



**Five Common Sales Issues
That Impact Salespeople's Ability to Win Deals**

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Introduction

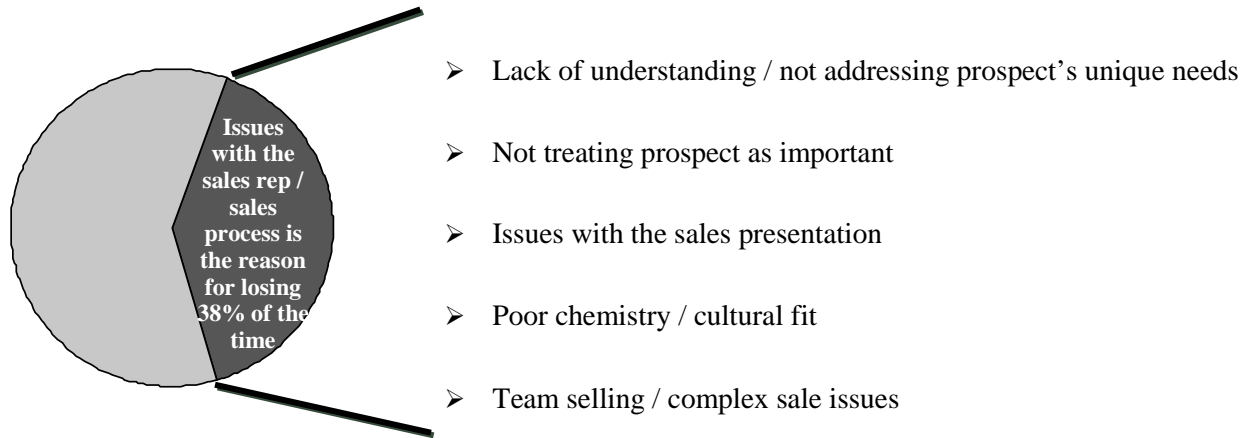


This whitepaper explores the five most common sales issues that can impact a salesperson's ability to win deals. Based on feedback from thousands of postdecision win/loss interviews, a few themes consistently surface regarding why salespeople lose in new business situations. This paper uses the aggregate results of these interviews to analyze the most prevalent reasons salespeople lose.

In an average win/loss analysis program (when conducted by an independent third party), 38 percent of prospects cite sales issues as a deciding factor in a lost deal. Additionally, in 21 percent of bids won situations, prospects also cite sales issues even though they awarded the business to the salesperson.

Several common and negative sales behaviors contribute to these percentages, with the most frequent being a failure on behalf of the salesperson to fully understand and address prospects' unique needs. Figure 1 highlights this issue as well as the other most frequently occurring sales concerns, including not making prospects feel valued, ineffective sales presentations, a lack of chemistry with the prospect/cultural fit with the prospect's organization, and complex sale/team selling issues.

**Fig. 1, Most Frequently Mentioned Issues
With the Sales Process**



Let's explore these five key salesmanship issues in more detail.

Understanding and Addressing the Prospect's Unique Needs

One common sales process shortcoming frequently cited by prospects is that the salesperson failed to understand and address their unique needs/circumstances. This sales issue can be overcome in several ways:

1. Performing adequate background research on the prospect/organization. Prospects frequently mention that the salesperson did not know enough about them or their organizations before they presented their proposed solution. If the salesperson does not know much about the prospect or company, it can be very difficult for the salesperson to make a compelling presentation. It also starts the entire sales process off on the wrong foot and means the prospect must spend time educating the salesperson about things the salesperson should have taken the time to learn on his own.

Following are two examples of real prospect feedback from situations where the salesperson did not perform adequate research before meeting with

the prospect. For the purposes of this whitepaper, the actual company names have been scrubbed and will be referred to as “Sample Company.”

When prospects mention that salespeople do not understand their unique needs, it is often because salespeople do not ask the right questions (or enough questions) during the sales process.

