

# How to Influence Decision Makers Right from the Start

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When proposing to C level executives, those CEO's, CIO's, CTO's, or CFO's, it is necessary to remember, they are only interested in solving their company's problems. Obviously, their bonus depends on it. They are not interested in a salesperson who seems to be pushing a product. In addition, these are very busy people. They have no patience for those who seem to be making endless small talk and for those who ramble. They expect that the salesperson will have something relevant to say right from the get-go.

The mistake that many presenters make with senior-level executives is to begin by stating their name and title and the purpose of the meeting. This is followed by a slide showing the agenda and an immediate "drill down" into minutia. This default opening leaves the executive guessing whether the presenter truly understands the issues.

The way one opens a presentation needs to be very carefully thought out. It should demonstrate that the person has done his/ her homework, has a handle on the company's business problems and can provide a terrific solution. It should be de-

livered in a conversational, enthusiastic manner. There are five key elements for a powerful opening statement.

1. Begin by sharing your understanding of what is going on in the customer's world right now and the company's corporate vision. Information about the company's business drivers can be gleaned from your client contact, newspaper articles or the company's annual report to their shareholders. The more a salesperson can verbalize the initiatives that are a priority to the executive, the more the person grabs the CIO's attention.
2. Next, identify the problems that make achieving the corporate vision difficult or impossible and the effect of those problems on the ROI. For example, perhaps, the customer's phone lines are outdated or production costs have risen dramatically. When the salesperson identifies not only the executive's problems but what it costs the company in time, money or results for not addressing them, the salesperson gets the executive's attention.
3. Now introduce your recommendation in broad sweep terms—not in detail. Generally speaking, what is the solution for the customer? For instance, a speaker might say: "Our Internet portal will dramatically improve traffic to your web site."
4. Follow this by telling the executive the benefits of the solution, again in very general terms. Obviously, without immediately seeing the benefit of the proposed solution, the executive will lose interest. It's a mistake to think the executive will make the link. As with the recommendation, the benefits should be generally stated. The time to go into detail about the recommendation and the benefits is in the key points of a presentation. C level executives are particularly eager to hear about solutions that affect the bottom line and help the business to grow, more so than anything else.
5. Finally, a good introduction previews the key points. Everyone loves to know what is coming next. A slide showing the agenda assures the executive that the salesperson will be go-

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ing into detail about issues that will help the executive team make an informed decision.

If the speaker's opening remarks have been relevant, C level executives will be curious about what follows next. They will pay careful attention throughout the presentation. Careful attention to opening a presentation will be worth any speaker's effort.

***Question:** What advice do you have for presenting as a team? What have you found improves customer loyalty? We're interested in your reaction to this article. Click here – to comment on this article, share your concerns or ask questions. Judy will respond to all questions.*

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