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Political Selling 101

By Dave Stein

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Note: To see the charts in this article, view it on www.HowWinnersSell.com

Most people who have been selling for even a short period of time understand that some level of corporate politics is present in every organization into which they sell. As sales professionals' experience and political savvy increases, so does what they observe in their accounts. If you aren't aware of political activity in your accounts, it doesn't mean that it isn't there. It just means you can't see it and certainly can't leverage it. If your competitor is politically savvy, you are at a distinct disadvantage.

What is politics? According to Merriam-Webster one definition is, "competition between competing interest groups or individuals for power and leadership." Winners have developed a set of skills that enables them to consistently succeed because of, or in spite of, politics. They've learned to select the right competing interest groups and then ride the power and leadership wave to success by devising and executing political strategies for each key influencer and decision maker.

Being adept politically will rarely lead to a win by itself. There are many other components to winning. But to not understand and take advantage of the interpersonal forces within an account is to leave assets unleveraged.

Here are some of the key skills required to elevate yourself into the realm of political selling:

Skill: A basic understanding of how corporate politics works.

For our purposes, politics and influence are synonymous. People need the help of other people to achieve certain business goals (i.e. my department's project gets funded) as well as business-driven personal goals (i.e. if it is successful, I get a raise—I can afford that new house).

Within a company, it works something like this: "If you report to me I can just tell you to do something and you will do it." That's SAY-SO influence. You'll do it because I say so. But if you don't work for me—let's say you work in another department—it becomes more difficult. I then have to influence you to help me. I'll use POLITICAL influence. That requires a combination of skills and artistry and it takes time and strategy.

Here is an example: Let's say that we both work for the same company, but for different departments. If I need your help for my department to achieve its quarterly objectives, I might look for ways in which I can help you achieve your objectives (ideally, business and personal objectives) and subtly advertise those to you as benefits of helping me. In that way we are aligned with a set of common

interdependent purposes. Win–win.

When you are selling into a company, you have absolutely no SAY–SO over the buyer. You can't tell anyone in your customer's company what to do. You can only influence them to give you information, insights, coaching and preference so that they influence others to look at you and your offering favorably. The best way to influence someone is to clearly communicate how and by how much you will contribute to the advancement of their business and (business–related) personal goals.

In the diagram below, you'll see that when you can help a buyer or influencer meet their personal and business goals (Quadrant 1), you're much more likely to gain commitment from them in helping you win.

In Quadrant 2, there is no personal win, so their commitment, although altruistic so far as a contribution to their company, will not be supported as strongly.

Stay away from people in Quadrant 3. In those cases, the person you are selling to is "in it for themselves," acting counter to what is in the best interests of their company. You run the risk of not only losing the deal, but being associated with "dirty politics," which could affect your personal and your company's reputation.

Quadrant 4 reminds you that if you find you can't contribute to the person achieving their business or personal goals, your likelihood of gaining their support is minimal. Don't turn these people into enemies, but focus your efforts on finding and selling to influencers in the first quadrant.

Skill: The ability to see what's invisible

As I suggested earlier, not everyone is skilled enough to observe sophisticated corporate politicians being influential. Savvy politicians do their thing privately. It's not unlike the backroom deals done by government politicians.

How do you know that there is influence being wielded? First, assume it is. Then begin to look at results and work backward. We can extract a good example from everyday government politics: If there is "pork"—say \$650.3 million in corporate tax benefits for igloo manufacturers in Alaska—embedded in a House of Representatives education bill, you can quickly figure out who lent a hand getting it through committee.

Ask your contacts within your customer's company or government department about prior purchases, projects and initiatives. Find out who sponsored them, whose budgets paid for them, who were the ultimate decision makers and who benefited in some more personal ways. The names you come up with will likely be people of influence, either through their command of an organization, or through astute politicking. They are the ones for whose influence you will be positioning during your sales campaign.

Skill: Connecting the dots

You've done some discovery and have begun to make associations. When you asked about recent projects, several people referenced Carrie Miehome, who works in the IT organization. She deftly led the steering committee with the CRM project last year. Funny thing though, that project was put ahead of others that already had funding. Why would that be, you might ask? Who benefits from a CRM implementation? The VP of Sales? The VP of Customer Service? Perhaps the CFO who wants more visibility into the revenue stream... It's perfectly reasonable to expect that she was influenced by a higher power. The challenge will be finding out whom, what was in it for them and what was in it for her if you are selling IT solutions to that company.

Skill: Knowing how to map out the organization

You'll need to start with an organization chart. If they won't give you one, you can build one by getting answers to pointed questions about reporting structure, by reading information on the web and, if your customer is a public company, from corporate SEC filings.

Next, get out a color marker. Draw black circles around isolated executives with no clout, orange lines between people with known connections, and blue circles around groups of people who serve on committees that are known to get funding and get things done. The most influential of the influencers get their names encircled in green. Draw red circles around people who are in Quadrant 3 above – those who are in it for themselves. You'll begin to see your customer's organization in a whole new light.

