At the Core of Consultative Selling

No Goal, No Prospect!

Once a goal is shared, the salesperson can learn about barriers to achieving a goal, and help the buyer see how barriers can be resolved by using the seller's offerings.

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CustomerCentric Selling® (CCS) is a disciplined approach, or process, applied to the sales function. CCS is comprised of steps in the sell cycle that define *what* the salesperson should do, as well as required skills and sales tools that show the reps how to perform each step.

CustomerCentric Selling is based on several core concepts, and we will explore some of these core concepts in this article and the next two issues of the *IPA Bulletin*. Even the most experienced salespeople tell us that if the CCS core concepts are adhered to, the job of selling is so much easier…and so much more successful! So, read on to see how you can help your sales team enhance their success.

In this issue, we will explore our first core concept: *No Goal, No Prospect!*

What Makes a Prospect?

Until suspects actually share a business goal, they are not prospects. Let's explore why. First, let's look at the thought process of a business executive who is making a buying decision. Executives (as do consumers) go through three distinct phases in the buying cycle.

Phase I: Phase 1 involves wrestling with a goal they need to achieve, or a problem they're trying to solve, and recognizing that there may be a solution out there to address their needs.

Phase II: Phase II is an active evaluation of product/service offerings from various vendors.

Phase III: Finally, Phase III is choosing a vendor and committing to the purchase. So, where do you think many traditional salespeople enter this buying cycle? Yep, Phase II! They're in there pitching product features without really understanding if anything they're saying is even relevant to what the buyer needs. How do you think this makes a buyer feel? Frustrated? Pressured? Manipulated? The salesperson needs to back up to Phase I and get in alignment with the executive's thought process.

Only when the salesperson understands what the executive is hoping to accomplish have they earned the right to talk about their own products/services.

Defining Business Goals

Now let's define business goals. This can best be illustrated by an example. An executive's statement, "We need to automate our operation," is not a business goal. If you delve into why they need to automate, you'll get answers such as, "We need to reduce costs," or "We need to get products to market faster so that we can hit our revenue targets."

Business goals are quantifiable, measurable and owned by executives. Business executives are well-versed in their business goals and potential barriers to meeting those goals. They also want to see how they could overcome these barriers by using a vendor's product/service offerings. So, until the seller gets a goal admitted to, there is no problem to be

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Until suspects actually share a business goal, they cannot be considered prospects.

solved and nothing for the salesperson to talk about (or sell!). Hence, no goal, no prospect.

Learning the Goal

So, how can a salesperson get a buyer to admit a goal? After all, buyers have historically had to listen to a salesperson's pitch; they are not at all accustomed to having business discussions with salespeople. For the sake of example, let's assume I'm contacting a vice president of sales to learn more about the goals they have for their selling organization. I would briefly introduce myself and then ask, "What objectives do you have for your selling organization in the coming year?" Let's assume that the person did not share any specific goals. One tool I would then use is the Menu of Goals and it would go something like this:

The top three goals that other vice presidents of sales have shared include:

1) Reducing the learning curve for new hires,
2) Increasing close ratios, and
3) Improving forecast accuracy.

Are you wrestling with any of these objectives?

Another tool that can be even more effective is a case study or success story. Let's again assume that the vice president of sales didn't share a goal. I would then say:

"A situation you may be interested in had to do with the head of sales at a manufacturing company that needed to reduce the length of the sell cycle and increase close ratios. Their salespeople spent 60-90 days with prospects and only 10 percent of these prospects actually closed. He said he needed a way for his salespeople to qualify a prospect's need for their products and ability to buy early in the sell cycle so the salespeople could focus on high-probability opportunities. After they implemented the CCS sales process, the length of the sell cycle decreased by two weeks and their close ratios increased to 60 percent. Are you experiencing similar challenges?"

Once a goal is shared, the salesperson can drill down to learn about potential barriers to achieving a goal and help the buyer visualize how these barriers can be resolved by using the seller's offerings. The suspect can now be classified as a prospect. IPA