

Connect With Executives To Win

WIN the Executive Decision and Close the Deal

Identifying executive decision-making styles and tailoring your sales efforts to match them will improve your sales productivity more than any amount of discounting, good timing or past relationships.

Learn how to customize your sales approach to WIN more deals with Miller Heiman's *Executive Impact*SM. Visit www.millerheiman.com to register for this valuable workshop.

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Connect With Executives To Win

Sales professionals admit that nearly half of all opportunities are lost as a direct result of not winning the approval of the senior decision-maker. Miller Heiman research shows that senior-level executives say that most sales professionals are ineffective at getting them to say “yes” to their proposals. Research also revealed that scrutiny involved with approving proposals has intensified while buying processes have become more complex, with decision-making responsibility moving higher in the organization to the executive level, making it more difficult to sell.

How can that sought-after approval be won?

It doesn't matter how slick your presentation is; what matters is how it resonates with executive decision-makers.

Sound decision-making skills are a prerequisite for executives. All senior-level decision-makers build a set of criteria based on experience, which guides their decision-making process. However, that doesn't mean that all executives favor the same style when it comes to making up their minds.

Since, as Miller Heiman research shows, three out of four opportunities being pursued today now require the approval of senior-level decision-makers, it has become necessary for sales managers to identify which style of decision-making executives favor, and to tailor their sales approach accordingly.

Yet, as Robert B. Miller writes in their article “Change the Way You Persuade” in the *Harvard Business Review*, “All too often [sales] people make the mistake of focusing too much on the content of their

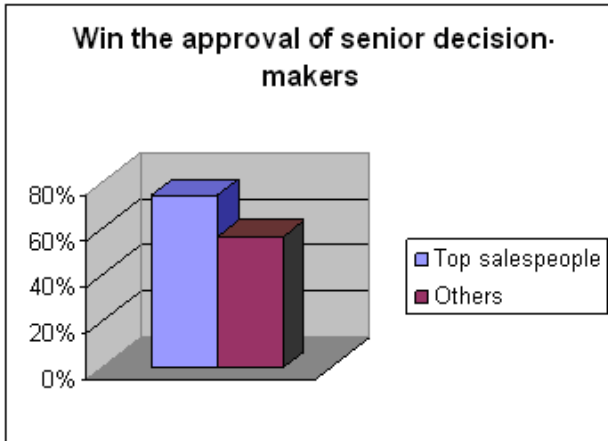
argument and not enough on how they deliver that message.” The way salespeople sell is not influencing how executives really make decisions. In most communications with executives, salespeople are getting it all wrong before they even get in the door.

Meet the Challenges

To tackle the challenges that arise from selling to the C-level, organizations are helping their sales professionals better understand the appropriate language, decision-making styles and day-to-day activities commonly associated with very senior-level executives. These organizations are also making their own executives more accessible to support sales efforts. This peer-to-peer selling approach (also referred to as “like-rank” selling) is becoming increasingly common. While this approach may add credibility to your organization's selling efforts, it's unlikely to provide significant improvements in sales effectiveness due to its lack of scalability.

You simply can't win business consistently in today's market without effectively winning the decision of executive-level decision-makers. And you simply can't win the decision of executive-level decision-makers if you don't vary your delivery to suit individual executive styles.

The challenge? Most salespeople believe they are highly influential in winning the support of senior-level decision-makers. But, as Miller writes, “In our experience, more than half of all sales presentations are mismatched to the decision-maker's style. Specifically, close to 80 percent of all sales presentations focus on skeptics and controllers [two decision-making styles identified by Miller's research], but those two groups accounted for just 28 percent of the executives we surveyed.”



If you don't understand how people make decisions—the kind of information they need and the order in which they need it—how effective can you be in influencing their thinking and getting them to say “yes” to your proposal? Whether or not you're successful in impressing others to decide in your favor is not a matter of happenstance.

The Research

Executives make decisions by considering many separate, yet common, data points. The majority of executives are not necessarily aware of how they accomplish this—they tend to gather points intuitively throughout the process. In making tough decisions, certain points become magnified for the business executive and so they fall back on the areas best known to them. Miller polled 1,684 executives to study their decision-making processes and discovered that executives tend to fit into one of five distinct decision-making styles categories:

- Charismatics (25 percent)
- Thinkers (11 percent)
- Skeptics (19 percent)
- Followers (36 percent)
- Controllers (nine percent)

To arrive at this conclusion a research study was performed, which asked executives two separate, but related, sets of questions. A straight statistical factor analysis was performed, and the pattern of the five styles emerged. As Robert B. Miller, co-founder of Reno, Nev.-based Miller Heiman, says, “Time has only confirmed our research.”