The two finalists we selected did more homework than Sample Company. They learned about the culture of our organization, about our people, and about what we did. What these two firms pulled into their presentations distinguished their presentations. For example, we had bios of our people online. They went online and read the bios of the people that would be at the presentation. In one instance, when one presenter introduced himself to one of our people, his comment was, “You look just like in your picture.” Another example was the way one firm took what they knew about our people and appealed to what our people were interested in during the presentation. The two finalists had memorized (or at least studied) all of the data out there about our company. They did not spend more time with me but they did their own research. The sales rep and other presentation team members from Sample Company did not do as much research as their counterparts; if they were familiar with our company, it did not show.

The sales rep did not do any background research before she came in. She did not know anything about our business, including the type of company we were, our size, or our product line. She should have known more about us especially since we were already a client on another side of their business.

Prospects can tell when a salesperson has not done his homework. Salespeople may think that they can bluff their way through, but there is no substitute for being prepared and learning as much as possible about the audience in advance.

2. Asking the right questions. When prospects mention that salespeople do not understand their unique needs, it is often because salespeople do not ask the right questions (or enough questions) during the sales process. This flaw is perhaps one of the most detrimental sales mistakes that salespeople

Selling is all about asking questions, and often salespeople (especially those at the beginning of their careers) do not do an adequate job uncovering the needs of prospects or properly qualifying each prospect.

make. Selling is all about asking questions, and often salespeople (especially those at the beginning of their careers) do not do an adequate job uncovering the needs of prospects or properly qualifying each prospect. The way to overcome this is by asking great questions. Many times, salespeople do not uncover what prospects are truly looking for and have difficulty making great presentations as a result.

Here is one example of what can happen when a salesperson does not ask all the right questions:

The other competitors we spoke with wanted to go into a lot more detail about our unique needs before meeting with us. They dug very deeply on multiple issues. They uncovered, discovered, and vetted. The prep work they put in was more substantial than Sample Company. In my mind, I appreciate this kind of effort at the front end. There was a pretty big difference between the time I spent with the others going over questions and requirements compared to Sample Company.

When a salesperson does a good job of asking great questions and really getting to know prospects, she will impress them with her interest in their situations and businesses. Also, people naturally enjoy talking about themselves, and asking questions gives prospects a platform and a captive audience. Asking good questions will increase the chances of winning the business, not only because the prospect will like and respect the salesperson more, but also because the salesperson will be in a much better position to execute throughout the sales process.

3. Listening. There is an old sales saying that goes, “You’ve got two ears and one mouth; use them in that proportion.” In situations where salespeople spend too much time talking and not enough time listening, they focus most of their value proposition on information that is largely irrelevant to the prospects involved. This issue again comes down to the salesperson’s inability to identify the true needs

Many salespeople do not take enough time to listen, and listening is critical in selling.

of the prospect in advance of the sales presentation. Many salespeople do not take enough time to listen, and listening is critical in selling.

Here are some examples from salespeople who did not adequately listen to prospects:

The salesperson lost this deal because of the presentation. I gave the sales rep insight into what our company was looking for and coached him before the presentation. He was either too busy, not engaged, did not listen, or did not understand what I said.

Our consultant asked each firm to cover certain topics at the presentation. This was a test to see if a company would listen to us and do what we asked. The sales rep from Sample Company did not listen at all. He went out of his way to sell us in a sales speech. We had already identified his company as a finalist and were past this. We got fluff, no substance. The other two finalists were very responsive to our request. We were able to get a sense of what it would be like working with them. We picked up on which companies delivered what we asked for and which did not. The fact that the sales presentation did not address our specifications made it very clear that Sample Company did not listen to us.

Prospects can tell when salespeople are not listening intently. It often comes across in the salesperson's presentations and interactions with the prospect during the sales process. Even if they ask the right questions, salespeople will still have trouble addressing the prospect's needs if they don't pay attention to the answers.

