

# Overcoming Your Fears of Top Executives: When Selling, Target “The Investor”

By Duane Cashin

A friend of mine who owns a very successful advertising agency lamented to me recently: “We have to fight for every scrap of business we get today. There is definitely lots of business out there for us but our competition seems to be oozing out of the woodwork. It’s insanely difficult to keep up.” Yet even with today’s business market so incredibly competitive, I am constantly meeting sales professionals who, fearing outright rejection or the expected impossibility of getting through to them, tell me they are hesitant, intimidated or outright terrified of calling upon top executives as a standard approach in their sales practice.

The bottom line however is that very few products or services today, when standing on their own merits, appear to be unique. Even when a company does come out with a distinctly innovative feature or benefit, that competitive advantage is usually short-lived. With so much readily available and affordable technology around today, it has become a fairly straightforward process for virtually any competing organization to mirror the advantages of such a “breakthrough.”

This means that today’s marketplace is becoming increasingly challenging for buyers to distinguish between competitive offerings, whether products or services or consulting services. Thus whenever a buyer feels that a product or service looks too much like a competing one, the buyer tends to default to pitting all sellers against each other, demanding the lowest price and the highest deliverables, obviously a most unpleasant position to be in for anyone in a selling role.

So the million-dollar questions today are: “What can I do to differentiate myself from my competition? How can I successfully sell my consulting services in a manner that reaps a profitable arrangement for us both?” The answer, which might sound counterintuitive, is to reach for the top! Begin your sales cycle not with a manager in the middle, or at a lower rung, but with your prospect firm’s ultimate decision-maker, the president or chief executive.

There are numerous advantages to calling on the top decision-maker, or “The Investor” as I like to call him (or her). The biggest reason to do so is that The Investor is REQUIRED to deliver concrete results and therefore will always focus on your service’s likely return on investment. As a result, The Investor is typically less concerned with the investment amount than you might expect. So by creating perceived value and proving that desired results will indeed occur, you are likely to enjoy success in your selling efforts.

Here are some other advantages of calling first on The Investor:

- You will quickly discover whether or not you stand a chance of earning this company's business, chiefly by learning of any existing loyalty that The Investor may have to one of your competitors.
- You will learn whether The Investor sees a gap between the organization's current level of performance and where he/she believes it should be. If, for example, The Investor sees no need for improvement, it will be *extremely* difficult to earn his/her company's business.
- By calling the top executive, you have the opportunity to learn where the influence and authority lies within the organization, such as whom, other than The Investor, you need to convince.
- By reaching The Investor you'll find out if a budget is available for implementation of your services.
- By working the process from the top down, you'll accelerate your sales cycle while reducing the cost of acquisition. This puts dollars in your pocket faster.
- After successfully winning this company's business, you are perfectly positioned to be referred by The Investor to other Investors, a development that can radically boost the level of your practice success.

Now that we've identified all the many reasons for calling on the topmost executives, why do many consultants or sales reps who attempt to do this often fail? The principle factor is lack of preparation. When underprepared, you'll forget to ask the right questions and do a poor job of presenting yourself in a way The Investor would perceive you or your services as representing high value.

Though you are primarily a consultant, think of yourself during your selling process as a "Revenue Professional." That way your thinking will be compatible with that of The Investor you are targeting. You don't want to be focused on simply selling your wares; instead, as a Revenue Professional, you want to be seeking ways to establish with The Investor a long-term relationship based on trust.

"But do Investors really want to hear from us?" I can hear you saying. YES, YES, YES! Investors are paid a lot of money to lead companies in profitable directions. A main reason they earn the big bucks is the fact they are expected to see into the future! Two primary ingredients that enable them to forecast upcoming business trends and opportunities are experience and knowledge. So, "timely" information will be their most precious capital. As a Revenue Professional as well as an expert in your field, you live out in that field, constantly hearing/seeing things that could be extremely valuable to the Investor. With

change so prevalent and rapid in business today, this perfectly positions you to act as a valuable information conduit to any Investor.

What types of knowledge should you be transmitting? Here's a short list:

- Challenges that The Investor could be facing in his/her particular industry;
- Facts about The Investor's competition;
- Opportunities available to The Investor in his/her industry;
- How your consulting service provides the kind of results an Investor is looking for.

One excellent source for gaining the knowledge you need is of course on the Internet. Another would be from a company's Annual Report. A third (a favorite of mine) is from what I refer to as the "Inside Supporter." Find one of these by introducing yourself to someone in The Investor's company who can feed you helpful information from time to time. I personally usually start with the sales department as they are sympathetic toward my goals, and thus, they are surprisingly willing to help out.

At this point, you should have a pretty fair understanding of how calling high in a prospect company can benefit you, and why it is so necessary in today's marketplace to differentiate yourself from your competition. Imagine how fantastic you will feel and how much more effective you will be when you successfully make the transition to "Revenue Professional!" So why not go out and get started today? All those Investors out there are awaiting your call!

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