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Guide for Visionary Leaders and Business Decision-makers.

By Bob Cannon

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Change and the Cycle of Specialization
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Guide for Visionary Leaders and Business Decision-makers. - In the January issue of Taking Aim, I reported on the book Margin. That book triggered some thoughts that had been floating in and out of my consciousness for some time. In fact I had even created the topic "Cycle of Specialization" several years ago, but just couldn't quite get my thoughts to gel in any cohesive manner. This then is an attempt to put into words those thoughts and how it affects us as visionary leaders and business decision-makers.

There is a Cycle of Specialization that has repeated itself over the centuries. It has been difficult to spot because the cycles have frequently been far apart, but the pace is quickening. Our society is being driven to a more rapid rate of change in the cycle by the growth in population, technology and information.

The cycle begins with prehistoric man and his work to survive. He had to be a vertical supplier to his own survival. He was responsible for his own food, shelter, water, and protection. He was dependent upon himself for his own survival. As time went on, he invented language and traveled in groups or tribes. These groups started to specialize. Some would hunt while others would drive the game to the hunters or cook the food and as that happened; each specialization became vertical in their specialty. The hunter prepared his own equipment for hunting and the cooks developed their own tools for cooking. Things changed very little for thousands of years. Certainly the villages changed and farming became a specialty and each farmer in turn became vertical in his specialty and developed his own tools. With the advent of farming came the permanent establishment of villages and a new range of specialties developed. Craftsmen developed who specialized in spinning wool, weaving cloth, making clothes, making shoes etc. Each craftsman again had to be a vertical supplier of tools and technology to his own craft. This knowledge was passed along via apprenticeships and the cycle continued. Today, as was pointed out in Margin, we are undergoing exponential change and with that, we are also undergoing exponential specialization. As a researcher, it is easy for me to point to the work the government has undertaken to modernize the old Standard Industrial Classification (S.I.C.) codes to

cover the new products and services that were not in existence when the codes were created. Another great example comes to mind having just gone through the traditional year-end review of the news. 2004 was for many the year of the blogger. Ten years ago the Internet was still in its infancy, there was no E-Commerce let alone bloggers. (My spell checker still doesn't recognize the word blogger.) Another area of incredible specialization is Health Care. It wasn't that many years ago that if I didn't feel well, I went to my doctor and he prescribed something to help me. Today my family doctor is nothing more than a gatekeeper. When I don't feel well now, I go to see him to find out whom to see to treat my problem.

Our efforts to improve our competitiveness with LEAN and Continuous Improvement are so internally focused that we are creating even more specialists to delve into the minutia of processes at a level previously unthinkable.

Specialization creates information, which requires more specialization creating an unending Cycle of Specialization devoted to continuous improvement of the product or service. (I am not certain which came first, specialization or information, but the cycle continues.)

With rampant specialization taking place in all areas of our lives, the information that is available to us has increased by a factor of 10,000. If we are to do the best for our organizations, it is imperative that visionary leaders and business decision-makers expand their knowledge accordingly. They must increase data input capabilities and speed up the decision-making process to keep pace.

The question is, "Can we change that quickly?" History suggests that we have remained genetically unchanged through thousands of years and it takes a minimum of a million years to affect and change us. We can't wait that long to address the gap between the exponential specialization and our human capabilities. If we agree that our future depends on our ability to learn faster than our competition and we recognize our own individual limitations, then the only solution lies in increasing the human talent available to our organizations.

I am not talking about a specialist who is internally focused and going to generate more information further complicating our already overly complicated lives, but rather a generalist who is externally focused and capable of leading teams of specialists at all levels in the organization. Someone with creative talent, a solid foundation in basics and a uniqueness of thought capable of taking a project from start to finish, thereby lessening the load on you the visionary leader and business decision-maker.

Large, prosperous organizations may be able to add this type of talent to their staff, but there are potential problems in this approach. First, it is costly. Second, these people need to be constantly challenged. Third and possibly most important is that the longer they stay with the organization the more they are likely to develop an internal perspective and thereby diminish their effectiveness to the organization.

Consequently, the challenges for organizations large and small are the same. Where do we find this kind of talent? How do we utilize this talent and have them maintain an external perspective?

