



CEO Sales Call Train Wrecks

With all of our electronic communication tools available today, sales people can literally prospect the universe and close business with clients they may never meet face-to-face. However, there are still business relationships in B2B sales where the value of your product or service is such that having face-to-face executive level connections between the two organizations can increase the alignment as well as create a competitor barrier. CEO level connections can be extremely productive for both companies and are well worth the effort.

Building these connections does not come without risk for the Chief Revenue Officer. I have observed CEO's without any sales background or experience have some success in building executive relationships with current clients. Unfortunately, some CEO's then decide they are ready to join the sales team and go "slay dragons" (i.e. attack the market and close new business). This epiphany occurs most frequently when overall business performance is below expectations.

The good news is you now have a CEO ready to engage in the challenges of working with the primary independent variable of every business – the prospect. The bad news is these well-intended CEO's have little or no sales background regarding the differences between existing client relationship events and new business prospecting calls.

The challenge for the Chief Revenue Officer is to make sure everyone on the sales call team knows and owns their role. You can only have one quarterback leading the qualifying topics discussion and directing who answers the prospect's questions. Without these rules of engagement, the call can end up taking a less-than-desired direction with just one untimely comment.

While CEO participation is usually well received by the prospect organization, comments volunteered by the CEO that are intended to accelerate the sales process can end up sending the sales team

immediately into damage control mode. Some of these CEO boomerang comments I have personally witnessed include:

“You can have an additional 10% discount if I can leave with an order today”.

This completely invalidated the pricing information provided to the prospect by the sales team prior to the meeting. Obviously the prospect’s only focus now was with the CEO – not their sales contact.

“We can extend warranty coverage at no charge.”

So much for delivering products under standard terms and conditions plus this message suggested a high level product quality problem.

“Call me at home if you need anything special.”

The CEO just became the prospect’s new account rep.

“So...what do we have to give you to get the order today?”

Not always the best way to start a negotiation – especially when the rest of the team was caught totally off guard.

“You really don’t understand how great our products are, do you?”

Forget the rule about never asking yes/no questions - this one came off as total arrogance on the part of the CEO.

“No one would buy our old design...we have a new one coming!”

So much for selling products you can deliver today.

“You need to understand our pricing ... we have a lot of engineering costs to recover.”

Not the best way to introduce a pricing model.

“Maybe we should just buy your company.”

The CEO sensed the discussion was not going well and volunteered this as a new agenda topic. The call ended immediately.

“Our product is patented so you CAN’T get it anywhere else.”

The prospect changed their design so they didn’t have to depend on this solution.

“This was a great call...I got to say everything I planned to say!”

It was an accurate comment but not one that you want to deliver at the end of a prospect meeting.

The post-call reviews are always about how to protect other prospects from this type of CEO disruption. Sales reps have called this type of disruption the equivalent of performing a heart-valve replacement on yourself. In other words, you never let the CEO operate on your revenue stream unless you are prepared to hemorrhage out.

The Chief Revenue Officer needs to get in front of this train and make sure the CEO knows the questions they should ask at the start of the meeting. The “glad to be here, how can we help you?” type dialog to get the discussion started is the best approach. After that, the CEO needs to wait to be called upon by the members of the sales team and only briefly speak to the topic requested. Compliance is non-optional behavior. I have always notified CEO’s they will get to walk back to the airport if they misbehave. So far, that has always worked!

About the Author

Carl Moe is the author of “*Sales Revenue System 2.0/Your Chief Revenue Officer B2B Success Model*”, a popular book that details the revenue system processes he implemented in his corporate executive roles. He is also founder of CRO Success LLC – a Minneapolis-based corporate resource specializing in restructuring business-to-business **revenue systems** for sustainable growth and optimized performance. CRO Success is both the name of the company and its mission statement.

Moe has decades of executive experience (President, COO, EVP and CRO roles) in technology-based global organizations and has conducted business in 14 countries outside North America. He holds a BSE and MBA from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Carl can be reached at 952.232.6720 or cmoe@crosuccess.com