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## **IS IT TIME TO MOVE TO CONSULTATIVE SELLING?**

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Customers hate to be "sold", but they do love to buy products and services that genuinely solve their business problems! This simple truth reflects the reason that successful companies (whether B to B or B to C) have increasingly shifted their selling approach to Consultative Selling over the last twenty years.

### **What is it?**

As opposed to the traditional selling model where sales people "push" products or services through a regurgitation of features and benefits, Consultative Selling repositions the salesperson as a consultant who help his customer to be more effective and successful in their business. Adoption of this model continues to grow year over year as successful companies look to transform their sales strategies and organizations.

Many names are used to describe the consultative selling approach. Among them strategic selling, solution selling, relationship selling etc.; but the common element of these programs is a client-centric focus.

The shift to consultative selling is characterized by the phrase "stop selling and start solving!" The consultative salesperson is trained in the approach and skills needed to develop an understanding of the customer's business... and the issues or problems that business faces. Through this understanding as well as knowledge of the industry or market that the customer serves, the consultative salesperson can have a higher quality conversation with the customer focused on their business and from this they can uncover opportunities to present relevant ideas and solutions.

A consultative selling methodology provides the framework for systematically achieving this process of creating strategic value for your customers.

### **Why is this approach valuable?**

Who would you rather deal with .a salesperson who is knowledgeable in your business and takes the time to truly understand the challenges you face, or a salesperson that simply is there to "tell" you about his products or services?

Clearly everyone wins in the consultative selling model. The customer is better served. Thoughtful conversations and dialogue will result in solutions that align with their key business issues and needs.

The consultative salesperson that follows a systematic approach and methodology will have much "higher probability" sales results and sales management benefits from more accurate forecasting and predictability that accrue to following a consistent process.

Optimally, consultative selling changes the type of relationship a salesperson can have with his customers. It will result in a more sustainable, long-term relationship based on trust and disclosure. It starts with taking the time to understand and focus on the customer and his business. As the relationship evolves, the effective consultative salesperson will have much greater "access" to the customer's organization because he is viewed as bringing valuable solutions, ideas and advice.

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## Are Consultative sales people born?

No! Like any other profession, becoming highly successful takes training, coaching and experience. Consultative selling training provides the approach, disciplines and skills needed to move to this powerful mode of selling. Effective communication, relationship development and understanding how to create real value for customers are some of the key components of these programs. The consultative selling methodologies establish a framework for consistency and repeatability in these processes.

Experienced consultative salespeople regularly look for opportunities to bring their customers value that extends beyond the range of their own specific products and services. How do they do this? By thinking about other things that could benefit their customer (an introduction to a potential third party partner, providing relevant advice, arranging a meeting with an existing customer etc.), and proactively fostering these activities. Consultative sales professionals, who become a valuable partner to their clients, are an invaluable asset to any company looking to grow its business and market share.

### A Case Study for the Value of Consultative Selling

#### *The Client:*

A well known provider of Wireless phones and service

#### *The Business Problem:*

The business was stuck in a downward spiral of commodity selling to low level managers where only price seemed to matter. It was losing market share and had to act.

#### *The Solution:*

They recognized that they needed to reorganize their sales force and "de-commoditize" the sales proposition. They decided to transform their sales organization and adopt the consultative selling model.

In 2002 they commenced consultative selling training for their sales force (including executive involvement), and implemented a sales pipeline management process. They continue to run follow-on training sessions for all new sales personnel.

#### *The Benefits:*

Their organization has seen a dramatic change in results ever since they moved to the consultative selling model. They have consistently taken market share from their closest competitor and today regularly outsell them between 25 and 100 to one on a monthly basis (.and their competitor has the lowest prices !)

As their VP, Sales and Customer Operations said, *"the cornerstone to our success was our consultative sales training and process. Our salespeople are considered the most successful in the industry and they attribute that success to the consultative selling approach. Clearly, selling value at the strategic level clearly outperforms selling price at the operational level!"*