

Make a positive impression

Management expectations sometimes need to change

Question:

I'm an experienced salesperson and have worked with my current employer for about a year. My specialty is working with large accounts. My success is measured by the number of proposals I submit and total revenue I generate. I will hit my revenue goal but will miss my proposal quota. If I continue to pursue large accounts, I will never hit my proposal quota. How do I negotiate performance expectations that are in line with my skill set?

Response:

Managing large complex accounts is a special talent. Not everyone has the confidence or ability to walk into a CEO's office, engage in meaningful dialogue and receive an invitation to meet again.

Your ability to engage with strategic leaders is a valuable asset. At the same time, if you fall short of performance expectations or take a non-traditional approach to achieve your territory goals, your supervisor (and

potentially higher level managers) may take issue. Ideally, you want to be viewed as a strategic contributor to your company's bottom line.

Consider these strategies to help position you for success:

1. Link your goals to your company's strategic plan

What goals does your company want to achieve this year? How will your expertise to close complex accounts support the company's strategic goals? To the degree possible, position your plan to align with your company's strategic direction.

2. Develop a strategic plan for your territory

Create a strategic plan for your territory. Be sure to include:

- Your target prospects.
- An explanation of why you selected these companies.
- The revenue you expect to generate over the next 12 – 24 months.
- Your plan(s) to meet these executives.
- How you will leverage your expertise (although this might be implied).
- The support you need from your company.

3. Prepare to present your plan

To impress your company's executives, be prepared – very prepared. How well you deliver your presentation, respond to their questions and project confidence will influence how they perceive your competency.

Know your material cold. Practice your presentation out loud. This dress rehearsal will flesh out any tricky spots and allow you to make adjustments before you are in the spot light.

4. Present your plan

Gear your presentation to the strategic leader. Overview your territory's potential and map out a proposed timeline for meeting with these key decision makers. You might consider asking your leadership team if they know any of these business leaders. Maybe they worked on a United Way campaign or currently serve on a board together. It would be fun to walk away with a referral in hand.

Be strategic with the questions you ask. Steer away from asking generic questions like: "What are your thoughts?" Instead, be specific and ask questions that illicit their opinion such as, "Do you agree that this strategy will be effective with C-level leaders?" Your willingness to be vulnerable will be perceived as confidence. You will need to rehearse in your mind's eye what it will feel like to receive their feedback. You want to be calm and gracious when they share their opinion with you. Resist the temptation to defend your strategy or plan. Just accept their commentary and move on. Something as simple as, "I appreciate your feedback. You have given me food for thought. Thank you."

5. Gain buy-in

End your presentation on a strong note. Don't be trite and say, "Thank you for your time today. I hope the information was helpful." Instead, ask for their support to change your performance criterion. Create a separate sheet titled "NEXT STEPS" and write out: Will you support changing my performance criterion from _____ to _____.

Even if you build a strong case and they agree that this change is in the company's best interest, they may need to consider other implications before giving you the final authorization. In this case, identify who you

should follow up with and on what timing.

This is an important presentation - beyond just gaining their support to change your performance criterion. Yes, it would be wonderful if you walked away with their support to change your performance metrics. But what's equally important is the impression that you make. You want your leadership team to walk away and say, "Wow! She is someone we need to keep our eyes on, she has potential."

This is an opportunity to shine and brand yourself. What do you want them to say about you after your presentation? They may not say it to your face. But to your boss

you want them to say, "I like the way she thinks. She's professional, smart and confident. Keep your eyes on her. We'd like to know when we can move her to . . ."

Every presentation is an opportunity to create a positive impression. Be prepared to be deliberate with your message and delivery. It will serve you beyond this presentation.



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