental health as fair or poor
- **13% YOY Increase** - 79% of Account Executives rate their mental health as fair or poor
- **9% YOY Increase** - 68% of Account Managers rate their mental health as fair or poor
- **16% YOY Increase** - 62% of Frontline Sales Managers rate their mental health as fair or poor

The only roles that experienced an improvement in their mental health were Executive Sales Leadership positions (4% decrease in those rating their mental health as fair or poor).

We'll explore this more in the next few sections, but several external factors like pressure to hit inflated growth targets, difficult decisions to layoff team members during a recession and experiencing lingering burnout from the pandemic are all factors.

Ultimately we see the push to “**do more with less**” having a severe impact on everyone in sales except for the executive leaders leading these initiatives and Return To Office (RTO) mandates.

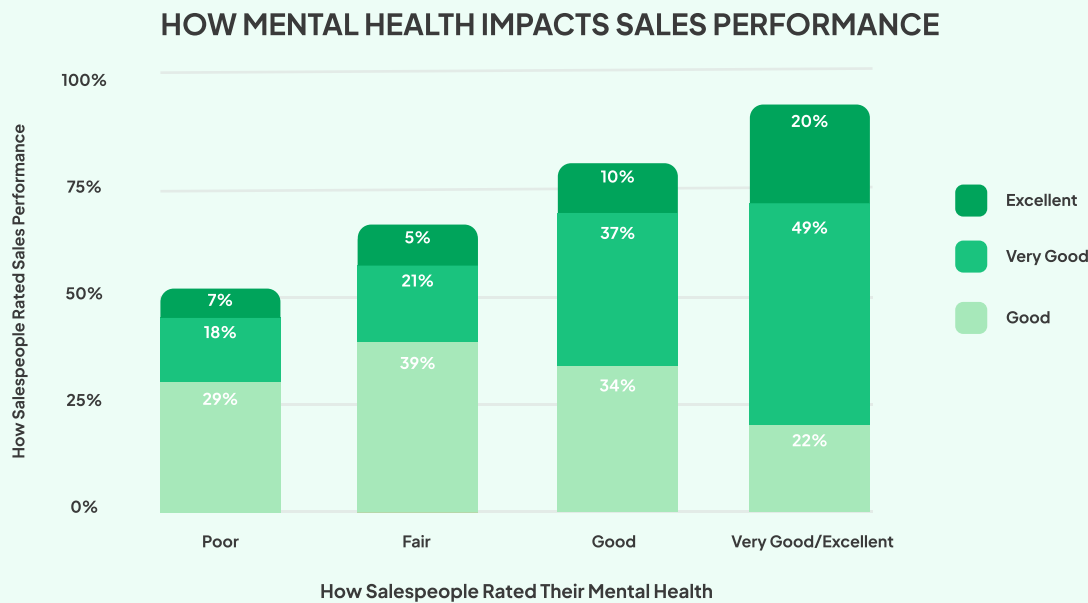
## HOW THOSE STRUGGLING WITH MENTAL HEALTH CHANGES BETWEEN ROLES



## HOW MUCH DOES MENTAL HEALTH AFFECT SALES PERFORMANCE

Similar to last year, we continued to see an extremely strong correlation between mental health and sales performance. **Among salespeople who rated their mental health the best, 91% rated their sales performance as good or better.**

This is 37% higher than those with the worst mental health, once again showing the relationship between mental health, mental performance and sales performance.



## THE EFFECT OF A TOXIC CULTURE ON MENTAL HEALTH

Why have things gotten worse? Societally – it was a difficult year for most.

Inflation, layoffs, budget cuts, global wars and return to office policies created a lot of change for those working in sales. As a result there was more volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity than ever before, which has had an impact on the mental health of sellers.

Large change creates high stress environments, but change, nor stress are inherently negative. They only become negative when individuals are unable to adapt to change quickly and in a meaningful way.

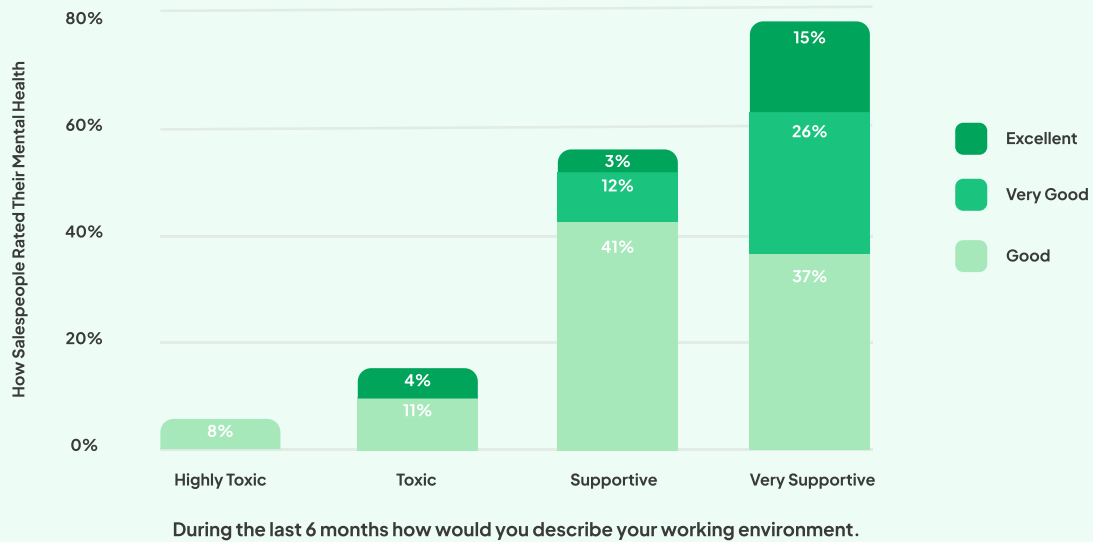
**And adaptation requires a supportive environment that allows individuals to buffer stress. This is where executive leaders failed their teams in 2023.**