Having spoken with audiences in support of the book, *The 5 Paths To Persuasion*, Miller has discussed the principles of the five categories with people all over the world. “While most of the data was gathered in North America, it was a large enough sample that what we're describing is human behavior,” he says. “In my experience, the categories ring true across cultures. Any variance that might occur is in the distribution between categories.”

What defines each executive style is the preference to see or hear certain types of information at certain steps in the buying process. Naturally, the best approach is to align the way in which you present information to the way in which executives prefer to absorb information, according to their decision style. But, the reality is that alignment doesn't exist for most sales professionals.

Virtually no presentations are tailored toward charismatics, though they comprise 25 percent of executives, and only six percent of presentations are presented for followers, though one in three executives possess that decision-making style.

Making the call

How do you identify the decision-making category for an executive if your initial meeting is a face-to-face presentation? It can be tough, but chances are you have had contact with others in the

organization who have arranged the meeting with the key executive. You can ask questions to help you determine which category the executive fits, such as:

- How does he make decisions?
- Is she somebody who looks at pros?
- Is he systematic?
- Does she take her time making decisions?
- Does he fall in love with new ideas right and left?

Then, go through a process of elimination. As Miller says, “It’s easier to eliminate styles than to try to lay the template over one to see how well it fits. Ask something like, ‘When something goes wrong, do they blame other people?’ Two of the styles—skeptics and controllers—are blamers. If the answer is yes, you’ve eliminated three categories straight off.”

Charismatics

Have you sold to an executive who seemed enthusiastic about your product or service, and you left the meeting feeling you had the deal only to find out a few days later you didn’t? You were probably dealing with a charismatic.

Miller writes, “...charismatics prefer arguments that are tied directly to bottom-line results and are particularly keen on proposals that will make their company more competitive.”

Though it seems counterintuitive, underselling may actually be the key, rather than getting wrapped up in a charismatic’s initial excitement. “[Charismatics] have learned from experience—particularly from the bad decisions they’ve made—to temper their initial enthusiasm with a good dose of reality,” according to Miller.

Miller recommends that you commit a sentence to memory for each style of decision making. The one-liner he suggests for charismatics is: “Overview, no long Powerpoints, three to four bullet items.”

Thinkers

If you’ve ever been in a meeting where an executive took contradictory points of view, or if you presented your product or service only to be greeted with silence, it’s likely you were selling to a thinker. “Perhaps the single-most important piece of information thinkers need is the presenter’s methodology for getting from point A to point B,” writes Miller.

Appeal directly to their intelligence, Miller suggests, since thinkers “often pride themselves on their ability to outthink and outmaneuver the competition.” One other thing to keep in mind: “the order of presentation to a thinker is almost exactly the reverse order of presentation to a charismatic.”

Miller’s sentence for thinkers: “Be sure to demonstrate the process you used for the recommendation and give examples.”

Skeptics

You’re presenting to an executive, and he gets up to leave temporarily. When he comes back, he launches an assault on your supporting case studies. You’re face-to-face with a skeptic.

When you’re dealing with a skeptic, you’re meeting a strong personality. The good news about this, according to Miller, is “you will know almost immediately where you stand with skeptics.

“Skeptics want to move forward with groundbreaking ideas, but they first need to make sure that those

ideas are from people they fully trust.” So, the key to connecting with a skeptic is enhancing your own credibility.

“Credibility is key in dealing with skeptics, so use primary sources of data, and don’t be shy about your track record,” Miller says.

Followers

Though it’s unlikely that most executives would want to advertise their status as followers, it’s the category into which most polled executives fit. Miller breaks it down like this: “In the end, they will agree to something only if they’ve seen it done elsewhere. But followers won’t admit this. In fact, they will seldom concede that they are followers; they would much rather have you believe that they are innovative and forward thinking. Frequently, followers are mistaken for skeptics.”

For followers, Miller uses this sentence: “Make sure to supply proof and show where the initiative has worked before. Show best practices of others’ successes.”

Controllers

It is least likely that you’ll run into a controller when giving a presentation to executives, but when you do, all bets are off.

