



The Most Powerful Name in Corporate News

Sales Training and Consulting



Bill Stinnett
President & Founder

CEOCFO: Mr. Stinnett, what is the concept behind Sales Excellence International?

Mr. Stinnett: We are in business to help sales leaders reach their sales goals and objectives. We do that through sales training, consulting, coaching, and various technologies that support sales teams.

CEOCFO: Overall, what do you understand about the sales process that perhaps others do not quite understand as well?

Mr. Stinnett: Through our research and work in this space for 14 years in business but almost 30 years in the industry, our unique angle is recognizing the importance of the customer's buying cycle and not just our sales cycle. Sales people tend to focus on what they do in order to make a sale, and our entire approach is built around understanding the things that our customers do in order to buy.

CEOCFO: Why have people not realized that in general?

Mr. Stinnett: I guess because as a sales professional, we think that we get paid based on our own efforts, and if we work hard we make a lot of money. Many salespeople, sadly, even though it is a fundamental concept, miss this because they step in front of a client to talk about what they are there to sell and ask the client to take steps in order to work through a sales process but don't ever slow down long enough to understand why the client may want to buy and how they would work through their buying process. It's an incredibly simple concept that most sales people do not execute or respond to very well.

CEOCFO: Would you give us a concrete example of where people go wrong and what are some of the steps you are able to show a salesperson or company about how to do it correctly?

Mr. Stinnett: I think that it starts within marketing. Every company that has something good to bring to market wants to get out the message about what they do, how they do it and who they do it for. Marketing arms sales with brochures, flyers, websites and talk tracks to go with PowerPoint presentations that talk about their company. Sadly, most customers could care less about us as sales people. They care about themselves and their own business, so the big mistake is that we step in front of a customer to deliver a message. What we really should be doing is asking questions to understand the client, their goals and objectives, and then position what we have to sell as a means of helping them achieve the goals they already have.

CEOCFO: What is an example of how a salesperson should be interacting differently?

Mr. Stinnett: We could take a laboratory instrument, for example. We work with many clients in the life sciences space, and if we are going to sell laboratory instrumentation to a chemist working in a laboratory, we are going to talk about how our instrumentation is more advanced. It is faster, it provides a more high-resolution result, and it does this more quickly and cost effectively. We would have a huge list of the things that my product does better than anybody else's product. What is not communicated along with that is how this helps run your laboratory more effectively. How does this cut down the time it takes you to discover application of new drug molecules or time to getting drugs to market. How can this help your laboratory be more profitable and in turn be able to make you better able to capture more business for the laboratory going forward. It is really having more of a business outcomes focus as opposed to a technologies capabilities focus.

CEOCFO: How do you teach a salesperson and how do you keep them from sliding back to their old ways?

Mr. Stinnett: That is a challenge for all of us, and even those of us in this profession who know better occasionally fall into the trap of the "broadcast" approach to selling: just talking about ourselves non-stop. What we have to do is force ourselves into more of the diagnostic approach to selling, and one of the best ways to do that is to record. Today, everybody's smartphone has a recording feature, so you can record your end of a telephone conference or record a conversation with a client if you are going to meet them in person and listen back to it. If you spend most of your time

talking about yourself and ending your sentences with a period, then you are making statements and you are talking about you. If you find yourself asking more questions and more of your sentences end with a question mark, then you are causing the customer to talk about them. There are two really important things that happen when you get the customer to talk about themselves. The first is that we understand more about the client. This enables us to better position what we have to sell to solve specific business problems that they are faced with. The second reason, which is just as important and maybe more important, is that the customer feels more understood. Whether they realize it or not, customers want to do business with someone who cares enough to ask them questions and to really understand where they are, where they want to go and what they want to accomplish so that the solution actually fits and helps them to accomplish the goals and objectives that they have. When customers feel that and sense that, dealing with someone who is more of a diagnostic sales person as opposed to a broadcast sales person makes a huge difference.

CEOCFO: *Is it more the individual person rather the company who is making the difference?*

Mr. Stinnett: It can be certainly, because individual behavior could be driving this based on the way that individual sales person thinks or the way that they have been taught. I also think that there are many companies that have a culture of letting us tell the world about us. As I said, they develop brochures, they develop websites, and they develop PowerPoint presentations that are focused around going to any website. You look at so many company websites and brochures today that talk about who they are, what they do, and who they have serviced. They are telling you about themselves. If you are this or that and you provide this or that, why should the customer care? As I was told almost 30 years ago, you want to answer the question that the customer has in their mind. Unless we answer that question, our message about all those great things about us will fall on deaf ears.

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CEOCFO: *Would you tell us about the different types of services you offer?*

Mr. Stinnett: I would say the majority of our work is in the world of sales training, and specifically we are talking about instructor-led classroom training. We also do a lot with HD video eLearning, which is more of an asynchronous approach, meaning people can learn on their own time individually, 24/7. We also do a fair amount of reinforcement work using web conferencing, which is an effective way to reach people without pulling them out of the field. In addition to training, we do a variety of consulting projects with clients helping them determine what they need to do with their sales force, technologies, systems, tools and processes to implement or deploy. We do individual sales coaching, and as I mentioned we also provide a few different kinds of technology that help our clients to better manage their overall sales process. We are also very active in sales assessments. This is an assessment of sales people to determine not just *what* they know but how they are *using* what they know, which is critical. It is one thing to know how to qualify an opportunity or prepare for a sales call, and it is another thing to actually take the steps to properly qualify an opportunity or properly prepare for a sales call.

