

## **Sold Anything Lately?**

by: Paula K. Martin, CEO, Martin Training Associates  
Copyright 2004, Paula K. Martin, All Rights Reserved

What does sales have to do with project management? Plenty. All Project Managers need the ability to sell. Some people think selling is a dirty word, but we have to sell every day. We sell our ideas. We sell our plans and the final deliverable. We sell ourselves (not literally, of course). To sell is to convince someone else to accept what we have to offer. There doesn't need to be an exchange of money for a sale to occur. There needs to be acceptance.

All managers need to sell, but as Project Managers, we have an even bigger need. Why? Because we have no authority. We have to rely on influencing others and selling is one way to influence. Let's examine the stages of the selling process.

1. Define Customers and Stakeholders - You can't make a sale unless you know who you have to sell to. Make sure you've identified all the stakeholders.
2. Manage Expectations - The requirements elicitation process is your first opportunity to begin to crawl inside your customers' heads, to see the world from their point of view. Elicit the customer's requirements in the customer's language. Then work with the customer to analyze and prioritize the requirements. This begins the process of managing the customer's expectations. Next, explicitly define the deliverable you will be asking your customer to accept. Define what will be included and not included. Then have the customer define his or her acceptance criteria - those critical factors that will determine his or her satisfaction with the deliverable. By knowing the acceptance criteria ahead of time, you have a clear sales target. But don't agree to acceptance criteria you can't meet. To delight a customer, you must exceed the acceptance criteria. To satisfy the customer and ensure acceptance (the sale), you must meet the criteria.
3. Assess Risk - Assess the risks of not being able to satisfy the customer. Develop countermeasures. Don't forget to assess the human and political risks as well as the technical risks.
4. Involvement - Involve customers and stakeholders in the planning and execution processes. If both groups are on your team, you'll develop buy-in, understanding and commitment all the way through the project. If a group isn't represented on the team, assign someone on the team to act as a liaison to that group. The liaison is the communications conduit to the stakeholder, collecting input, communicating progress and issues, gathering feedback and paving the way for the final sale.
5. Communicate - Communicate, communicate, communicate - in the customer's language. Drop the technical jargon. Talk in "customer speak." Create a communication plan. Ask for feedback regularly so you can make mid-course corrections if necessary.
6. Presentation - Present whatever it is you're selling. Make sure it speaks to the customer's needs and wants (meets or exceeds the acceptance criteria). Explain how the solution will benefit the customer. Stay away from selling the technical benefits. Ask for

## Sold Anything Lately?

by: Paula K. Martin, CEO, Martin Training Associates  
Copyright 2004, Paula K. Martin, All Rights Reserved

acceptance. If you don't get it, elicit the customer's concerns and determine your next course of action.

7. Evaluation - Ask the customer and other stakeholders to evaluate the entire sales process. What did you do well? What could you have done better? Use this evaluation during your lessons learned.

Selling is all about stepping into the mind of the customer and helping him or her address specific problems and concerns. It is about learning the customer's language and always speaking to the customer in clear, understandable terms.

I recently tried to buy a new TV. I wanted a large screen HDTV, I thought, and went into the store to try and buy one. Rear projection, front projection, LCD, DCP, plasma screen. I was so overwhelmed with the salesman's technical jargon that I walked out after an hour, with nothing more than a headache. I still don't own a new TV as no one has been able to sell to me in language I understand.

In the end, you're most likely to make the sale when there is customer involvement in the process from the beginning. The customer then understands the constraints, the issues and the problems and can help to decide what to do about them. He has journeyed down the road with you to the point of acceptance and because of that journey together, it's much more likely that you will make the sale, now that the customer is on the team doing the selling.

\*\*\*\*\*

Paula Martin is the CEO of Martin Training Associates, a management training and consulting firm. For more information, visit the Martin Training website: [www.martintraining.net](http://www.martintraining.net) or our new Executive website: [www.mtaexec.com](http://www.mtaexec.com). Phone: 866-922-3122 or 513-563-3512.