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## Why Salespeople are Losing at the Top

Miller Heiman's two-year research effort reveals a groundbreaking reality: The way you sell is incompatible with how executives really make decisions.

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## Why Salespeople are Losing at the Top

Miller Heiman's two-year research effort reveals a groundbreaking reality: salespeople are losing deals because they are not winning executive approval.

## Why Winning at the Top is Critical to Growing Business

Salespeople who are effective at winning the approval of high-level decision makers represent a strategic advantage in an increasingly competitive marketplace. Miller Heiman research shows that 3 out of 4 opportunities being pursued today now require the approval of senior-level decision makers. Yet, research also reveals that most sales professionals are ineffective at getting these executives to say, "yes" to their proposal.

Executive-level selling is not a new concept. It's been talked about for decades. But why has winning the approval of key decision makers become a priority now? Why have winning sales organizations found that accessing and influencing key decision makers has such a dramatic impact on their ability to consistently win business?

There are several factors at play. The level at which the final decision is made has moved up in the organization. Today, these economic buyers (the ultimate decision makers who can either veto or approve your solution) are frequently senior-level executives or members of the C-suite, such as the chief sales officer, chief information officer, chief financial officer, and the CEO.

At the same time, the scrutiny involved with approving proposals has intensified. Furthermore, sales professionals admit that nearly half of all opportunities being lost are a direct result of not winning the approval of the senior decision maker.

The paradox? Most salespeople believe they are highly influential in winning the support of senior-level decision makers.

Selling organizations are tackling these challenges with limited success. When asked to define the problem associated with effective executive-level selling, most sales leaders agree it's an issue of access. Additionally, some organizations admit sales professionals lack the experience and credibility to influence senior-level executives.

To solve these two challenges, organizations are helping their sales professionals better understand the appropriate language, personalities, and day-to-day activities commonly associated with very senior level executives. These organizations are also making their own executives more accessible to support sales efforts. This peer-to-peer selling approach (also referred to as "like-rank" selling) is becoming increasingly common. While this approach may add credibility to your organization's selling efforts, it's unlikely to provide significant improvements in sales effectiveness due to its lack of scalability.

You simply can't win business consistently in today's market without effectively winning the decision of executive-level decision makers.

## Miller Heiman Research Uncovers a Ground-Breaking Reality

Recently, a two-year Miller Heiman research project was completed by Robert B. Miller, the co-founder of Miller Heiman and co-author of *Strategic Selling*®, *Conceptual Selling*®, and *Large Account Management Process*™. The study, which interviewed more than 1,700 key executives, revealed why most sales professionals are ineffective at winning the executive decision.

The groundbreaking reality is: The way salespeople sell is not influencing how executives really make decisions. In most communications with executives, salespeople are getting it all wrong before they even get in the door.

## Why are Decision-Making Styles Important?

Solving the problem of lost opportunities at the executive level lies in understanding how executives really make decisions.

Most business executives make it to the senior level in their companies due to the quality of their decisions. Learning mostly by experience, they build a set of criteria that guides their decision-making process. Each decision requires both rational and emotional elements, but the emphasis and tolerance on those elements varies greatly based on an executive's decision-making style.

Executives make decisions by considering many separate, yet common, data points. The majority are not necessarily aware of how they accomplish this – they tend to gather those points intuitively along the way. In making tough decisions, though, certain points become magnified for the business executive and so they fall back on the areas best known to them, what we call executive styles for decision-making.

Understanding and identifying these styles will make communicating with executives more effective than any amount of discounting, good timing, or past relationships. By tailoring your sales efforts toward a specific decision-making style, you will have a considerable advantage in winning the executive decision.

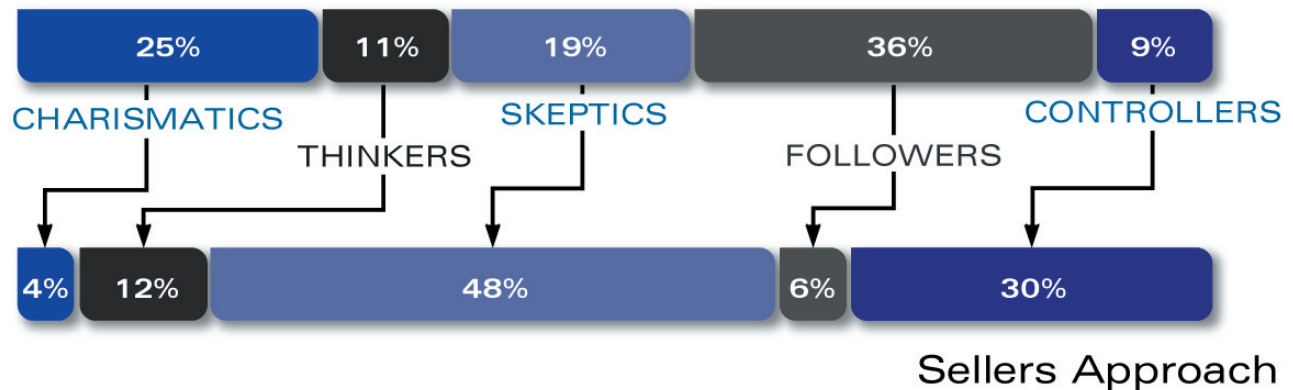
## Identifying and Targeting the Five Decision-Making Styles