**DATA: ONLY 28% OF SELLERS SAY THEY WORK IN A SUPPORTIVE OR VERY SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT – WHY DOES THIS MATTER?**

Among sellers working in a very supportive environment, 78% rated their mental health as good or better. **When sellers are working in a highly toxic environment, only 8% rate their mental health as good with 0% describing their mental health as very good or excellent.** (see graph below)

**Take-Away: When sellers feel unsafe in their roles, it severely impacts their mental performance.**

## HOW TOXIC ENVIRONMENTS IMPACTS MENTAL HEALTH

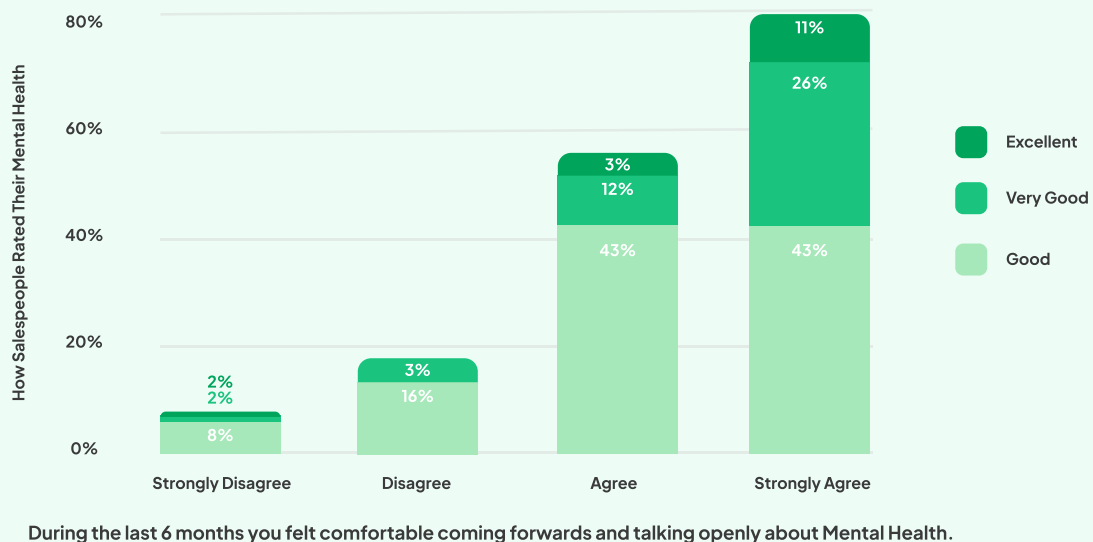


**DATA: ONLY 23% OF SELLERS STRONGLY AGREE OR AGREE THAT THEY FELT COMFORTABLE COMING FORWARD AND TALKING OPENLY ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH - WHY DOES THIS MATTER?**

Among sellers who strongly agreed that they felt comfortable talking openly about mental health, 80% rated their mental health as good or better. When stigma was present and sellers strongly disagreed that they could talk openly about mental health only 12% rate their mental health as good or better. (see graph below)

