

A Regular at the Table

Five steps to influencing and speeding up buying decisions

Editor's Note: In this column space of *Vet-Advantage*, we will give you insight into both basic and advanced tactical selling techniques that will help you serve customers better than ever before. But let us preface this with a warning. The material in these articles is not for salespeople who are not ready to push themselves harder than ever before. It is for the professional who seeks constant improvement, fresh ways to serve customers, and constant learners who are never satisfied with being average. If this is you, it's great to have you on board. Now let's get to work!

“That information looks good,” the customer says. “Do me a favor: Give me a brochure and some pricing, and I’ll be sure to take it to our next meeting. Give me a call next week, and I’ll let you know if there is any interest.”

If you are a salesperson, you not only have heard those words but you no doubt hear them often. When it happens, it leaves you wondering if you are being blown off, or if there really is interest. Regardless of the wondering, most salespeople agree to the prospect’s recommendation, make a note to call back and promise to follow up later.

The problem with this mildly wimpy approach is that it often leaves salespeople chasing deals that never had a chance ... costing them countless hours of sales time. It also prevents salespeople from understanding the who, what, when and how of the opportunity’s decision-making process, thereby minimizing the chance of a successful sale. If you want to increase your sales by more than 15 percent this year, simply master the following process and use it every time a prospect tells you to give them a brochure and pricing ... because they have to talk to others.



By Brian Sullivan

Stop hoping your existing relationships can sell your solution to others as well as you can. They can't.

Step No. 1: Always ask who is responsible for making decisions

Don't be afraid of insulting the person you are talking to. For example:

“Sue, who as well as yourself, is involved in determining if this solution would be best for your facility?”

Notice how this wording gives possible decision-maker Sue her well-deserved respect ... even if she has absolutely no role in that decision. You give her respect, she tells you how the buying process works. Two winners on that deal!

Step No. 2: Ask to be involved in the meeting.

You belong at the table where that decision is being made. Stop hoping your existing relationships can sell your solution to others as well as you can. They can't. Which means on every opportunity, you need to expect and ask to attend. For example:

“Sue, I know I've given you quite a bit of information. Would it be helpful if I make myself available for that meeting should any detailed questions come up?”

Step No. 3: Get a Big Fat Yes from the person in front of you (or on the phone).

Too often, salespeople assume that because the prospect said they were going to take it to somebody else, they must like the solution. They then assume the prospect is “all in” and will actively sell it to others. But we all have had deals go bad because our assumption was wrong. If you want to know how excited your possible “champion” is about your product, then ask. For example:

“Sue, you mentioned the other folks that need to be involved in the decision. But before we even get to that point, do YOU believe that my product would be a good fit your facility?”

No more guessing. Listen closely to the words and enthusiasm your prospect uses. If they can’t make a case to you why they think it would be a good idea, there is zero chance they will make it to the other decision-makers. Look at this as a nice little practice session. In this session you have the opportunity to add additional information that will better prepare your champ for that next meeting. Don’t be surprised if your prospect gets even more excited about your solution while they are telling you what they think. The more they talk about the benefits of your product, the more they sell it to themselves. Selling it to themselves will prepare them to sell it to others.

Step No. 4: Find out what’s important to the others.

Assuming your prospect validated their support for your solution, follow with:

“I’m glad you like what you heard. Sue, now I’m curious. What are the other decision-makers going to need to hear to

come to the same conclusion you just did? That my product would make sense for your facility.”

This will allow your champ to think through what each person may need to know to make a positive decision on your product. As the lightbulbs come on, be prepared to provide additional supporting materials to help your prospect make the case for your solution. By the way, what often happens as you follow this process is prospects like Sue will understand that they may have to work too hard to deliver your presentation. Don’t be surprised if they now decide it makes sense for you to be part of that meeting.

Step No. 5: Make detailed notes in your CRM or other planning tool.

After all that great work and discovery, why on earth would

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you want shove your notes into a beat up folder or under the front seat of your fancy Ford Taurus? Put those names and what’s important in an electronic file for safekeeping. Your organized knowledge and easy access to key decision-makers throughout your territory is one of your greatest assets.

If yours is a complex sale, the above process may need to be repeated in the same facility more than once. Make it a habit and you will get to more and higher decision-makers. While your competition remains stuck in the basement, praying their message magically finds its way through the decision-making hallways, you will become a regular at the table where purchase orders, and careers are made. ■