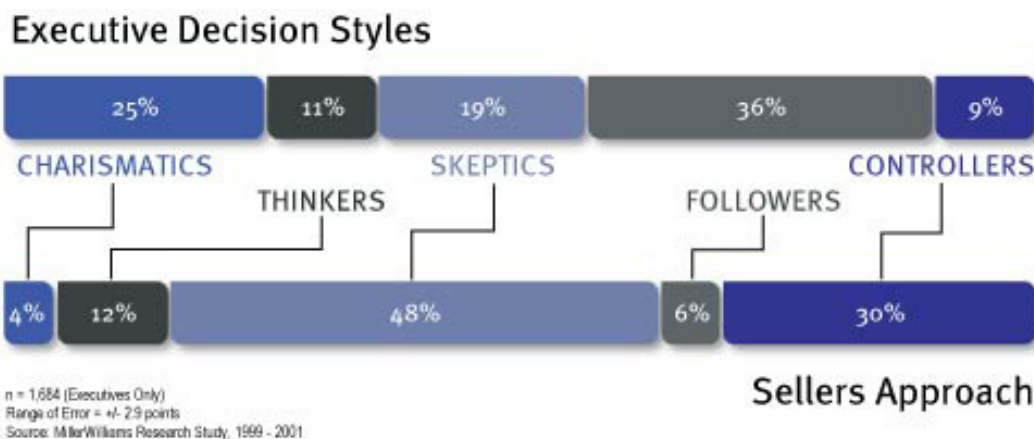
“In practice the only way to sell an idea to controllers is *not* to sell it; instead, let them make the choice to buy. Your best bet is to simply supply them with the information they need and hope they will convince themselves,” writes Miller.

When dealing with controllers, Miller recommends you keep this sentence in mind: “Don’t try to make it happen; let it happen.” Miller elaborates on this: “Get it done through a controller’s lieutenants. Don’t try to force the meeting. They don’t want to change the status quo unless they absolutely must. The attribute that is the highest with controllers is lowest in charismatics: self-absorption. Their trust level is low.”

The Wrong Assessment

Thinkers can be mistaken for charismatics; skeptics can be mistaken for followers. What do you do if you find yourself in the middle of a presentation geared toward one style and it becomes apparent that the executive belongs to another category?

Miller found himself in this situation not long ago. He had prepared for a presentation to a charismatic because he’d been told that he was very open, charming, enthusiastic and liked out-of-the-box thinking; however, as the presentation progressed, the executive asked for more details and examples. Miller



realized it was a misread. The executive was a thinker. But, because he was prepared with a detailed analysis for follow-up, Miller was able to pull out several in-depth examples.

Mistakes in assessment happen most often when you're relying on others' information to pinpoint the executive's style. That's why he recommends you commit those one-line sentences to memory. If you can think on your feet, remember the way in which to present to each style and are properly prepared, you can switch gears mid-presentation.

Winning the Executive Decision

Understanding and identifying decision-making styles will make communicating with executives more effective than any amount of discounting, good timing or past relationships. By tailoring your sales efforts toward a specific decision-making style, you will have a considerable advantage in winning the executive decision. Think of this as a second filter to apply to the information you are presenting. After you've determined what solution provides the best fit for your client, you can then filter the information further to mesh with the specific decision-making style.

As a result of the research performed by Miller, Miller Heiman developed a new sales training workshop unlike anything else available. *Executive Impact*SM– 5 *Paths to Unlocking Decisions*, is the only executive-selling workshop that focuses exclusively on how executives really make decisions. It's based on hard facts and empirical data, and supported by a recently published book, co-authored by Robert Miller, *The 5 Paths to Persuasion*.

As Miller says, "Think about your computer and its personalized default modes. There is not one mode

that works best for everyone. Similarly, each of us has learned a decision system that works best for us when faced with a major decision. The five decision styles represent the varying approaches to decision making. Each is effective. No one is better than the other. It depends upon the individual."

About Miller Heiman

Miller Heiman has been a thought leader and innovator in the sales arena for almost thirty years, helping clients worldwide win high value complex deals, grow key accounts and build winning sales organizations.

With a prestigious client list, including Fortune 500 companies, Miller Heiman helps clients in virtually every major industry to build high performance sales teams that deliver consistent sustainable results to drive revenue.

The company is headquartered in Reno, Nevada and has offices around the world. More information can be obtained by visiting the company's website at: www.millerheiman.com.