Selling Solutions for Sales Engineers

If Only Sales Would Understand…

This Talking Point is an extremely abbreviated summary of a 2-day "Selling Solutions for Sales Engineers" workshop. Any references to solution selling relate to the general concepts of selling and not to the Solution Selling ® methodology.

Can you recall the mind and rear-end numbing experience of sitting in a Sales Methodology class for an entire week? Stuck in a windowless hotel conference room with a bunch of salespeople who you are convinced will instantly forget everything they have been taught the moment they leave the room. Thinking that, possibly, two out of the five days were useful for a Sales Engineer?

Here then, are the abbreviated highlights of S3E – Selling Solutions for Sales Engineers. Twelve principles you should apply to your career from this point forwards to prove that you can sell solutions and uniquely solve your customer's business problems.

1. Stop Blaming The Rep! You are only responsible for what you can control. You are 100% in control of your behavior; you can only influence the behavior of others. Remove the adjectives "dumb, stupid, clueless" from your vocabulary when referring to the sales force and stop looking for reasons why you cannot be professional and solution sell. Remember that reps are paid to turn a no into a yes and to accelerate a customers buying cycle – that is their job.

2. Solutions Are Not Products In Disguise. Solution selling is both a process and an attitude. It means spending more time in the earlier stages of the sales cycle performing discovery and less time handling technical validation at the end of the cycle. It means asking questions and really understanding your customer's business and your customer's issues so you can provide a solution to a problem as opposed to technology. Can you present or demonstrate your solution without mentioning any product names or acronyms? Try it!

3. **Pain And More Pain**. Customers buy because they have a problem they need to solve, and not because you want to sell them something. Your job as an SE is to identify that problem and the resultant pain, and then to amplify it and make it real. That involves asking questions such as "*how long has that been happening*" and "*what happens if..*"

4. **Reducing The Risk Curve**. The current economic downturn hasn't made your job any easier. Sales cycles have been elongated because of budget restrictions, purchasing committees and simply more people being involved in the sale. One of the primary goals of an SE is to reduce the risk that a customer may see in buying and then implementing your solution. Risk is lowered by providing a clear and unambiguous route from the customer's current state (with pain) to a desired state (with no pain). Some sales guides picture this as a chasm, with your solution being a rope bridge. Instead of a rope bridge, make it your solution a super-safe six lane highway over a suspension bridge; your competition is providing the rope bridge.

5. **Show Me The Money**. Every corporate expenditure now requires a cost justification. Solutions with a less than 6 month implementation and with less than a 12 month payback are preferred. Remember you are not only competing against your traditional competitors, but also against every other project, plus DNI – Do Nothing Inc. Use every single chance to drill down into the economics. If the payback doesn't make sense, it is better to determine that early in the sales cycle than at negotiation time.

6. **Diagnosis And Discovery**. The more discovery, earlier in the sales cycle, the better you will understand your customer's business and the better you can diagnose and prescribe a solution. An Oracle study of 6,500 companies a few years back revealed that 70% of those companies purchased software from the vendor who knew their business the best, as opposed to the vendor who supplied the best technology. Although you may have years of experience as an SE and can immediately diagnose a customer business issue, the customer needs to get to that point in their own time. Rushing in with a solution (even if it is the right one) is NOT solution selling if the customer feels you haven't spent sufficient time listening and understanding. Prescription without diagnosis is malpractice in both sales and medicine!

7. **Simple Is Good**. Refer to item #4. As SE's we tend to fall in love with our technology and want to tell the customer all about it. Yet our job is to sell, not to teach. Presenting a customer with four different options to solve a problem is not going to speed the sale along. Although there may be some reassurance in having four options,

the customer really wants to understand which option is best for them and needs to hear that from you if you want a role as a trusted advisor.

8. Trust Me. Selling a solution means doing the right thing for the customer. If you identify some warning signs with regard to product fit, financial return or implementation early in the process then you need (within reason) to speak up. First raise the issues internally and let your sales team work through it – as ignoring a problem and hoping it will go away is *Slam Selling!* - not solution selling.

9. Bad News Is Good News. Qualification is a good thing, as you can qualify yourself both into and out of a deal. Receiving a blind RFP from a "strategic partner", giving a standard out-of-the-box generic demo, being asked to leave your solution at the customer site for "playing with it" or realizing that the economics of the project are misaligned are all good things. Each of those events should cause you to run away from the opportunity. Your sales rep may need a little convincing, but other opportunities will arise which deserve a more intense focus than these total wastes of time.

10. What That Means. Do not assume that your customer grasps all the intricacies and nuances of your solution. In some cases they may have totally missed the point. Visualize a 2 by 4 piece of wood/baseball bat/cricket bat – you need to beat your customer over the head with your virtual bat until they "get" your unique selling points. Just because you have been around your solution for years and fully understand it does mean that the customer will after a few meetings and a demo.

11. So What and Who Cares? Expanding upon the virtues of simplicity, all of your customer communication needs to answer those two questions. Throw in a "Says Who?" in relation to any claims or statements you are making and you have it covered (if the answer to that last one is "we do" then you may want to rethink things).

12. It's Only A Solution If. The customer believes it is a solution. Many SE's deal in features and advantages, yet to be absolutely FAB-ulous (Feature-Advantage-Benefit) you need to include the benefit. The customer can only relate to the benefit if he has stated that the benefit is both something that he requires and it is of use to him. Just because you say it is a benefit (see prior point) doesn't mean that it is.

Summary

Solution selling is an opportunity to inject discipline into the sales cycle, by making sure you are fully prepared for every sales call and meeting. I recently heard an experienced presales manager say "*never present to an audience whose criteria for judging you and your solution is unknown*". Even if no-one else in your organization chooses to sell solutions instead of selling products, you still can sell solutions – and maintain your professional integrity and customer trust.

"If You Think Hiring A Professional Is Expensive, Wait Until You Hire An Amateur."

Red Adair, Oil Well Firefighter.

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.

To receive the monthly Talking Points Newsletter, email info@masteringtechnicalsales.com or sign up from the front page of the website.