



TRAINING
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PERSPECTIVES ON SALES TRAINING

SPECIAL EDITION

**THE SALESPERSON'S
MOST VALUABLE PORTFOLIO**

ALIGNING WITH WHAT MATTERS MOST TO YOUR CUSTOMER

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Struggling to differentiate themselves in today's crowded and hurried markets, many salespeople and account managers rely too much on products and pricing and too little on what matters most to their customers. But top performers in industry-leading companies take a different, more deliberate approach; they engage around value and on their customer's pursuit of success, rather than focusing just on closing the deal. In the current business environment, as product development cycle times become progressively shorter, trying to distinguish the features and benefits of one product over another has become increasingly difficult, if not impossible, in some markets.

Today, there's a more effective way to differentiate yourself: your value portfolio.

CHANGE THE DYNAMICS BY ENGAGING DIFFERENTLY

Buying has changed dramatically in recent years, and this is because the perspective of the buyer has evolved. New technologies, the pace of business, an ever-changing competitive landscape, and empowered procurement organizations threaten traditionally understood best practices that many in sales have depended upon for decades. Enlightened and demanding buyers don't care about the salesperson's forms, tips, tricks and veiled attempts to control or manipulate them. What they do care about is being successful, which is something they have in common with the seller.

When salespeople consider customer engagement through the lens of their

offerings, their perspective tends to become skewed by how they believe the customer feels about their product or service. It is entirely possible that you may be trying to appeal to your customer with a product or service that your customer isn't even thinking about, and possibly doesn't care much about — at least not yet.

Customers consistently contend that they want to work with salespeople and organizations that understand their business, their needs, and their unique requirements. As a result, attempts by salespeople to push product, solutions or any other offerings on a customer that isn't yet interested can be detrimental, perhaps even fatal. But despite the risk, most salespeople have done this

at some point in their sales careers. An alternate approach that's likely to be more successful requires looking at your products and services through the lens of the customer, rather than looking at the customer through the lens of what you want them to care about.

ALIGN WITH WHAT MATTERS MOST TO YOUR CUSTOMER

Customers want sellers to engage and focus on them. To the extent that you can do this, you will distinguish yourself from your competitors by capturing early mindshare, and potentially creating value when your buyer's evaluation has only just begun. Or, even better, before it has started. But how can you achieve this, when conventional sales wisdom says to push products, close deals and exceed quotas, as if your guest of honor — the customer — doesn't have a seat at the table?

REDUCING CUSTOMER STRESS, PRESSURE AND RISK SHOULD ALWAYS BE TOP-OF-MIND FOR THE SAVVY SALESPERSON.

When you can help your customer develop a vision of success with you that exceeds that of your competitors and you can explain the core elements of value that you'll use to advance and accelerate their vision, you take a giant step toward achieving something that many salespeople struggle to accomplish. You align yourself, your organization and your offerings with what matters most to your customer. Your buyer wants to be successful as much as you do. But, most well-trained and well-read salespeople will agree that their pathways to sales success are different, and will vary widely based on which training methodology they ascribe to, or which book they most recently read.

Contemporary customers and buyers look at their suppliers, salespeople and account managers through a set of six lenses: products, resources, expertise, services, industry experience, and brand/reputation. (See sidebar on page 4.) The organizations that are most effective in aligning customer needs and requirements with these components of value are also the most

successful, because the process of making these connections enables their customers to develop a vision of success — and the organization doing the selling becomes part of it.

GAIN SALES MOMENTUM BY LEVERAGING YOUR PAST PROVEN VALUE

If you're in an existing customer relationship, think about where you have created value with them in the past. Hopefully, your history has been positive and your success, mutual. In these cases, a discussion of past proven value is an opportunity to acknowledge how you and your customer have created and co-created value together, a likely door-opener for conversations about future success. But if your customer's experience hasn't been what they had hoped, you can't escape or ignore the impact of perceived poor performance. Sometimes your past

proven value is realizing what you and your organization can do better for your customer the next time around.

When you have a new customer, consider using comparable organizations where you do have past proven value — in the same industry or region, or with similar business objectives or requirements — as examples. The frenetic pace that drives the businesses of most customers makes them feel stressed and pressured enough, not to mention any risks that they associate with the opportunity they may be discussing with you. Your past proven value can reduce the risk that customers (new or existing) perceive, should they elect to do business with you. Reducing customer stress, pressure and risk should always be top-of-mind for the savvy salesperson.

DRIVE GREATER COLLABORATION BY DEVELOPING NEW OPPORTUNITIES WITH YOUR CUSTOMER

Where are you currently engaging and collaborating with your customer to create

and co-create value, and how will you be successful together when you do so?