**Take-Away: When sellers cannot talk openly about mental health, it severely impacts their mental performance.**

## HOW STIGMA IMPACTS MENTAL HEALTH



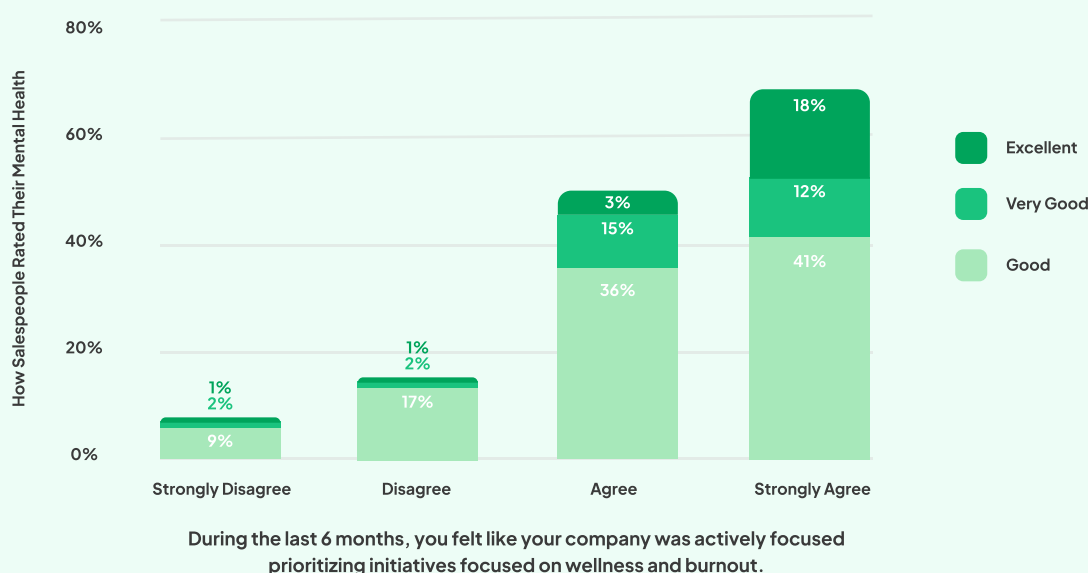
**DATA: ONLY 15% OF SELLERS STRONGLY AGREE OR AGREE THAT THEIR COMPANY WAS ACTIVELY PRIORITIZING INITIATIVES FOCUSED ON WELLNESS AND BURNOUT.**

**DATA: 32% OF SALES ORGANIZATIONS DECREASED SUPPORT FOR MENTAL HEALTH IN 2023 - WHY DOES THIS MATTER?**

Among sellers strongly agreed that their company was actively prioritizing initiatives focused on wellness and burnout, 71% rated their mental health as good or better. When investments were not being made into these areas, only 12% rate their mental health as good or better. (see graph below)

**Take-Away: When companies do not invest into wellness and burnout prevention, it severely impacts the mental performance of their sales team.**

### HOW INVESTING INTO WELLNESS INITIATIVES IMPACTS MENTAL HEALTH



## SALES LEADERS THIS IS WHAT YOU CAN DO TO START BUILDING SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

On the next page are 13 core needs which thousands of research papers have proven humans need to feel their best and thrive during stressful environments. Across all of these needs a greater proportion of salespeople in 2023, now disagree that these needs are being met compared to 2022.

The increase in core needs not being met is drastic and likely contributing to why significantly more salespeople are struggling with their mental health this year than ever before.

It's as if sales leaders needed the last 18 months to go back and give the "old way" (i.e. fear, micromanagement, profits over people, etc) one last try following the pandemic. But the data is clear that this old school approach does more harm than good.

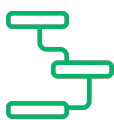
**If your organization values sustainable high performance, these basic human needs should be prioritized. Failure to do so is strongly correlated with worse mental health and lower sales performance.**

Needs Assessment	Strongly Disagreed or Disagreed Need Was Met in 2023	Percentage Increased From 2022
Felt Like You Had Clarity And Direction In Your Career Path	55%	+13%
Felt Like Your Sales Target And Metrics Were Achievable	55%	+14%
Felt Like You Had Job Security And Your Role Was Safe	51%	+19%
Felt Like You Could Be Open And Vulnerable With How You Were Feeling At Work	49%	+5%
Felt Like You Were Making A Difference In The World	47%	+9%
Felt Confident In The Direction And Vision Of Your Company	45%	+10%
Felt Recognized And Valued By Your Company	45%	+14%
Felt Like You Had Strong Boundaries With Work	44%	+2%
Felt Financially Secure In Your Job	43%	+17%
Felt Supported By Your Leader Or Manager	36%	+9%
Felt Connected To Peers And Teammates	33%	+9%
Felt Like You Had Autonomy And Free-Will In Your Role	24%	+4%
Felt Like You Had The Skills And Strengths To Do Your Job Well	14%	+4%

## TOP 5 CORE NEEDS NOT CURRENTLY BEING MET IN SALES

For all 13 of the core needs we surveyed, the data tells the same story: The more sellers feel like a core need (i.e. career pathing, achievable metrics, job security, etc.) are being met, the better they rate their mental health and sales performance.

