Value-Added Selling – Part 4 of 5

Getting engaged with your Prospect

Last month in "got sales?" I discussed "Relationship Selling" as the second part of this 5 part series on Value-Added Selling (click **HERE** to see Parts 1 through 3). In this issue I'll discuss how to engage yourself in your prospect/customer's business.

As I had previously mentioned, Value-Added selling means becoming more than a sales rep trying to sell something. It means being truly concerned about the prospect's needs and becoming more of a partner than a vendor. For instance, there are many things you can do to become more engaged with the prospect's company than just working with the one contact (person) you have.

First of all, you should always try to call at the highest level of management as possible. If you sell too low in the organization, you probably won't be talking to the decision maker. Sometimes this is unavoidable since the manager might have delegated the research and recommendation phases to one of his direct reports. If this is the case, then you'll have a more difficult time reaching higher levels until you've convinced this lower-level individual to recommend your product. But that doesn't mean you don't try.

Also, you should try to get to higher levels of decision makers as soon as you can. Otherwise you could be wasting your time. You see, what often happens is a sales rep finds someone in the prospect's organization who is interested in what they have to say, or sell. Now this person may not be a decision maker, but the sales rep still likes talking to him because at least they found someone who appears interested. This could be a huge waste of time since this person may not be in a position to recommend you to his management or doesn't have any authority to make a decision and is just enjoying himself learning about your offerings. Getting to higher levels of management, early on, is important so you can speak with people who understand and need the value of what you are offering and can make the purchasing decision.

You should also expand your sphere of influence by involving as many people in the prospect's company as possible, both vertically and horizontally. Vertically means meeting people who are up and down the management chain. For instance, you may be speaking to a department head, but you also want to include the IT manager who reports to him because he will be critical in the implementation phase and you'll need to get his buy-in on the technical issues when the time comes. You could also try to meet this department head's boss to ensure that he is aware of what this project is all about and that you have his buy-in as well.

Involving horizontal people means meeting your prospect's counterparts in their company. If you're selling to the Sales Manager, then also meet the Marketing Manager, IT Manager and Purchasing Agent, all at the same organizational level as your prospect. If you are selling insurance or financial services and are meeting with the husband, meet with the wife as well. Why? Because each of these people may be part of the decision making process, or users of your system, and they'll somehow be involved in the decision or the purchase. You'll want to make sure that you get the opportunity to listen to their unique requirements and address their needs. This is much better than expecting your prospect to "sell" your product to other department heads, managers or users on your behalf. That's your job and only you should do this.

What you're doing is building a customer-based team. You're getting buy-in from various areas of the company and showing each involved party that you offer a value to them and their specific needs. If you only deal with one person, then that will be the person trying to sell your wares internally to other parties, which you must always try to avoid. Also, what if the one person you're working with leaves the company? Then you're stuck and have to start all over again. If you engaged several other people and departments in your sales process, you can more easily continue with your efforts with little or no additional effect. Involving your customer is important to ensure you are working with a team instead of just one person, which allows you to become more of a value to as many areas of their company as possible.

The team approach works the other way as well. You should present a "selling team" that is comprised of different areas of <u>your</u> company. In other words, unless you are a very small company and you wear all the hats, don't go solo. Use your company's resources. You'll want to get different people from your company to actively participate in the sales effort. Each member of your team should establish a relationship with their appropriate counterpart at the prospect's company. This way, each person or department at the prospect's company will be comfortable with your company since they will have a relationship with someone in which they can "speak the same language".

Your team could include your top management to show they value this prospect's business. It could include your Customer Service person to show how they can address their service needs. It could include your Contracts person who can help with streamlining the negotiations, thus making it easier to do business with your company. It could include your technical person who can speak the same language as the prospect's IT person, thus getting through any technical issues. Basically, you should have as many people in your company meet and work with your prospect's company as possible to build one-on-one relationships and share their appropriate expertise and assistance. Your team will fill any gaps that you can't address, they'll add expertise where you cannot, and they will cover for you when you are not available.

Let's face it, there's no way you can know everything across all departments and help the customer with all their needs. So use your team to do this. It will build enormous trust and comfort by your prospect. It will also make you a value-added sales professional.

Another thing you can do to engage yourself with your customer's business is to focus on their bottom line, and not just yours. Relate all your activities to the customer's bottom line and what will reduce their costs or make them money or improve their situation. You can do this by using the consultative or solution-oriented approach. In other words, don't sell products or features. Focus on the benefits to the customer and sell that instead. By fully understanding their requirements, which is established in the earlier qualification stage of the sale cycle, you'll be able to consult with them on the benefits of the best solutions for them, instead of just trying to sell them something. This approach works much better when the prospect feels they are buying what they need instead of you selling them what you want.

Value-added selling boils down to a few simple, yet critical, points. Be a strategic partner who consults, not sells. Be easy to do business with by being creative and flexible and by making other resources in your company available to them. Help them to make the right decisions by showing them how your product or service will address their needs. Also, be viewed as a value-added problem solver in which the prospect actually will want to work with and, therefore, purchase from. What this all means is that you should be part of their team, as someone who genuinely cares about their well-being and what's best for them. When you engage yourself in your customer's business, you'll stand a much better chance of making the sale. When that happens, you'll make your money. So focus on the customer and your money will follow.

Good luck and good selling!

Russ Lombardo
(702) 655-5652
russ@PeakSalesConsulting.com
www.PeakSalesConsulting.com

Russ Lombardo is President of **PEAK Sales Consulting** (www.peaksalesconsulting.com) and an experienced CRM and Sales specialist, consultant, trainer, writer and speaker. Russ works with businesses to help improve their customer acquisition and retention for increased revenue and success. Russ is author of the books, "CRM For The Common Man" and "Smart Marketing." He can be reached at **702-655-5652** and email at **russ@peaksalesconsulting.com**.