



Executive Sponsorship

Briefing Paper



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Overall aims

The aims of an Executive Sponsor programme are generally :

- To increase the likelihood of increased, profitable business through proactive relationship building at senior levels
- To uncover new 'possibilities' for business through excellent relationship building
- To provide additional skilled and knowledgeable resource to be used at critical points in sales opportunities
- To increase customer confidence in you as a supplier
- To provide a 'safety valve' for escalation of any issues
- For senior managers to become more aware of what is actually happening in customer accounts
- For account managers to have additional experienced people to act as their 'mentor' / 'sounding board' / 'coach' in addition to line management

Executive Sponsors

Executive Sponsors often have the following typical traits :

- Be perceived by the customer as having significant power and influence within the organisation
- Be proficient in basic relationship building skills
- Be able to represent the company in broad measure (in addition to any specific functional expertise)
- Have time available and be committed to the programme, in particular to customer contact, and being responsive to any customer demands
- Be prepared to act in accordance with the Account Plan, under the orchestration of the Account Manager
- Be prepared to act as a mentor and coach to Account Managers, to be a part of the Account Team and to work with the Account Manager on an agreed Account Plan

Responsibilities

Specific responsibilities of the Executive Sponsor can be varied by account but it is expected will include commitment to :

- regular (quarterly / 6 monthly) customer contact
- reviewing the Account Plan (plus taking part in War Room or other Plan Improvement activities) on a regular basis
- making time for full briefings before any planned customer contact (it is the responsibility of the account manager to provide full briefings)
- producing a visit reports following any customer contact

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- responding within agreed timescales to any customer generated emergency contact
- keeping up to date on the account situation to be in a position to effectively handle any emergency contact
- keeping abreast of any and all company wide developments, so being in a position to represent the company in all matters
- being proactive in making suggestions to the account manager
- after any unsolicited (possible new account) meeting / encounter, to immediately work with relevant sales managers to assign and brief an account manager, who will further qualify and develop any Possibility.

Introducing the Executive Sponsor to the Account

Timing of the introduction of an Executive Sponsor to the Account can be quite critical. Introducing the Sponsor too early can serve to diminish the importance of the role, and may well lead to incorrect positioning. Clearly introducing the Sponsor too late means that the many benefits of the programme are not realised.

The most critical element of the introduction however is getting the positioning and alignment right. This will be determined by your Playing Field Analysis and Key Player Mapping. As always, you need to be aware that once introduced at one level in the organisation, it will be difficult to change alignment, and therefore the mapping should be at the highest level appropriate. In an account where there is significant future potential, but we are not aligned correctly, it may be best to introduce an Executive Sponsor at one level, with a plan to introduce someone more senior at a later stage.

When actually introducing the Sponsor into the account, it is important that expectations are set correctly on both sides, and in particular the Executive is positioned as 'working with' the Account Team, rather than being an automatic escalation point.

Customer Meetings

The Executive Sponsor will get involved in many different types of customer meetings, although we have identified three particular types of meeting where contact is particularly valuable :

Early Cycle Meetings: Our objective here is to engage in relationship building activities, which lead to 'possibilities' being identified, which can be passed to the account manager for hardening into opportunities.

Late Cycle Meetings : Our objective here is to assist in the final stages of gaining customer commitment. The role of the Executive Sponsor is normally to provide re-assurance to the potential customer.

Account Servicing Meetings : Here the Executive Sponsor can act as a 'safety valve' for senior customer executives (only) in the event of normal communication channels being broken.

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Following any customer contact, the Executive Sponsor should produce a brief visit report entered into Salesforce, and also call the Account Manager for a full debrief.

Account Plans

The Executive Sponsor agrees to at least review the Account Plan on a regular (minimum 6-monthly) basis with the Account Manager and update Salesforce with a comment to say that they have done this.

In most cases the Executive Sponsor will also act as a coach and sounding board for the account manager during the plan development or refinement stage, and will often attend account planning meetings with the account team.

The senior leadership team should review a minimum of one Account Plan per month at their regular leadership meetings. During this review the Account Manager can be available to answer any detailed questions, but crucially the Executive Sponsor will present the plan.

Implementation

As can be seen from the above, Executive Sponsorship is not a project to be taken lightly. It will require time and commitment from many very senior and busy people. The Executive Sponsor needs to be introduced at the right time to the right people and customer expectations need to be set correctly. There are various processes involved in a successful implementation.

Someone should be assigned to act as Programme Manager for the Executive Sponsorship Programme, and will report to the senior leadership team on a quarterly basis showing:

- Current list of accounts and Executive Sponsors (at this Executive Level)
- List of Customer visits this quarter by Executive
- List of Account Plans with date of last review by the Executive Sponsor
- List of Account Plans reviewed by the Executive Team (one per month on average) with a schedule for the next few months.