The top 5 core needs not currently being met at the end of 2023:



### 1. Career Pathing



### 2. Achieving Targets



### 3. Job Security

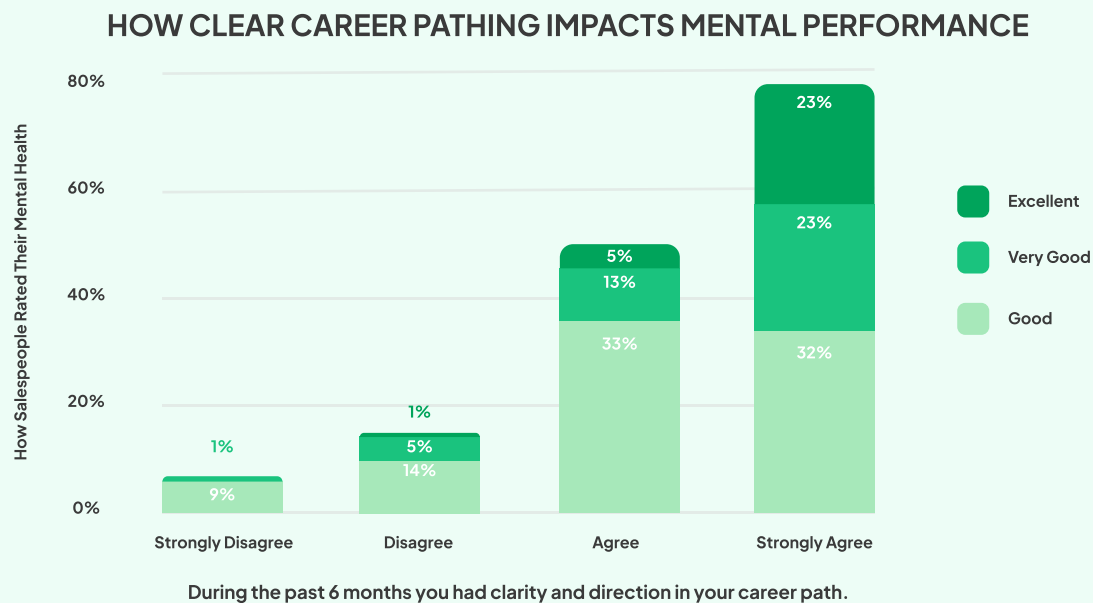


### 4. Vulnerability



### 5. Meaningful Work

# 1. CLEAR CAREER PATHING



When building a culture of accountability, discussing career pathing is a no-brainer as it sets clear expectations for leaders and sellers. If people know where they want to go, it can make it easier for them to feel good about themselves and self-motivate on days when they're struggling.

**Among salespeople who strongly agreed that they had direction and clarity in their career path, 78% rated their mental health as good or better. This was almost 7X higher than those who felt like they had very little direction in their career.**

## RECOMMENDATIONS, EXAMPLES & RESOURCES

### 1. CAREER GROWTH DURING INTERVIEWS

Include career growth as part of the interview process and ask them their career goals.

### 2. CAREER GROWTH IN 1:1'S

Include career growth conversations in your 1:1's. Have this discussion monthly. Assign "homework" of reading a book or taking an online course that addresses one of their weaknesses. Have them present this information to the team.

### 3. CLEAR GUIDELINES

Provide clear guidelines on what sellers need to do to advance to the next level and stick to them. Meritocracies keep career pathing clear, while company politics makes everything less clear and everyone unhappy.



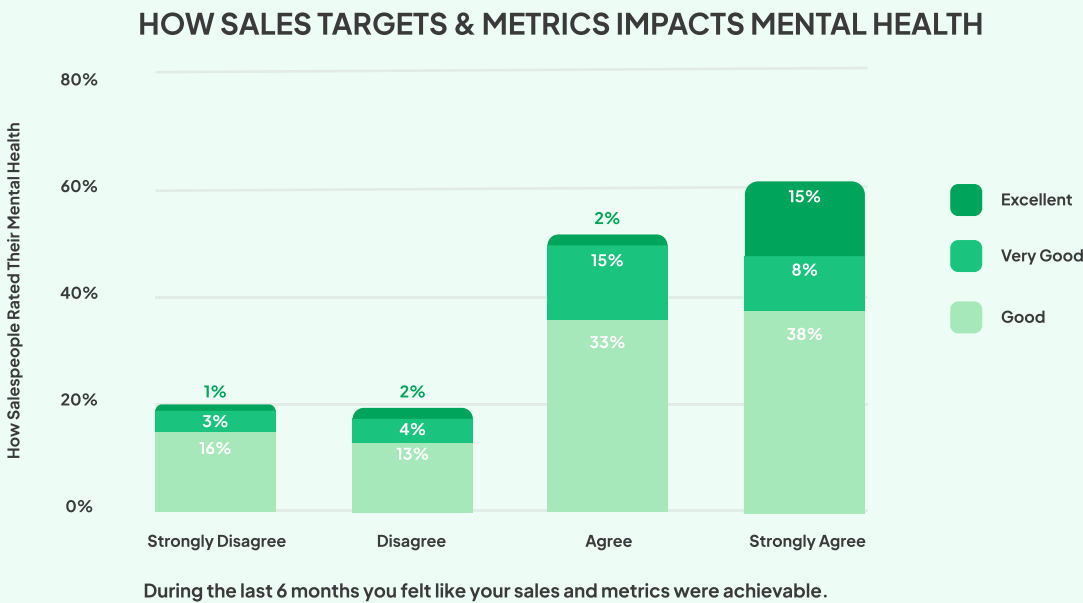
#### 4. DROP OLD SCHOOL ATTITUDE

Drop your old school attitude. Career advancements happen at an accelerated rate today, so swap your perspective of “entitlement” with “career driven” individuals. If they don’t see a clear path forward with you, they’ll find it elsewhere – and fast.

