

Value Building 101

Get in the front seat of the car with your customer

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It is no secret that mastering the art of building value in deals leads to higher commissions and improved win rates. For salespeople, this is an attractive skill to acquire. However, ironically, while many salespeople want to increase their gross profit in the deals they work, they often lack a consistent system to effectively build value. My observations over the past few years indicate that such a system is either missing or poorly taught in organizations across the nation. A proven process is essential for salespeople who want to make more money by building value inside of their deals.

I've had the privilege of working with more than 750 salespeople annually across the country through my 12-week sales boot camp. This program focuses on three key aspects: prospecting to acquire net-new clients, conducting effective meetings that lead to next steps and, ultimately, building more value in sales processes.

What continually surprises me is that the sales reps and leaders in my programs often discover that their organizations lack concrete strategies for adding value beyond building stronger client relationships, emphasizing their companies' exceptional service teams and trying to save clients as much money as possible. This situation helps explain why we frequently find ourselves in price wars.

I recommend three things for you to consider incorporating into a value-building system for your organization:

(1) Criteria Discovery: How you go about understanding what matters to your client

(2) Sales Process: How you incorporate value-building steps into your sales cycle

(3) Proposals: How you present your business case for differentiation

You should aim to have a plan for salesperson development and create management processes to improve their skills in these areas. Although I will only be sharing information on the first part of this system (criteria discovery)



in this article, I will be covering the other parts in another Office Technology article and a BTA Building My Business webinar in the months ahead.

Criteria Discovery: How We Go About Understanding Our Clients

"It's not about you. It's about the customer." Have you heard that before?

What about this one: "That's why you have one mouth and two ears."

In both situations, you have a similar challenge: You aren't listening enough and clearly don't understand what your customer cares about. Unfortunately, this is a normal issue that occurs daily with salespeople. This can improve when you learn how to discover and understand your customer's criteria. Without this, you can't hope to build any value in your sales.

What does "criteria" even mean? I like to think of criteria as getting inside of your client's brain:

- What is going on in his (or her) head?
- What's happening today in his world?
- What is he trying to accomplish?
- What challenges is he trying to overcome?
- What made him start his search for a better way?
- How does he see your solution fitting into these plans?
- How does he see you as a partner?
- How does he think you could help?
- How much is he spending today?
- How much is the lack of efficiency costing him?
- What would happen if he didn't hit his goal?

If you know how your client would answer each of these questions, then you have successfully understood his criteria. Your sales team members should seek to learn about these criteria with all clients they interact with.

Think about it. How easy would it be to sell value to your clients if you knew their criteria? If you knew you had a way to help your customers reach their goals and get through their challenges by leveraging your solutions, how easy

would it be to increase the gross profit in your deals?

So what is the biggest threat you have to understanding criteria? Assumptions. Salespeople assume way too much. That's when it becomes all about you and not the customer. Also, when you assume, you fail to ask questions. When you don't ask questions, you end up talking a lot more in your meetings. Remember, one mouth, two ears. The solution? You must get better at asking questions that uncover the client's criteria.

How to Get Better at Asking Questions

From what I've seen, asking great questions during client meetings is an advanced skill. Even the sales leaders I work with have challenges with it. It's all due to a lack of a system or process during meetings.

Here is the system I would recommend you consider incorporating into your premeeting preparation. You have to remember that your solutions, for the most part, can be sold to any company in any industry. That is a good thing and a bad thing. It's good because there are tons of potential clients out there, but it's bad because you need to spend time to understand every single industry. Without some sort of understanding, your ability to have a nice, flowing conversation that yields solid criteria will be difficult to obtain. You need a way to prime yourself to have a good conversation with your prospect. That comes from your premeeting preparation.

Whenever I prepare for client meetings, I ask myself two questions: "How does this company make money? How could our offerings help it make more?" These questions send me down a path of learning about the client's business, industry and objectives before having our first meeting. All clients we meet with want to make more money. Companies exist to make money. All decisions our clients make support that truth.

When you ask yourself these questions beforehand, you end up learning about your client's business and uncover legitimate questions about how your solutions could fit into the company's growth and performance. Those questions prime your mind to have an interesting conversation during the actual meeting with your client.

Quality questions prepared beforehand turn into a conversation with the client that's focused around him and his business. However, the best salesperson comes prepared for this meeting to both have a conversation around the questions he uncovered from his premeeting preparation that lead to criteria, as well as share relevant best-practice ideas on how other organizations have leveraged his offerings to achieve success.

Like a GPS navigation system, he should see your solutions, your organization and your expertise as essential to his company's success.

Understanding Our Customer's Criteria Changes Our Relationship With Him

We can't forget that our customers are on a mission. They are trying to take their businesses to better places — places that are different from where they are today. Imagine them in the driver's seats of their cars. Nothing is more important than reaching the destinations they've set for their organizations. They

must reach their goals.

As a salesperson, your goal should be getting invited into the front seat of the car with your client. He needs to see you as a resource for him and his business. You should seek to be that valuable to his mission. Like a GPS navigation system, he should see your solutions, your organization and your expertise as essential to his company's success. To get to this point, you need to earn the right of the customer asking you to take a ride. Without understanding his criteria, where he is going, why he is choosing the path he is on, his time frames and rationale, how could you ever share the true value of your solution with him?

Once your sales organization adopts and fosters a system that identifies and understands client criteria, the next part of building value is to have time to prove out those value differentiators inside of a sales process. Companies that are known to build the most value and have the highest gross profit in their deals have sales processes that foster value building. I will dive into that within the second part of the value building 101 series. ■

Derek Shebby, founder of Modern Sales Training, spent 17 years as a top sales executive and sales director with Mr. Copy (MRC)/Xerox in San Diego, California. MRC was the largest Xerox agent in the nation before being acquired by Global Imaging Systems in 2009. During his tenure, Shebby oversaw the performance and development of hundreds of salespeople and sales leaders across the state. Specializing in the entire sales process, he helped grow his dealership from \$40 million to more than \$100 million in annual revenue (30 to 500 employees). Since 2020, Shebby has coached dealership sales managers, vice presidents and presidents to sales growth and profitability by implementing proven industry strategies and modern sales leadership processes. He also runs a sales boot camp that is being utilized by the top dealers in the country, has an MPS workshop (sponsored by Clover) and a sales community called OUTLIERS. Shebby can be reached at derek@modernsalestraining.com and has exclusive sales trainings for BTA members at www.modernsalestraining.com/BTA. Visit www.modernsalestraining.com.

