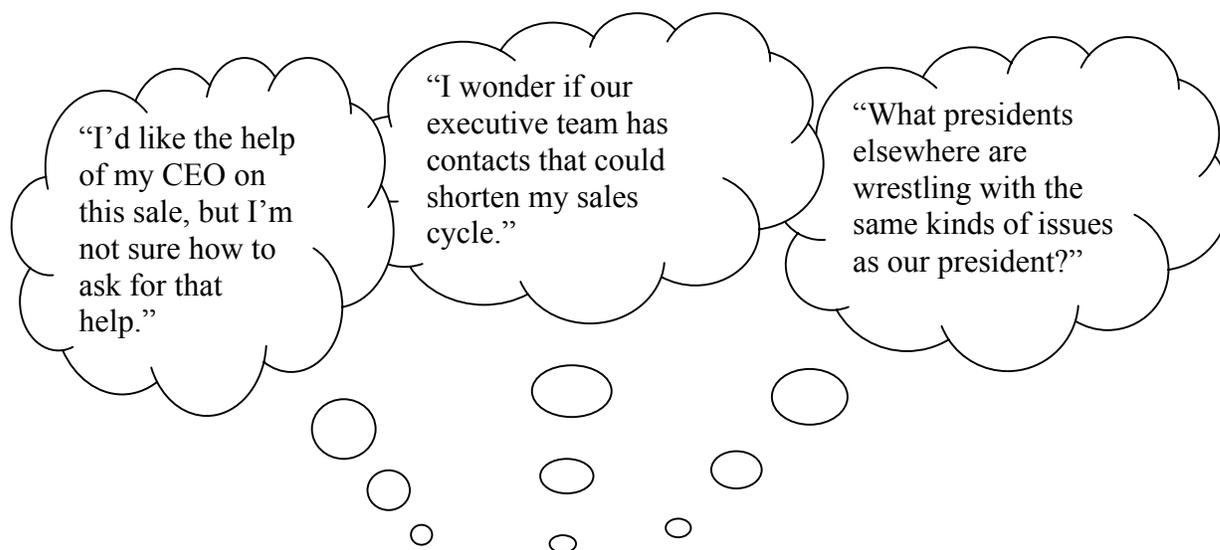


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## **Selling with the C-Suite** **Effective Use of the Executive Resource Before, During & After the Call**



As a salesperson, are you ever paid a smaller commission when you enlist the executive resources in your own organization? No. If your own CEO helps you get earlier access to an Economic Buyer, are you penalized for using your own CEO to shorten the sales cycle? Of course not.

So why do so few salespeople actively seek to deploy their own executive team in the sales process? Earlier this year, we interviewed senior executives to get an insider's perspective on how they wanted to be used in the sales process – *before, during, and after the call*.

It's not enough anymore that "the customer likes us." Dave Reiss, CEO, Applied Systems Technology, Inc., puts it this way, "Our customers' businesses are ferocious economic entities – over time, each business is going to demand more and more value." That means that what you are providing today is never enough to sustain the relationship indefinitely. When a salesperson positions his or her own executive team as a resource with key customers, it sends a strong message about the commitment and intellectual capital available for creating new value.

Leveraging our own C-Suite's\* intellectual capital creates wealth-building opportunities for our clients. It's a basic rule of economics that *wealth is created when assets are shifted from a lower use to a higher use*. That shift takes place for our customers when the customer finds the highest-value use for our products or services; it also takes place when we work on "big problems" that we can solve together.

The flipside of this equation is that *wealth is destroyed when assets are shifted from a higher use to a lower use!* If the most expensive people in your sales organization (the senior executives) are not deployed efficiently, value leaks from your organization. And opportunities, ones that you might have closed with executive support, go to someone else.

## **Before the Call**

This checklist highlights the actions high-performing CEOs suggest before the call to increase their contribution on key opportunities.

- **Target CEO Time and Resources.** Where and when does CEO involvement add the most value?
  - ❑ Focus executive resources on customers that need to hear from the CEO about culture or process.
  - ❑ Match internal executives with customers facing similar business issues.
  - ❑ Use group events to improve access to senior executives.
- **Understand the Sales Process for your Organization.** Just because your CEO is involved doesn't mean it's time to abandon your normal sales process. The executive team's greatest value in a call is in leveraging the sales process, not replacing it with charisma.
  - ❑ Use the CEO at the right stage in the process.
  - ❑ Respect the buying process of your customer's organization – what stage in their process is best matched to your executive resources?
- **Develop a Formal Strategy.** Many of the executives we interviewed require a disciplined routine before each major call. They won't go on a call with an unprepared salesperson.
  - ❑ Are the salesperson and the executive both clear on the Valid Business Reason for this meeting?
  - ❑ What three or four high impact questions should we prepare for this particular call?
  - ❑ Tim Bauer, the EVP of Outsourcing Solutions Inc., requires serious due diligence before the call. "You never want to send the CEO on a preliminary, unqualified call."
- **Open Doors.** Actual prospecting by the CEO, or exclusively on behalf of the CEO, pays huge dividends.
  - ❑ There were as many approaches to CEO prospecting as there were people we interviewed, but everyone agreed that the C-Suite has the unique ability to open certain doors.
  - ❑ What if you don't have time? Brett Norgaard, CRO of Wire the Market, observes, "CEOs should not wait until they have time to prospect – or they will never start. Reaching out to prospects at key points in the process may be worth millions of dollars to your company."

