



Hope vs. Strategizing

So much rides on sales success: the house payment, new car, vacation, college educations, investments, self esteem, etc., it is no wonder that hope is fundamental to the sales-professional's personality. Hope is an essential, driving force but does hope help selling?

When asked by management for the progress on a sales campaign, most sales professionals will recall the account in question, review the recent events and their feelings about those events, then generate the next steps depending on the individual with whom they are talking. At the coffee machine with the VP of Sales the sales representative might offer: "Planning to visit their key plant then a meeting with the VP CXO." "Great".

But, driving to a new account sales call with their sales manager, the representative might be a little more detailed: "Well, the last discussion did not go as I had hoped, and I am considering calling ABC Consulting and checking their view of the situation, then pushing hard for a visit to their main plant, and if that goes well, and we collect the right data, we can focus directly on the VP CXO for an ROI meeting." "Great, don't we turn here?"

In both cases the rep escaped additional scrutiny and coaching. The illusion of a plan was heard, and as well as the assumption the disclosed "plan of action" would be followed. The rep feels the disclosures were in line with the level of interest, and everyone is happy. But one should ask, did either management professional go farther than scratching the surface? Did they recognize hope when they heard plan? Would they get the same answer two days in a row?

If we use mental activity to gauge work, then hoping is definitely thinking, right next to imagination. How do we drive hope into constructive behavior like strategizing?

Most reps generate only those few next steps as seem reasonable. After those few steps any more detail becomes fuzzy from diminishing levels of certainty. Hope takes over to fill the gap between the last step worthy of remembering and the sales goal with financial payoff. Without hope, the distance in capital equipment and services sales to the goal would be too far and uncertain to reach for.

Starting with a standard plan or creating a plan together would be a good approach for the rep and manager. After some initial analysis is done, talking through the characteristics of the account and strategizing would be useful to both the rep and the manager. As the first calls are made, the strategy would need to be edited to keep current with the state of the

campaign. In fact maintaining the strategy as a reflection of the campaign could be useful for periodic reviews, for sharing with sales team members and for archiving once closed or lost. Reps will begin to see that many professionals are dependent on the progress and understanding of their campaigns.

Urging the rep to strategize transforms hope energy into useful activity. Experienced or not, the rep will expend more effort maintaining the campaign strategy, and less focus on what they hope will happen. The selling process is dynamic and normal planning tools will not work.

With more thinking invested in the campaign, good ideas will emerge that shorten sales cycles, expand revenue, and win sales. The net value will be to make the forecast more accurate because the hope factor as been reduced.

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