

ARTICLE

## **Ask the Expert: The Expert Answers**

**How do you define a buying influence when a third party administers the purchases? And the user is screaming I am the owner?**

## The expert answers...



Your inquiry has been referred to me for an answer, since as the founder I am considered to be the 'process geek.' Besides, I am always intrigued by sales conundrums. I am Bob Miller, founder of Miller Heiman.

### **“How do you define a buying influence when a third party administers the purchases? And the user is screaming I am the owner?”**

I am going to give you an answer, but it is based on some assumptions I am making about the situation.

Whether the End User administers the purchase, or another third party, the roles played in the sale are the same basic three plus your Coach. BUT, remember that one person may also be playing two or more roles and thus wearing a different hat.

It is my experience that when a buying influence is “screaming,” s/he has on a Gatekeeper hat; that is, s/he is playing the role of a Technical Buying Influence. Remember the role of the Technical or Gatekeeper buying influence is to screen you OUT. They cannot say “yes”. They can only say “no”, and they usually do on technical matters. It sounds to me like this guy (or gal) is screaming because someone has gone over him, around him, or through him in the purchasing process and has negated his input. Not a smart thing to do with a key User Buying Influence. It will almost always come back to bite you. Nothing infuriates a Technical buying influence more than this tactic.

Whether this is the Reality of the situation, or just this User's PERCEPTION of the situation, is almost beside the point. You as the responsible salesperson have to deal with the PERCEPTION, because that is his reality at the moment.

As to corrective actions, I would suggest someone (you?) get in there and just LISTEN to this person. Sounds to me like he is saying, “no one in the surrogate purchasing process is listening to me.” He may be right. But even if that is incorrect, you are the one who is going to get stuck with the problem because it is your product and the account is your responsibility today.

Hope this helps.

Warmest best regards,

Robert (Bob) B. Miller

Update: In following up, Bob's assumptions were correct, as we learned from the person who asked the question. His predecessor account manager had indeed gone over the contact's head, putting the account at risk. (The Editor)