

Control Your Message

Coaching Questions

“If you don’t control your message, what could happen?”

Topic Introduction

A rule of thumb for any sales person is to always speak with decision makers. Sometimes you think you are speaking to one, but lots of things could happen to prevent that. Maybe there are decision making layers or maybe you just didn’t get to the level you thought you had. If you don’t control your message, when it reaches the decision maker it won’t sound the way you want it to.

Discussion Questions

- Could the message continue to be communicated? Are there other decision makers? Are there influencers? How big is the buying group?
- Could the message be changed?
- Could there be a miscommunication in your message or medium used?
- Could the relevant points be prioritized incorrectly by different members of the buying group, as they have different priorities than the decision maker?

Key Learning

Control your message so that if you are speaking to a decision maker, or even if you aren’t, the right message comes across.

“How do you make sure that you are speaking to a decision maker?”

Topic Introduction

Making sure that you are speaking to a decision maker is important, but you don’t want to make the rest of the buying group feel inferior. There are good and bad ways to do this.

Discussion Questions

- Do you ask them how a decision is usually made? Do you ask them the process?
- Do you confirm that all the relevant parties will be at the meeting?
- Do you ask directly who the decision maker is?

Key Learning

Being direct is permitted. Being rude is not.

“What’s your backup plan?”

Topic Introduction

If you can’t get in front of the right people, you need a way to control your message, show your organization’s brand, and generate interest.

Discussion Questions

- If you can’t meet with the decision maker, how could you control the message?
- If you have an online business, how do you ensure your message is communicated accurately?
- With word of mouth, how do you avoid miscommunication?
- What is a creative way to control your message?

Key Learning

With new technology there are new ways to control your message. Often it is easier and faster for an influencer to forward an email or forward a link to a video rather than trying to rephrase what a sales person has told them.

Examples

Real Life Example: If you don't control your message, what could happen?

A great example of needing to control your message is when you are applying for any government or foundation grant. This is not a traditional 'sale', but you are 'pitching' and 'selling' your organization in order to receive a grant.

Typically a grant is awarded by a board of individuals. Each individual evaluates your application independently based on the written word that was provided to them.

Many organizations that submit a grant proposal would have called up the coordinator for the grant and spoken to them. Some of this conversation may be communicated to the board, but it is unlikely that it was transcribed. Even if your case was compelling over the phone to the coordinator, if you did not communicate that in the proposal you will not be successful in your application.

Once you have received your grant, this problem continues as most have some sort of reporting requirement. You may have monthly phone conversations with the coordinator of the grant, but you need to fully outline your progress or use of the funds in a detailed report for the board or other stakeholders. If the grant is from the government, an independent auditor is often brought in to review the financials and the progress of any project being completed with the funds.

This is a great example of needing to carefully control your message.

Real Life Example: How do you make sure that you are speaking to a decision maker?

A carpet manufacturer was looking at entering the non-profit market. They felt as though this was a good fit as they were a social enterprise dedicated to sustainability within the carpet manufacturing industry.

A key part of their process in developing relationships with the non-profit sector was to make sure that they were speaking with decision makers. They did this in two ways;

1. Each time that they called an organization, they always asked to speak with the CFO or the CFO equivalent. Typically in any organization, if you are asking for a financial commitment, the buck stops with the CFO making them the key decision maker.

Note: In instances where the CFO deferred responsibility, there was the added benefit that the CFO would perform the introduction to their subordinate. This made the subordinate more willing to work with the carpet manufacturer.

2. Whomever they were speaking to (either the CFO or another individual within the organization), the sales person would always clarify that they were the decision maker by asking; "Are you the decision maker?"

With these two tactics, the carpet manufacturer was able to build relationships at the top of non-profit organizations very quickly.

Real Life Example: What's your backup plan?

Salesforce.com is a CRM (customer relationship management) tool that is hosted online. Their sales people will reach out to large organizations and pitch their service. Due to their online presence, controlling their message is easy and they use a lot of different tactics to control their message:

1. They use PDF brochures that are customized by target market. The sales person can send the appropriate brochure rather than letting the customer select their own.
2. They have online videos that explain the total service offering or individual components of it. A sales person could simply send the videos that most apply to their target. This prevents the customer from viewing all of the videos and getting confused.

Although the customer could help themselves, it is in the company's best interest to control the message and get the pinpointed information to them.