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Credibility And The SE

Protecting Your #1 Asset

Credibility (n)

(1): The quality of being believed or trusted

(2): The #1 asset of a Sales Engineer

(3): What sets the SE apart from the Salesperson

The truly exceptional Sales Engineer possesses many qualities and many skills and has to apply them in many situations. Three of the most important qualities I always sought as a hiring manager (and even during my time as an IT executive) were Integrity, Awareness and Credibility. Integrity is self-evident as a quality, Awareness is being able to do or say (and conversely not do and not say) the right thing at the right time. So that leaves me with Credibility and what that means to the SE.

It is simple - you cannot do your job without being credible. It means that the customer believes in you, the sales team believes in you and your manager and peers believe in you. It means you fulfill both the Sales and the Engineer (or the Technical and the Consultant) portions of your job title. It's no good being able to recite speeds and feeds if they are not relevant, it's no good asking twenty discovery questions of the customer if you do nothing with that data - and give nothing back to the customer that they can use.

So specifically, what are some of the actions and behaviors that lead towards establishing and increasing your credibility? Here are some ideas. Actually I think of them as way more than ideas - they are non-negotiable requirements.

Three Steps To Credibility

1. The DAYS of our lives. A long time ago, one of my very first managers introduced me to the acronym "DAYS" - Do As You Say. When you make a commitment - do it! Delivery as promised = credibility. Which means be careful about what you say "yes" to. You don't gain credit for "yes" - you gain credit and credibility for "done!"

2. Don't Guess! If you don't know something about a customer situation - find out - don't guess! Guesses lead to mistakes. Mistakes lead to mistrust. Mistrust never leads to revenue. You may get away with a well-intentioned error once or twice, but it is a bad habit to get into. I have heard many SE leaders announce, "*If you lie to a customer, you get fired.*" Do not get put into the position when someone takes a guess as fact and you have to defend it.

3. Teach and Learn. You don't see this associated with credibility too often - so here is the rationale. As an SE you need to be learning every day - about Business, Solutions, People and Technology. As an SE you have something to teach someone every single day - whether it's your peers, a customer, a partner or even your manager. People notice this - and it is more than just DAYS, it is that proverbial extra mile that your leaders and customers are always asking for.

Why write this now? Well, in the past three months I have been fortunate enough to interact with about 1,000 SE's in my seminars and workshops. I've been watching those SE's learn, I've been watching some of them teach and help others, I've watched as the understanding of complete and necessary discovery helps them to avoid guessing and I've watched them follow through on commitments they've made back to their managers and their organizations.

I am firmly convinced that being an SE can be one of the most rewarding jobs in the world - and a large part of that is the credibility that SE's gain as they work on developing their trade and their craft. Customers expect you to understand their business, to know their environment and to communicate clearly and faithfully your advantages in a truthful manner. It is a requirement for the position.

So do your customers, your peers and your managers believe and trust in you?

"A good word costs no more than a bad one"

English Proverb

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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