Selling Strategic Solutions To Multiple Decision Makers

Selling strategic solution is more complex today than ever before. There are more people involved in the sale, they take longer to decide, and their decision making process seems to be made a blurry fog. It used to be that sales people could make a single call on a single buyer and that person would make the decision. This is no longer true. Today the decision making process is done by consensus and coloration. People who want to get buy-in from others and people who don't want to be held responsible for making a single solitary decision that others will have to live with.

A few years ago, it took an average of five to six calls on a prospect before they would make a decision. Today, according to research it takes an average of eight to nine calls before a decision is reached. When you think about this, how many calls are you making on the account?

With the global economy, we have competitors from India, China, Europe and other countries, who are hungrier, faster, and less expensive than we are. These new competitors are making things even more confusing for the prospective client which entails getting more people involved from their side, or the hiring of consultants to advise them how to procure, all of which leads to an even longer sales cycle. Where it took only an average of two people to make a decision in 1990, in 2000 the number of people involved in the sale averaged three to five. Today, that number is six to eight people. How many of the people involved in the sale do you know?

When you think about this, it's not difficult to realize that many things affecting the strategy of the sale takes place when you are not there. These people talk to each other and make decisions we are not even aware of and that contradict what we were told. Sometimes the person who was the decision maker is no longer the decision maker because of internal power struggles or committee empowerment. And we all know and have experienced the sale to be derailed at the last minute by something completely unforeseen.

Average performing sales people do not meet with the multiple people involved in the sale – and this is probably the biggest reason behind lost sales. They rely on one person's opinion. They never meet with the other people who are involved with the decision.

We must meet and work with the multiple decision makers in an organization, to become more effective in selling strategic solutions. We need to understand each person's role in the decision making process and understand what the expertise each brings to their role.

Because there are many people involved, we need to relate our solution to each person differently and according to their roles and expertise. This may require you to talk specs and features to one person and the business benefits to another. Others will want to know what standards you use, and others will want to know more about the results or business outcomes. Without meeting each person, your sales strategy will become equivalent to throwing darts in a dark room.

Here are several critical pieces of advice to help you and your team to become better positioned with the prospective client;

1. Learn to deal with multiple decision makers in an organization, each of whom can influence the purchase. You need to understand their role and as importantly, understand what their expertise is that others will acquiesce to or not argue against because of that expertise. The best way to understand this is to ask them.
2. Become excellent at questioning. The ability to question well builds rapport and demonstrates your expertise throughout the sales cycle. The process of how you "run the sale" is what your prospect is evaluating as much as they are evaluating the solution.
3. Try to educate the prospective client as to all the options and the advantages and disadvantages of each option of the solution to the client's problem. This is a key in consultative selling strategies.
4. Try to identify the economic buyer immediately. Look for someone who is responsible for the P&L. Then you need to identify the economic buyer's "go to" person and work through them.
5. After you meet with people in the account provide a brief recap with the economic buyer and the "go to" person. If possible, do it in person.
6. Perform account mapping - that is, align the titles of your execs with of their execs.
7. A common selling approach is needed so the members of your sales pursuit team can speak the same the language and quickly grasp the sales strategy.
8. Begin developing a win theme and deal strategy on paper as soon as possible and convey that to all the members of the team. Adjust the win theme with new information. Test the win theme.
9. The pursuit team needs to meet in person regularly. Use tools such as whiteboards, a sales strategy process, to build a good and effective win-strategy.