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## I Love Selling to the Executive-Level—Not!

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How many books are there on selling to the Executive-Level/Economic Buyer? One would assume that with so many books written on the topic, this should be happening all the time. However, few salespeople still are able to elevate their contact level to the economic decision maker.

First of all, what are the barriers from a seller's perspective?

- 1) **Fear:** It is outside their comfort zone. Many do not feel they can pull off an executive meeting. "The Executive-level doesn't care about my product/service" is the common refrain from salespeople.
- 2) **Adding value:** There is an old saying that senior-level decision makers are more interested in their business vs. what you're selling. This is true. As a salesperson, you must do your homework on the customer and know what is important to them. You must demonstrate this in the meeting.
- 3) **Gatekeepers:** It is easier to take the path of least resistance and sell to the gatekeeper.

Years ago I was coaching a salesperson, Patricia (not her real name), on elevating her contact to the CEO of a large financial institution. Based on the key impact of her product for the financial institution, this CEO would definitely be interested in scoping out the future of the partnership. My client was experiencing a lot of strong competitors in the marketplace, so my client's Vice President of Sales set a directive to all sales to build and solidify relationships at the executive level. Thus, my firm was hired to help the company accomplish this and why I became Patricia's coach.

Patricia and I had made several calls to this financial institute and had scheduled a meeting with our best contact there (credible within his organization, loved us, and was willing to help). As we prepared for this meeting, the one and only goal was to schedule a meeting with the CEO. Over lunch, I peppered Patricia on how to ask for the meeting. She nailed it every time and had the attitude and positioning down perfectly.

In the meeting with our contact, however, after the niceties and addressing some of the issues, Patricia never once asked for a meeting with the CEO. What? Remember, our only goal was to get our contact to schedule the meeting. That was the ONLY purpose, yet Patricia was closing her folder and thanking him for his time. As a coach, you prefer the client to execute on the given strategy, but I had been working on this for about six months and knew it was time to step in. So I jumped in and asked the customer by leveraging what we had rehearsed over lunch to get a meeting with the CEO. This customer's response was, "Sure, when do you want the meeting? Would it be okay if I attended?"

The question is: if it was that easy, why hadn't Patricia asked for the meeting? It was because SHE did not want it. This could have happened three months earlier.

So is it skill or will?

In my book, *Reignite—How to Rekindle Your Passion for Selling*, I provide an overview of the attributes of top performers: attitude, motivation, accountability, and integrity. Let me demonstrate how the attributes of top performers actually drive the execution of the key skill of selling to the Executive-Level.

Consider the following questions.

**Motivation:** How motivated am I to call higher? What's in it for me? How badly do I want this prospect? Do I need to shorten the selling cycle?

**Attitude:** How comfortable am I at the Executive-Level? How confident am I in my ability to deliver value? Do I act like I have had hundreds of meetings at the Executive-level; can I fake confidence?

**Accountability:** How do I handle obstacles to getting to the C-Suite? Am I responsible for making this happen? Do I feel it is my responsibility to sell to the person who can say yes?

**Integrity:** Do I have loyal coaches who want to help? Does the customer trust me to bring value?

Selling high in an organization shortens the sales cycle. Yet, a majority of salespeople become their own gatekeepers simply because selling to the Executive-Level is outside their comfort zone. However, like anything else, you build confidence in knowledge, preparation, repetition, and success.

Question: What are your personal barriers to selling to the Executive-Level?

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