#### 5. DELEGATE

Delegate small projects appropriately. If a seller wants to be in management, give them a new hire to mentor and/or the opportunity to lead aspects of team training.

## 2. ACHIEVABLE SALES TARGETS AND METRICS



The main purpose of a sales target is to provide a seller with a challenging yet achievable goal to work towards each month or quarter. Like any goal in life, when these targets feel unachievable, we’re more likely to lose hope and feel defeated.

This was captured in the data which showed among salespeople who strongly agreed their sales targets were achievable; **61% of salespeople rated their mental health as good, very good or excellent. When sales targets felt out of reach, this number was much lower and only 20% rated their mental health as good or better.**

## RECOMMENDATIONS, EXAMPLES & RESOURCES

### 1. START WITH A MENTAL HEALTH CHECK IN

Any goal feels less achievable when we're tired, stressed or experiencing burnout. If a seller feels like their sales target is unattainable, start with a Mental Health check-in first.

### 2. REASONABLE ACTIVITY LEVEL

Determine if it is humanly possible for sellers to hit their target? Calculate this by using conversion rates and average deal size metrics to determine the top of funnel activity required to achieve target. Is this level of activity reasonable?

### 3. DEFINE ICP

Often sellers spend a lot of time targeting accounts and buyers outside their ICP which puts them further behind quota. Get clear on what the ideal customer looks like and buying signals that need to be present at each stage of the sales cycle.

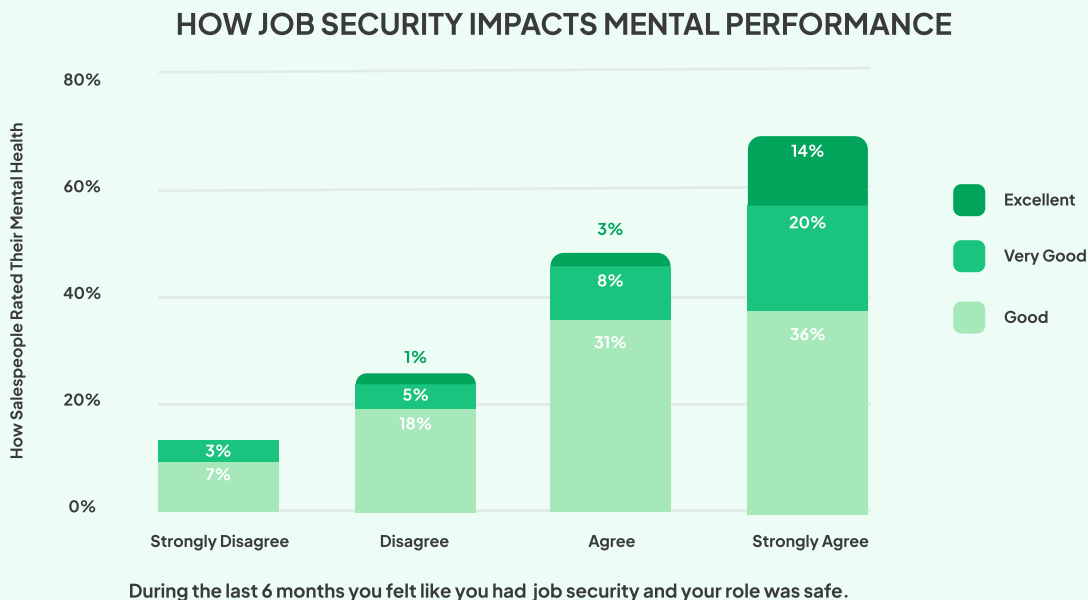
### 4. PROVIDE REGULAR COACHING

Coach reps on how to increase deal size, improve conversion rates or invest into technology that helps increase activity throughout the sales process.

### 5. QUOTA RELIEF

Provide quota relief for reps on vacation so they don't feel punished for taking time off to decompress.

## 3. JOB SECURITY



Providing job security to salespeople is a critical factor in enhancing their sales performance, as it fosters a sense of stability and confidence. When sellers feel secure in their positions, they are more likely to take calculated risks and be innovative in their approach, directly contributing to improved sales outcomes. Other studies have also shown that job security reduces stress and anxiety, enabling salespeople to focus more on customer relationships, rather than being preoccupied with job uncertainty.

The correlation between job security and better mental health was extremely strong in the data.

**Among salespeople who strongly agreed that they felt safe and secure in their role, 70% rated their mental health as good, very good or excellent. This was 7X higher than those sellers who experienced the least amount of job security in 2023.**

## RECOMMENDATIONS, EXAMPLES & RESOURCES

### 1. TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION

Regularly communicate company performance, goals, and challenges. Transparency in sharing business health and future prospects reassures employees about their job stability.

