

## Value Selling Games

Persuading customers to ‘hold the football’ means becoming a star performer – and convincing them of it.



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ACCORDING TO MOST fabricators, when it comes to purchasing boards it’s all about price. Quality, delivery, and service are assumed. Price is all that matters. In fact, most people I speak with have horror stories about what “partnership” means to their customers. Here’s an example from someone I spoke with recently:

“The customer was desperate. They had been to 20 board shops and none could provide the boards they needed. We were the last chance. We worked closely with the engineers and project manager. For three months we worked day and night, at first producing one good board for every five we built. After a great deal of work we consistently produced the boards. Although we were paid well, we lost money after accounting for our time and effort. But we didn’t care: The customer said this was going to be a huge project and we were getting in on the ground floor. We built prototypes and performed pre-production and they were happy. We considered ourselves partners.

“After a year it was time to quote the production. This was the payoff. The quantities were huge; our quote was for \$5 million. We submitted and we waited. We checked and waited some more. The first clue something was amiss was when we learned other houses had quoted. Not to worry, they told us, this was routine; they had to have other quotes. Soon, however, it was getting difficult to reach our partners by phone. We made a trip to see them: They said everything was fine, hang in there.

“A month later, after great insistence in our part, they said the business went to a long-time supplier; actually, one of the fabricators that had failed to build the prototype. Surprise, it magically learned the process and could now produce the boards – at a price much lower than ours. And, of course, it was a qualified supplier, and we were not.

“The people we considered our partners were embarrassed, but blamed it on the organization and said their effort to get us some of the business was overruled by the finance department. Don’t talk to me about partnership!”

Does this happen all the time? No, but it does occur more often than not. It seems clear the “partners”

passed what they learned from one shop on to a cheaper, qualified supplier. And every time I talk with a board shop owner about customer partnering, they respond with a similar tale. Most shops I know are made up of good people who want to please the customer. The problem is that most also feel like Charlie Brown – trusting Lucy yet one more time to hold that football. Their hearts say “partner,” but their minds say the “football” – business – will be yanked away at a moment’s notice.

How can you make sure that a customer will stick and become a true partner? There are a number of ways, but the one I think most effective is to do so much for that customer that it comes to rely on you as its board expert, its “go to” vendor, the one it can count on all the time. Be so valuable, the customer willingly pays a premium to use your services. To get to this point, you must be a very, very good supplier. You must have great quality and never miss a delivery date. And you must truly act like your customer’s board house. That means

### Most shops feel like Charlie Brown: THE “FOOTBALL” – BUSINESS – GETS YANKED AWAY.

anticipating requirements – and meeting them. Understand what the customer’s technology needs are today and what they will be in the future, and make sure you can meet them. The customer must regard you as its board expert, a trusted advisor. Yet doing all this is not enough. Not only must the customer be able to place a clear value on what you do, it must recognize the differences between you and other suppliers. This is where value selling comes in.

Lou DeRose is the man behind value selling. DeRose has spent years helping companies improve their position with customers by teaching the principles of value selling. DeRose has worked with IPC to educate board houses on how to better win and retain customers and will soon conduct a Webcast version of his class. Next month, I’ll cover some key principles of value selling that can be implemented right way. ○

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