

IS YOUR SALES TEAM PREPARED ^{TO} HAVE “BUSINESS OUTCOME” CONVERSATIONS WITH EXECUTIVES ?

Getting Non-IT Buyers To Say “ Yes”

More and more, your sales growth depends on selling business solutions – not just products – to non-IT executive decision makers.

Consider these facts:

- By the end of the decade more than 90 percent of technology spending will come from outside of IT organizations, up from 20 percent in 2000.¹
- C-level and line-of-business executives are currently spending the same amount of time in “IT pre-purchase” activities as their IT staffs.²

Here’s the challenge:

Unlike IT buyers, line-of-business executives don’t respond to sales presentations about products and services. They lack interest in complex feature sets and lengthy discussions of why your company is a superior supplier.

Instead, they demand (and deserve) an insightful conversation about business outcomes.

Assess Your Sales Readiness

Concerns, like how to:

- Reduce costs with limited risk.
- Repair or improve critical business processes.
- Develop a defensible competitive advantage.
- Improve cash flow and returns on fixed assets.

To close larger technology sales faster, your people need to engage in business-focused, rather than product-focused, conversations with the executives who increasingly make or influence buying decisions.

And, to be successful in those conversations, they must forge and sustain genuine connections with those executives.

Do your people possess the executive presence and communication skills to be able to do that?

Business Outcome Conversation Skills Checklist

My sales people are able to:

- Provide the best answer to: "Why should I take a meeting with YOU?"
- Prepare for and structure an executive conversation such that they know, when they walk out the door, that the executive feels the time was well spent
- Establish themselves as credible knowledge sources to an executive (especially if they are more junior than the executive)
- Get executives to reveal their true business drivers and care-about
- Get the second meeting with an executive
- Maintain a long-term relationship with an executive
- Handle tough questions and anticipate ways they might stumble
- Salvage an executive call or meeting that has gone off track or is going poorly



In our experience, traditional sales training often focuses on presenting a product pitch rather than having a conversation about business outcomes.



What Most Sales Training Gets Wrong

American companies alone spend about \$20 billion a year on sales training, according to the Association for Talent Development (ATD). Sadly, that investment doesn't appear to be paying off. According to Dave Stein and ES Research, 85 to 90 percent of sales training has no lasting impact after 120 days. Why?

In our experience, traditional sales training often focuses on presenting a product pitch, rather than having a conversation about business outcomes. Salespeople are asked to memorize a slew of facts about product features and benefits — information customers should be able to easily access themselves online.

Secondly, most sales training fails to bridge the gap between theory and practice. In other words, there is no learning by doing. This is a huge failing.

The reality is hundreds of studies have been conducted on experiential learning. The research is clear: When learners are provided the opportunity to apply the knowledge they've gained within a training and coaching environment, they learn more quickly and are able to better retain new knowledge and skills.

Have traditional investments in sales paid off?

- Has your investment in product training been effective?
- Has your sales methodology improved performance in the field?
- Are you converting marketing opportunities into actual sales?
- Have sales enablement efforts increased close rates?

Not as much as you'd expected?

If your sales training and support investments are not bearing the ripe, juicy fruit you'd hoped for, it may be because members of your sales team are unprepared to have business outcome conversations or lack the skills to be able to make the executive connection.

How they communicate could be the stumbling block to their success and could, consequently, be holding your organization back from achieving its goals.

A Different, Better Approach

The best sales communicators know that for an interaction with an executive customer to be productive, three elements must be present: 1) Understanding 2) Value and 3) Trust.

Understanding

When salespeople use “understanding” as their first measure of progress, as opposed to agreement or buy-in, we’ve found that they are better able to communicate with clarity and precision and move the sales process forward.

Value

Once a customer feels that you do understand their situation, you need to be able to articulate the business and personal value of your offer. In other words, how can your products and services help customers solve business challenges and ease personal concerns or enhance their position or career?

Trust

These days, organizations can be incredibly complex. Buying decisions can involve multiple stakeholders from across many different lines of business. To earn the sum trust of the group, salespeople need to be able to communicate understanding and demonstrate value in ways that are credible and relevant – personally and professionally – to every stakeholder at the table.

Sounds pretty intuitive, right?

Understanding. Value. Trust. But, achieving all three requires your sales team to master the art and science of business outcome conversations.

“
**If you grab me
in the first two
minutes, I might
give you five
more...**

- CEO of Fortune 100
technology company

”

How to Master Executive-level Business Outcome Conversations

To communicate understanding, value, and trust, salespeople must be able to demonstrate they understand an executive's world, display executive presence, and create and sustain an ongoing dialogue with the executive.

Understand the executive's world.

- Determine what's important to the executive.
- Provide insights and recommendations that respond to what's most important

Display executive presence.

- Maintain composure and energy, conveying a strong and knowledgeable presence.
- Build rapport and connection that encourages the executive to talk frankly with you.

Create and sustain an ongoing dialogue.

- Show the executive that you understand his or her comments and are able to incorporate them into your thinking by linking back to them.
- Ask thought-provoking questions to uncover the issues most pressing to the executive.
- Handle tough questions in a way that demonstrates you have the knowledge and tenacity to help the executive solve his or her problems.

The good news is these skills can be learned. The even better news? These skills, when applied, can have a measurable impact on your bottom line. Mastering these skills takes intense practice. That's where Mandel Communications comes in.

How One Technology Reseller Did It

The problem:

The sales team at this large technology reseller was increasingly faced with the challenge of selling to C-level and line-of-business executives. While the team was skilled in selling the features and benefits of the 300,000 IT products it represented, sales growth suffered because the team couldn't "make the executive connection."

The solution:

The company enlisted the help of Mandel Communications to build new skills in initiating and conducting compelling executive conversations. During the training, Mandel:

- Challenged the team to practice new skills "live" in front of actual executives and mentors
- Provided extensive video feedback and real-time coaching to build skills and confidence
- Introduced a proven, easy-to-use messaging and conversations framework that the team can use to plan quickly for their executive conversations

The results:

Confidence and skills levels increased, and the sales team is now more effective at conducting compelling business outcome conversations with the executives who influence buying decisions.

The Mandel Communications Difference

Mandel readies technology sales teams to:

- Plan for conversations that motivate line-of-business executives to support your proposals.
- Get attention in the first two minutes of every interaction.
- Demonstrate observable executive presence that builds credibility and trust.
- Ask thought-provoking, outcome-oriented questions.
- Handle tough questions from executive buyers in ways that demonstrate your acumen and build credibility with buyers.

We do this via a rigorous approach to training that is:

- Based on learn-by-doing activities that produce skills that stick.
- Designed to bridge the gap between knowing what to do and how to do it.
- Linked to your organization's current business issues, initiatives, and goals.
- Focused on real world performance improvement and on-the-job application.
- Enlivened by built-in practice sessions.
- Enriched by immediate videotaped feedback.
- Supported by expert, individualized, in-the-moment coaching by Mandel coaches and executive mentors.

Sources

¹ <http://www.gartner.com/newsroom/id/2208015>

² <http://www.idc.com/eagroup/download/accelerating-new-buyers-journey.pdf>

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Increasing my salespeople's ability to do that one important thing, and that's to manage new conversations, helps me be more successful.

- Vice President for a Global
Technology Company

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