



Russ Ralph

Sales Life

from **SolutionsforSales**

Our regular feature 'Sales Life' invites senior salespeople to give their views on key sales issues.

This quarter we talk to Russ Ralph, Strategic Business Development Manager at Petrofac.

What is your job title and what do you do?

I am Strategic Business Development Manager for Plant Asset Management, a division of Petrofac. Petrofac is an international provider of facilities solutions to the Oil and Gas industries and I recently joined the Plant Asset Management division. Our division is made up of over 100 highly skilled and experienced engineers that provide a range of asset integrity solutions. This means making sure that not only do our clients' assets meet international standards and regulations, but also that they will achieve optimum performance and stand the test of time.

What is the top sales challenge you and your team are currently facing?

Currently our biggest challenge is maximising our opportunities with existing key customers. We have successful relationships with some huge organisations and our challenge is to develop these relationships. We do this by implementing a structured account management style and demonstrating through our work on existing projects that we can deliver to customers on a global scale.

What is the best piece of sales advice you've ever been given?

Be true to yourself and don't change who you are to sell something. Striking up a conversation and finding out what someone is interested in is the natural way you would talk to someone in the 'real world', and this should not be any different in a sales situation. This is the way you will find out what your customers' real challenges are. It will also earn you respect and build your credibility as a trusted partner.

Describe a memorable deal

I was part of team pitching to be the Project Management Consultant (PMC) on a major new gas distribution project for the city of Abu Dhabi. The deal, to manage the external engineering and construction, working directly for the ADNOC (The Abu Dhabi National Oil Company), was a key opportunity to establish ourselves in this market. The General Manager of the project visited the UK many times and at one memorable dinner he simply said to me: "I just want to be able to sleep at night." The importance of reliable risk assessment and safety practices cannot be underestimated in this industry. There were lots of established players competing for this deal but they were

not able to prove that they had the expertise to fulfil the safety requirements. We won the deal as we were able to identify the decision maker and meet his requirements for thorough risk assessment and stringent safety practices.

What is the most important thing to learn about your industry?

You need to be open and listen to what your customer needs before you get too involved with the technical side of the requirements. If you focus on the technical side of a project it is easy to get bogged down in the details too quickly. You must also be sensitive to commercial drivers. Being able to see the 'big picture' and understand what is driving your customers will help you meet their needs more successfully.

Who in your industry do you most admire?

I worked with Phil Michel at the UK Atomic Energy Authority early in my career. The UKAEA worked on nuclear research projects and I joined at a time when their challenge was to diversify. The company had a great deal of experience in assessing hazardous facilities and was looking for a way to transfer this capability into different markets. Phil led this project. He had the ability to get in front of senior Oil and Gas people and convince them of the benefits of the proposal.

Phil was very successful in selling the UKAEA's nuclear based services into the Oil and Gas market and was really the person who got me into Sales. I followed his lead and was inspired by his professionalism and success.

What is the best time of day for a meeting?

For me it's 10am as I'm a morning person. 10am is better than first thing as it allows people to settle in and prepare for the day before they begin the meeting. Also, a 10am meeting often gives the option to follow on with lunch, which is always good in a sales situation.

Which do you think is most important when winning new business; technical expertise or sales skills?

I think sales skills are the most important. Qualifying your target is essential and must be done before you get anywhere near the technical stuff. If the opportunity is qualified correctly, and the relationship has been built, then you need to follow up with technical expertise. This is what builds credibility and makes the customer believe what you have promised, but it is sales skills that get you to this point.