



Steve Gedney

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 Steve Gedney. Steve has worked as Sales Director and Managing Director throughout Europe, Australia and South Africa with companies such as Borland, Mercury and IBM.

What are the top sales challenges you come across and how do you deal with them?

It's a common view that you need to have a 'C' level contact in order to win a major deal, indeed many Executive teams put considerable pressure on sales teams to establish this relationship. This can introduce an unnecessary diversion and unwarranted pressure on the sales team. It is almost certain that unless you work for an IBM, HP or Oracle then the C level exec with whom you want to meet does not want to meet with you. Unless you have some genuinely 'game-changing' technology you will have to earn the right for this type of relationship. It's better to realise that until this is won you would be better off meeting with their 'trusted Lieutenant'; somebody who wants a career enhancing project to get involved with.

Another challenge I have faced is how to engage prospects in a new and interesting way. Every company states that their technology is unique or that they are truly customer focused, unfortunately customers don't believe this so they switch off. The best way around this is to go back to basics. You must do what you said you would do, deliver on time, provide a service and retain your integrity and honesty. Polite persistence pays.

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

Following the completion of my sales training with IBM I asked the top two sales performers for their advice. The first said, "do the small things right; return calls when you said you would, turn up on time. Customers don't forget and all buying decisions are emotional." The second advised, "work hard and don't give up, this will ensure that you are in the right place at the right time to take advantage of opportunities that you may not have expected to occur."

Describe a memorable deal

While working in Australia for Candle Corporation at the end of our 1999 FY we needed one more sizeable deal to

make our target. Of course, in December 1999 the business world was focused on the "Millennium Bug" with a lot of nervous apprehension. IBM Global Services Australia (IGSA) were hosting the systems of many important customers in Asia Pacific. I had built a relationship with the Head of Operations at IGSA and on December 31st I left a voicemail on his mobile phone asking if he would complete the deal before midnight. He was buried deep in the operations "bunker" preparing to be the first major IT centre in the world to enter the year 2000. He stepped out to give instructions to one of his managers to agree terms with us. I drove to their office and made my way through the thousands of partying revellers to collect the contract at 10pm.

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

Stick at it, the hi-tech software industry is full of ups and downs. Unexpected career changes are the norm and an effective way to deal with this is to stay informed of the latest issues and keep networking with your contacts, there are always opportunities.

Who in your industry do you most admire?

The technical staff, they are the unsung deal winners. They win over the customers by demonstrating their depth of understanding and passion.

What is the best time of day for a meeting?

Between 09.00 and 11.00, as this is when prospects and customers are most receptive and alert and willing to commit to the desired course of action. The worst time to meet is if you are last on the list to present your offer during a 'beauty parade' or 'technical bake-off'. I would work very hard to trade this slot for another.

Where do you get your best ideas?

In the car on the way to work, there are so few distractions.

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

Both technical and sales skills are needed in equal quantity. Without the input of both it is unlikely that your company will fulfil its potential.