4. Being consultative. A lack of a consultative approach is the final explanation that prospects tend to give for why salespeople do not fully understand their needs. Being consultative involves the previous three aspects we have reviewed. It involves asking great questions, listening attentively, and performing background research on prospects (and companies) so that the salesperson

In order to be consultative, the salesperson must show that he understands each prospect's situation and make suggestions about how the product or service can meet the needs they are aware of as well as those they may not have even thought of.

truly collaborates with prospects in developing the right solutions for their organizations.

Here is an example of a situation in which the prospect felt that the salesperson was not being consultative:

We knew they reviewed our situation and understood it at a baseline level. However, we would have liked to see them analyze our current situation and make recommendations on ways to make our business richer, even if they did so just to give us ideas to consider. We liked the winning firm the best because they offered lots of helpful suggestions to streamline and eliminate the manual interventions we had been doing. The winning firm put recommendations in writing for us to consider; they were more consultative.

Being consultative involves the finer points of truly understanding each prospect's unique needs. It involves not only doing research, asking questions, and listening, but then taking the knowledge acquired to the next level. In order to be consultative, the salesperson must demonstrate understanding of each prospect's situation and make suggestions about how the product or service can meet the needs they are aware of as well as those they may not have even thought of.

When salespeople don't accurately identify each prospect's unique needs, problems will arise as the sales process progresses.

When salespeople don't accurately identify each prospect's unique needs, problems arise as the sales process progresses. An accurate needs assessment is "table stakes" for a successful sales process. It's hard to win if you don't know what the prospect wants.

Treating Prospects as Valued Customers

The second most frequently mentioned area where the sales process breaks down may be surprising. Prospects often comment that the salesperson and his company did not demonstrate a strong desire to win their business or assure the prospects that they would be made to feel valued once they became a customer.

One third of prospects who cite the sales approach as a key reason for not selecting a company attribute their concern to not feeling important.

Given the amount of money companies spend on each prospective client during the sales process, it would seem that demonstrating a desire for the business would be inherent, but it is not. In fact, one-third of prospects who cite the sales approach as a key reason for not selecting a company attribute their concern to not feeling important. If prospects perceive that they are not important to the salesperson, they will infer that they will not be important customers to the company.

Sales personnel should make every prospect feel valued 100 percent of the time. Now, it could be argued that not all prospects are good fits for a company, but if a company is going to spend the time going after the business, then they need to convey to the prospects that they would be important. Otherwise, they shouldn't waste their time or the prospects'. Prospects often comment that salespeople spend too much time selling them a product versus offering them a solution to a problem. If a salesperson is not able to solve a prospect's problem, then he should accept that it's not a good fit and spend time on prospects whose problems he can address.

There are four salesmanship issues that can make prospects feel unimportant: prospects perceive that they are just another sale for the books; lack of responsiveness from the salesperson; the prospect perceives the salesperson to be arrogant; and the salesperson's company's size makes prospects feel like they would be "a small fish in a big pond."

Let's explore each of these issues in more detail.

1. Just another sale for the books. One major way in which prospects cite that they feel unimportant to salespeople is when they perceive that the salesperson is only in it for the commission check. Prospects often feel that salespeople are not genuine in their efforts and, therefore, it makes prospects feel insignificant. They feel that the salesperson is only in it to close the deal and doesn't really care about the long term needs of the

prospect.

Following is a quote from a prospect who did not feel important during the sales process:

Throughout the sales process, I had a feeling that my business was being approached strictly as a sales call . . . a deal to close for the books. I did not feel comfortable that the sales rep was invested in the long haul with me. And this is an impression of how it might have been with the company as a whole. The rep was very, very knowledgeable and knew the product in and out, but I could not get comfortable that the company was going to deliver the service and long term relationship that means a lot to me. I decided to stay where I've been. The big negative was the overall tone or feeling of the sales process. My impression was that it was a sales operation first, not a service opportunity. I felt like they were looking for the win and then they would forget about us.

When a salesperson is not responsive to prospects, prospects infer that the salesperson's company will not be responsive to them once they become customers.