### 2. CAREER DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Offer training and development programs to help salespeople upskill and adapt to changing market conditions. This investment in their growth shows a commitment to their long-term presence in the company.

### 3. REGULAR FEEDBACK AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Provide constructive feedback and mentorship. Establish support systems such as peer mentoring or mental health resources, showing that the company cares about its employees' well-being and professional growth.

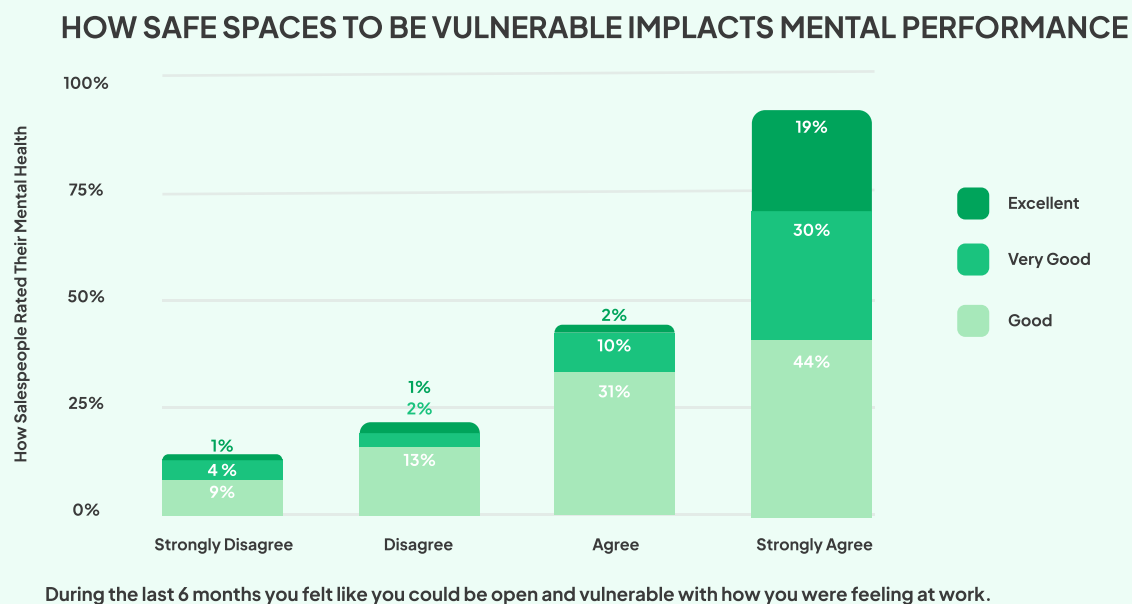
### 4. INSTITUTE A “FAILURE FRIDAY’S”

Often failure is catastrophized by sellers but something that happens multiple times a week. By creating time each week to openly discuss the biggest failure from the week, teams can normalize this process and see these setbacks as learning lessons.

### 5. ANNOUNCE A FIRING FREEZE

A firing freeze is a way to clear uncertainty after a round of layoffs. By announcing a firing freeze for a set period of time, sellers can feel more confident knowing their role is safe and get back focusing on performing at a high level.

## 4. VULNERABILITY



Vulnerability is often portrayed as a sign of weakness within sales, but what if the opposite is actually true? A growing body of research continues to prove that Psychological Safety is one of the greatest predictors of high performance within teams. When salespeople can express themselves without experiencing fear or shame, they are better equipped to deal with failure and feel more confident approaching challenging goals.

For example, among salespeople who strongly agreed that they could be open and vulnerable with how they were feeling at work, 93% rated their mental health as good or better. Among sellers who strongly disagreed that they could be open and vulnerable while at work, only 93% rated their mental health as such.

**What this means is sellers who feel like they can be open and vulnerable with how they're feeling at work are almost 6.5X more likely to rate their mental health as good or better compared to those who feel stigma about opening up.**

## RECOMMENDATIONS, EXAMPLES & RESOURCES

### 1. LEAD WITH VULNERABILITY

Leaders must lead with vulnerability and be vulnerable first. **No one wants to have a vulnerable conversation with a judgemental perfectionist.** Share your story(ies) of hardship

### 2. VULNERABLE CONVERSATIONS

Learn how to have vulnerable conversations with your team. Carve out time during one-on-ones and team meetings for sellers to have a safe space to express themselves. Vulnerable does not mean a confession of your sins. They are simple and reassuring sharing that indicates you are a human too. When done properly it can lead to empathy, not sympathy.

### 3. EVERYONE HAS BAD DAYS

We're all human and have bad days. If you're feeling overwhelmed, then tell your team. For example, if you're a new parent and your newborn kept you up last night, let your team know you aren't at your best today. The more vulnerable you are, the more you show your team you believe in creating a safe place for everyone.

### 4. CONSISTENCY BUILDS TRUST

Trust and safety is built when consistent actions are taken over time, not by simply telling your team to be more vulnerable.

