

# Anticipating customers' needs is key to growth

Sales people need to offer a solution rather than just a product

**THEO GARRUN**

**T**he greatest challenge facing businesses in the current economic climate is how to accelerate growth.

That inevitably means how to grow revenue through better engagement with customers.

So says Vanessa Bluen of The Consultant Powerhouse, who stresses that it isn't going to happen if your sales teams carry on doing things in the same way as they did before.

"The biggest change in the last few years has been the ease of access to information and, with it, has come an effective barometer for inauthenticity," she says.

It's all about relevancy, she says, and salespeople can no longer get



**VANESSA BLUEN**

by with merely providing their products, tailored in some way to look like a solution to the customer's need.

"It requires a change in mindset, away from an attitude of what can I get from you to one of what can I give you?"

This requires a new approach to engagement with prospective

clients and The Consultant Powerhouse works with The Ioweu Institute's Keith Dugdale to empower business teams with the skills to build these new relationships.

"Basically we look at four main aspects when it comes to the new way of engaging with clients, Bluen explains.

"You need to understand what keeps them awake at night; you must accept that the client isn't looking to buy something, but to gain new insights; that the client is looking to minimise risks in the current economic climate; and that the client is looking for benchmarks to measure themselves against."

The way for an organisation to differentiate itself is by convincing prospective clients that you are the partner that is most likely to make them successful.

"The aim is to get the client to say at the end of a meeting that they felt it was the most valuable hour they spent in that week," Bluen says. "To do that you need to

move away from pitching your specific products and services and to listen to, and offer advice on what is bothering the prospective client, even if that falls outside of the scope of what you offer."

The Ioweu approach is that everyone in the organisation must be able to engage with clients in these ways.

There are three sets of skills that everyone needs if they are to add value to the company:

They must, obviously, have the technical skill and knowledge when it comes to the product or service offered.

But, Bluen explains, it goes beyond that. You need business acumen – what is required to ensure profitability in interactions with clients.

And, most importantly, you need business partnering skills. "These are the crucial engagement tools," Bluen explains, "and they include building trust through really listening to what the client has to say and offering a solution that meets their

needs in the first instance, not your own sales ambitions.

"In effect, it's about getting under your client's skin. You need the confidence to shift the conversation to a strategic level. You need to move beyond being a technical product provider to becoming a strategic solution provider."

The Consultant Powerhouse is running an "Accelerate business growth through client engagement" workshop with Keith Dugdale, unpacking some of these issues, on Tuesday September 16 at The Core Office Park in Sunninghill. The price is R1 500 per person. Contact Emma Sanderson on 011 453 2002 or [training@theconsultantpowerhouse.co.za](mailto:training@theconsultantpowerhouse.co.za) for more information.

● The Star Workplace is giving three readers the opportunity to attend Dugdale's workshop for free.

Write a short paragraph motivating why you should be the one to attend the event and e-mail it to: [training@theconsultantpowerhouse.co.za](mailto:training@theconsultantpowerhouse.co.za)