



## CONNECTING WITH EXECUTIVES IN LARGE ORGANISATIONS

by Leigh Wallinger

Increasingly, sales people are finding it harder and harder to access senior executives in large organisations. Historically, these people could be contacted with some creativity on behalf of the sales person. Today, though, creativity on its own is insufficient, some other techniques are needed to succeed.

Senior staff are having a tough time these days as they struggle to prioritise and balance a whole raft of conflicting pressures. Their to-do lists are continually expanding, the people they used to delegate to are either overloaded themselves or have been released in a cycle of downsizing. Everyone is struggling with information overload and bulging in-trays – both paper and electronic.

The average executive has something like 80 hours of work in their in-tray at any one time. No wonder then, that when you decide to contact one of these people to sell your product/service, you are not welcomed with open arms. If you do get past the secretary or PA and voicemail system on the telephone, you will break their train of thought and interrupt their current activity.

### **Perceptions are critical**

Remember how you feel when you receive a sales call at home, just when you and your family are eating a meal together for the first time in ages. If you do bother to answer the phone in the first place, do you give the caller 100% of your attention? How easy is it to simply say “We could be interested, call us back in 6 months time” and conclude the call?

Do you ever find yourself getting a response like this when you are making telephone calls? Of course you do. The difference is that you record the result of the call in your corporate CRM system as “interested”. How interested were you when you received a similar call?

So, you decide instead to write to the executive. Your letter will end up in a pile of papers or your email arrives into an overloaded inbox. Even if the executive looks at what you sent, it's unlikely to be given any real thought, so you get low levels of response.

There is an alternative way to contact these senior executives.

Networking.

You can network your way into large organisations and create an opportunity to meet with the senior executives. It isn't easy, it isn't quick, but it's possible.

### **Networking isn't Selling**

Networking is sometimes confused by sales people with attending events in which you bump into potential prospects and sell to them. For people who “network” like this, everyone else they meet is a “poor” contact because they are not a prospect. It is unlikely that this approach will lead to sustained success. It is far better to avoid the temptation to categorise the people you meet at networking events as “good” contacts and “poor” contacts. Attempt to build relationships with everyone you meet and adopt a “give to get” mentality.

For all you know, the event receptionist who gives you your badge might be related to an ideal prospect for your company. The person you want to meet, say it's the CEO of Widgets plc, might be their best friend's parent. If you get to know the event receptionist, provide them with some needed information or help them in some way, without expecting anything in



return, then you will be seen as genuine and someone with integrity. In time, they will want to help you – because that is human nature. You simply say that you are “looking to be connected to one of the senior executives in Widget plc and you wondered if they could help you in some way....”.

Once you embrace the networking ethos, you will find truth in the saying “what goes around comes around”. You will help lots of people and you will get help from people. However, it isn’t always the people who you help that end up helping you. It takes time to build up momentum through networking – this is based on the Law of Delayed Gratification - and reflects the importance of having a long time perspective. Your rewards will come at some stage after you have given help to others unconditionally. Sometimes these rewards appear after a long time.

If you have tried networking in the past and came to the conclusion “it doesn’t work for my type of business”, then it is likely that you were approaching networking as an extension to the process of prospecting. Networking isn’t prospecting.

If networking isn’t working for you then it means you are either taking a short-term view or you are selling, not networking – this ultimately drives people away from you, when you really want to attract them. It means you are not giving sufficiently to others.

### **Give unconditionally**

If you focus on what each person you meet can do for you then you will not be looking hard enough for ways to assist them. As a result, you are not giving enough to justify your rewards. Think about the process of sowing and reaping. You put in lots of effort to prepare the soil, you tend the plants until they mature and you reap the harvest. Success in networking comes from fuelling and nurturing your relationships by helping others achieve their goals.

How do you find ways to help others? Simple. Ask them questions, listen to the replies and be interested in them.

Consider that the average person you meet at networking events has 300 contacts. This is probably a pessimistic number as most people who attend networking events regularly will realise the importance of having an extensive network of contacts. Assuming you meet 10 new people at a networking event, then you have access to 3000+ new connections, any one of them could unlock the door of a senior executive.

By committing yourself to networking, you will find ways to connect with the senior people in large organisations who you need to know to do business with. Getting to know these people and helping them meet their objectives will unlock opportunities for you to sell your own products and services. It takes time for networking to work because it takes time to build trust in new relationships. Don’t rush it and you’ll soon find yourself connected to senior executives in large companies.

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