

How to Sell in Today's Economy

Are you trying to increase contract training sales but seem to be stalled by the economy? Do you believe that companies say training is always the first to go? You can still get the decision maker's attention and land those large accounts.

Success belongs to the salesperson who understands why people buy. It is all about uncovering your customer's need or "pain" and then creating a solution-based proposal to meet those needs. Once your college starts selling solutions rather than classes, you will begin landing those larger accounts—even in this economy.

Here are some techniques for selling in a "down" economy:

- Not everyone is your customer! Be proactive and target specific companies who fit your profile (number of employees and dollar volume of business) and who would be open to your products.
- Position your contract training unit as a supplier of answers for companies facing tough times. Lay out the solutions in phases so the customer can purchase sections as needed rather than everything at one.
- Don't waste time talking to the non-decision maker. Research the decision maker and go directly to that person. This will shorten your sales cycle and save your department money.
- Fill your sales funnel daily. This means making outbound prospecting calls. It will take 30 prospecting calls to close 10 accounts. The goal is to conduct 20 face-to-face sales calls a month.
- Create a Unique Selling Proposition (USP) to show how your Contract Training Unit is better and different from the competition. Use this at chamber meetings, to approach the decision maker and as a sound byte for the upper management of your college to use when speaking at events. Your college typically has these things to sell: value, trust, college brand, price, customer service and quality consultants.
- Create new solutions that match the needs and trends of companies today. This might include Lean, Six Sigma, Go Green Programs, Boomer

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Institutes, Generational Differences, and methods for finding and hiring a quality workforce.

- Create probing questions to use during the sale call. Use the questions to help determine the customer's need or "pain". Be ready with 6-8 key questions and a determination of your desired outcome for the sales call. Some examples include, "Are you on track with your company goals?" "Does your employee skill level detain their productivity?" "Will the current level of your leadership take your organization where you want it to be?"
- Diagnose before you prescribe. Ask open questions, listen for the responses, ask additional questions and continue to listen for the need beneath the need. Gather the information and create a solutions-based proposal listing the customer's need, their success indicators and your solutions.
- Hand deliver the proposal. This gives you a chance to review the company's need, your specific solutions and then handle objections. Hand delivering the proposal and reviewing with the decision makers will help shorten your sales cycle.
- Close the account and give top-notch customer service. Stay close to your current customers and continue to build their trust. They should think of your college first when they have a need.
- Continue to build your brand both internally and externally. Become known as a "resource" of answers for specific problems that companies are facing. Offer blended solutions such as training, consulting, coaching, distance learning, certificate programs, pilot programs, performance improvement, strategic planning, process improvement, executive retreats, executive breakfast series, and more.
- Utilize referrals from your current happy customers. Have them suggest other companies who might also utilize your services. The referral "warms" up the call and makes it easier to find the decision maker.

Selling is an attitude. We can position ourselves and our colleges as the exact resource needed by businesses today. Once we understand that CEOs have issues, problems, and pain, especially in this economy, and that we have solutions for their pain, we have suddenly broken the mindset that we can't sell until things get better. Now, more than ever, businesses need our services. Rethink your approach and begin selling solutions instead of classes!

Kathy Yeager is President of Contract Training Edge and has over 30 years experience in workforce development and selling contract training. Kathy is the author of Benchmarking Workforce Development, a project conducted with 20 colleges nationwide to determine best practices and trends. Kathy conducts one and two-day workshops on Solution Selling, benchmarking and one-on-one sales coaching. Contact Kathy at 913-593-5347 or e-mail her at kyeager@ctedge.net. Additional information can be found on the website at www.ctedge.net.