Remember, the prospect's perception is reality, so even if a salesperson feels that she always treats prospects as important, some prospects may perceive the opposite.

2. Responsiveness. Poor responsiveness is a selling blunder that is entirely within the control of the salesperson. While this is not a major issue among most salespeople, it does come up, and when it does, it makes prospects feel like the salesperson does not want their business. The salesperson is often the initial first impression that a customer or prospect will have of a company. When a salesperson is not responsive to prospects, prospects infer that the salesperson's company will not be responsive to them once they become customers. Therefore, they will feel unimportant.

Here is a quote that exemplifies this type of sales issue:

The sales rep traveled a lot and was in conferences often so was difficult to reach. We had to exchange a lot of voice mails. Sometimes he did not provide me with everything I asked for or gave me the

wrong information. His responses were not timely enough.

Being responsive can be one of the greatest competitive differentiators for a salesperson.

No prospect has ever said that he felt the salesperson was too responsive or too quick to get back to him to resolve issues or answer questions. Being responsive can be one of the greatest competitive differentiators for a salesperson. Being responsive not only shows prospects that the salesperson cares about them and makes them feel important, but it also differentiates the salesperson from all the other salespeople who take days to get back to prospects for simple answers to their questions.

3. Arrogance. Perceived arrogance is another issue that ends some sales processes as soon as they begin. When a salesperson comes off as all-knowing or condescending to a prospect, this can be a challenging situation and often makes prospects feel unimportant. It is one thing to be confident; it is another to be arrogant.

Additionally, the root cause of a perception of arrogance can come from other places, such as a company's position in the marketplace. For example, if the salesperson sells for a market leader, some prospects may have a preconceived notion about the company before entering into a sales cycle. Here is a sample quote from a prospect who perceived a salesperson as arrogant due to her company's positioning in the marketplace:

They came in with an attitude that came across as they were all-knowing; because they were an industry leader, they did not have to prove themselves. They had arrogance about them. They should have sold us on their customer service instead of resting on their laurels. We did not like their attitude at the presentation and were concerned about what they would be like to work with . . . In the end, they came in third. They did not try to prove themselves to us, and they failed to win the account because of it. No effort was made to customize the presentation . . . The winning firm did a great job making us feel confident they could do

Sometimes the sheer size of a company will make prospects feel like they will become “another number” or “small fish in a big pond.”

the job and that they wanted the account.

No one likes to be called arrogant, and salespeople are always shocked when they receive feedback that a prospect viewed them this way. Remember, some of what salespeople do may be perceived the wrong way. Even if they don't mean to come off that way, they may have to alter how they approach each sales situation.

4. A small fish in a big pond. Sometimes the sheer size of a company will make prospects feel like they will become “another number” or “small fish in a big pond.” This happens quite often in sales situations for big companies. When selling for a big company with many customers, prospects might fear feeling insignificant, and the salesperson will need to address this with them on a proactive basis.

Here is a quote in which a prospect felt he would not be an important client because of how many customers the selling firm had:

They are a large company. Based on our experience, being a small fish in a big pond likely means that the service is not as good as it would be from a smaller company. We did not think we were a big enough deal for this large company.

Treating prospects as though they would be important customers is critical in winning deals. There are a variety of ways in which prospects perceive that salespeople make them feel unimportant. Similar to the challenges of not correctly identifying each prospect's needs, when prospects don't feel important, it will cause problems in all areas of the sales process.

Issues with the Sales Presentation

Presentations are another area in which prospects frequently cite issues. Most people assume that when presentations go poorly, the salesperson should be aware of it. However, at times this is not the case. Subtle things can go wrong in a presentation that the salesperson may not see, and unless they are pointed out, the salesperson and company run the risk of repeating the same mistakes again and again.

There are four main areas that prospects cite with respect to how sales presentations could have been improved: lack of preparedness; lack of customization to the presentation to show that the salesperson understood the prospect's unique needs; lack of salesperson's product or industry knowledge; and lack of differentiation.

