



Mastering Technical Sales

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Personal Agendas

Why Emotions Can Drive The Technical Sale

Sometimes, as Sales Engineers, we get all wrapped up in the technology of our solutions and the business issues they may solve that we forget about the people who are buying from us.

Do not fool yourself about this. Any successful sales person will tell you that there is an emotional side to every deal and that it is up to you to uncover it. I would say that this is one of the major "value-adds" that differentiates an SE from a senior SE. Why? Everyone needs a reason to (not) buy from you. If you think the technical decision is purely driven by the output from some Excel spreadsheet capturing features and speeds/feeds - think again.



Here is an example: The evaluation team objectively rates you as a 3.5 on a particular requirement. The scoring can only be 1-5. That means you get a 4 if they want you, and a 3 if they don't. Your product has performed well and you have sold it hard - it is still emotion that turns the 3 into a 4, or a must-have requirement you cannot meet turns into a nice-to-have instead.

So - spend some time figuring out the WIIFM (What's In It For Me) of the influencers, recommenders and advisors within your customer.

Uncovering The Personal Agendas Of Your Customer

Depending on the culture, you can simply ask "*What does <the success of> this project personally mean to you?*" You are going to invest in some relationship building first, which may be as simple as a cup of coffee in the company cafeteria. Remember that you are far more likely to get the answer than the salesrep, as you are the *trusted techie*. My theory is that when you ask anyone in management they are going to have an answer. Most

individual contributors will have one too. It's the people who don't have a clue that are most dangerous to the sale - so it's up to you to provide a personal agenda, the WIIFM, for them. Here is a short list of some of the common personal agenda drivers, and the possible logic behind them.

1. **Recognition.** This is the internal recognition of purchasing and implementing a solution that truly generates the planned savings and comes in on time and on budget. Depending on your source, anywhere from 30 to 60% of IT projects fail - so being attached to a success gives the customer some powerful mojo.
2. **Job Security.** Purchasing your solution may provide an individual or a first-line manager with a measure of security as they now "control" your solution within the company. On the other hand, if the implementation of your solution spreads that responsibility across multiple departments that may not be viewed as positively by the individuals involved.
3. **Promotion.** Promotions mean more money, more responsibility and a maybe a bigger office. The higher up the organizational food chain the person is - the more that is at stake. Often paired with recognition - the successful purchase and implementation of your solution compared to other internal failures, may lead to a great end-of-year rating and all that brings. Think about what happens inside your company if you are the prime driver of some incredibly successful project.
4. **Resume Improvement.** This has a generational factor, but is differentiated between "hot", "cold" and "stable" products. Every year there are "hot" products that are growing rapidly and command respect and money in the business. Learning a hot product (cloud, virtualization, SaaS) makes Generation Y more marketable and Boomers more secure. Stable products are generally from the larger companies - Oracle, HP, EMC, SAP - where there are always jobs available in the market.
5. **Power.** This really combines several of the previous points together. As an example, I recall the implementation of a Customer Relationship Management system within a hi-tech company. The initial install was in customer service, which ultimately switched the balance of "know thy customer" data from what had been a strong marketing organization to the support/research team who suddenly had all the utilization and issues data. One VP's star shone brighter, while the others dimmed.

6. **Money.** Seriously - it's a big incentive. I tell the story of when I was at Sybase competing with Oracle on Wall Street. We used to tell prospective Database Admins to look at the New York Times Jobs Wanted section every Sunday and compare listings. A Sybase DBA could get twice the starting salary of an Oracle DBA and often a signing bonus. A powerful message, but not one that you should approach directly with a prospective customer - they need to make the intuitive leap rather than being pushed.
7. **External/Other.** Sometimes there are external factors that drive a personal agenda - especially towards the top of the organization. A CIO may want some publicity or to become a leader in some external organization. There can also be a measure of "revenge". Dell lost a \$600k contract with one of my employers because of a bad support issue my daughter had which influenced my decision. It may sound petty and personal, but until you check, you never know.
8. **Look In The Mirror.** Always remember that you have a bias, a personal agenda, as well. Just be aware of it so that you can realistically differentiate between what you hope you hear and what you actually hear. Don't fall victim to "*Happy Ears!*"

Summary

"*People buy from people*". That is true, but is only part of the story. When your solution not only satisfied the technology and business requirements, but also fits into a decision-makers personal agenda your win rate climbs steeply. As an SE, it is your job to help the salesperson uncover these agendas, as more often the customer is more comfortable speaking with you. So put on your detective cap and discover the hidden personal agendas!

"Good advice is almost certain to be ignored, but that is no reason not to give it."

Agatha Christie, Author

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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