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## Enterprise Sales Executives Require an Array of Skills

By Meta L. Levin

Charlie Ill is a quarterback of sorts. To serve both his customers and his company, he is regularly called upon to bring together a diverse assortment of players from different functional areas, to interpret his customer's plays and politics, and to design customized solutions in often tricky situations.

Mr. Ill, senior vice president of global sales for telecommunications company Avaya, is one of a new breed of salespeople who rely on education, business expertise and management skills — as much as sales ability — to thrive in a fast-paced, target-driven environment. An enterprise sales professional is often his company's point person for the entire customer organization, coordinating not only sales but also support and post-sales account management. They must be able to develop relationships across their own organizations as well as their clients', handle themselves in the executive suite and gain a deep understanding of what drives their customers' businesses. Increasingly, they are seen and see themselves as partners with their customers to jointly deliver the potential for growth.

"Today's best team leaders are seasoned professionals who not only represent their companies well, but also are tasked with building bridges with nearly every functional group within their customer organizations," says Greg Welch, Chicago-based global practice leader, consumer goods and services, for recruiter Spencer Stuart. "[They] routinely partner with the customer side across areas like logistics, pricing, consumer insights, public relations and information technology in an effort to improve sales and profits for both sides."

Howard Stevens, Dayton, Ohio-based CEO and chairman of research and consulting company HR Chally, counts a daunting array of skills necessary to be an effective enterprise sales professional: They must be effective managers; understand the customer's business; be an advocate for their customers within their own organizations; be accessible to the customer; be a problem solver; and be innovative and creative.

That means that enterprise salespeople must be well respected within their own companies and have the clout to "make things happen" internally, says Mr. Welch. This is in their customers' best interest, especially in an environment in which customized solutions are the norm rather than the exception.

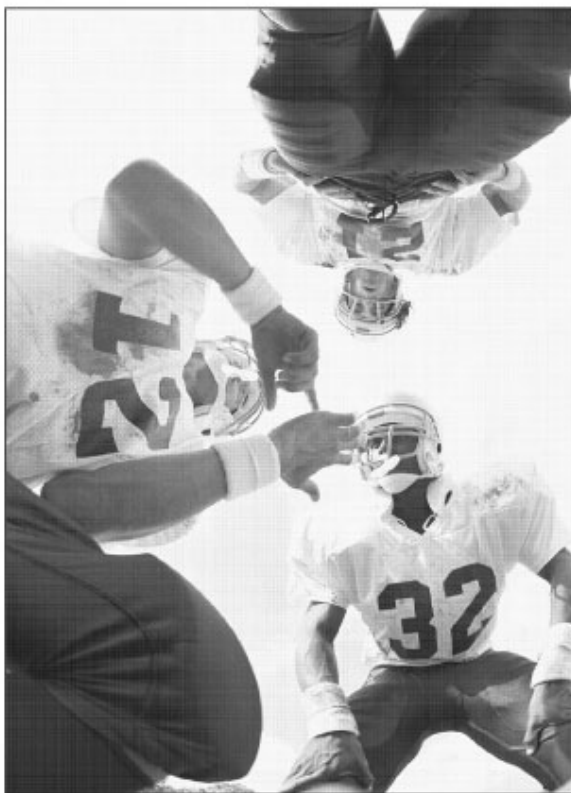
It's no wonder that enterprise salespeople are at the highest end of the sales pecking order. That they are is evidenced by a growing number of organizations that are springing up to research and assess, as well as train and promote, sales education. For instance, Andy Zoltners, who teaches a salesforce management course at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management in Chicago, is also co-founder and managing director of ZS Associates, a management consulting firm specializing in sales and marketing.

### Promoting Sales Education

Mr. Stevens, whose company, HR Chally, provides personnel assessment and research services in leadership development and sales improvement, says his "personal mission in life" is to promote sales education as part of business-school curriculums. He is also a big supporter of the University Sales Center Alliance, a consortium of sales centers located in universities throughout the U.S. that offer sales programs that meet the certification criteria of the Professional Society for Sales and Marketing Training, based in Coral Springs, Fla.

Fifteen years ago, Frank Cespedes, who teaches marketing at Harvard Business School and is managing partner with the Center for Executive Development, a Boston-based firm supplying customized executive education and strategic change-management programs, wrote "Teamwork for Today's Selling" for the Harvard Business Review. He believes that the points he made then are just as applicable now. An enterprise sales professional must possess the core selling skills, but they must also be able to deal with a variety of people, identify and speak the language of the decision makers in the customer organization, understand the customer's "go-to-market" strategy, and work across internal boundaries in his own company.

Alston Gardner, an adjunct professor at the University of North Carolina's Kenan Flagler School of Business in Chapel Hill, notes that enterprise sales professionals almost always have a col-



lege degree and some kind of sales skills and negotiation training. Not to mention instruction in strategy and business analysis. "They can create a business solution, understand a profit and loss statement, and understand the impact on the business," he says.

Mr. Ill's introduction to this type of sale occurred in the late 1970s when he went to work for IBM. His new employers put him through a year-long program that included classes in technology, business applications and ways to sell that addressed these needs within the client organization. Over the years he seized on opportunities to get an extensive knowledge of other industries — classes in insurance at the University of Pennsylvania, business at Harvard University and courses offered through IBM and other places in which he worked.

"It allowed me to have an in-depth discussion with CEOs, CIOs and CFOs," he says. "It is more effective if you can communicate in terms of individual business objectives. The CEO may have a different outlook than the CIO, whose may be different from the CFO, all in the same company."

Marty Leahy, an account executive with Redwood City, Calif.-based Comergent, a purveyor of e-business software, credits his success in enterprise sales to a healthy curiosity and a willingness to learn "and learn and learn. I would never consider going into a company without knowing who its competition is, how they differ, what they need to accomplish from a business perspective and what they are trying to do in the market," he says. His self-education has allowed him to become

comfortable sitting down with business executives and to speak their language.

That's not to say that sales ability doesn't play a role in enterprise sales. "At the end of the day, this is about connecting with folks," says Barry Trailer, San Francisco-based co-founder of CSO Insights, a research firm that specializes in measuring the effectiveness of sales and marketing organizations. Those connections are in their own companies as well as with their customers.

### Integrity and Empathy

Companies understand the importance of putting the right people in these jobs, and they pay attention to the skill sets of potential hires. "Sales is about the inherent character of the person," says Prof. Zoltners at the Kellogg School of Management. "It might be content specific, but in general it's about integrity and empathy." His research shows that salespeople who can create trust and who develop relationships within the supplier organization have a better chance of succeeding. Those traits, he believes, are not trainable.

By all estimations, the basic ability to connect with others may not be taught, but can be enhanced through education. That is why most corporations provide training opportunities for their sales staffs.

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Prof. Gardner of the Kenan Flagler School of Business cites the example of an IBM enterprise sales representative who spoke to one of his classes. "Between sales and technical support, she might lead a team of up to 100 to 150 people [for a large account]," he says. Those people might not report to her, but to be successful she will use leadership skills, as well as her standing in the company, perceived or true, to gain their cooperation to make and implement a sale.

"Today, it is not unusual for the team leaders of the largest global teams to report directly to the president of their companies," says Mr. Welch of recruiter Spencer Stuart. "These are important jobs and companies have eliminated unnecessary layers so that decision making is streamlined."