

Selling to the Chief Sales Officer



Having been both a salesperson and a Chief Sales Officer (CSO), I have observed that there are some very specific best practices that can greatly enhance successful selling to the CSO of any enterprise.

Taking stock of the consistent motivators. While the titles given to business executives can be confusing, and while it is sometimes easy to misunderstand the real responsibilities of a function, the CSO always deals with the reality of measurability and product or service differentiation.

These factors expose the sales function to scrutiny across the organization and often outside the walls of the establishment. Understanding these realities and aligning value propositions that deal with improvements to these elements is key to success when the top sales executive is the prospect.

Putting measurability in your corner. It is said that without sales growth, a firm cannot stay even. Competition and customer demand for ever-improving products and services creates an environment of constant need to improve and grow. Because it is relatively easy for a firm to measure sales activity and compare it to past performance, industry averages, and competitive statistics, the CSO is constantly under surveillance of the measurement process.

Information about the CSO function is readily available to the salesperson selling to the sales department. Verifying and assuring a clear understanding with the CSO about the current state of the measurements is a best practice. The salesperson can personally relate to relevant terms of measurement: quota-to-date, sales productivity, quarter-to-quarter growth, market share percent, and a variety of sales initiative statistics.

If the salesperson is "in tune" and understands which of the measurements is most important to the CSO early in the sales process, he or she is on the way to aligning a proposition that has the greatest opportunity for success. The sales executive has an in-depth understanding of selling to the requirements of his customers and expects those who sell to him or her to do the same. Start with understanding what measurements mean the most to the CSO and to the company.

Focusing on product or service differentiation. Salespeople look to the CSO and the CSO's team to help them differentiate their product or service in the marketplace. Leadership in this area is what endears the sales force to the sales function because it reflects an understanding of the client needs and the competitive thrusts. The selling team members need to show the value of their offering to assist in this requirement. A breakthrough best practice is evident when a feature of the proposition is translated into a differentiation element for the sales force. This means that the salesperson has done the work to relate to the client-facing sales force and included this key element in the proposition. This can take many forms. Installability, post-sales support, prospect segmentation, opportunity tracking, and efficient proposal preparation are some examples that can differentiate a firm's products in the marketplace. The selling firm must understand the current state of the company's position on these functions. For the CSO, the value of enhancing these



elements can directly drive a sale for the solution provider. When selling team members can specifically display how they can help their customer differentiate itself in the marketplace, they are respected as a partner rather than just a vendor by the CSO.

Confirming value alignment. Because a salesperson can easily fall into the trap of anticipating that they already know the needs of the CSO, it is highly effective to use the CPS Value Alignment Tool to assure the real needs are addressed and proposed in the solution. The tool is developed and verified listing the CSO's critical success factors, then the customer's differentiators, and finally the selling firm's top capabilities. The technique makes it easy to match capabilities to requirements and assure alignment to the sales function.

CPS Value Alignment to the Client CSO

Customer Critical Success Factors or Key Initiatives					Customer Competitive Differentiators						
1)	Year-to-year sales growth				1)	Easy to install					
2)	Market share percent increase				2)	Post-sales support					
3)	New client growth				3)	Proposal responsiveness					
4)	Sales productivity				4)	Customization					
5)	Sales automation				5)	Other					
6)					6)						
Your Selling Organization Top Capabilities					Key Contacts/Department						
1)	Segmentation consulting		X	X	X	1)	Dir. Sales Support				
2)	Product packaging	X	X	X	X	X	2)	Dir. Sales Operations			
3)	Value consulting	X		X	X	X	3)	Western Regional Mgr			
4)	Sales application development		X	X	X	X	X	4)	V.P. Sales		
5)	Sales training		X	X	X	X	X	5)			
6)								6)			

ABOUT CPS. Critical Path Strategies helps clients improve the effectiveness of their sales organization. Our portfolio of services addresses the strategic, organizational, and relationship issues that impact selling performance. Our powerful processes enable clients to transform their sales culture, enhance their competitive position, and accomplish strategic business initiatives. Our clients—emerging companies and members of the Fortune 500 alike—typically measure 100 to 500 times their CPS investment in revenue growth.

Ensuring success. Get to know your client's top salespeople. Interview them for an understanding of their best sales practices, as well as the obstacles they face. These conversations will have a direct, positive bearing on the outcome of the CSO's decision to buy your proposition. If you can enhance the efficiency of the "recognized" best salespeople, you have endeared yourself and your firm to the entire sales organization.

Provide "gifts" of information to the sales leadership. As a salesperson, you are armed with an abundance of knowledge about best practices and tips concerning sales practices and methods. This is the opportunity to be a consultant. The CSO is always interested in sales success references, innovation, research, and prospective sales leads.

