

## Senior Decision Maker Selling

In the area of our business that involves aligning sales teams that have historically been transactional in focus, but desire to execute more strategically; we see the following ideas to be the most productive.

### **Define and Align:**

What does good look like at the big table?

A basic starting point is a conclusive and ironclad agreement in your firm's executive suite that the ultimate goal is to reposition the offer in the client's eye as a clear strategic synchronization with the client's own desired business outcomes. Without having this top level buy-in on the project, it is doomed to failure and your client's time is wasted, perhaps further alienating **A list** clients who desperately need your company to be a true strategic asset to them.

To achieve this, an aligned management team working in lockstep with each other within a well defined strategy needs to think about the following in regards to the current makeup of the sales team.

### **Here are six factors to consider:**

1. Where do your salespeople currently and comfortably enter accounts?
2. Are your salespeople getting in front of the right people, using their time at the right level?
3. Do your salespeople comfortably interface with Senior Executives?
4. Do your current entry points within an account match the level of expenditure, commitment and long term value to the prospect that your product or service represent?
5. Does your organization measure sales performance in two dimensions; organic growth with current clients and new growth with sought after prospects?
6. Once new accounts are obtained, does your current sales force have the capacity to build relationships with a wide variety of people at varying levels in an organization?

Far too many salespeople tend to enter an account at a level that is comfortable, easy and expedient.

## **The Problem as we see it:**

Salespeople who enter an account too low, meaning they start selling to a person in an account with little or no authority, tend to do so for one or more of the following reasons:

1. Their self-image makes them feel inferior to key decision makers in an account and they don't feel comfortable "rubbing elbows" with people at the top of the org chart. Your salespeople's self-image can make or break your bottom-line.
2. Some tell us they were trained to enter an account and that's the way it has always been done. You might hear something like, "I just always go see the person at the front desk and they'll send you to the right person." The old, "if it ain't broke don't fix it" routine. The problem with doing it the way it's always been done is you don't know how many opportunities are being left on the table or squandered by your salespeople not knowing how good things could be if they were talking to people with more authority.
3. They don't qualify their prospects well enough and they settle for talking to anybody who will listen (QP 1 prospects). In most cases people who will listen to a salesperson for the sake of listening don't have much going on and they're happy to spend hours burning the clock on the company dime.
4. They're not positioned well in the marketplace. The most successful salespeople are those who develop a pseudo industry-celebrity status in the market. Senior Level Decision Makers will listen to those people who they believe have something important to say. Personal positioning is "key" to your sales team's success.

In many cases salespeople are driven to set appointments by quota crazy sales managers who demand that they make a certain number of calls or presentations per week.

**The result:** Lots of salespeople calling on too many of the wrong people.

You can help your sales team penetrate accounts at a higher level by identifying how your product or service fits into your customer's overall direction and their motive for buying from you.

## **Determine where your product or service fits:**

- Is your product or service strategic and essential to the overall business strategy of your prospect?
- Is your product or service an operational component that relates to day-to-day activities of your prospect?
- How much impact does your product or service have on your customers' profitability, revenue or cash flow? Would you consider your product/service an "A" priority purchase – like jet fuel for an airline, a "B" priority purchase – like foam cushioning for seats on the same airline, or a "C" priority purchase – like ice for soft drinks for passengers.

- Still not sure how to understand priority? Take the above Airline example and imagine you are flying with them at 40,000 ft. Now which one of A, B, C would you want to make sure they won't run out of? How will your product or service impact the long-term direction of your customers business?
- Is your product or service seen as a commodity?
- How exclusive is your product or service?

### **Always teach positioning:**

All of these issues play an essential role in determining where your salespeople should first attempt to enter an account.

- If you are selling something that is not exclusive and purely operational in application, your salespeople are probably calling on someone at that level. However, what happens when your competitor gets the attention of someone with far more “clout,” directional strategy and authority within your account?
- No matter what you sell, train your salespeople to enter at as high a level as possible. This will position your product or service more strategically (it doesn't matter if you're selling cleaning services, computers or cars). When salespeople enter an account at lower levels, they run the risk of becoming a “supplier”, someone who provides commodities, often only temporarily until someone else offers a lower price.
- Entering an account at the highest level will position your product or service with the long-term strategy of the buyer. Forging a consultative partnership with key decision makers means you're less vulnerable to price competition and your relationship is more likely to weather future changes within that organization.

Part of your job as a sales manager or executive is to help your sales people sell “smarter.” That means, getting your sales people to understand **Senior-Level-Decision-Maker Selling**.

### **SLDM Selling means:**

- Your salespeople are selling to the highest levels within an account.
- Your salespeople understand the importance of being “handed down.”
- Your salespeople are creating partnerships with executive level customers.
- Your salespeople are working with executive level customers to provide a wide range of solutions and applications.
- Your salespeople are developing relationships in their accounts with a wide-range of people with varying levels of authority and influence.

**Breaking down the three levels of buyers that your salespeople are likely to face:**

**SLDM – Strategic Buyers** (Their concern: “How will it benefit our long-term business strategy?”)

**Middle Management – Operational Buyers** (Their concern: “How will we put your product or service into place?”)

**Personnel – Logistical Buyers** (Their concern: “How much more work will your product or service require?”)

Although it is initially difficult to enter accounts at high levels, it makes both selling and servicing within the account much easier.

You should see increased penetration in existing accounts, higher rates of client retention and less price resistance, which will result in higher margins, better business visibility for the senior suite and a more stable enterprise.

**One last caution:**

Before you embark on this direction, ensure you have strategic plan alignment and commitment within your core senior team so that your sales team can truly be an effective strategic pillar of your business.

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