Win/loss research reveals that despite where a company ranks among competitors going into the final sales presentation, a poor presentation will leave the prospect with an unsettling impression and often results in a lost sale.

1. Preparedness. Preparation is one of the most important aspects of the sales process. It results in strong execution and also leads to confidence and enthusiasm—all critical ingredients to a successful sales presentation. Salespeople simply must strive to “own” their sales presentations, because if they don't, competitors will, and they will win the business.

The following prospect quotes illustrate how lack of preparation influences the sales outcome:

Sample Company was less prepared than the other two finalists. They were not ill prepared; I do not want to fault the sales rep. They tackled all they needed to, but the other two sales reps over prepared. They left no stone unturned. This was a fairly complex sales situation, so the client hired me as an independent consultant to help them find the best solution. The other two finalists wanted to go into a lot more detail with me about the fine points of the deal before meeting with the client. They both

dug very deeply on multiple issues.

We were not as impressed by Sample Company's presentation or the people involved. Their sales team was not organized and lacked the right people. We could tell that the winning firm had practiced the presentation many times. The winning firm included key people who were prepared and impressive.

Prospects frequently feel that sales presentations are “canned” and not tailored to their unique needs.

As these quotes suggest, it can also be the case where competitors simply prepare more. It may not be that a salesperson is unprepared but that the competition does more prep work to impress the prospect and outsell him to win the deal.

2. Customization. Another critical sales presentation issue involves a lack of customization to each prospect's particular situation. Prospects frequently feel that sales presentations are “canned” and not tailored to their unique needs. Additionally, if a prospect feels that the message was not customized, it will be hard for her to feel important.

Here is a quote from a prospect who felt that an RFP was not customized:

I think the RFP could have been more tailored to our company. The other vendors really customized their responses. The competition went out of their way to show that they had clients in our field. Sample Company did not tailor their response at all . . . I think the other players are better at customizing their capabilities and RFP responses. Sample Company will need to do a better job of responding to RFPs if they want to get into these types of deal situations in the future.

Customizing a presentation does not necessarily mean recreating all of the sales materials. Customization comes as much from what one says as it does from what one shows the prospect.

Limited product or industry knowledge can severely limit a salesperson's ability to make a great presentation. A salesperson can be the best presenter in the world, but if he doesn't understand his product, he will lack substance.

3. Product / industry knowledge. Another sales presentation comment commonly referenced by prospects is that the salesperson was not knowledgeable about their product or industry. This can be problematic because often prospects need to be educated by salespeople about the specifics of how a product or service works. When a salesperson comes across as unknowledgeable, prospects will likely lose confidence and choose a firm with a salesperson who better understands their particular product or industry.

Following is an example of a prospect who viewed their salesperson as unknowledgeable.

Although the sales rep would get high marks from me in regard to the sales presentation and his sales skills, the fact was that his product knowledge was low. I do not know why the sales rep was not aware of the product's integration capabilities (or lack thereof). I feel like I was incorrectly sold a bill of goods and that the sales rep was uninformed about the product.

Limited product or industry knowledge can severely limit a salesperson's ability to make a great presentation. A salesperson can be the best presenter in the world, but if he doesn't understand his product, he will lack substance. And if he isn't knowledgeable about his industry, he will not be able to speak proficiently about the competition. If a salesperson lacks knowledge, it will be hard for him to instill confidence in the audience or to transfer enthusiasm to them about what he is selling. All else being equal, prospects want to buy from experts.

4. Differentiation. Another recurring sales presentation issue involves salespeople's ability to differentiate themselves, their companies, and their products and services from the competition. Differentiating one's pitch is perhaps the highest art form of making a great presentation. Making sales presentations distinctive not only involves strong execution of the fundamentals, but it also involves delivering some form of creativity within the pitch.

Differentiating one's pitch is perhaps the highest art form of making a great presentation.

