

# Understanding Your Company's Sales Roles. Part One.

Whether you are responsible for the hiring of sales executives, the performance management of a sales team, or both, it is essential you understand the type of sales engagement your organisation requires.

Having a clear understanding of how your organisation develops and services new business relationships will ensure you know how to spot the right candidates during interviews, help them develop the right skills during employment and retain the best talent for your company.

Ensuring the right person is in the right role is a vital component of every organisation's talent management strategy. Not only is this the key to optimising the performance and return from your sales operations, but it also facilitates retention of top talent.

Here's a brief overview of four common sales techniques used in both field sales and key account management.



## Strategic Selling

Operating at C suite level, *Strategic Selling* delivers the potential for significant revenue gains but is one of the most complex proactive sales approaches and requires skills more akin to those of a business analyst than classic salesmanship.

Fundamentally different from *Solution Selling*, the *Strategic Selling* role demands the ability to proactively identify and position, for the customer, a way forward in the face of a current or imminent business problem, where the customer has yet to identify how to resolve it.

This involves sophisticated research and analysis of the dynamics in the customer's marketplace, together with the current customer situation, to uncover and understand significant market drivers requiring a key business response.

### Key aims are:

- 1) Alerting the customer to challenges over the horizon.
- 2) Defining, with the customer, the potential business impacts of those challenges.

3) Crafting joint options and solutions that can be implemented successfully to obviate those defined problems. This will involve your company's capabilities/ offerings and may also require integration of third party components to achieve a complete solution.

Candidates for *Strategic Selling* require a range of capabilities to perform this role, the top 4 being to:

- Research and analyse the customer's marketplace and customer situation.
- Identify current and impending customer business problems from the market data.
- Select capabilities required to address identified business problems with the widest possible scope.
- Propose to the customer executive team a solution package that not only addresses the current or impending business problem, but also creates a competitive advantage for the customer's business.

## Solution Selling

*Solution Selling* is the most complex form of reactive or customer needs-based selling. Operating at C suite level, it encompasses the ability to craft, for the customer, a complete, high-level and complex solution to meet a customer business need, where the way forward for the business has already been determined by the customer.

Often the customer is still without clarity as to how they will move forward – *Solution Selling* provides the 'how'. *Solution Selling* develops answers to meet complex customer needs and sometimes incorporates the offerings of others, where appropriate. The *Solution Selling* premise is that customers may know in principle what they need, but they may not have all the capabilities to pull a solution together and deliver a high-impact business outcome.

### Key aims are:

- 1) Working with the customer to design both a solution to a business level problem, but also to define the business outcome, usually in financial terms.
- 2) Creating an opportunity to establish a long-term relationship with a customer at senior levels within the business, opening the door to a possible long-term account relationship.
- 3) Establishing your own company as a significant business partner with senior business level people within the customer.



Candidates for *Solution Selling* require a range of capabilities to perform this role, the top 4 being to:

- Identify customer needs at main board or senior business manager level early in the buying cycle.
- Determine how the need can be fulfilled.
- Analyse and quantify the business value that the proposed fulfillment approach will offer to the customer.
- Specify what actions and resources will be required to fulfill the need, and by when.

## Application Selling

Occurring at many levels within the customer, *Application Selling* is the ability to identify opportunities within which to position an existing, fixed-scope, yet configurable offering that delivers a defined outcome for the customer to meet a defined need. This can be sold directly to the customer as a stand-alone application (e.g. an accounting system) or through others as part of a more complex solution (e.g. a just-in-time manufacturing solution). The level at which a sale takes place is frequently dependent on the cost and complexity of the application being sold.

### Key aims are:

- 1) Evidencing to the customer the benefits of the offering being sold in the context of their defined need.
- 2) Showing the customer how their offering can be configured to deliver the defined benefits.
- 3) Creating a competitive advantage and a feeling of fondness for their offering in the mind of the key customer decision makers.

Candidates for *Application Selling* require a range of capabilities to perform this role, the top 4 being to:

- Prospect vigorously to identify opportunities.
- Identify the customer's need at a functional level.
- Evaluate how well your own offering meets customer need.
- Build competitive analysis showing your own offering in a favorable light.

## Transactional Selling

*Transactional Selling* is the 'ability to identify opportunities within which to position a fully-functionally defined, stand-alone component'. As components tend not to deliver end-user functionality in themselves, a transactional sale usually involves technical integration of a component into an application along with justification of why it will perform better than another. Hence, *Transactional Selling* usually occurs at the technical and procurement levels.

### Key aims are:

- 1) Evidencing to the customer the ease with which their offering can be integrated into the customer's own offering.
- 2) Highlighting the key functional benefits of their offering to meet the customer's needs.
- 3) Creating a feeling of 'fondness' for the offering, so that the customer feels a preference to select them as suppliers over all other options.

Candidates for *Transactional Selling* require a range of capabilities to perform this role, the top 4 being to:

- Prospect vigorously to identify opportunities.
- Identify application areas within which the component could contribute value.
- Apply a high level of technical competence.
- Determine how much application benefit would result from use of the component.