

Navigating Multiple Decision-Makers

Find the authority that can say, “Yes”

STORY BY DAN STALP | PHOTO BY KENNY JOHNSON



Q. *We sell our services to a lot of companies with multiple decision makers, co-owners, partners, etc. Sometimes they have differing needs. Should we approach these prospects differently than single decision makers? Paul Weber, president, EAG Advertising*

A. Congratulations on selling larger, more complicated deals—you are working the mature market segment! At Sandler, we talk about the “stairway to success.” Step 1 might be an owner who has one employee

want to focus on the decision-maker, we also want to cater to the other influencers in the decision-making process. These individuals are also sometimes called “stakeholders.” Keep in mind that the person who can say “yes” can also delegate that decision to someone else if they choose.

CASE IN POINT

I once called on a mortgage company and met with the president of the company. Halfway through our pre-sale process, he hired a new general manager.

“EVERYONE IN AN ORGANIZATION CAN TELL YOU ‘NO,’ TYPICALLY ONLY ONE PERSON IN AN ORGANIZATION CAN TELL YOU ‘YES!’”

and can make the decision without anyone else being impacted. Step 4 might be an owner with anywhere from 10 to 20 employees and at least one manager in place. Step 8 might be an international company with multiple locations, an executive team, a board and committees. What you described above sounds like a Step 6 or higher.

WHO’S IN CHARGE

A Sandler Rule you might want to consider is this: Everyone in an organization can tell you “no,” typically only one person in an organization can tell you “yes!”

So, the key here is to find out who has the authority to tell you “yes.” While we definitely

Rather than telling the general manager they were going with us, he thought he might empower the general manager by letting him make the decision, which he did with someone else.

The fact that sales professionals typically garner more overall profit (not necessarily percentage-wise) on larger deals could be due to the following reasons:

- ▶ More difficult because the decision impacts more people
- ▶ A more complex decision process
- ▶ A longer sales cycle
- ▶ Competition is more skilled

So, in order to succeed in this type of sales arena, we need to find out what is personally

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at stake for each of the stakeholders, with the most important personal reasons being those of the decision-maker.

This is where we stop talking about what the company gets overall and focus on what each individual (stakeholder) gets by adding or replacing someone with your product and/or service.

THE SQUEAKY WHEEL

Another way to look at it is: How are they personally impacted by doing nothing? The person who can say “yes” can and will trump the others if they so choose.

However, don’t underestimate how an unhappy employee or employees can offset the alleviating of the personal pain of the decision maker. Oftentimes, the squeaky wheel does get the oil.

Part of your role as the sales professional in the complex sales environment is to coach the decision maker on how they will handle the push back from their team or other department heads.

Being a trusted advisor to your prospect or to your client is why you get paid the big bucks in the first place. And it separates professionals from novices. **KCB**