In order to differentiate, salespeople really must know their product well, and must be able to articulate how they are different from their competition. This can be very difficult, especially in industries where the product or service is largely commoditized.

Here are some quotes about salespeople who struggled to differentiate their pitches during the sales process:

They came across as competent, knowledgeable, and friendly, but they didn't differentiate themselves. At no point did they come out and say, "Here is where we are better." They seemed to know us but didn't use that knowledge to take the presentation to the next level.

We were not closed-minded about changing vendors. However, if Sample Company wanted to win, they had to do a better job differentiating themselves. We did not see a compelling reason to switch. Their pricing and technology were similar to what we currently had. Sample Company needs to show what makes them different. Otherwise, they are just going to be a commodity item.

Articulating how one is different is an advanced part of selling. Salespeople need to not only understand themselves and their company but also the competitive landscape of their industry. They will need to understand their competition, because it will be impossible to articulate how they are different if they don't know anything about their competitors. This is why newer salespeople often have a harder time differentiating themselves against more mature sales professionals. Differentiation comes with experience, seasoning, and a commitment to your profession.

Chemistry / Cultural Fit with Organization

Building rapport and developing chemistry with prospects is one of the more difficult aspects of the sales process, not only because some elements of personal chemistry are outside your control, but also because there is often significant time pressure on salespeople (especially at the beginning of a sales cycle).

The fourth area where prospects often mention a disconnect during the sales process is with respect to the personal chemistry they feel with the salesperson or with the salesperson's organization. Many salespeople feel there isn't much they can do about their ability to have chemistry with prospects, which is not altogether false - you click with some people better than others. It is a fact, however, that the very best salespeople are the ones who can get along with the most people. While chemistry cannot always be overcome, there are several tactics one can take to improve the likelihood of connecting with a prospect, such as preparation and planning.

There are three main issues that prospects cite when they give feedback with respect to a lack of chemistry with salespeople: inability to build rapport, regional/cultural differences, and salespeople coming across as overly aggressive or pushy. Let's review each of these areas in more detail.

1. Building rapport. The ability to develop a sense of chemistry with prospects comes early on in the sales process. When a prospect does not feel chemistry with the salesperson, it is usually because the salesperson could have done a better job at taking more time to build rapport at the beginning of the sales cycle versus rushing into "the hard sell." Many times, salespeople do not spend enough time getting to know prospects on a more personal level before moving on into the sales process.

The sales process has a flow to it, and just as a salesperson should identify what the prospect is looking for before making a sales presentation, she should also establish some type of rapport before identifying prospect needs. Building rapport and developing chemistry with prospects is one of the more difficult aspects of the sales process, not only because some elements of personal chemistry are outside of one's control, but also because there is often significant time pressure put on salespeople (especially at the beginning of a sales cycle). Additionally, each prospect is different. Some like

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to take time at the beginning of a sales process to get to know the salesperson, and others like to get right into the sales discussion. Some prospect situations will seem effortless in developing rapport, and others will seem very difficult.

Here is a prospect quote that illustrates the need for rapport building:

There was a concern on our part that we did not connect with the salesperson immediately. It may have been that he was quiet, but we did not think he was as strong as the other salespeople. Again, it could have been his personality, the lack of rapport between us, or his understanding of the business. All of us on the committee felt this way. The salespeople we met from the other firms were easy for us to build a rapport with. We felt they would be honest with us and straightforward.

The best antidote to a lack of chemistry with prospects is preparation. As mentioned earlier, prospects can tell when a salesperson is prepared, and this will put them at ease at the beginning of a sales conversation. Additionally, the more a salesperson prepares, the more flexible he can be with how he approaches each prospect. Therefore, depending on how much rapport is felt with a prospect at the beginning of a sales cycle, a salesperson will be able to alter his approach and presentation style to best fit the needs of the prospect.

