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Transform Yourself from a Salesperson into a Businessperson

By Dave Stein

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If I told you that one of the most important characteristics of sales excellence in today's hypercompetitive business environment was not to be a salesperson, would you think you subscribed to the wrong magazine? Well, I have a good reason for saying it.

I'm not really saying you shouldn't be a salesperson. I'm saying that to be a top sales professional, you have to be a businessperson — because businesspeople make the most effective salespeople. And why is that true? Because what you are really selling is business improvement.

In terms of selling, what do I mean by "businessperson"? A businessperson is someone who can transcend the product or service she is selling to reach higher ground — the ability to understand, articulate, and drive the contribution her business can make to the client's business.

What is the business value of your product or service? To communicate this to your prospect convincingly, you must be more than a sales rep. You have to be a businessperson and, using business competencies, view and present your offering as platform upon which your prospect can achieve their business plan going forward.

Characteristics of a Businessperson

Being a businessperson not only means developing these business skills, such as the ability to read and interpret financial statements, but it also involves a way of thinking and being. Here are some of the behaviors and traits I have observed in sales winners — people I would also consider businesspeople:

uThey know that if they give their customer what he needs, they will then get what they need.

uThey make rational decisions, rather than allowing emotion to guide them.

uThey follow orderly procedures and processes, rather than taking random actions.

uThey plan for the future and have the discipline and motivation to execute that plan.

uThey seek out the truth through insightful, probing questions, rather than blindly accepting what they are told.

uThey accept responsibility for their own actions and for those who work on their behalf.

uThey know how to use technology to improve not only their own but their customer's business position.

uThey work for a win-win solution, knowing that anything else will ultimately be lose-lose.

If you don't want your client to treat your product or service as a commodity, you have to differentiate

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your offering from your competitor's. It comes down to perception. If your clients see you as just a salesperson, they won't respect you the way they would someone they viewed as a businessperson. Here's how they think: A businessperson is a professional; a businessperson is there for the long haul. Salespeople are all the same, interchangeable; they're just after a quick buck. This perception, common among top executives, is unfair, but it's a fact of life. That's why people who sell for a living adopt titles such as Marketing Representative, Business Development Manager, and Client Acquisition Executive on their business cards.

Take a good look at yourself. Read the list of behaviors again. Can you identify areas where you need to improve? What should you do?

First, accept the fact that you, and you alone, are responsible for your own personal and professional growth. No one is going to barge through your door and change you. You've already recognized that a change is needed. That's the toughest step.

Expand Your General Business Knowledge

How much do you know about business in general? Do you know how businesses operate? What about your company? What about your three best clients? Can you articulate their visions? Can you identify their short- and long-term strategies?

To survive and thrive in the information economy, the most important skill you'll need is good, old-fashioned business know-how. You should know how businesses operate, especially in the marketplace into which you sell. Become familiar with concepts and current practices in business strategy and planning, Internet commerce, business collaboration, and change management, among other areas.

One of my clients, bidding to replace a company's decade-old software with a new product that would let independent agents enter orders, asked how the company proposed to get the agents to accept the changeover. There was a stunned silence. Nobody in the company had imagined that the independents might resist the idea. My client, having uncovered an unidentified risk, locked up the deal by adding management services to the proposal.

Financial Statements Revisited

The most important element of business know-how is understanding how financial statements represent a company's financial position and how that company compares with others in its market. If you can't read and interpret an income statement, cash flow statement, or balance sheet, learn to do so right away. There are no shortcuts. Those financial statements are as revealing of business health as CAT scans, EKGs, and blood tests are of your physical health. You don't need to become a CPA, but a solid knowledge of financial concepts and an ability to compare clients are key.

If you believe, as I do, that effective selling at the executive level is about quantifying and proving the business value you can contribute, then having business know-how is a vital component of that approach. If you don't have it, how do you get it? Here are a few ideas:

- uTake a course in reading and interpreting financial statements at your local college, at night school, or (in the United States) with the American Management Association. In Europe, try Management Centre Europe.

- uRead a book on the subject. Do the exercises.

- uAsk your brokerage firm for guides to reading and interpreting financial statements. Most large brokerage houses have either a book or a comprehensive document on the subject.

- uSpend some time with your own company's CFO, controller, or accountant. If you aren't well versed in finance, do you know someone who can interpret a financial report for you in a pinch?

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If you have a close relationship with a client, ask his CFO, controller, or accountant to walk you through the company's financials. This is a very powerful way to understand how your client's business operates. If you sell into a vertical market, this approach will give you real insight into that industry, which can be used when selling to other companies. We're not talking about sharing proprietary information, of course, but industry norms — median profit margins, sales costs, revenues per employee, anything that will help you show how your offering contributes to their business plan. I submit to you that the timeless truth about sales is, "It's all about money." So if you can't show your clients and customers how your offering will earn or save them big money, you'll never consistently win the big sale.

Action: Develop the skill of zooming in and zooming out — looking at your client's company from 40,000 feet, diving deeply into relevant details, only to zoom out to the big picture again. More articles at www.HowWinnersSell.com

Before founding The Stein Advantage, Inc., Dave Stein was employed in a diversity of executive sales and marketing roles. Dave consults, coaches, speaks and trains on competitive sales strategies. He

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Stop Being a Salesperson

By Jim Logan

Stop Being a Salesperson by Jim Logan

There is absolutely nothing wrong or immoral about being a salesperson. That being said, we have too many salespeople in sales organizations and not enough businesspeople.

Salespeople tend to focus on themselves and the products and services they sell. Businesspeople focus on solving business problems and opening new opportunities, focusing on the outcome of the solutions they employ rather than the technical details of the products and services they offer.

Stop being a salesperson and become a businessperson when you engage with your prospective and existing customers. Place emphasis and communicate with your customers on the benefits they will realize from use of your products or services. Add value by solving business problems and creating new opportunities.

Corporate executives, business owners, investors, and senior management rarely have time for sales people; they always have time for businesspeople. The reason is businesspeople address issues of their primary concern - enabling business. Salespeople generally want to just talk about their products and services.

As a business owner or executive, which meeting would you welcome most: a conversation with a

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businessperson regarding growth and opportunity in your business or a features and functionality presentation about a product or service?

Jim Logan is founder of Accelerate Business Group, LLC, a revenue growth company. Accelerate Business Group partners with their customers to build revenue the only three ways possible – getting more new customers, increasing the value of your average sale, and getting more repeat business. Jim can be reached at <http://www.jslogan.com>.



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