

# **Best Practice Guide To Selling Sr. Executives**

**A Revenue Accelerators White Paper**

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## Why prospecting to Sr. Decision makers is so difficult.

### Introduction

In the case of Large to Mid-sized companies, they keep getting bigger and more global. They constantly re-org, right size, and outsource. It's this continuous state of change that takes an already overworked, stressed our workforce of Sr. decision makers and makes it even more difficult to get a few moments of mindshare. In the case of smaller companies, these Sr. decision makers are often owners, and have even more pressure to run the business while dealing with a plethora of people, technology, money and competitive issues.

*“The traditional self-focused selling approach is no longer effective because today’s new buyers are unwilling to follow you. They don’t want to be ‘sold’. They want to make educated buying decisions. To make a sale, you must join them on a buying path.”*

Kevin Davis,  
Getting into Your  
Customer’s Head

### Challenges

With time as such a precious commodity, Sr. executives use a multitude of resources to block vendor’s attempts to engage. Over the last several years, the types of gate keeping has increased, going beyond Voicemail to filtered EM, auto-attendant phones, no direct phone numbers, etc. However executives do occasionally rely on vendors for new technology releases, but remain cautious when opening up the company doors. So, the need to communicate continues but in a very restricted means. As salespeople, we do we abuse this privilege, further exacerbating to exchange information with a Sr. executives. Additionally, we forget about the competitive noise. This is the amount of new vendors cropping up, which is at an all time high in US history; with 100,000’s of reps selling their products and services to these same targets. No wonder Sr. decision makers are skeptics to any and all claims of grandeur.

Then, there is also the sheer amounts of offline and online marketing messages and events. No wonder decision makers are so resistant to the main form of marketing - a salesperson on the phone! So, if the environment in which we sell is made up of controlled chaos, our messaging and approach needs to be even more readily noticeable and different. That means we sell “value” vs. what the rest of the vendor population does; which is selling product features and benefits.

### Why is building trust so difficult?<sup>i</sup>

1. **Lack of knowledge regarding your solution** is a major reason your prospect is so resistant. When they do not quickly understand the nature of your solution, they will NOT take the time to be made aware of a need.

"Ability to ask good questions was the single biggest differentiator between top seller and average sellers. When top sellers learned about problems or concerns, they kept asking questions to discover business ramifications and the value of making a change".

*Neil Rackham,  
Spin Selling*

"As differentiation from product advantages is reduced or neutralized, the customer relationship built on value grows in importance."

Gartner Group

2. **A skeptical prospect is a complex prospect**, and is disbelieving about the value of your solution or the benefits you claim. Quick credibility is critical.
3. **The need to compare is another reason your prospect is cautious**. No one likes to buy without knowing they are fully informed.
4. **Ease or difficulty of purchase** is another reason for success or failure. How easy is it to do business with you, and have you proved your trustworthiness?
5. **Not having an understanding of what your solution can do for the prospect personally and business wise**. Sr. executives will not act on vendor information alone. They want factual, clear, and honest information, and prefer to deal with specialists not generalist and NOT salespeople.
6. **Poor presentation** is another obstacle. If you are unable to effectively present your value, then your chances to sell are significantly reduced.
7. **Inadequate product performance** is a big reason why prospects resist. Even if your company is the best, they may have preconceived notions.
8. **Sr. executives prefer the status quo**. It protects their domain
9. **Most Sr. executives prefer to remain quiet**. A lower profile today is desired.
10. **They are savvier, and more cynical**. They disregard claims of superiority.

Considering the above, you need to think and act like our prospect. As you make calls, "ask them" how they prefer to deal with vendors? How they look at new ideas or technology? What they dislike most? What they like the most? In the end, it's much more about your value, and how you present it. If it was just about great technology, they would just all be buying it, wouldn't they?