Consider the active opportunities for value creation and co-creation that you are pursuing with your customer. How will these "potential sales" translate into value that is realizable, measurable and sustainable for your customer? Customers understand that salespeople and account managers are responsible for delivering revenues to their organizations, and sometimes they even express an interest in helping their suppliers be successful. But this is far more likely to happen if you and your customer have a history of past proven value creation together. Your ability to discuss and answer these four questions collaboratively with your customer is likely to have a profound impact on your success going forward:

1. What's going on in your business, and what are you trying to do?
2. Why is it challenging and why do you need help?
3. How can we help you resolve challenges and find a solution?
4. Where is our value different and why should you partner with us?

The responses will expand your value portfolio to include opportunities for value creation and co-creation in the present, and the momentum from your past proven value, as well as your current opportunities, will allow you to peek into the "crystal ball" of future potential value with your customer.

LEVERAGE THE PAST AND THE PRESENT TO BUILD A SUCCESSFUL FUTURE WITH YOUR CUSTOMER

The vast majority of buyers and sellers prefer to do business with someone that they currently have a relationship with, especially a trust-based relationship. This is great news, because combined, the value that you have created in the past and the value that you are creating in the present position you with relationships that will enable you to vision a successful future for and with your customer. When this happens, you've earned the right to explore future potential value together.

Think of how you feel when you see or hear something familiar, something you've

SIX COMPONENTS OF CUSTOMER VALUE

ONE

Products = Value

When the customer believes your products are superior to your competitor's products.

TWO

Resources = Value

When the customer believes your resources will enable their success.

THREE

Expertise = Value

When the customer believes your people will provide expertise/best practices.

FOUR

Services = Value

When the customer believes your service levels are higher and more proactive.

FIVE

Industry Experience = Value

When the customer believes your experience with similar customers reduces risk.

SIX

Brand/Reputation = Value

When the customer believes in your reputation for quality, service and product excellence, and your organization derives competitive advantage as a result.

seen or experienced previously. Unless your original experience was negative, you're likely to feel a sense of satisfaction because you've been there before. This is precisely how your customer feels when they believe that you can create value again because you've been there before—together. The momentum gained from past and present value-creation efforts tends to be accrued by only a few competitors in any given opportunity (sometimes only one), and it can powerfully propel forward the salespeople and account managers that harness it effectively.

The savvy customer understands that their likelihood of future success is much greater with a provider that has delivered value in the past and is doing so today. Your value portfolio provides you both with a unique and powerful platform for collaboration, which is extremely challenging, if not impossible, for a new competitor to replicate—but you have to use it and share it with your customer in order to fully benefit from it.

BUILD A PORTFOLIO OF PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE CUSTOMER VALUE

As you consider taking a more deliberate approach to engaging your customer around value and focusing more on making their customers successful, rather than on just closing the deal, assess yourself against the following best practices and see how you compare.

- **Engaging differently with your customer per the changing dynamics of today's buyers**
Have you given your customer reasons to engage and explore possibilities of value creation with you? If so, what are they?
- **Aligning with what matters most to your customer**
Do you understand what your customer cares most about, how these things translate into value for them, and why they are so important? Please elaborate.
- **Gaining sales momentum by leveraging your past proven value**
Does your customer understand and acknowledge the value that you have created with them in the past, and see this as a predictor of potential success in the future? If so, how can you validate this?

THE SALESPERSON WHO ALIGNS WITH WHAT MATTERS MOST TO THE BUYER IS WELL-POSITIONED FOR FUTURE SUCCESS.

- **Driving greater collaboration in developing new opportunities with your customer**
Were you able to elevate your conversation beyond price and product and toward value while collaborating with your customer? If so, how have you done so?
 - **Leveraging the past and the present to build a successful future with your customer**
Have you determined how you will measure and validate your value creation efforts with your customer moving forward, and are these measures important to both organizations? Please elaborate.
 - **Building a portfolio of past, present and future value**
Does your customer have a view of your value that includes what you have created, what you are creating, and perhaps even what you might be able to create with them in the future? If so, how do they feel about your value portfolio?
- Customers expect more from their suppliers than products, prices, promises and sales pitches. The salesperson or account manager who aligns with what matters most to the buyer is well-positioned for future success. Value creation and co-creation with customers transcends time, and can be your most powerful differentiator in today's frenzied and commoditized world. And when your customer sees you as a valuable component of their past and present success, it's only natural that they will want to discuss opportunities for future potential value creation with you — first. 🌱

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