



## Mastering Technical Sales

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*John Care, Managing Director*

## 2009 New Year's Resolutions

### Self-Improvement for the Pre-Sales Engineer

Had I followed even half the New Year Resolutions I have made over the past ten years, I would be under 100 pounds in weight; much loved by every single child and animal within ten miles; responsible for a major dip in Starbuck's profits and be enrolled in the Princeton Theological Seminary. Needless to say, very little of that actually happened and my success rate was fairly dismal.

However, as a pre-sales engineer there are a number of professional and personal resolutions you can make for 2009 to increase your 3P's of Performance, Promotability and income Potential. These resolutions have been collected from colleagues over the years and are presented for your benefit. The call to action is to implement just a few of them!

### **This Year I Will ..**

These are some of the positive actions you can take during 2009 which can impact the 3P's and also contribute towards your employment stability:

1. **Discuss expectations with my boss in January.** Sit down with your boss sometime in the next 30 days and discuss specific expectations for the year. Don't make it a formal review session but do leverage any feedback you received in your last official performance appraisal.
2. **Solicit feedback.** Ask for specific feedback after every sales call or customer facing interaction. A good model is to request the salesperson/peer/your manager to use the top-bottom-next three system unless you have some other preference. That means, "*Which three things I did or said should I repeat, which three things should I omit, and which three new things should I try next time?*" You may also

find, as an added bonus, an occasional salesrep who will reciprocate and ask you for feedback too.

3. **Take feedback to heart and listen.** Asking for feedback is only the first step - if you do not act upon it then you will never improve your performance and you will stop receiving feedback even when you ask for it.
4. **Become a Business Subject Matter Expert (SME).** Seek out an opportunity to learn more about a specific business or business problem your solution can solve. Early in my career I worked on deals with three pharmaceutical companies inside six months. I learnt a lot about the Clinical Trial process and how its problems related back to my technology. I wrote up a primer on the subject, gave a one hour lunch-and-learn seminar internally - and become the Pharmaceutical SME for that company and the next two I worked at.
5. **Share my toys.** Your kindergarten teacher was absolutely right! How many times have you worked on a demo or presentation and discovered that someone else in the company had already built most of the material you needed? Whenever you or your team build something reusable - publicize it and the favor will be returned.
6. **Reach out across the seas.** Establish a relationship with a peer located in another country or continent. Stretch yourself and make it a non-English speaking country. Expand the #5-Share My Toys and match up with your international "twin". Many of the best ideas and processes I have ever seen were sparked by non-English speaking presales teams.
7. **Smile more often.** Smiling during a presentation will put your audience at ease. Even during a webcast it will relax your voice and remove some of the stress you may be feeling. This resolution will work wonders for your home life as well, unless you turn into the smiling fool.
8. **Tell more customer stories.** Add in some personal touches and let your customers know how other customers are using your solutions. Make the stories a simple 30-40 seconds outlining a business problem and the eventual (happy) ending.

## This Year I Will Not ...

There are some things we do and say which we shouldn't. Here are some suggestions for a few habits to either remove from your repertoire or commit to turn a negative into a positive.

1. **Accept customer procrastination.** Instead of responding to "*I'll have to think about it*" with a "but" statement, keep the dialogue open. Try "*why do you feel that way*" or "*what can we change about this solution to make you more comfortable?*" Asking just one more question often yields positive results.
2. **Be a slave to email.** Give it a rest. Set your email to sync up only once an hour, organize your inbox and don't feel you have to respond instantly to any message.
3. **Catch Blackberry-itis.** Turn the Blackberry off or put it on silent mode. Take some rubber balls into your next meeting and suggest that people can throw them at anyone who goes heads-down and thumbs-up under the table.
4. **Allow a salesperson to give a 20 slide corporate overview.** Enough said.
5. **Say "let me just show you this last option".** Forget the feature. If it was that important you should show it at the start. Be quiet and sit down.
6. **Jump into a silence.** Silence during a customer meeting can be uncomfortable for both sides. However, if you, or someone from your team, have asked an important question which demands an answer - let the customer answer. Do not jump into the silence after five seconds and let them off the hook. This tactic also works well when dealing with people inside your company and almost every customer service agent in the world.
7. **Let the negatives outweigh the positives.** Always look for the positive. Turn "*no-one has ever heard of my company*" into "*they can't have a negative image of us*" and switch "*our product is new and untested*" into "*today, innovation and the competitive edge is priceless*". Then convert "*an angry bear is chasing me*" into "*I really needed the exercise*".

## **Summary**

The first step towards making something happen is to write it down and then personally commit to action. Pick as many of the positives as you can handle and just a few of the negatives - write them down, display them with pride, and then put together a plan to make it happen. Perhaps you should call your boss and invite him for lunch, and then the last rep you worked with and ask for feedback on your performance during the sales call.

**Mastering Technical Sales wishes you a happy, healthy and profitable 2009.**

"A New Year's Resolution is something that goes in one Year and out the other"

*Anonymous*

Talking Points is a monthly column authored by John Care, Managing Director of Mastering Technical Sales. For more information on this and other Sales Engineering topics visit the website at [www.masteringtechnicalsales.com](http://www.masteringtechnicalsales.com).

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