

Your Secret Sales Force

No one hunts a whale alone. The Whale Hunters have consistently urged our clients to train subject matter experts to participate in the sales process, and we learn from you every day what a significant difference this practice makes not only in landing big deals but in serving the customer after the deal is done. We call this team approach “launching your boat.”

Recently, however, I have talked to several people who are struggling to think of who should be on their boat. In some cases they do not have enough of an inside team to populate a boat efficiently. They are outsourcing key services and/or relying on independent contractors and joint ventures. Or they have had to reduce their staff and key members of the boat are already doing double duty. Or they simply have not found the combination of oarsmen that will win the big deals for them. They have trained inside people, and they are sending a team out to make a sale, yet they are still coming in second or third and are not satisfied with their sales approach.

Here’s my advice if this is happening to you:

- Reassess what whales fear about doing business with you. Whales are more fearful today than ever. If you’re coming in second, chances are you have a very desirable product/service mix but they are too afraid to buy it from you. Those fears have to do with intangibles unrelated to your product or service. To name a few: fear that you are too small, fear that you do not have a recognized brand, fear that you cannot ramp up, fear that you do not have enough staying power, fear that you do not understand how to do business with a large complex company.
- Reassess your “fear busters. These are the specific, tangible cases, white papers, research reports, charts, graphs, testimonials, processes and the like that are designed to mitigate the fears. Be certain that all of your messages to the whale communicate the highest possible level of safety and security. That is, everything from your website to your brochures to your proposal to your proposal team needs to be first rate, solid, and savvy about big customers.
- Reassess what roles, relationships, or messages might be missing on your boat. What fears remain in the mind of the whale when you have presented all of your solution and all of your credentials? What’s left that’s just not enough? Keep in mind that whales fear change, conflict, work, and mistakes. Analyze what might be the most likely way in which you are coming up short, and address that shortcoming.

I’ll give you a few examples of whale fears that some of my clients confront—fears that are extremely difficult to allay.

- “You have never had a customer as big as us before.”
- “Our decision-makers (or CEO, or Board of Directors) have never heard of you.”

- “We never want to represent more than 35% of a supplier’s business.”

How can you populate your boat to alleviate these and other fears that are very real and very damaging to your possibilities? This is where external boat members come into play. These are people who are on your side but are not your employees. I’m going to offer a few examples.

- Your banker. If you are not fortunate to have a high quality banking relationship with a banker or banking team devoted to your business success, you need to start today to find that banker and build that relationship. Your banker can tell the whale that when the deal is done, the banker is prepared to extend you a line of credit sufficient to finance the ramp up period and to manage cash flow while the whale gets you integrated into its accounts payable system. Whales are notorious for being slow to pay.
- Your accountant. A high quality, sophisticated accounting firm can assure the whale that you can comply with all of its requirements for invoicing and documenting expenses. If your whale is a government entity, this becomes extremely important. Many whales have onerous methods of payment for goods, services, and expenses and require levels and methods of documentation that you have never dreamed of. Get your accountant in front of this whale.
- Your staffing firm. If you will need to add staff in order to complete this deal, the whale will worry about how and where you will locate and train the high quality new people that will be required. It’s extremely beneficial to build a relationship with a staffing firm that you can count on to help you ramp up fast for big contracts. Your staffing rep can assure the whale that you have the capacity to locate, recruit, and train the people who will be needed to fulfill this contract.
- Your outsource partner(s). In any line of work you may rely on various outsource partners who are key to your delivery. Perhaps you outsource credit card processing, or call center staff for your help desk, or marketing, warehousing, supply chain management. If your solution relies on one or more outsource partners, bring them to the table in your discussions with the whale. If you frequently do business with this partner, consider a formal merging of your companies, or create a new company that completes both parts of the solution. A single entity is easier for the whale to comprehend.
- Your customer. Do you have a customer that was once your biggest customer? A customer whose business required you to ramp up fast or to grow substantially? A customer who took a chance on you even though your brand was unfamiliar to them? If so, one of these customers might be on your boat to demonstrate to the whale that you have done this before, successfully.

You do business every day with people who know your reputation, your growth curve, your responsibility and reliability. With the proper preparation and rehearsal with your team, each can be a powerful oarsman on your boat.