These actions “*Before the Call*” increase the chances that executive involvement will speed (and not derail!) your most significant opportunities. Read on for how to prepare for the necessary considerations and actions during and after the call.

Picture the CEO at your most important account. This week, that CEO might be (a) explaining last quarter’s results to the Board of Directors, (b) working with their sales team to reverse sustained pressure on gross margins, and (c) considering initiatives that may differentiate his or her organization in its market.

Why do so many sales organizations think it’s OK to fly under this person’s radar?

Visualize that same CEO making time for a 60-minute strategic discussion with a C-Suite\* executive with experience in their industry. In that meeting, the CEO is explaining one of his or her most important business issues. “**How can your executive team make the most of this opportunity?**”

That’s the question we recently asked a select group of executives. Here are their suggestions for leveraging executive-level participation *during* and *after* a sales call.

### During the Call

- **Don’t assume, just because two CEOs have shown up, that the heavy lifting is over.** The 2005 Miller Heiman Sales Effectiveness Study, based on more than 3,400 interviews with sales professionals, reports increasing preference for process over personality in sales management. This is happening at the same time that customers are seeking greater business acumen from salespeople.
- **Demonstrate your understanding of how the other executive thinks.** What order and sequence of questions will best differentiate this executive meeting? Jack Unroe, CEO of two Vedior subsidiaries, explains that preparation is his key to understanding the other executive’s mindset. “I also want to know what the executive I’m talking to really cares about. For example, if they are they a financial type, who’s their auditor and what are the analysts saying about their industry? If they are sales-oriented, what type of differentiation are they driving with *their customers?*”
- **Executive involvement should never happen accidentally.** Greg Palmer of Remedy recommends decisive action. “If it’s part of your sales process to include senior executives, then bake those executives and their specific roles into your process: don’t let it happen on a whim.”
  - Fred Kohnke, CEO, CBS Personnel Holdings, uses his experience to help address the business issues his customers are facing. “In any complex sale, it is unlikely that the salespeople are going to be the ones actually doing all the work after the deal is signed – *and the buyers know that*. Part of the executive’s role in the sales process should be to understand infrastructure and to organize support for complex solutions.”
- **Surprise the customer.** Pete Espinosa, who personally coordinated pre-appointment research for the CEO and Chairman of IBM, explains, “The CEO has to

do three things consistently well on sales calls. Since the customer often anticipates that your top executive is there to forcefully negotiate, *to make things happen*, your CEO must first counter this expectation by acknowledging, 'We appreciate the opportunity to compete. We appreciate your process and your people.' Second, the CEO must differentiate his or her company in a memorable way. And third, the CEO must open the channels of communication so that the customer feels like he or she has access to the company beyond the front line sales and service channels. These three things make the call *surprisingly* enjoyable for the customer."

- **Share business process goals.** Genia Spencer of Randstad posits that, "Customers today are more interested in buying outcomes than inputs. We need to discuss the tangible result that our proposal will deliver – and not just the ROI, but also the impact on the customer's business processes."

### After the Call

- **Methodically follow up.** As valuable as your executive team involvement can be *before* and *during* the call, the impact of the right kind of note or phone call *after* the call holds equal meaning for the customer. After all, many buying decisions are made *after the call*. The follow-up stage may actually be the best opportunity the executive has to communicate intimately with the customer: to let them know we heard them, without the appearance of staging.
- **Ask your executive team to publish its successes.** Sue Burnett, President of Burnett Staffing Specialists communicates her sales activity to the field monthly – and in return the field shares its sales activity with her. Even if you don't make 120 calls per year like Sue does, the simple act of publishing your commitment and results sends a strong message about your priorities. How about publishing externally? Carmella Calta at Staff Solutions jointly issued a Press Release *with her customer* to announce the success of one of their campaigns.
- **Ask your executive team to share business opportunities with customers.** Dan Campbell, CEO of Hire Dynamics not only referred business to one of his key customers, he also introduced a financial partner interested in acquiring the customer's business.
- **Thank the customer...again.** Don't call only when you want something. Let customers know that you are interested in their satisfaction, long after the deal has been signed. That's not something you get much mileage from promising – you have to actually do it.

\*Examples of the "C-Suite" include CEO, CFO, COO.

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