

## **Solution Selling® Tips for a Tough Marketplace**

Today's marketplace is the toughest that many of my clients have seen in years. When times are tough, there is sometimes the tendency to toss out what you have learned/used from Solution Selling and revert to previous sales behaviors. To the contrary, this is the time to focus even more on successfully implementing Solution Selling.

Below are some of the behaviors that I am seeing Salespeople and Managers revert back to, along with some ideas on how you could apply Solution Selling to further your efforts during these tough times:

- **Sales Teams are focusing too much time on prospects that are "already looking"** – I had a prospect tell me very recently that they are consistently finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> to various competitors. Further into our discussion, they realized that they were "column fodder" and that they were wasting their precious time on unqualified opportunities. I am fine with working opportunities like RFPs, however only if you respond in a smart way. For example, qualify the opportunity by asking for the 3 one-hour meetings (this prospect realized that the vendors that were winning, were spending more face time with the buyers). As importantly, do your prep work. Find out who the competition is (internal and external). What are some "traps" that you can set for the competition that relate to *general, buyer-specific, and sourcing-specific strengths* that you have. Also, what are some traps that your competitors will be setting for you and how can you handle? Once you do the prep work, your goal is to reengineer vision, using at the very least, Anxiety Creation.
- **Sales Teams are focusing less on those that are "not looking"** – Salespeople are looking for quick hits and I completely understand! However, strive to carve out some time, i.e. 10% of your day, to focus on the 90% that are currently not looking. This particularly applies to your existing clients, because if you are not proactive with them, there is a good chance that your competitors are trying to make inroads themselves. Your job is to get them to recognize that they have "pain" and that it is curable! Work on developing prospecting scripts, reference stories and value propositions that get clients and prospects to recognize that they have pain that can be addressed. I heard an SVP of Sales say recently that companies are no longer buying technology or products. He is right! But he went on to say that executives "*are still trying to solve business problems.*" Even today, they will buy if they have the power to buy and if it is value justified!
- **Sales Teams are focusing on smaller sized opportunities** – Not a bad idea, particularly if you use this "Sun-Tzu" strategy as a way to prove yourself within an organization while also using it as an opportunity to hear about bigger deals in the future. But keep in mind, that you can still apply the Solution Selling process to smaller and shorter sales cycle opportunities. For example, use Reference Stories and ask questions that relate to how other companies have used "single" services that you offer vs. entire solutions. And if you feel that it is inappropriate to "explore impact" as you don't want to expand the opportunity to such a size that it will perhaps slow things down, that is fine. I would encourage you to use the "9 boxes" even if you choose at a particular meeting not to use the "I" column. You can explore the impact section at a later time when you are consciously trying to expand the opportunity.
- **Sales Teams are looking for "short term" revenue opportunities** – One objective of Solution Selling is to shorten the sales cycles for both big (i.e., 9 months down to 3 months) and small opportunities (i.e., one week down to two days). Particularly for short-term opportunities, it is critical to build credibility, ID pain, diagnose, create vision & value, and make sure you are dealing with power (or can get to them quickly). If you have the opportunity to close opportunities quickly, refer to pages in the manual that refer to "One-Call Closes." Notice that the Strategic Alignment Prompter is no different than the one you have already learned until you exit the "9 boxes." A VP-Sales told me that in today's market, it is critically important to compile the "requirements" before the proof stage (demo or tour), which will speed up sales!

Keep in mind that one of our objectives is to help build a common language across a sales organization so that you can have pro-active discussions around what components of the process you use and don't use (on a case by case basis). It is a process to be used to help get you out of the tough times instead of one to be put on the shelf!