

# The Ultimate C-Level Engagement Handbook

A step by step guide to engaging executives and increasing your average deal size, reducing your sales cycle and closing more sales.

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# Table of contents

# Introduction

# Chapter 1: The C-level difference

# Chapter 2: The power of research

# Chapter 3: Choosing the right executive

# Chapter 4: Meeting content – quality over quantity

# Closing thoughts

# ∞ Introduction

Your average sales value is \$500,000. Imagine if by engaging at the C-Level you were able to achieve the following 3 things:

- Reduce your average sales cycle from 6 months to 5 months
- Increase your average sale value from \$500,000 to \$600,000
- Improve your close ratio from 1:3 to 1:2.5

This is actually what happens when you get the sales process right from the start and engage at the REAL decision maker level. The REAL result just by moving the needle by the small margins above is that every sale now has the effective value of \$767,000

# ∞ Introduction

## Who are C-Level customers?

C-level, also called the C-suite, is an adjective used to describe high-ranking executive titles within an organization. C, in this context, stands for chief. Officers who hold C-level positions are typically considered the most powerful and influential members of an organization; consequently, they make higher-stakes decisions, their workload is more demanding, and they have relatively high salaries.

For any sales person that wants success and wants to close the big deals, there are a multitude of reasons to be disciplined and only sell to the C-level. However you have to understand the differences in approach and how to maximize impact and results once you have worked your way into the C-suite.

Selling to lower or mid-level employees is usually a slow, multi-step process that results in lower sales value. If they're not a decision maker, then you are relying on that individual to persuade their manager or executive to make the ultimate purchasing decision most-likely losing much of your intended message. **Are they a better sales person than you?**

The approach of selling low creates a chain of second-hand information and delays. Your sale turns into a time-consuming game of telephone tag, with you hoping against hope that the right message will reach the top without getting garbled in transmission.

Learn how to communicate and work directly with the executive team, and do it right, then you'll close sales faster, bigger and more often. After all, the people who make the decisions should be the ones receiving all of the facts, and they should be getting them straight from the source—you.

# ∞ Introduction

However, along with the many potential benefits that come from selling directly to managers, there are a few other issues to consider. After all, **targeting executives requires a different strategy than selling to anyone else** in the company. So, as you take the highroad and focus your sales efforts on the CFO, CIO, CTO, SVP, etc. and those at the top, keep the following in mind.

In most cases, high-level management is most involved early in the sales process, immediately after the need is identified. Once they've outlined the goals of the project, they usually delegate the details to other employees, and then circle back when it's time to authorize the final purchase.

**So, how do you get on the executive's radar earlier in the process?** Start by optimizing your messaging, both written and verbal communications. Generate web

content for the keywords a manager may enter when searching for the solutions you offer. Also, be sure to make use of the various social media and email options available to you.

Studies show that 90 percent of executives check their email regularly, with 64 percent using LinkedIn on a regular basis, so cover all your bases and get your content out there. Finally, The C-level team are usually the first ones in the office and the last ones to leave, so they are nearly always available outside of normal office hours.

# ∞ Chapter 1 – The C-level Difference

## **Why is it so important to sell to the C-Level executives in your target accounts?**

If you work in a company that has a relatively complex sales process and by complex we mean that there are a number of individuals from both companies involved and the timescale is anywhere from 3 months and up then being in control of the sales cycle is critical. A mistake that many sales people make is to let the sale meander and not manage the outcome.

**The executive team of any company are driven by business need.** This means that the shareholders and stakeholders in the business set objectives relating to revenue (usually growth!), profitability, productivity, efficiency or growth (new geographies, new vertical markets, new products, etc.).

The executive team is accountable to deliver these results, but more importantly for a sales person they are empowered to make the decisions that will **deliver the results.**

By being properly engaged with the executive team means that whichever direction the sales cycle takes you always have the ability to bring it back on course via that relationship. There will very often be an individual or a team in lower or middle management that will want to derail the process or take in the direction they feel comfortable with, but this is usually for their benefit and not the overall company's.

Sales people should utilize the influence the C-Level executives have and be able to secure the resources needed on the prospects side to ensure the sales cycle keeps moving.

# ∞ Chapter 1 – The C-level Difference

C-Level executives understand how important it is to work to deadlines and therefore agreeing timescales and making sure people stick to them is normal, if you don't do this they are likely to be more surprised.

**C-Level executives understand that change is good.** Unlike working with mid-level management the executive team understand that in order to progress there is likely to be a little short term pain and discomfort. However they don't throw this up as an objection and are able to set expectations internally.

## ∞ Chapter 2 – The Power of Research

When you are meeting the “exec” team members you have engaged with it is not the time to ask basic questions. **A professional sales person should already have a working knowledge of the company’s needs and background**, as well as a very good understanding of what their company brings to the table in addressing the prospects’ needs. Busy executives don’t have time to spoon-feed information or dwell on minutia. Senior executives will have far more empathy with, and therefore buy from, the salesperson who demonstrates they understand their business goals and challenges and have a credible solution to them reaching their objectives by working together.

