

Coaching The Competitive Position

By Carol Ann Livernoche

In a recent evaluation, we spoke with buyers to determine why they did or did not buy from a particular provider. To give you an idea of the types of feedback that we received, here are some of the more common responses we hear:

- "We didn't feel like they understood or cared about our needs"
- "Even though we spent time with them beforehand, the presentation or demonstration was generic and "all about them"
- "We really wanted to buy from X, but they spent more time talking about the faults of their competitor's solution than about the strengths of theirs"

Competitive coaching is needed early and often. Your best opportunities to create differentiation are early in the sales cycle and in informal settings. A strong coach should examine all dimensions of competitive positioning:

- Strategy – Can you compete head-to-head, in the current environment or do you need to change rules?
- Execution – Everyone who interacts with a prospect has competitive positioning responsibility. Is everyone executing effectively?
- Culture – Have you assessed the alignment of corporate cultures and how common beliefs and business values can be leveraged?
- Personal – Do you understand personal drivers and past experiences that may shape preference?
- Solution – A total solution includes your organization, products, services and people – don't limit your focus to product only.

You can take control and minimize the risks of a negative outcome when you look at all angles of competitive positioning. In the words of Vince Lombardi, "If winning isn't everything, why do they keep score?"