
SECTION 5

PROFESSIONAL'S SELLING
PROCESS

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Decision
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THERE ARE NO SINGLE DECISION MAKERS

A few years ago, I purchased a toy for my son. I had invested an hour or so trying it out and talking to the clerk at Toys-R-Us, and was proud of the decision I had made. The sales clerk thought he had made a sale. But to my surprise and disappointment, my son wasn't interested in the toy at all. He didn't thank me or acknowledge my hard work. As it turned out, a couple of his friends had the same toy and hated it.

A few days later, I returned the toy to the store. The pride of my decision-making was extinguished. Both the sales clerk and I learned a valuable selling lesson that day: to make a sale requires that all decision influencers come to terms with the decision.

Dealing With Multiple Decision Makers

So it goes in the businesses we serve. There are few decision makers, only decision influencers. From the smallest business to the largest organization, decisions to engage your services are made by multiple individuals.

As the businesses to which you are selling grow larger, the number of decision influencers increases. As the number of influencers increase, the complexity of the sale grows. To improve your selling success in large organizations, you must identify and persuade all the decision influencers.

The relative power held by a person in a particular position in one company usually will be quite different in another organization. The decision process and the relative power of specific decision influencers can vary greatly in businesses of the same type and size.

Conclusion

When selling to organizations, it is crucial to identify and persuade *all* the decision influencers. Professionals who routinely cover only one of the decision influencers sell substantially less than their share of the business. For example, a professional who makes ten proposals and has two competitors on each should sell one in three, or 33%, if he is getting his share. However, we find that sellers who meet with only one buying influencer will get a 10-15% share while sellers who meet with several decision influencers score in the 40-70% range.

IDENTIFYING THE MAJOR DECISION INFLUENCERS

Identifying the major decision influencers is a crucial step in the selling process. Develop your prowess in the group dynamics of complex decision making and you will be the all-star of new business development in your firm.

There are many identifiable decision influencers in a business. They include: the executive, the user, the outsider and the deal killer

The Executive

The executive influencer is the person with the most power in the decision to engage you. This person has big “Yes” authority. Big “Yes” authority means that this person listens to all the recommendations from others and makes the final decision to hire you. The larger the financial commitment to hire you, the more likely it is that strong power resides in a top executive. When small dollars and limited services are involved, executive power can reside in the user. If you do not obtain an audience with the executive decision influencer, your chances of making the sale diminish rapidly.

The User

The user is the person in your prospect’s businesses who will interact with you and most frequently use your services di-

rectly. In-house counsel, corporate controllers, and risk managers are a few of the possible users.

Since the user is going to be interacting with you the most and it's to the business's benefit that the user get along with you and feel comfortable with you the other influencers often give a good deal of weight to the user's recommendation. However, others on the team may be hiring you to supplement the skills of the user or to help out-place and hire a new user. The user influencer will almost always have big "No" authority and a small "Yes" authority.

The Outsider

Most companies have several outsiders that influence any decision to engage a major professional firm. Investment bankers, commercial bankers, surety bonding agents, outside board members, family members, and other professionals are some.

Outsiders usually have big "No" authority. In many cases, the outsider can be a strong "Yes" influence on the executive influencer when referring you into the opportunity.

The Deal Killer

In every organization there lurks a person who has big "No" authority. That person evaluates you or your firm on a set of technical standards and says to the others that you pass or fail. This person's sole job is to screen out the professionals who do not measure up. You must identify this person and learn about the set of standards he or she has set.

UNDERSTANDING INFLUENCERS' PERCEPTIONS AND VALUES

People make decisions emotionally and justify them with logic. But *perceptions* drive the emotions. For thousands of years, the perception that the world was flat drove the emotion of fear that kept people from sailing too far west. In any company, the perceptions of the various decision influencers may be similar or quite different. If the perceptions of individuals within an organization are radically different, the decision process will be more difficult for you to influence.

