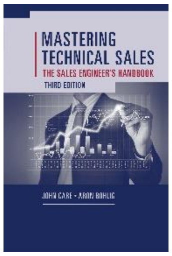

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The Corporate Sales Meeting: Top 10 Tips

Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death (By PowerPoint)

We have all lived through, or in some cases barely survived, the traditional offsite sales meeting. Everyone – sales, sales engineering and a few random marketing, support and development folks – is crammed into a large, dark and window-less room. Further torture is then applied by using Death by PowerPoint for between two and four days.

This Talking Point addresses the offsite sales (or training) meeting from a Sales Engineering point of view. We may maim a sacred cow or two, and provide you with a few ideas about some radically different ways of planning, organizing and then running these meetings. Of course, if you are perfectly content to have your brain and your rear-end numbed by PowerPoint combined with uncomfortable seats and a possible hangover – you can stop reading right now.

So : The Top Ten Tips To Improve Offsite Sales Meetings for Sales Engineers.

1. Build A Mission Statement For The Meeting. It may be a novel idea, but why not actually decide exactly what you want to have accomplished by the end of the meeting? Then set up your agenda, content and overall theme to match the mission statement. The vaguer and fluffier you make the mission, the more likely you are to send the audience into crashing boredom and buzzword bingo.

2. Try solving some problems instead. Every SE organization has its challenges and problems. Take the opportunity to address some of the problems, choose some that are within your span of control (or influence) to get fixed, and put together teams to work on each problem. Have them report the specific action items and steps they came up with to obtain resolution. You can spend an afternoon doing this and gain major efficiency and morale boosts as a result.

3. Have a Break-Out Room for Pre-Sales Engineers. Many of these ideas deal with breaking the SE team out of the main sessions for anywhere from a few hours to several days. Provide a separate room for these sessions, well equipped with power strips, internet

access if appropriate, and configured for white boards, two projectors and display screens.

4. It's NOT an opportunity for corporate folks to satisfy their annual MBOs. Review the agenda very carefully beforehand, and if someone is presenting just because they have requested "*30 minutes with the sales force to share what they are doing*" – that is a strong indicator they are fulfilling an MBO. Put people on the agenda that YOU need to hear from – not because they want to speak AT you.

5. Set a standard presentation format. Ask your presenters (give the executive committee a pass if necessary) to utilize a standard format for their slides. This does not mean logo, color and font. It means a "*what this means to you"* and a "*what you should do/learn next*" slide. Anyone who displays an organization chart or a slide with more than 5 bullets should be booed off stage.

6. Set-up a guru/expert track. Arrange for a few specialized sessions to be held exclusively for the very senior or principal/master level, sales engineers. Make these by invitation only so you are catering to the top 10% of the organization as a way of saying 'thank-you' and providing an incentive to the other 90%.

7. Promote healthy snacks and daylight. The last thing you want is to have people fall asleep during someone's talk, especially yours. You also do not want to accentuate the body's natural lull in energy after lunch. One way to reduce this risk is to avoid certain foods and drinks that make people sleepy. Tryptophan is nature's sleeping pill. Turkey and dairy products are high in tryptophan. Fatty foods take longer to digest and sit in the stomach longer, just churning around, making people uncomfortable and fatigued. Finally, simple sugars give people a quick high but some come down hard in response to a sharp dip in blood sugar level. Sitting in a dark room just exacerbates all these effects.[1]

8. There are some things SE's do not need to know. Do not subject SE's to long and boring discussions about legal contracts, pricing and revenue recognition issues (unless that is, strangely, part of their job). Instead, refer back to points #3 and #6 to use this time to dive deeper into some core competency skills.

9. Test and retest the content. Should part of your mission statement (point #1) relate to education, then make sure that your audience has "*got it*". I used to, much to the initial disgust of my SE team, run pop-quizzes and competitions to ensure that information has been retained and internalized. The prizes used to liven up the sessions, and I <u>never</u> had an issue with getting corporate folks to come teach my team!

[1] Adapted from the ECG Newsletter : http://ecglink.com/library/ps/meals.html

10. Invite outside speakers and star salespeople or managers to speak. Have the VP of sales or engineering come into an SE-only session and address the troops. Also, consider inviting several of the more successful salespeople, who work well with pre-sales, to come in and talk about some of their deals.

Summary

You may be reading this as an individual contributor and wonder what you can do to impact large corporate meetings. Pass this Talking Point up the management chain, but also consider suggesting some of these points (in particular #2) for your next, smaller, area or district meeting. When they call attendance in the room, are you going to put your hand up in the air to signal “Present” or “Guilty”?

"Meetings are indispensable when you don't want to do anything.”

John Kenneth Galbraith, 1898-1981

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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