

Say yes to clients, but don't let them hijack your time

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- *Your toughest sale can be inside your own organization.*
- *Identify your revenue tie and sell to it.*
- *Manage your time so you can execute.*

Does this sound familiar to you in your organization:

What should we do about...

Why do we...

Should we really go ahead and ...

These are internal clients asking the questions. You are selling to someone inside, down the hall or in the corner office.

So how do you sell to internal clients?

For Sue (not her real name), in a staff support role, we answered it this way: Find the revenue line and execute. Here's the process.

First, define the revenue line. Review the core functions of the job – items that support revenue generation or the sales teams who bring in cash. Sue supports revenue by the external events she conducts, Web site updates and e-newsletters for sales and service. The sales teams use Sue's pitch sheets for each business line.

Next, control your calendar. Serve your clients but don't let them hijack your time. It's productive to denote your mental energy to a theme each day, developing that set of thoughts. Jumping between activities derails creativity and thought patterns.

Define focus areas for each day. In Sue's example, Monday is for marketing material, Tuesday is for external events, etc. Granted she cannot adhere to this 100 percent but it keeps the top priorities in focus and blocks of time budgeted.

With the revenue line and calendar done, we organize her approach. Make selling her ideas clean and consistent. For instance, e-mail messaging has four elements:

1. Subject line. State the reason for the message. Be direct. No re:re:re: or FW. Example: "Approve target date for ACME roll-out."
2. Lead paragraph. Say the purpose of the e-mail and one phrase of the requested action.
3. Brief details. No more than 2-3 points per e-mail, each point written in a separate paragraph.
4. Action item summary. Make it easy to find the "to do's". Clear, short bullet-points.

Once Sue sells her idea, she has to execute. Unlike outside sales, she doesn't just leave her prospects office or hang up the phone. Her client is close by and can drop in any time. It's a distraction. It reduces productivity.

To execute, create private work time.

Phone: Sue has to put her phone on “do not disturb.” When I said this, she panicked. What happens if a client calls? “Am I telling them NO!?” Actually it’s, “Not now, later.”

Office: Set aside daily private time. Well, Sue works in a cube. So from construction paper we made red, yellow and green traffic lights. If red is posted, do not disturb. Yellow – caution. Green – open. Her team and clients love it and respect it. Now there are traffic lights around the office.

We all have “internal clients” or manage people with internal clients. Use your time to sell and execute with four steps:

- Sell to the revenue line.
- Budget your calendar like you budget your dollars.
- Organize your thoughts clearly.
- Preserve execution time.