2. Regional/cultural differences. In addition to the personal chemistry that may or may not occur between the prospect and the salesperson, cultural chemistry between the prospect and salesperson's organizations is important to the sales process. Often, the end decision comes down to how well the prospect "likes" the selling company and its employees and/or if there is a cultural fit between the two companies. While a salesperson can adjust his strategy to prevail over a lack of rapport between individuals, an organization-wide mismatch in chemistry and cultural fit is more difficult to overcome. For example, it may be that

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the prospect’s company is small and is in an industry where relationships are of the utmost importance to their business. If the prospect is looking at a very large, technology-focused company where the relationship is formed primarily via the Internet, there may be a disconnect. In this scenario, the prospect may connect with the people he meets during the sales process, but if he knows that his personal, one-on-one contact will be limited, he may decide there is not a good “fit.”

Part of our decision was based on how we fit by industry, demographics, and corporate culture into the entity chosen. Sample Company was the most progressive of the companies we looked at. We are a stodgy manufacturing company, and Sample Company was too progressive. They were too technologically based for our company and culture. The firm we selected relied less on technology and more on people. They had a higher-touch service model that worked better for our culture.

3. Being too pushy or overly aggressive. Another common sales flaw that is often seen in less experienced sales organizations is aggressive behavior or pushiness. The definition of “pushy” varies from prospect to prospect, so it is important to feel out the prospect and establish a cadence of communication that is mutually acceptable early on in the sales process. It is one thing to be persistent, but being pushy means that the salesperson is following up too much and not understanding how the prospect wants to progress in the sales process.

The following quote exemplifies this situation:

We had significant issues with the sales rep. I would describe her as “very pushy.” I’m sure in this business she has to be that way to a certain extent, but my advice would be for her to pull it back a little. She also talks a lot and doesn’t listen so well. Even after we told her that her company had lost, we were still getting phone calls from her, which we equated to whining.

Complex Sale/Team Selling Issues

Whenever you expand the number of people presenting to a prospect, you increase your level of exposure to potential salesmanship issues.

The final area of salesmanship issues involves team selling situations. Team selling happens frequently in large deal situations in which prospects meet the team with which they will be working on a day-to-day basis once the sales process is over. Or, if it is a more technical sale, prospects may need to meet with technology personnel in order to better understand what they are being sold and how it will fit their needs.

Whenever the number of people presenting to a prospect is expanded, the level of exposure to potential salesmanship issues is increased. That said, it is obviously imperative to the sales process that the prospect meet the appropriate contacts, and the prospect will be more likely to feel valued if the salesperson takes the time to introduce everyone. Therefore, it is critical that all members of the sales team work together and get feedback on their performance so that everyone can understand how important his or her individual role is in securing new business.

There are three key areas that prospects mention in complex/team selling situations: lack of key personnel/mix of personnel at the presentation; issues with individual sales presentation team members/weaker presenters; and lack of cohesiveness.

Let's review each of these areas in more detail.

1. Mix of personnel at the presentation. One significant issue that can arise during team selling situations is when the mix of sales presentation team members is not what the prospect was expecting. This can happen because either there are missing presentation team members or because the mix of personnel is not well balanced. In complex sales situations, prospects often want to meet the team of people with whom they would be working, and, as the below quotes show, if this team is not present or does not present well, it can often result in a lost sale.

Issues with the mix of personnel can also be the result of diversity issues, not just the mix between sales, marketing, technology, and service personnel.

Although I really feel that she did a good job as a sales rep, we ultimately agreed that the winning firm's team was a lot more energetic, and, as a result, they connected better with us. Sample Company's sales team was much more serious than the winning team, and it came across as a little stodgy . . . Also, we never met anyone from their client service area, whereas the winning firm brought in our actual client service people during the presentation. It was good to be able to look the person in the eye and get a feel for what it would be like to work with them.

Additionally, issues with the mix of personnel can also be the result of diversity issues, not just the mix between sales, marketing, technology, and service personnel.