### What do we not do? What do we do? (Rules of the Road)<sup>ii</sup>

First and foremost, stopping sounding like you are selling something! The age old saying still hold true, everyone wants to buy and no one want to be sold. Some things that we need to remember when prospecting:

- § Do NOT prospect to mid management. They take 3-4X longer to close.
- § Do NOT lead with "we" or I". Lead with "you ". It's never about us.
- § Do NOT say "Hi". Sr. executives are not personal contacts.
- § Do NOT say "I have worked"; it is always we have; as in your company.
- § Do NOT ask if they have time. They never do; speak your value directly.
- § Do NOT open with your company. Always whom you are what you can do.
- § Do NOT be formal. Be authoritative, but casual in the way your speak.
- § Do NOT talk technology. Vendors that do that are never "trusted advisors".
- § Do NOT talk features. Sr. executives speak strategies, KPI's, and metrics.
- § Do NOT sell extraordinary results. Sell industry knowledge and similar results.
- § Do NOT be overly polite. It's they that have the Pain, not you.
- § Do NOT send long Emails. It insults them thinking you expect them to read it.
- § Do NOT write like an author. Write like you speak, Sr. executives do this well.

- § Do NOT say “would you like”, “we are happy”. They prefer peer-to-peer.
- § Do NOT say “we help”...we support, we deliver, we work with...
- § Do NOT assume you'll speak to them – they expect you to make the call.
- § Do NOT repeat what they already know – “I am emailing you back” etc.

**What can we do?**

- § DO speak like a resource. Sr. executives don't deal with vendors.
- § DO express yourself confidently. Sr. executives do not cower.
- § DO expect them to call you back. After all, you do offer a valuable resource.
- § DO contact them many times. You need to cut through the clutter.

"In talking with hundreds of executives at midsize to large companies, I find that in terms of calls they receive, the largest compliant is salespeople who apparently do little to no research before they make the first call. Many say that the callers have no idea what our business is or they don't understand my role in the company, or they don't respect my time, or when I re-direct them, they don't respect my people".

Brian J. Carroll,  
Lead Generation  
for the Complex

Skilled consultative sales reps know that once you engage power, it is easier to sell, and much more profitable. To make a difference for you and your company, make this practice an everyday occurrence. Learn about your targeted prospects, and share your powerful industry and market knowledge. They'll appreciate it and return the exchange with faster deals, and better relationships.

To help us, this industry decision-making guide by the Brooks Group<sup>iii</sup> clearly points out how your Sr. decision maker views their role in the business. Knowing this, sell into it! Sell to power, write and speak strategic messages (make money, save money). Sell to mid-management, speak and write about technology integration and usage. Sell lower down, it's all about features.

**The Decision-Making Pyramid**



**Going forward, what specifically can I do?**

**Use common dictionary words in your opening statements that sell Value**

- A. Increase, maximize, accumulate, and improve productivity of revenues.
- B. Minimize, reduce, conserve, and decrease or elimination of expenses.
- C. Avoiding costs by using a better process.
- D. Profit from acquiring, preventing, changing, and optimizing.
- E. Specific, Immediate, urgency.

## Avoid common phrases which will pigeonhole you as a Sales rep.

These phrases may be used at other times during the sales process, but they have no place in the opening statement. They are more of vendor speak.

1. How are you today?
2. I'd like to learn a little more about your business to determine...
3. We're the leading provider of...
4. I'd like to see if there are some ways we might work together
5. Is now a good time to talk?

*"Instead of thinking about value-added think about knowledge-added. What knowledge can you add to your service, or communicate about your service, that will make you more attractive to...business partners and customers?"*

Harry Beckwith  
The invisible  
Touch

## Good news: your company does have value metrics.

Even if your company does not have hard-lined value metrics, there are sources, as in customer polling, industry reports, and analyzing your own market that can help you sell. Your company does have strong value metrics; they just need to be positioned in value-forward statements to fortify the meaning to the Sr. executive.

- § After spending \$500,000 on a six-month SEO project, we helped a major Consumer goods client measure that their 15% sale improvement came at the expense of competitors and not of affiliates or category traffic increases.
- § In working with over 850 clients, from small on-line shops to the Fortune 100, they have been able to validate more than 10,000 PPC campaigns, and determine if the results merited not re-directing the marketing costs.
- § With fewer issues to resolve, clients such as Deloitte & Touche and Ernst & Young have seen internal and external audits costs reduced up to 60% annually; while increasing protection to customer assets by 99%.
- § Our clients, over 450, have been able to "see" what their competitors are doing, and significantly improved benchmarking performance and search campaign ROI's using the surfing habits of 2.5M US Internet users and lifestyle segmentation across more than 35,000 web sites.

