



Mastering Technical Sales

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2012 New Year's Resolutions

Self-Improvement for the Pre-Sales Engineer

4,000 years ago the Babylonians started the tradition of making resolutions for the New Year to appease their gods. They typically paid off debts, returned borrowed equipment and made peace with estranged friends and relatives. Millions of people around the world will make a personal resolution this New Year's Eve (or their equivalent). The difference in the size of the 7.30am crowd at my gym on February 1st compared to January 2nd shows that less than 20% of those resolutions will have been kept by the end of a single month. ***Is your success rate as a sales engineering professional better than that?***

There are a number of professional and personal resolutions you can make in 2012 to increase your 3P's of Performance, Promotability and income Potential. These resolutions - some old, some new - have been collected from colleagues over the years. The call to action is to implement just a few of them!

This Year I Will ..

Here are some of the positive actions you can take during 2012 which can impact the 3P's and also contribute towards your employment stability:

1. **Write Down Your Career Expectations.** If you want to be promoted, or to get that management position you have been eyeing up - write down the how and the why. If you want to transfer in/out of a division - write it down! That simple act makes your abstract wish become more concrete and achievable. Plus you have already taken the first step.
2. **Discuss Those Expectations With The 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. This sets the tone for the rest of the year. As a senior manager, nothing used to frustrate me more than having to guess what my

employee's expectations were. Mind reading is not in the job description. If your boss does not know what you want - he/she cannot help you.

3. **Embrace The Cloud.** It's here. Even if you work for a fully virtualized and mobile social-media, big-data oriented company there is more to come. Over the past 12 months, more than your iTunes library has migrated to the cloud. Become a cloud expert, as it is having the same impact on businesses as client-server in 1990 or the internet in 2000. Take it from someone who profited from both of them.
4. **Solicit Feedback and Act On Feedback.** Ask for specific feedback after every sales call or customer facing interaction. A good method is to request the salesperson/peer/your manager to use the top-bottom-next three model. 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 salesperson that will reciprocate and ask you for feedback too. 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. So check back with the person who gave you the original feedback and close the loop with them.
5. **Understand Not Everyone Is Like You.** Take the time to understand the motivations and personalities of the people you work with - especially when it comes to giving and receiving feedback. See if you can persuade your team to take a DISC/Colorful Insights or Myers-Briggs test and share the results. (Great 2012 resolution for new managers!)
6. **Rely More On Planning And Less On Willpower.** You need to change your behavior and that is a major challenge because you have been practicing the old way for a long time. Willpower and good intentions only get you so far. Do not plan to "improve my discovery skills", sign yourself up for a discovery class or workshop right now. (Thanks Dan and Chip Heath for this one)
7. **Tell The World About My Resolution.** Well - at least tell a few people so that they can check up on you and nag you into holding onto your resolution. You may even find a colleague who has the same resolution and you can plan together and support each other. Use that competitive spirit every Sales Engineer has. I set out to gain one new and large customer in 2011 - so I told my friends and family what I intended to do. There is nothing like forecasting to a group of 20 friends to focus the mind and slim down the to-do list!

8. **Share My Toys.** Your kindergarten teacher was smart! 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, post it and the favour will be returned.
9. **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 #8-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.
10. **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.
11. **Replace PowerPoint With A White Board.** Pick a customer-facing pitch you usually do with PowerPoint or with words alone (like a Q&A). Build and devise a visual presentation that you draw out instead of using the laptop. You'll be that much closer to gaining credibility and that "trusted advisor" status.
12. **Cast A Longer Shadow.** Being a great SE is not just about fulfilling your job description and giving great demo/presentations/proposals/proofs. It is about what else you contribute to your SE community - who you mentor, who you help in other parts of the organization and the other non-written parts of the job.

This Year I Will Not ...

There are some things we do and say which we should not. Here are a few habits to either remove from your repertoire or commit to turning a negative into a positive.

1. **Fall Victim To The Curse Of Knowledge.** You know your "stuff". The customer does not. You have presented it or demoed it (or both) multiple times this year. This is the first time the customer has seen it. Do not make assumptions. Make it easy for the customer to understand and follow you:

If they cannot remember it, they cannot repeat it".

If they cannot repeat it - they do not get it.

If they do not get it - they will not buy it

2. **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.
3. **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. Remove yourself from newsgroups and lists that you never read. I cut down my email by 20% this year simply by using unsubscribe and email folder rules.
4. **Allow anyone in the company to give a 20 slide corporate overview.** Enough said.
5. **Start a sentence with: "No, But or However".** Whatever praise or agreement comes before those words will automatically be forgotten by the person listening to you.
6. **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*". Try it at home with friends and family too.

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 tell a few other important people in your life..

Mastering Technical Sales wishes you a happy, healthy and profitable 2012.

"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.

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