

2017 Sport Marketing Association Conference (SMA XV)

Destined for Sales or Service? The Career Progression and Sorting of Managers across Sport Sales Departments

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25-minute oral presentation
(including questions)

Introduction

Over the past decade, an increasing number of women have established careers in professional sales (Macintosh & Krush, 2014). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, women comprised 49.6 of all positions within sales and sales related occupations (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). In addition to an increase in sales employment, nearly 40% of all managers in 2016 were women, with the highest percentages in the areas of human resources, medical and health services, public relations and fundraising, and social and community managers (Torpey, 2017). While these statistics may not directly represent the specific sector of sport, it is important to note that professional sport sales positions continue to be on the rise and therefore, an employable area for women wishing to enter and advance in the field. The sales staff within professional sport continues to be diverse and dynamic and includes the function of both “sales” and “service”. The question as to whether women are more suitable, and or prefer, one function over the other remains relevant when exploring the areas of commitment and career advancement.

Review of Literature

Since entry level ticket sales continues to be a gateway into the sport industry, it is important for women to gain direct sales experience. Sport industry practitioners have noted that while women may start their careers in sales-focused positions, they often transition into service roles early on (Boardman, 2015). This concept of sorting is prevalent across other industries as well. In a study of female job applicants within sales and client service positions across the technology industry, the authors found that while the percentage of “entry level” applicants were comparable across the two positions, there was a glaring difference at the “manager” level with just 15.69% of female applicants for sales manager positions, versus 41.32% of female applicants for client service positions (Fernandez & Capero, 2017).

Regarding time allocation of salespeople across professional sports leagues, Pierce, Petersen & Lee (2013) found that females spent more time servicing accounts than their male counterparts. Other studies have identified that women may be more predisposed to sales jobs and excel at the “caring” or “soft” aspects of building relationships with clients and/or businesses (Muehling & Weeks, 1988; Lane, 2000). Lane & Crane (2002) argue that this stereotype leads to the eventual sorting of women into service selling positions, which limits their opportunities to advance into high ranking management roles.

Purpose of Study

Currently, there is little to no existing research in the area of gender sorting across sales departments in professional sport. As a result, the primary purpose of this study was to examine and contrast the background and career trajectory of male and female sales and service managers within Major League Baseball (MLB). The following research questions were developed to guide the study:

R1: Do differences exist in the career trajectory of female and male sales and service managers?

R2: Are females more likely to remain in service positions upon entrance into the field?

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R3: Do differences exist in the years of experience and number of positions held between female and male sales and service managers?

Methodology

Through the use purposive sampling, subjects were identified through current Major League Baseball (MLB) team website front office staff directories, utilizing the following keywords in sales and service positions: senior manager, manager, director, supervisor, and vice president. Of the positions identified, 51 individuals with incomplete LinkedIn profiles were removed from sample. A final content analysis of 129 LinkedIn profiles (63 female; 66 male) of the sales and service leadership positions was conducted to determine current and previous positions held, years of experience, years in entry level position, education, and career progression within the areas of sales and service.

Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis of the data set revealed that just 28.6% of females entered the field through a sales-focused position and remained or continued in a sales-focused position, as opposed to 77.3% of their male counterparts. The results also revealed that 25.4% of females whose entry level position was sales-focused transitioned into a service-focused position at some point. This is compared to just 3% of males who completed the same transition. It is important to also note that 40.6% of females sampled had an entry level position that was service-focused and remained or continued in a service-focused position, as opposed to just 12.1% of males in the sample.

An independent samples t-test was conducted in order to evaluate differences in group means for male and female executives in regards to their career trajectory. Significant differences were found for number of positions held $t(127) = 4.795, p = .000$ and months spent in entry level position $t(127) = 2.041, p = .046$. Males held on average 4.41 positions throughout their career, while females held 3.16. Females spent an average of 3.10 years in their entry-level positions, while males spent just 2.16 years.

Discussion & Implications

The results of the study confirm that some form of gender sorting is occurring within Major League Baseball sales departments. Females in the sample were much more likely than their male counterparts to be “sorted” into service-focused roles after starting their career in sales-focused positions. Subsequently, the sorting of female sales executives into service-focused positions appears to be having an impact on their career trajectory. For instance, the females in the sample held fewer positions throughout their career, which represents fewer opportunities for advancement and promotion. Additionally, they spent longer periods of time waiting to be promoted out of their entry level position.

While this study confirms the existence of sorting, and the subsequent impact on career trajectory, more in-depth analysis is necessary to determine what specific factors lead to the eventual sorting of females into service-focused positions. Phase 2 of this study will attempt to gather that information by surveying female sales and service managers on their experiences related to mentorship and professional development. Complete descriptive statistics, results from the statistical analysis conducted, and further implications for sport management practitioners and scholars will be provided at the conference.

References

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