



Calling All Hands

Most buying decisions aren't made solo. Increase your odds of success by selling up and down the corporate ladder. By Rick Davis



Rick Davis is president of Building Leaders, Inc., a Chicago-based sales training organization. 773.769.4409. E-mail: rickdavis@buildingleaders.com

The old adage that tells you to “get to the decision maker” is sage advice, but it fails to address the real challenge of business-to-business selling today. In the real world, decisions frequently are not made by one person but rather by a committee of influencers. To strengthen your relationships with clients and prospects, strive to sell vertically within the organization.

Vertical selling implies selling to all levels, not just to the power players within an organization. The benefits of this approach are astounding. First, you strengthen your relationship with organizational leaders by creating buy-in for your services. Second, your efforts to sell to underlings within an organization will establish long-term growth potential, because those underlings are the eventual leaders in the company.

You will also discover that the depth of your relationship creates powerful opportunities in timing. Rather than trying to close deals when the timing is right for you, the key to successful selling is to be in proper position when the timing is right for the client. Create depth in your client relationships by developing business relationships with as many people as you can in your clients' organizations.

A serious violation of this concept occurred for a manufacturer representative while calling on an LBM dealer. The representative continued to channel his selling efforts to the purchasing agent, figuring that he was the key decision-maker. This was true regarding transactional activity but not for decisions on program development and

selecting products for resale. The salesman was oblivious to the discussions occurring at the higher level between the owner and sales manager.

By the time the salesman heard of the impending change in the relationship, it was too late for him to react, and he lost a significant chunk of business. He had failed to achieve depth of relationship.

Conversely, the new vice president of sales and marketing for my organization discovered that the business relationship he established with an inside salesperson translated into huge dividends down the road. When the inside salesperson was later promoted to regional sales manager, she personally led the charge to introduce his product to every branch in her region. This long-term sales benefit was a result of the professionalism with which he dealt with her early in her career.

To sell vertically, do this:

1. Schedule appointments with various individuals in an organization.

Just because you have a meeting with the superintendent or branch manager doesn't mean you are entitled to stop at the desks of other people in the company. When you know you will be in a region, call ahead to schedule as many appointments with people as possible, even if only for a few minutes. Your professionalism will shine through, and you will achieve more in less time.

2. Be multilingual. Remember that each person in an organization has unique perspectives and challenges. The superintendent in the field is most interested in delivery issues and timing, while the purchasing agent will focus on cost issues. The administrative staff will be interested in convenience and the respect with which they are treated, while the owner is singularly interested in profits. An accomplished Sales Leader knows how to speak a multitude of languages within a single organization.

3. Ask first, speak second. People will find you interesting only when you show interest in them. It is always a good idea to begin conversations with prospects and clients by taking time to understand the challenges they face and how they perceive the organization as changing in these evolving times.

Sell vertically, and you'll discover richness in relationships that you have never experienced before. You will also discover that sales success comes to you when you least expect it. ■