

Get Over It, Techs ... You've Gotta Sell!

Editor's Note: This is part one of a two-part series.

Who says that techs can't sell? Granted, many techs don't want to sell, but desire and ability are two distinctly different things. Let's face it — in these trying economic times, boosting revenues requires commitment from everyone in the company. That means that everyone, from techs to administrative staff, is responsible for continually developing new opportunities and cultivating additional business with existing customers.

So, how do you, the skilled technical expert, make the transition (albeit reluctantly) to consultative salesperson? There are core competencies that you must develop. The first is probably the most difficult. You've got to change your mind. Yes, change your mind. Begin thinking of sales as a form of personal and professional survival. It's how you will keep your job. Face it — declining sales will result in declining revenues, which will ultimately earn you a prime spot in the unemployment line. So change your mind. Begin thinking of sales as the way of fulfilling that little line on your job description that says "other duties as assigned." Recognize it as a necessary function that none of us can escape.

The second core competency is refined communication. No offense, but technical folks are not well known for their exceptional communication skills. Focus on three critical aspects of communication: listening, speaking and writing. These aspects are listed in order of importance. Listening is the essential sales skill. Those of us who are responsible for generating revenues have to be able to listen to our clients and prospects. Once we have heard what they have to say, we are then responsible for reflecting on that information and then figuring out ways to meet their needs. Think in terms of additional products and services that you can provide to that client. Think in terms of your unique expertise. How can you use your expertise to help the client? Who else in your company has skills that can be helpful in this situation? This means that after listening, you have to think broadly. Think beyond your limited technical area to the larger arena of the company's entire suite of products and services.

Moving on to speaking — focus on speaking clearly and succinctly. In other words, enunciate and get to the point. Words are not like money; you can have too much. Clients



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don't really grasp your technical jargon; they are just too polite to say, "In English please!" (Trust me, that's exactly what they're thinking!) Find ways to express your points in simple, easy-to-understand terminology. You may need to enhance your communication with clear, simple drawings and diagrams. Find ways to reach customers and promote a higher level of understanding. They will appreciate the extra effort.

If you are occasionally called on to make presentations, brush up on those skills by taking a class. Classroom learning provides all of the information that you need to deliver a polished




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presentation. You will learn how to avoid putting clients into a PowerPoint coma. You will also learn how to stand, breathe and construct a captivating presentation. If the classroom doesn't appeal to you, consider joining your local ToastMasters. This will give you plenty of opportunities for practice. You will also get peer feedback.

Last, writing, whether it's e-mails or letters, also needs to reflect a high level of professional competence. Don't leave readers guessing; be sure that your intent is unambiguous. Use clear, easy-to-understand language; however, be sure to avoid colloquialisms. When constructing letters and e-mails, remember that you are not writing the great American novel. Your readers will not be patient enough to read volumes. So, get to the point. If the point is too complicated, you should proba-

bly be having a conversation, not writing a book. If you know that writing is a problem area for you, get help. Have a colleague review your correspondence before you send it out.

Now you have the basics. Change your mind and become very serious about auditing and refining your communication skills. These are the first steps in becoming the consultative salesperson that today's business environment requires. Next month's article will cover possible approaches that will maximize your sales abilities. 

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