### 5. IDENTIFY YOUR BLINDSPOTS

All leaders have blind spots that can impact trust and vulnerability within their teams. Regularly ask your team how supported they feel from a mental health standpoint. Asking them to submit feedback anonymously through a Google Form can help reps feel safe providing honest feedback.

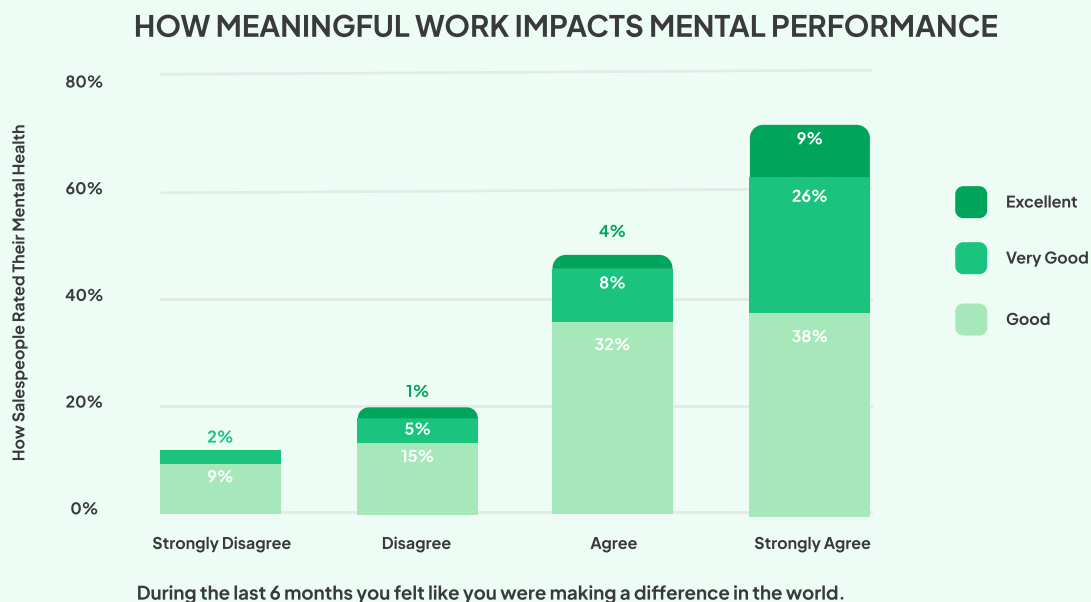
### 6. DO NOT "SHOULD" ON PEOPLE

When saying, "What you should do..." to anyone is not vulnerability or empathy. Shoulding on people is what a manipulative dictator will try to do and becomes a "guilt trip"

### 7. OTHER EXAMPLES

- During a 1:1 ask each member privately, "If I could do one thing better to help you, what would you suggest?"
- Record a sales call or cold call. Ask your team "what did I miss?"
- During a team meeting: Bring in a guest to coach the team on something outside of work and about life.

## 5. MEANINGFUL WORK



When was the last time you pushed through adversity to reach a goal you didn't care about? If you did, we bet it was not much fun. When sellers are emotionally connected to their work and feel like they're making a meaningful difference in the lives of others, their mental performance improves.

From a mental health aspect, among salespeople who strongly agreed they felt like they were making a difference in the world; **73% rated their mental health as good, very good or excellent. When salespeople felt their work was having little impact on the world, only 11% rated their mental health as good or better.**

## RECOMMENDATIONS, EXAMPLES & RESOURCES

### 1. CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF THE WHY

Ensure all sellers have a clear understanding of WHY the products they sell are changing the lives of buyers and making a difference in the world.

### 2. ALLOW PAID TIME OFF

Allow your team to take paid time off for volunteering to causes that are important to them.

### 3. REGULARLY REVISIT CASE STUDIES

Regularly revisit customer case studies that highlight the impact of products being sold.

### 4. CONNECT SALES METRICS AND CLOSED DEALS

Regularly connect sales metrics and closed deals to the impact these actions are having on the growth of individual sellers and the company.

### 5. FOCUS ON HOW TO IMPROVE, NOT OUTCOMES

Put less emphasis on the outcomes and more focus on how salespeople are improving through learning new skills, developing their craft and how they can show up their best selves each day.

### 6. SERVANT MINDSET

Help sellers adopt a servant mindset in which they put their clients' needs and challenges ahead of their desire to make commission.