## So, what do I do tomorrow?

The next time you cold call, write an email, answer a phone, set-up a presentation, or just close; make sure you have gathered the Pain, repeated it back, asked about urgency, and "speak with Sr. decision" makers. The four things to ask yourself, especially when dealing with Sr. executives, are:

**1) Ask yourself, 'What Won't Happen?'** At the end of your closing cycle, you should have a good idea of how your company will provide value to your the specific prospect. Your next step is to get them to understand what the *implications of not choosing* to engage your service will be, and in dollars. *There is always an associated loss of benefit as sales, revenues, conversions, efficiencies...* Armed with this, you're ready to communicate this impact.

**2) Ask the Client, 'What Won't Happen?'** At the appropriate time in your sales cycle, ask the prospect, "To help me understand your situation so I can craft the

The HR Chally Group' 10 year study stated: "the salesperson's failure to understand the customer's business was one of the biggest concerns voiced by customers year after year." That's a problem. "Salespeople basically have less than six minutes to get credibility with a client, says John Hoskins, cofounder of Advantage Performance Group. If they can't speak a client's language, they're dead."

HR Chally Group

best solution for you, can you give me a sense of what would happen if you choose not to move forward in this process and use our solution?" In this example only - read it only for a better understanding of value extraction:

**Sales Rep:** *Yes, I can see what you're saying about monthly sales lagging if you don't take care of this, with what you told me, it could be perhaps \$240,000 per year. What I am wondering is what will happen to your customer conversions? Since you're converting 6% of your visitors, and we've already discussed how engaging our services can get you up about 20% more, what might happen if we don't go forward?*

**Prospect:** *We'll, I'm not really sure. I guess we've been losing a little ground to competitors, which is, of course, why we're talking here. So I guess we'd lose a little more. But I don't know how much.*

**Sales rep:** *It's impossible to know for certain, of course, but do you think it's more than 2%...5%...loss to competitors?*

**Client:** *I'm pretty sure, it would be more than 5%, but not sure how much.*

**Sales rep:** *OK, then, we'll use 5% as a benchmark, to be on the conservative side. One last question about pricing; what do you see happening there?*

**Client:** *Well, if we move forward, we'd like to raise prices, of course, but if we don't move forward, we'll continue to have price competition pressures. I think we'll find our prices either hold steady or fall by up to 3%.*

**3) Quantify the results:** Just as you quantify the benefits and value of moving forward, quantify the implications for the customer of not moving forward. Make sure your case is clear before going on to the next step. In what ever you sell, there needs to be financial impact to the prospect.

**4) Demonstrate the results:** When you present your solution (e.g. proposal, demo, etc), demonstrate the impact of What Won't Happen?

## Summary

It's clear to see how Sr. executives think and act differently. So, take your targeted list of prospects, and start at the top when approaching the firm. Armed with preliminary research, value metrics, and a clear understanding of how your solution delivers value, you have a dramatically better opportunity to access power. You will still often be directed downwards, but, you can go back up and re-touch Sr. executives, which will shorten your time to sell by leveraging their power. Practice your trade with tools just like any other craftsperson and you will succeed. Use different tools for different situations, create your own, modify others, experiment, test them with prospects, and master the art of selling to Sr. executives.

**Edward Golod founded** Revenue Accelerators with over 25 years of sales leadership building high tech consultative sales engines, has sold over \$160M in "hunted" technology solutions. Ed has held leading sales roles at the world's largest software firms including SAS Institute and Microsoft, and is an entrepreneur of several technology firms selling to the Enterprise. He now enables small to mid-sized technology companies drive new business while lowering their costs of sales. To learn more, please visit

[www.RevAccel.com](http://www.RevAccel.com)

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<sup>i</sup> Excerpts taken from Jill Konrath' book, *Selling to Big Companies*. Jill Konrath is a leading-edge sales strategist and business advisor who helps sellers crack into corporate accounts, shorten time to revenue on product launches & speed up their sales cycles.

<sup>ii</sup> Excerpts taken from Jill Konrath' book, *Selling to Big Companies*.

<sup>iii</sup> Excerpts taken from The Brook Groups, a sales and sales management training and consulting firm that has helped more than 2,000 organizations improve their businesses through unparalleled training, follow-up, reinforcement and ROI-tracking programs.