CEOCFO: *Is there a common thread in the companies that work with Sales Excellence?*

Mr. Stinnett: Companies that like our approach are companies that sell a complex solution to a complex market. What I mean by that is larger, big-ticket kinds of items. They are not necessarily always product-based, but a lot of times they have a services element to them. In short, they are solutions that are fairly intangible and hard to see, touch and feel. As a result, they need to be able to really sell the value of what they do as opposed to just the features and functions of what the products are. Companies that are attracted to us are companies in technology, telecommunications, life sciences, manufacturing, and a variety of different markets where they sell business to business solutions that solve business problems.

CEOCFO: *Do you sometimes work with marketing people to get a concept across?*

Mr. Stinnett: That is something I think we do not really market as well as we perhaps should or could. Most of our clients are sales organizations, and when we offer help with marketing we kind of back into it and sales tells us we should go talk to the marketing department. We do work with companies to put together marketing materials and a go-to-market strategy that is more directed for customer outcomes and results as opposed to product features and functions. That is definitely something that we have done a fair amount of and probably can do much more.

CEOCFO: *If people take your training and hear your ideas, do they understand and realize this is the way it should be or do you find resistance?*

Mr. Stinnett: What is refreshing about the courses we deliver is that every head is nodding. Every head in the room agrees and believes in the truth. We did not think up these truths. We did not make this stuff up, we just observe the truth

in the market place and every other sales person has observed it as well. We are all guilty of falling into that broadcast mode. We start telling our customers about who we are and what we do, and what we need to be doing is asking more questions. There is really almost no resistance. It is a little bit more of a hand to a forehead. People just cannot believe they have been doing it wrong. Many of the experienced people who come to our workshops have actually been taught this before, but they themselves have slipped back in to an old way of functioning and behaving. That is not the only concept we teach, but it is perhaps one of the most fundamental concepts that we teach, and we teach not only concepts but a variety of techniques and specific approaches to help us become more diagnostic and remain diagnostic as we work with our clients.

CEOCFO: *How important is it to match the rhythm of the customer?*

Mr. Stinnett: Not that we do a lot of training around that because there are companies that do provide training specifically around personality styles and how to get along with different kinds of people, but I at least like to encourage sales people to recognize that there are a lot of different types of buyer types. I do not know that I am necessarily going to say we always want to match styles with our buyer, but we at least need to recognize it and let them be who they are. What I see sales people doing is project their own style onto the customer and assume that they behave in the same way, and that is not necessarily true. I see a lot of sales people really limit their success because they can really only be successful or effective with people like them. If you look at the main personality style concepts out there of people who write books and teach seminars on the subject, there are usually four main types that they designate. There are four quadrants for the types of people. Truthfully there might be 19 types, but most of them cut them into four. If I am only one of them and I can only relate to that one quadrant, then I have left 75 percent of the buying public out. What I at least like to encourage sales people to do is to recognize that not everybody necessarily behaves or thinks the way that you do. That is why we are always focused on understanding how the customer thinks and behaves. The first book I published in 2004 was called *Think Like Your Customer*, and the title of that book hopefully engenders everything that I have been saying about this and your last question as well.

CEOCFO: *How is business these days?*

Mr. Stinnett: We find business to really be exploding, and I will tell you why. Despite what we might read or hear on the evening news, companies are hiring sales people. When sales organizations are growing, there is a lot of work for us to do, whether that is around new hire training or because a sales force has doubled needs to have more systems and processes in place. Business is good, and we knock on wood and hope it remains that way for the foreseeable future.

CEOCFO: *What might be different a year from now?*

Mr. Stinnett: We are really continuing to invest heavily in our technology products and services. Many companies are less and less inclined to take people out of the field for training, so we are investing more heavily in our eLearning solutions and in other kinds of portable-device based learning solutions like on-demand video. What will change over time for us is less time to come in a class but still the same need to train sales people. We are trying to react to that and bring technology and other innovations in so that we can continue to help our clients without taking their sales people out of the field.

CEOCFO: *Why Sales Excellence International?*

Mr. Stinnett: People ask us this pretty frequently, and I give them the answer that I gave you early on in this call, which is that we focus on helping people understand the things that their customers do in order to buy. We also put a lot of emphasis on custom tailoring our training solutions. We really take the time to understand our customers' markets, their industries, their internal cultures, and we put together a program that is really highly custom-tailored to them. We use examples and small group exercises and role plays that are tailored to their industry so that sales people can step out of a workshop and immediately start to apply what they have learned. There is no translation process that is required of the learner. The learner is going to get ideas they can immediately take out and put to use. It is a custom tailoring of what we do that really probably sets us apart. We made this comment to a large client who contacted us just last week and said everybody says that. Everybody says that we custom tailor and it is just about you and your business, and my only response to that is we actually do it. The only reason I can say that is because we are constantly getting calls from customers who have never heard of us but they engage with us, and when we deliver what we do, they tell us right and left that they cannot believe the level we went to understand their business, interview their people and put together a course that is really tailored for them.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine



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