Skill: Targeting the right influencers

Now that you have a map of the political/influence environment, you've got to begin targeting the influencers. It's a mini-version of the same four-part plan I discuss in my book, *How Winners Sell* and in the e-Learning Edition:

·**Situation Assessment:** What is their background, how do they make decisions, who do they depend upon, what are their successes, failures, with whom do they align, how do they influence others, what's in it for them on a personal and business goals basis... You get the idea.

·**Goal:** Your goal is straightforward. You want them to support you at a minimum, but ideally to sell internally on your behalf. (At a higher level, your goal for the deal is to win it.) What's important here is to focus on their goal. If they achieve theirs, you have a much greater opportunity to achieve yours.

·**Strategy:** Remember my strategy statement format: They are going to buy from me because _____. In this case, they are going to influence a decision in my favor because _____. Remember that the strategy is the means to and end — the goal.

·**Tactics:** Every phone call, sales call, visit, lunch, dinner, presentation, discussion by the water cooler, email message, and snail-mail letter has to advance your strategy. Some of your tactics will be to prove that you can advance their business goals and some (more discreetly handled) will indicate that you understand and will work toward them achieving their personal goals.

I've covered the basics of "political" selling. Be aware, there are risks involved: getting in over your head, taking the wrong side, over-focusing on politics, not spending time on the competitive side, overlooking people who can sabotage your deal. And the list goes on. If you don't have any experience with this aspect of selling, I strongly suggest finding a mentor to coach you through.

If you or your company is pursuing a critical deal where a strong political strategy is required, or you would like Dave Stein to give a presentation or speech about this subject to your team, give us a call.

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Before founding The Stein Advantage, Inc., Dave Stein was employed in a diversity of executive sales and marketing roles. Dave consultants, coaches, speaks and trains on competitive sales strategies. He is author of *How Winners Sell: 21 Proven Strategies to Outsell Your Competition & Win the Big Sale*. Dave was an early adopter of technology and is a recognized expert on technology sales, marketing, and service. More info: www.HowWinnersSell.com.

You've Got To Be Joking!

By Michael Hopkins

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I don't know about you, but I get a lot of joke stuff arriving in my email. I've got one buddy in particular who hardly lets a day go by without sending something.

Sometimes they're side-splittingly hilarious, and other times they just don't make the grade --- it's a question of taste I suppose.

Anyway, I was cleaning up my folders in Outlook Express recently to make some space on my hard disk (I've got a whopping 20 Gb and I'm already getting low on space --- must be all those MP3's...)

Well, anyway, I knew that my 'Jokes' folder was taking up a lot of memory (it's full of images, video files and so on), so I decided that a major cull was needed.

As I went down the list, I had no problem deleting the turkeys, but it broke my heart to delete the jokes that could still make me laugh second time around.

And then it hit me. Why not make an ebook full of all the funniest stuff? That way, I can delete them from my hard disk and pack them all neatly into a single, compressed ebook file. And, thus, the idea for "101 Hilarious Jokes To eMail Your Friends" was born.

It was never my intention to actually sell this ebook, (which is why you'll find it free on the BizzyDays website). However, it was never my expectation either, that it would prove to be such a resounding success.

Sure, I knew it would be popular with visitors. After all a joke collection is always a popular idea and, if it's free, well hey, all the better.

The point though is, I never fully appreciated just how much additional traffic this funny little book could generate. I get at least 100 extra visitors EVERY DAY thanks to a book that I just put together to save disk space.

Not bad for two hours of enjoyable 'work'.

So what's the moral of the story?

Well there are three of them:

MORAL# 1:

Free ebooks are a terrific way to promote any online business. You can read more about that in a previous article called "Are you using the 4-letter word?" which is available here:

http://bizzydays.com/reprint_rights/reprint.htm

MORAL# 2:

People like jokes! Humor is always in demand and, yes, a lot of people are willing to pay for it.

But here's a tip if you plan on selling joke ebooks — don't make a general "101 Jokes" ebook. It would sell some copies, but not enough. A far better approach is to target SPECIFIC audiences.

Instead of '101 Hilarious Jokes To eMail Your Friends' why not "101 Hilarious Jokes For Expectant Moms", "101 Hilarious Jokes For Lawyers With A Conscience" or "101 Hilarious Jokes For Dairy Farmers".

Okay, I admit, that the second title wouldn't have much of a market :-), but imagine the novelty gift idea value of the others.

Okay, specialist joke books will take you longer to compile than general joke books, but think of the fun you'll have along the way.

Once you've finished compiling an appropriate collection of jokes for the target market, all you've got to do is ensure that you aim your promotion at the right people and, hey presto, you're in the money!

MORAL# 3:

There is an infinite number of ideas for top-selling ebooks and coming up with those ideas is much easier than you may think. And, once you know how to pluck great ideas out of thin air, your success in ebook publishing is a simple matter of promoting your ebooks

to the right target market.

Have fun!

Michael Hopkins is owner of BizzyDays eBook Publications. Visit now to download original ebooks for FREE at: <http://www.bizzydays.com> This article first appeared in Michael's newsletter 'Ebook Times'. To subscribe visit: http://www.bizzydays.com/free_newsletter.htm



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