Very rarely is there a quick answer or simple way to undertake the necessary research and get all of the information needed to be effective.

However the investment in quality desk based research in the form of information available on the web as well

as utilizing the phone to talk to more junior employees within the target company will pay back handsomely once you are face-to-face with a C-level executive.

**Being armed with relevant and vital information that allows you to understand the organization fully will set you apart from your competitors and mean you can get down to the really meaningful conversations with the key people.**

It is important to find credible sources. Understand what is happening within that company’s market sector, among their competitors and in many cases it pays dividends undertake research and to talk to their competitors. Being armed with accurate data and cold hard facts will be impressive to prospective executive customers. Executives are very numbers-driven, placing more value on studies and measurable proof, than on emotion or “gut feelings.” Come prepared with solid statistics, test results, case studies, and any other reliable information to support your proposed solution.

## ∞ Chapter 3 – Choosing the right Executive

Whilst it would be perfect to always sell right at the top of the organization it may be the case that in larger corporations, the CEO or COO may not deal directly with what you're offering or get involved in any sales processes. There will be a number of senior executives who are responsible for specific functions within the business and have decision-making authority.

Dr. Steve Bistriz of the Harvard Business Review suggests targeting the executive that “stands to gain or lose the most from your sales opportunity.” To do so means you must understand the particular persona and function in detail, as well as how they fit into the specific organization.

As previously stated in chapter 2 **sales people must start by undertaking research and analysing the company.** Which executives are trusted to make the difficult decisions? Which executives work have previously collaborated on projects and purchasing decisions?

If you have supporters within the organization, be sure to get an insider's-perspective; this insight can be invaluable. Once you've identified the right executive for your sale, you'll need to make contact with them and get to know them. **Targeting the right executive can greatly reduce the time it takes to come to an agreement,** and can even result in having a person of influence in the organization actively supporting you—even when you're not around.

Work your network and make sure you are introduced by people you know wherever possible. When you are referred into an opportunity you are twice as likely to end up with the sale. The team at Operatix should know, over the past 15 years they have opened up over 40,000 new sales opportunities in collaboration with their clients. **Endorsements from trusted mutual contacts are a great way to earn instant credibility in the eyes of executives.**

## ∞ Chapter 4 – Meeting content – Quality over Quantity

For many sales people it is very rare for them to be in the situation of selling to a C-level executive they tend to be unprepared for the meeting. Not necessarily unprepared in the sense of having done their research on the key individuals, the company and their markets, but unprepared with a structure and flow to the meeting and the sales process.

Often sales people will immediately start talking about their own company, product and market and at the point this starts control of the sales cycle is lost and all of the hard work put into getting into the Executive Office has just flown out of the window.

**A C-level customer would find it perfectly normal for the sales person to set the agenda.** The sales person is the expert here, they go through the process 3 or 4 times a week, 200 times a year, surely the sales person can confidently lay out the process that should be followed, assuming everything goes to plan?

A sales person should set the expectation. Paint a picture for the executive and lay out a plan that he/she can easily grasp and buy into:

- How long this process should take (if you want the sales cycle to be 4 months rather than 6 then lay out that plan)
- What is the start point and the end point
- The steps in the process
- The resources that will be required on each side
- The likely outcome at each stage
- The likely objections from his mid-management
- How important it is that you understand his organizations objectives, challenges and needs in order to streamline the process and maximize the use of his people's time.

## ∞ Chapter 4 – Meeting content – Quality over Quantity

The final point on the above list is the most important, once you start to converse fully. **People like to talk about themselves, their achievements, plans and ambitions** and this is exactly what every sales person must achieve with their executive level prospect. Start understanding the company from the top down, understand the potential pitfalls and barriers they have to succeed and then drill down with probing questioning, finally bringing them to the realization that:

- **They have a potential problem that is much bigger than they thought**
- **They need to find a solution to this problem faster than they thought**
- **You are a totally credible individual and a company that understands his company and his issues**

Therefore the initial phase of the sales process is to actually get the prospect to buy into YOUR timescale and YOUR process, whilst building credibility in yourself, your company and your solutions, to the point where the C-level executive wants you to run the entire process and is happy to be led on almost every element.

Once the above has been established it is a question of building further credibility at a lower management level, which is where and when the sales person should start to use the resources available to them, from Sales Engineers, Engineers, subject matter experts, Legal, Bid support and the sales persons own executive team.

As mentioned during the introduction to this e-book the net effect of achieving the above is a more than 50% uplift in sales.

# ∞ Finally things to consider when selling to the C-level

- C-level decision makers are paid to improve business results
- C-level decision makers think big picture
- C-level decision makers deal with changing priorities
- C-level decision makers are extremely busy
- C-level decision makers delegate to others
- C-level decision makers don't like to make mistakes
- C-level decision makers have big egos
- C-level decision makers spend the bulk of their day in meetings
- C-level decision makers have at least 40 hours of work on their desk at any given time
- C-level decision makers receive upwards of 150 emails every day

**“ Effective selling to the C-  
level will increase  
sales by more than 50% ”**

**If you are keen to achieve  
this, talk to us!**

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