

Everybody Sells Services! At Least They Should

Five Reasons Why

By James Alexander (taken from his latest book, [Seriously Selling Services](#))*

No matter what stage of development your services organization is in, relying entirely on the product sales force to drive services is not a good idea. Discover how to tap into your hidden sales force—what it takes to get your technical talent competent, confident, and committed to seriously selling services.

There is no faster and easier way to grow profitable services revenue than by using your technical people to help sell your offerings. Nothing works better or quicker.

Five Reasons Why Using Technical Talent to Sell Is Such a Good Thing

My research shows that a best practice of top services organizations within product companies is that their technical talent demonstrate appropriate selling skills. Let's look a little deeper to see why this is so powerful.

1. **There are lots of them.** Depending on the type of services sold and the services strategy, services providers usually outnumber salespeople. Of course it varies, but often the ratio is 20 to 1 or more—professional services consultants implementing projects, field services engineers doing preventive maintenance, technical support engineers resolving problems. Just think of the power of increasing your services selling capabilities if you can tap into just a part of this potential.
2. **They know the customer.** Services providers are where the action is. Who better understands the issues and day-to-day realities of customers than the folks who implement, prevent, troubleshoot, fix problems, and advise on new opportunities than a service technician who is in the building or on the phone every day and knows everyone from the facilities manager to the department head to the CIO? As they walk the plant floor or office hallways, eat in the lunchroom, and meet with technical staff, they become privy to a wealth of information specific to company issues, challenges, problems, and opportunities.
3. **They have established trust with the customer.** Trust is, of course, a main driver in decision making, and your technical talent often have a high level of customer trust established from a history and track record of doing what they say they will do. When your technical people make suggestions, customers listen.
4. **They are not a threat.** Technical folks don't have "sales" on their business card. The "BS warning signal" that automatically goes off inside customers' heads when they come in contact with a salesperson does not sound when dealing with a technical person. Customers are much more likely to share their reality and respond to recommendations from a technical person than they ever will to a salesperson. This is an important fact of life.

5. **Small investment—big return.** Once your technical talent buys into the concept that when they influence with integrity it is good for their customers, you are two-thirds of the way home. Because of the four points outlined above, all it takes is some building of existing skills and a road map on what to do, and they can quickly start positively influencing services sales. While it might take years to get product sellers effectively selling services, your technical people can be productive in just months.

The Four Steps in Getting Your Technical Talent to Help Sell Services

Knowing how to positively leverage the trust built by your project managers, consultants, support account managers, and field engineers makes it easy to sell services (and products) that add value both to your customers and your organization.

Effectively done, you'll see qualitative changes in 30 days and quantitative results in three months. Here are the core steps to making it work:

Step One: Communicate That Professional Selling Is Not Evil

You've all probably heard this from your technical talent at one time or another: "If I'd have wanted to sell, I'd have gone into sales." I've heard this time and time again in my workshops on helping technical talent become more like consultants or helping them understand the attributes of trusted advisors. When this part of the workshop occurs, the body language of many of the technical people quickly changes—their arms cross, their bodies lean back in the chair, and their eyes roll.

When asked, "When you hear the word 'selling,' what thoughts come to mind?", the answers are predictable: "slick," "used-car salesman," "sleazy," and so on. This is truly a shame. Many of us let a few bad experiences early in life or stereotypes about salespeople (see the movie *Tin Men* for a great example of all that can be bad about selling) color our thoughts and attitudes toward what is one of the most challenging and important professions.

The truth is that your technical people are not acting professionally if they are not selling—that is, looking for customer problems or opportunities that your organization can positively address. Selling is servicing; it is as simple as that. Once they understand that selling, properly done, is good for their customers, most of your technical talent will be open to this important change in their role.

Step Two: Lay Out Baseline Expectations for Everyone in the Services Organization Who Touches the Customer

Figure 1 outlines the six levels of selling expectations for your technical talent, ranging from very passive to very aggressive. Following each expectation is an example communication from the technical person to the salesperson. I strongly suggest that you establish a minimum level of selling support for each of your services groups (project managers, account managers, consultants) and make this a central part of your expectations and their performance plan. It must be seen as a core part of the job, not a nice-to-do, but a must-do. For your people who really like selling, you may want to bump up their role a level or two.

As you review the expectations, determine where each of your technical groups are today and where they should be in a year or two.

Figure 1



As a reference point, Figure 2 shows the level of selling expectations for technical talent from my research. I’ve seen services executives ask more business development behaviors of their technical talent each year, but I was very surprised at the survey results. As you see in Figure 11, over 50% of expectations were very aggressive—at a level 5 or 6. This has some significant implications, as it is a fairly drastic change for those who were hired to “fix problems and make sure stuff works.”

Figure 2



Step Three: Provide Incentives That Motivate Your People

Recognition is always a strong motivator. I suggest starting small. For example, as some of your people attempt to be more aggressive in selling appropriately, acknowledge them both publically and privately. Feature them in your internal newsletters, buy them lunch—just show them you appreciate their efforts. Their peers will quickly try and get involved as well.

Step Four: Train Everyone on How to Build Relationships and Sell Services

Find some services industry-specific, high-involvement training that will give your people not only the appropriate skills for selling competence, but also improve their selling confidence. My experience shows that quality training will yield positive selling behaviors almost immediately.

Sure there are other considerations, but the above four steps are the main elements of getting your technical talent up and running on selling services.

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Want to learn more about getting everybody to sell services? Interested in finding out the common barriers to plan for and the three best practices to doing it right? [Click here](#) to attend our free upcoming Everybody Sells Services Webinar on February 25, 2010.

**[Seriously Selling Services](#) offers research-based, field-proven core and best practices, lessons learned, and benchmarks for successfully selling services. Alexander, a world-renown researcher, speaker, consultant, and best-selling author on the subject of services, brings to light the misconceptions that can stop serious initiatives before they get started and offers fresh insights on how to succeed in this lucrative and worthwhile endeavor. Regardless of the industry you're in, it's time to seriously sell services!*