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Executive Access

GETTING IN AND EARNING THE KEYS TO THE ELEVATOR

EDITORIAL | JEFF THULL





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For the past 22 years, **Jeff Thull**, CEO/President of Prime Resource Group, has gained a reputation for his expertise in the arena of sales and marketing strategies for companies involved in complex sales. His wealth of real-world experience has made him a leading authority and valued advisor for executive teams of major companies worldwide. Contact Information: Prime Resource Group, Inc.; 800-876-0378; primeresource.com.

Salespeople say, “Executives won’t pay attention. They’re indifferent and won’t take the time to see us.” Executives say, “Salespeople all sound the same. They’re well-versed about their products, but they don’t take the time to understand my business. I’ll see anyone that can show me a solid business case, but they shouldn’t whine if I won’t waste my time to ‘learn’ about their solutions.”

The result of this disconnect is that too many executives never connect valuable solutions that can make a measurable impact on their companies’ profitable growth and carry out their best positioned strategy, and the sellers end up with poor results. So what’s preventing executives from getting the information they need? It certainly isn’t a lack of innovative and exceptional products and solutions, and it doesn’t seem to be the executive’s lack of issues to be addressed.

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To be able to build a solid business case at the executive level, it is often necessary to get access to people within the organization who can give you the critical information you need to build a strong case that is relevant to the executive. Ideally, you are looking for the executive’s support, to move up and down the elevator to meet with people who have the information you need to refine the case that you will report back to that executive.

So how do you connect and get the keys to the elevator? Consider that there are two agendas for the executive conversation — yours and the executive’s.

Your agenda includes three key objectives:

- ✦ First you want to establish relevancy and be seen as a valued business resource.
- ✦ With the relevancy connection, you want to test the executive’s beliefs about the absence of value, and if it matches, create and increase the sense of urgency around the issue.
- ✦ Finally, you want to gain sponsorship for an extended diagnosis at lower levels in the organization and keep the executive involved in the progress.

The executive’s agenda includes:

- ✦ Getting ideas and resources to execute their strategy.
- ✦ Getting help in aligning their internal resources with their strategy.

- ✦ Getting help in improving a key performance indicator.

The real key to creating executive relevancy is diligent preparation. Spontaneous relevancy is not an option. The effectiveness of your initial contact with the executive depends on the facts that you have developed in the discover process. Think of yourself as an attorney preparing your opening statement. You are stating a hypothesis about the facts of the case and you are receiving the judge’s support to view the evidence that will support your case.

Learn About the Customer

Discover conversations prepare your hypothesis. They are not about selling. They are designed to help you learn about the customer’s reality, identify physical evidence of the issues or challenges they are experiencing, and the potential consequences they are experiencing or exposed to. They will uncover fact-based evidence and the customer’s perspective on these consequences. You need to be focused on the existence of the physical symptoms that result from the absence of your value. Be open, honest and straightforward — discover that conversations are not covert missions. Like a doctor, you want to identify the symptoms and if they exist, develop a prognosis on the potential risk your prospect is experiencing without your solution.

These conversations are to be with those closest to the action, those who are working at the point where the absence of your solution’s value manifests itself. The specific individuals you interview are dependent on the various places where the physical evidence of the absence of your value can be observed. There are three resource pools in and around your customer’s company to draw from: their employees, their vendors, and their customers.

If you have found the symptoms, you have determined that there is a basis to initiate a conversation with the executive. The information gathered will provide the relevancy and credibility you will need to begin the conversation successfully. You will connect the symptoms with the executive’s job responsibilities and performance indicators on the executive’s dashboard.

Your goal is to create a hypothesis that will earn the “keys to the elevator;” that is, to achieve conceptual buy-in on the value you offer, gain the sponsorship of the executive for continued diagnosis, and receive access to individuals within the customer’s company who you will speak with to continue the process. The executive will value your input from the beginning and look forward to working with you on this and other projects. You will differentiate yourself early in the process by how you sell more than by what you are selling. 