Miller Heiman research identifies five distinct decision-making styles found among executives. Every executive can be categorized by one of these styles:

- **Charismatics** - show exuberance during a sales presentation, but yield a final decision on a balanced set of information
- **Thinkers** - exhibit often contradictory points-of-view within a single meeting through a barrage of questions
- **Skeptics** - remain highly suspicious of each data point due to their very strong egos
- **Followers** - make decisions based on how other trusted executives made them or decisions they've made previously
- **Controllers** - focus on the pure facts and analytics of the offering due to their large amounts of fear and uncertainty

What defines each executive style is their preference to see or hear certain types of information at certain steps in the buying process. The top sales professionals typically possess a flair for doing this, but the skills are easily mastered once you know the executive's style in decision-making.

## Executive Decision Styles



Depending at what step an executive is in the buying process, you must present them certain sets of information to meet their criteria. The reality is, there is a dramatic misalignment in how information should be presented to the five decision-making styles of executives versus how information is presented.

- 78% of sales presentations are aligned to Skeptics and Controllers, even though these two decision-making styles only comprise less than 30% of all executives
- Virtually no presentations are tailored toward Charismatics, though Charismatics comprise 25% of all executive-level decision makers
- Only 6% of presentations are tailored toward Followers, though 1 in 3 executives possess a decision-making style of a Follower
- Charismatics and Followers comprise 61% of executives, yet only 10% of presentations are tailored to meet their needs

Have you sold to an executive who was enthusiastic about your product or service, and you left the meeting feeling you had the deal only to find out a few days later you didn't? You were probably dealing with a Charismatic decision style. Our research shows that 25 percent of all executives use a Charismatic decision-making style. However, salespeople are selling to match this style only 4 percent of the time. The result is like jamming a square peg into a round hole.

The key to winning with Charismatics is to stay grounded in the tangible results and bottom-line impact to their organization. One of the best ways to win with the Charismatic decision-maker is to point out risks and how they are minimized during implementation - this builds credibility.

## Winning the Executive Decision

By identifying and targeting the decision-making styles of executives, you will immediately impact your effectiveness with these key decision-makers. Think of this as a second filter to apply to the information you are presenting. After you've determined what solution provides the best fit for your client, you can then filter the information further to the specific decision-making style.

Each style requires information presented in a different way. For instance, you need to adapt to the interruptions and enthusiasm of a Charismatic and learn who's the right person from your organization to best convince a Controller. The better prepared you are for each style, the better your chance of securing their approval.

As a result of this research, Miller Heiman developed a new sales training workshop unlike anything else available. *Executive Impact<sub>SM</sub> – 5 Paths to Unlocking Decisions*, is the only executive-selling workshop that focuses exclusively on how executives really make decisions. It's based on hard facts and empirical data, and supported by a recently published book, co-authored by Robert Miller, *The 5 Paths to Persuasion*.

### In the workshop, you'll learn how to:

- Develop proven strategies for gaining executive-level access
- Identify each of the five decision-making styles of executives
- Develop strategies for before, during, and after each executive-level interaction
- Develop a tool kit designed for influencing a specific executive's decision-making style to move the sale forward
- Tailor your selling efforts when multiple decision styles are involved
- Create compatible sales teams that align with all the executives within an account

It's important to realize this way of selling more effectively is not about personality styles. It's about how an executive processes information when making a decision. There is consistency in how executives make the decisions that have helped them rise through the ranks. It's predictable. Identifying and understanding these styles will change the way you sell forever.

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*Executive Impact<sub>SM</sub>* is the first sales training workshop that aligns your sales efforts toward the decision-making styles of executives. In the past few years, effective executive-level selling has become critical in your ability to win more business. In fact, the inability to present effectively to senior-level decision makers is the biggest reason why sales opportunities are being lost today.

To learn more about *Executive Impact<sub>SM</sub> – 5 Path to Unlocking Decisions*, visit [www.millerheiman.com](http://www.millerheiman.com) or call 877-678-9139.