We are a nonprofit organization that assists women in a variety of areas. Furthermore, the committee that made this decision was [composed] primarily of women. Sample Company's presentation team did not have any women on it. In contrast, the winning firm sent in a team of women, including the president of the company, who was female. Sample Company may want to consider the composition of the audience when putting a team together. They also should have put together material that was better suited for the female demographics of our workforce.

It is critical to bring the right people to each presentation. Whether these are technical or service people or whether it involves the right gender or diversity mix, prospects often notice when a sales team does not have the right blend of personnel.

2. Less experienced presenters. Another important issue that negatively impacts prospect perceptions is when weaker sales presentation team members present during a team sales approach. Prospects frequently comment on less experienced members of the sales presentation team or when client service personnel are brought in to meet with prospects. These businesspeople are typically not

A lack of presentation abilities can end up leaving the prospect with the impression that other presentation team members are not excited to be at the meeting, and therefore, prospects can feel unimportant.

accustomed to making sales presentations, and they often come across as unprepared or inexperienced.

The client service rep did not come across well during the presentation. He lacked confidence. He was somber and not outgoing enough. He did not take command of the room or the client. The client did not feel he would manage the relationship well. The client service rep needed to present and communicate better. The winning firm spent most of their time talking about the quality of their people and were able to show the client service rep in the best possible way.

The one problem we had with the presentation team was with the client service representative. He was experienced but was not the type of individual we wanted working with us in difficult situations. We were not sure how he would handle them. When you only have a short time to shape your impression of an individual and that impression is not strong, it can take you a long time to get over it. We did not want to take any risks. If this individual is going to be put in front of potential clients, he has to be able to establish a rapport with the people in the room and make a positive impression on them. This did not happen . . . He was not someone we wanted to work with. We had concerns about him being able to navigate us through issues or tough situations. He was the one reason they lost the business.

Additionally, a lack of presentation abilities can end up leaving the prospect with the impression that other presentation team members are not excited to be at the meeting, and therefore, prospects can feel unimportant.

We got the impression from the individual that would be our day-to-day contact that it was not important to him that Sample Company win this account. He did not jump through any hoops for us. He was not warm and fuzzy toward us, and this turned us off. He may have been a good accountant, but that is not all that counts.

When a team does not come across as a cohesive unit, it is typically a signal of a lack of preparation.

Although these types of issues can be frustrating for sales personnel, it is ultimately the salesperson's responsibility to quarterback the selling team. Whether the salesperson chooses to address this issue through training or enhanced preparation, candid prospect feedback shared with less experienced team members can also be a powerful catalyst for change and development.

3. Cohesiveness. Each of the preceding team selling issues can leave the prospect feeling that there was a lack of cohesiveness during the presentation. Lack of cohesiveness can be symptomatic of multiple issues, including lack of preparation, contrasting presentation styles and personalities, egos, and a mix of experienced and less experienced or nervous presenters.

As the following quotes show, lack of cohesiveness is a much cited comment by prospects during team sale debriefs.

The presentation team as a whole did not work well together. For example, one presentation team member interjected a comment during another team member's presentation that contradicted what the team member was saying. This was not a cohesive group; it was clear they had not worked together a lot before. The presentation was not choreographed well.

The sales rep could have done more to prepare the team for the presentation. He should have gone over it with the team beforehand. He also could have worked in the other sales team members better. There were conflicting stories told by individuals on the team. They should have prepared a cohesive story . . . The sales presentation lacked a prepared, customized approach. It looked like it had been pulled together last minute.

Cohesiveness is critical during team selling presentations, and when a team does not come across as a cohesive unit, it is typically a signal of a lack of preparation. It is only through dry runs and consistent preparation that the best selling teams

become successful. Just as being consultative is the highest form of understanding prospects' unique needs and differentiation is the top distinction for making a great presentation, cohesiveness is the highest compliment a selling team can receive.

Conclusion

As this white paper has shown, there are many things that can go wrong during a sales process. Reviewing each of these areas in more detail should help salespeople and sales managers understand the types of "red flags" to look out for during each sales process and this process will ultimately help to improve sales effectiveness.