

Sales isn't the Enemy of Product Management

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Have you ever stereotyped someone? It's extremely difficult to fight against. Once someone labels you as a technical person, it's hard to be considered competent as a business person. Well-meaning folks might say, "Oh that Val knows the market, he should be in marketing..." or maybe they'll say, "Val is technical, I don't know what he's talking about, so he belongs in development...". On and on it goes.

Problem is, once you've been stereotyped, good luck getting out. You'll need to look for a new place to work. I used to use this in Sales. I'd try to cast my competition into a stereotype. As an example I might say, "Oh such and such is a good tool if you only want " or maybe "Folks who use such and such are technology-centric, and don't ever have to address business issues...". This kind of talk is hard for the competition to get out of. The prospect looks for and finds examples of however I labeled them, yet never directly asks the competition, so they're never given the chance to defend themselves.

In case you're wondering, I'm not bragging; this is BAD! Stereotyping an individual, or entire organization is the lowest of the low. This is so low, that those who do it ... ops, there I go again.

Unfortunately there seems to be a growing trend within companies today, where product management people think its ok to make cute remarks about the competence (or lack thereof) of Sales teams. They laugh with each other, and elbow each other's ribs with a knowing look. I'll tell you right now this is wrong, and very cowardly. If your Sales organization is incompetent, then as a product management team it's your job to fix it.

I was mentoring a teacher once who was positive her students were all idiots because they couldn't get what was being taught. As product managers, we need to understand that Sales are one of our target markets. If we can't deliver what they need to comprehend our offerings, it isn't because Sales are no good. Perhaps we should ask just how good we are as a product management team, if we can't empower our Sales organization.

Sales is our right arm. Ok, maybe some would argue that they are the head. I don't know what part, but there is no doubt that they are part of the body. I've heard folks laughing at the idea of Sales doing win/loss reports. You just have to hang your head, when other product managers can be so ignorant. Yes, I know Sales people can have a bias, but so can we.

Look win/loss reports are one of many things we do for market sensing. A win/loss reports from Sales is just one report. Think of them as salt in your oatmeal. Salt by itself isn't all that good for you, your right. But why would you do that? Oatmeal without salt isn't very good either. There are many benefits that come from Sales participating in conducting win/loss reports. Consider reading '[Win/loss Reviews](#)' by Rick Marcet for more on this.

My point is that Sales is and must be an integral part of the product management team. From win/loss reporting, market analysis, customer satisfaction, problem validation, opportunity definition, feature validation, roadmapping, requirement and release validation, Sales plays a role in these activities of the Seven Pillars. When you hear other product management team members trying to stereotype Sales, call them on it. Ask them to explain what they're really trying to say behind all those cowardly innuendos. If you hear trainers behaving like that, walk out, they certainly don't know what they're talking about.

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