### 7. OFFERING SALES SABBATICALS

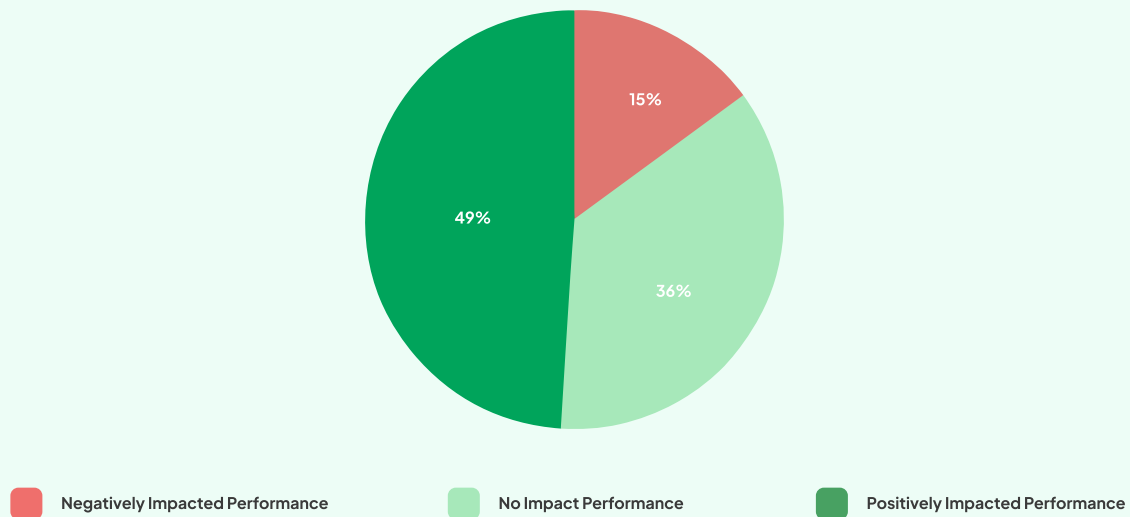
Consider building optional paid sabbaticals into your employee experience and offered to sellers every 3–5 years. Extended periods of time off help individuals refocus on their purpose and hold leaders accountable to creating environments that sellers want to return to.

## REMOTE WORKING AND RETURN TO OFFICE (RTO) MANDATES

Key findings:

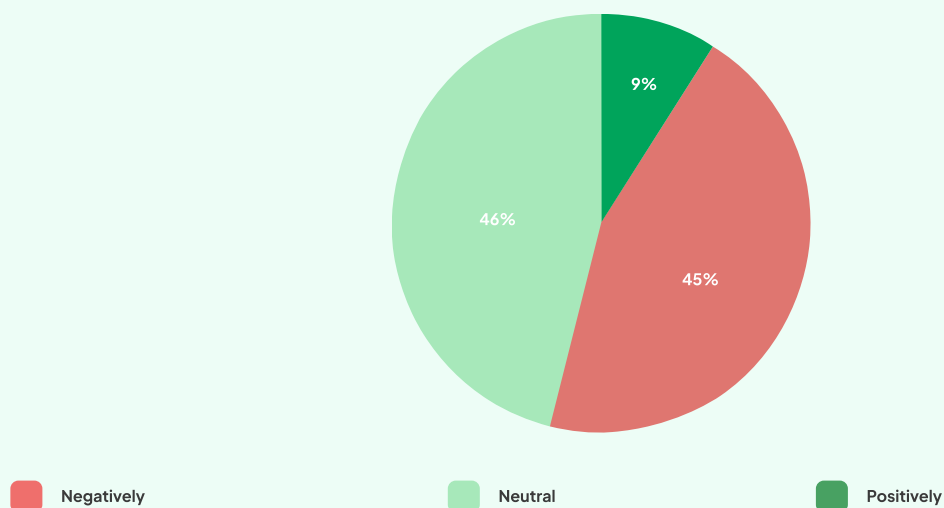
1. Only 15% of sellers feel like working from home has negatively impacted their performance with 49% saying it has positively impacted their performance and 36% saying it has had no impact on their performance.

### HOW WAS WORKING FROM HOME IMPACTED YOUR PERFORMANCE?



2. 45% of sellers say that RTO mandates have negatively impacted their mental health and mental performance.

### HOW HAVE RTO POLICIES IMPACTED YOUR MENTAL HEALTH?





## CONCLUSION

Mentally well and engaged sales teams can make or break a company. No other department has a more direct influence on your business's bottom line. Simultaneously, no other team feels the same level of pressure to perform. This has a high emotional toll on the individual. Protecting and supporting your company's best assets is critical to growing your business and outperforming the competition.

In 2023 there was a regression in spending and attention on mental health in sales, which has resulted in low performance felt across the industry. More sellers than ever are stressed, tired and disengaged from their work than ever before.

**If leaders hope to have a successful 2024, their top focus needs to be on building resilient teams that are mentally healthy. This is the only way to protect mental performance and ensure teams are able to thrive under pressure.**

We've conducted this research to demonstrate the value of supporting mental health in sales. It is not just at the financial level, but also at the human level. You can have it both ways – but you must be willing to face your discomfort.

So, what are you going to do about the mental health of your sales team? To explore sales specific resilience, mindset, stress-management and mental health training delivered by Jeff Riseley of the Sales Health Alliance, visit [www.saleshealthalliance.com](http://www.saleshealthalliance.com).

## Thank You To Our Partners