Perceptions Are Reality

If each of your decision influencers perceives that the business is in a high-growth, stimulating economy, a decision to change service providers is relatively easy. But, if some believe that economic conditions are uncertain, they will likely believe a business should hold onto its tried-and-true advisors in such times, and you may have difficulty replacing the incumbent professional.

Compare the perceptions of business among your decision influencers and look for consistencies and differences that may provide clues on how to close the sale later.

Value System

An owner of a business that was getting lousy service from their accounting firm told me, “The hardest decision I have ever made in my business career was to change accounting firms twelve years ago.” That told me that his emotional “switching costs” were too high to overcome in a short few meetings. He valued loyalty and feared confronting a poorly performing professional. Such insight helped us develop a winning sales strategy that did not threaten the incumbent firm, but focused on services the client was not presently receiving.

Conclusion

During the last 20 years, I have found that a high percentage of companies who consider changing service providers keep the incumbent, when the incumbent is allowed to also propose. Beware of the “fools gold” of proposing against an incumbent.

Learn the value system of each one of your buying influences by asking lots of questions, the answers to which tell you about the values held most dear. When you understand the value systems of each person, you will be able to devise a sales strategy that has a high probability of success.

UNDERSTANDING INFLUENCER'S PERSONALITIES

Personality styles have been studied since biblical times. The ancient Greek Hypocrites identified four distinct personalities. Others have identified many more and have concluded that everyone has several personality styles. I have learned that you can do a lot with Hypocrites' four styles: directors, compliants, influencers, and steadies. These styles are similar to a modern system called DISC.

Directors

The Directors are usually quick decision makers and will allow you only a small amount of access time. They require few facts and are very bottom-line, goal-oriented. Directors live life their way. Director personalities are exhibited in a high percentage of CEOs.

Compliants

Compliants are people who measure their decisions by some internal or external set of rules. The compliant personality is a methodical decision maker and will examine many facts. Engineers, accountants, and doctors have a high percentage of compliant personalities.

Influencers

Influencers exhibit very persuasive and outgoing personalities. They enjoy moving other people to their point of view. Influencers are friendly and powerful communicators. They are fast-paced and have a short attention span. Influencer personalities are exhibited in many CEOs and sales managers.

Steadies

The Steady personality is a friendly person who thrives on consensus and being well liked. Steadies are usually uncomfortable with making rapid decisions. Their primary concern is for the effect of a change on other people in the organization.

Conclusion

By utilizing this knowledge of different personality types, you will be better able to present yourself in a way that is more likely to be accepted.

PLANNING EACH CALL IMPROVES SUCCESS

Different decision influencers need to be approached in different ways. Forgetting to plan the objective of each sales contact or setting unrealistic objectives is the root of most sales failures. In the complex sale, a professional should plan on a series of at least five—and often as many as a dozen—personal sales calls on a large prospect. Trying to close the sale on the first call is like throwing a “hail-Mary” pass in the first quarter of a football game.

Pre-call planning will help you eliminate gaps in your knowledge about a prospect and will help you maintain the momentum necessary in a long-cycle sale. With each successive call, there should be a routine you follow to help you touch all the bases. Your contact cycle will go through a number of stages, including the following:

Research

The more you know, the better you’ll do when you make your first sales call if you can answer questions like these:

- What are some common problems of companies in this industry?
- What has appeared in the press regarding this company?

- What is the content and style of the company's website?
- Who are the company's suppliers? (Consider calling them.)
- Who else works or has worked with this company? (Find out their opinions.)

During your early sales calls, you should gather additional information about the business, its problems, the decision influencers and their values, your competition, and potential service or product needs of the organization.

Focus and Track

Ask yourself, "Where am I in the sales process with this prospect?" If you are in the discovery phase, focus on the discovery issues in this book. If the prospect is in the decision phase and you are in discovery, your chances of success are limited.

Next focus on the people you know and the ones you don't know who are in the decision group. Develop a strategy to meet one or two new people on each sales call. Remember, if you are being blocked from meeting key people in the decision process, the company may not be sincere in considering you.

Conclusion

Having goals for each sales contact will focus you and improve your success rate.