

Event Number One

Feasibility and Assessment

This first one is critical and worth repeating. It is all about doing the right thing for the customer as well as for you. Frankly, it is a lot about your own motives and integrity. At the very center and the essence of persuasiveness is the messenger's personal integrity and motivation to do the right thing. Why bring it up? Whether a salesperson has this critical, personal dimension or not is more than obvious to the other person most of the time. Self-centered, self-serving, self-absorbed salespeople fool very few potential clients. On the other hand, salespeople who practice the win/win philosophy will intuitively want to conduct a thorough feasibility survey, an assessment of the customer's business situation. Again, it shows!

If we conduct the first event right, not an optional event, and execute fully, we will gain momentum and a significant differentiating advantage over all our opponents. Our strategy for our first meeting should be to gain confidence and the all-important credibility with the potential client, to get the chemistry stirring in a positive motion. **The right way to begin is by asking the right questions rather than showing up with all the right answers.**

Earlier I mentioned Mack Hanan, who many credit with being the Father of Consultative Selling. He wrote a book on the subject over thirty years ago, and IBM, among others, subscribed to Mack's

training and applied the concept religiously. What are the principles of consultative selling? Simple! Adequate analysis and patient examination before prescriptions get written! Think about it. If you knew you had a health problem, with no clue of the cause, how would you feel about a doctor who immediately prescribed treatment without a reasonable examination? The same lack of confidence results when salespeople proclaim value propositions without examination.

Our first event should be a chapter out of Mack Hanan's book. During IBM's heyday, when IBM controlled the mainframe business, almost without exception, whenever a new opportunity developed, the branch office nearly always suggested a feasibility study, a full exploratory survey of existing systems, customer and user objectives, problems, potential solutions, existing costs, maintenance issues, service priorities, etc. Talk about building credibility! The best first step in developing great chemistry is to first build great trust.

One of the most difficult challenges in successfully managing the large, long, complex campaign is establishing clear, attractive differentiation. How the assessment phase is established and pursued can be the real differentiation among the competing vendors.

Do the right thing by the customer and trust and credibility will follow. So will momentum! That, by the way, is the correct order of things. As trust and credibility become established, it becomes more natural to get a clearer picture of the central qualifying issues, such as:

- The real decision-makers
- Schedule for decision and implementation
- Key criteria issues from the potential client's perspective
- Availability of funding
- Our ability of being able to deliver a differentiating value proposition
- Any "cast in stone" predisposition toward a competitor or to us

Reality dictates that in order to engage long-term with any prospective client, sound qualifying is a must. Conducting the right level of assessment affords this important step.

Case Study

I worked with an outstanding sales guy years ago. Our company sold software to the electric design engineering community. Before presenting solutions to any client, he would have more knowledge of the client's environment than anyone calling on the account. For example, if the client's potential were printed circuit board solutions, he would know everything about the client's parts management program. He would know the number of turns (repetitive efforts for electronic routing and timing closure) in getting boards finished and confirmed by the client. He would know their design and simulation system. He would understand the targeted system of the board, the application of the full system, the number of layers, the size of the boards, the thermal requirements, the type of mounts required, the specific past routing problems and countless other valuable pieces of information that would put him in a position of strength with his client. He would get all this information simply by asking for the client's cooperation in gathering information, a feasibility study. Put yourself in his opponent's shoes. If you didn't have the same information, how would you like to compete against him in that scenario? Not I! And oh! Another thing. I never once saw this outstanding salesperson try to outsmart a customer. Instead, he was very much into "doing the right thing by his customer! Did he also understand campaign momentum? You bet!

Another Case Study

A major consulting organization in Asia had landed a huge contract for completing the architecture and application development for a major customer. The contractor jumped on the project immediately, put a project manager on site, hired dozens of independent software companies for writing code and off they went. One of the critical requirements of the contract was that the system be developed in a specific programming language. The major contractor in this case learned quickly how little it knew about the designated language and the architectural development phase. To make a long story short, within nine months the company tried six different project managers in an

effort to get the program on track. The customer was furious with the contractor, and the contractor was bound, financially, to perform.

My company was a vendor of software development technology, based on the language of choice, and we had a consulting services team with expertise in the application development process. We were invited by the contractor to submit our license pricing for the project. Typical entry into a high-tech campaign! To make it even more typical, they asked for a corporate overview of our company and a full-scale demonstration. We had spotted the whale!

Did we have a corporate overview? Absolutely! Could we do demonstrations? You bet, with the best! Would that have been the best thing to do for the customer? Not hardly! Further, it would not have been the best thing to do for the organization I represented.

What we countered instead was to have one of our consultants join me on site for a period of two weeks to conduct a feasibility study, at which time we would be in a position to give some useful counsel and perhaps a proposal which would include software license pricing. We also told the contractor that we might chose not to participate unless we were reasonably sure the project was going to be successful. We were given the green light to move forward with the right level of access to all the information we needed to gather.

At the conclusion of the two-week period, thanks to our exceptional technical consultant and a superb inside mentor, a long-time employee of the contractor, we knew far more about the project than the contractor or the customer. We knew how to get it on the right path, the scope of the architectural problem, the priorities of the project management team and a good estimate of the number of applications that could be developed within twelve months.

When we summarized our findings, we proposed that we develop the architecture with bundled software and maintenance. In short, the customer was way over on our side as was our internal mentor. Also, after spending two great weeks with our consultant, there was no way the project manager was going to watch us walk away. We won a multi-million dollar contract to develop the architecture, which we completed in ninety days-set up by executing the diagnosis or assessment event at the right time and under the right circumstances.

A salesperson will make a positive impression on the client by not rushing to conclusions and solutions. Rather, by approaching the opportunity as a professional, as a consultative salesperson and not looking like someone who needs to close one more deal quickly in order to make his target for the current quarter, a positive impression will be made. Don't misunderstand and think that we are going to make a career of studying and analyzing our client. We don't want to overdo the feasibility phase. On the other hand, in order to approach our customer as consultative salespeople, a reasonable level of due diligence is necessary. Put another way, **whoever wins this campaign will excel in the diagnostic due diligence phase, the feasibility phase, of managing the campaign.** Let me ask you. Assume two salespeople from competing companies have the same opportunity. They call on the same client, and one asks for the opportunity to conduct a due diligence survey or an assessment. The other schedules a demonstration and corporate overview for the next activity, which happens quite often. Of the two, on whom would you place a serious bet? Which one has gained trust, credibility and momentum?