

I've long written blogs about splitting up the sales process and making sure that the relevant skill sets in the business OWN their part of the sales process (Lead Gen, Subject Matter experts etc....)

But when I do a review of our clients' closed deals in the previous year (I've just finished this for 2010), it's interesting to note that the best salesmen are the guys who run the business.

It's not as simple as saying that they own the company so can give deals out / have the gravitas etc.... but rather that in my view they have the best blend of the following attributes:

Honesty - I think that our clients who sell repeatedly to new blue chip clients need to demonstrate their integrity from meeting 1. I know from dealing with them on a daily basis that the more open and direct they are with us, the better they will be in the room with a prospect. This ALWAYS turns out to be true, even if it means walking away from an opportunity that's not right for them.

It goes without saying that some salespeople struggle to communicate this effectively.

Subject Matter expertise - This needs to be demonstrated from meeting 1. We advise clients very often about the fact that the first hour is their opportunity to add value and "consult" - building credibility and appetite in the prospect from the first few moments. The best performers in this area are those who listen well and ask good questions, NOT the ones who talk endlessly.

It's just as easy to demonstrate expertise by asking good questions - rather than lecturing. PLUS, you get to find out what the prospect needs too. Salespeople can achieve this through great question technique, but too often this goes by the wayside as they search and probe for an opportunity because that's what "solution sales" told them to do.

Strategic input - The best deal-makers need to communicate a sense of strategic

understanding. The bigger picture (especially for technology sales) is crucial, and this input often comes in the form of stories told from experience which reassure and impress a prospect, and make them feel that the individual has the bigger picture close to his heart.

Deal-making skills - This is all about not being greedy. I've never seen in the last 8 years of helping consulting / technology and media companies close deals a situation where the first deal is for big money. In our world, deals start small... even if the big deal has been scoped out and priced up.

Who does this part best? Well it's always a commercially savvy person - who is often the boss. That's not to say that a salesperson can't do this well, but we nearly always see that the boss steals the negotiations away by getting involved in contracts too early. Similarly the salesperson often goes in too heavy and scares off a client without even knowing why it's been lost.

Our experience tells us that these are the key ingredients for the best possible new business... delivered by a blend of skills. The reality is that the guy running the business nearly always has that blend.