After much introspection and thought, I have decided the solution lies in hiring talent on a project-by-project basis. The specifications for this talent include real world experience leading projects from inception to successful completion. The talent must have a track record of working with and through people as well as exhibiting creativity and the potential for original thinking. Obviously this person needs to be a good communicator. If you have followed my logic this far, then what you need is a "Consultant."

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Byline

Bob Cannon helps visionary leaders make decisions that gain a competitive advantage. Check out other interesting articles available in the Taking Aim newsletter available at www.cannonadvantage.com . Bob can be reached at (216) 408-9495 or mailto: bob@cannonadvantage.com

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Robert E. Cannon helps visionary leaders and business decision-makers who want to enhance the competitive advantage of their organizations. He is also the author of "Taking Aim", the free monthly

e-zine written for leaders that takes aim at current issues, mixes in real-world experience and provides the focus needed to gain a competitive advantage.

Sell at the top -- enjoy greater success!

By Frank Williams

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As a former CEO of a good size industrial company, I always found it strange that I didn't have more salespeople call me directly. Did they know I always answered my own phone? Did they not intuitively understand that, at some point, I would be involved in any major buying decision? Did they not grasp that getting to know me and understand my thinking would be a smart move in closing any sales with my firm? And, to me, starting at the top seems to be the best place to begin any sales cycle, yet my phone rarely had salesman attached to the other end and many studies on sales techniques confirm this.

Would you be surprised to find out that more than seventy-five percent of high-level decision makers are involved early-on in any major buying process? A more shocking statistic yields that less than five percent of all salespeople talk to the high-level decision maker. Why is this?

Global Marketing, Inc. held discussions with many salespeople about this inhibitor to greater sales achievement. Lack of business knowledge, low confidence or no experience connecting with high-level decision makers is the most common feedback as to why these sales people don't start at the top. Global Marketing suggests that if you have these individuals in your organization – route them out fast or train them how to approach and close on high-level decision makers, or your competitor will!

Selling at the highest level in any account makes good selling sense. Calling on these top-level people means talking to someone who has the ability to say "yes" or "no" to your idea. Going straight to the

top means shorter sales cycle, better treatment, and will create additional pull for your idea. Those that sell at the top usually find there is less competition because (as earlier stated) most salespeople are too intimidated to call on the top decision maker. And when was the last time you heard a top decision maker suggest that they don't have the budget for an idea they like.

Failure to call at a high level within a targeted business come with a variety of salespeople rationalizations. Many individuals we spoke to said they were afraid to go over the head of their lower-level contact in fear of offending them. Others stated they feel intimidated by the top level decision makers.

Other on-going myths' surrounding senior level decision makers:

I'll never get by the screener to gain an appointment.

These people have more important things to do.

These are smart people with Yale or Harvard MBA's.

Most high-level decision makers hate salespeople.

Successful sales people I know don't buy-into these or other myths. Remember, that high-level decision makers did not reach the top by being aloof. Many organizations promote from within and these top people usually recognize the importance of meeting with key decision makers. Besides, in today's business, most organizations are flatter making the key decision maker more accessible.

However, the bottom line for any solid sales approach is to bring something of value to the high-level decision maker – this will ensure you will always get their attention.

Working and connecting with high-level decision makers takes a practice and a willingness to plan your sales call. Recognize that you must understand how high-level decision makers operate. Typically, they are more direct. No long-winded chat-chat for these guys. They like to control meetings and are more strategic in their thinking and decision making. Something that may take lower-level contact months to decide may be acted on immediately by the high-level decision maker. They take measured risks and make calculated decisions, so don't waste their time by presenting canned presentations, or lack an understanding of their business — usually these high-level decision makers are looking for you to make a difference in their business, not just make a deal.

As a young salesman, a person I came to respect gave me some sage advice — "begin as you mean to continue". Have your salespeople start at the top. Your business will achieve more and your competitors will envy you.

Frank Williams is a marketer. With many post graduate courses in management, leadership, marketing and technology to his credit, Williams is a widely respected speaker, author and technologist. He has significant knowledge in marketing strategies and is the founder and CEO of Global Marketing, Inc. – a leader in business, marketing and sales consulting. Other valuable articles can be found at: <http://members.cox.net/glmarketing/glmarketing/index.htm>



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