

The decision maker and the invisible man

This week, my insights and reflection come from a lunch with a special someone I used to sell to when I was a rep. As the CTO of a large group, his perspective on sellers is not only stimulating, it also offers precious insights to all the smaller and bigger companies out there.

Since my friend has also praised my book *Popcorn for the new CEO*, not only for the business insights but also for the pop culture references, I will thank him by drawing parallels with the movie *The Invisible Man*, the movie.

“There’s a way back. God knows there’s a way back! If only they’d leave me alone.” – *The Invisible Man*

We started our lunch talking about my latest article about revenue architecture, and his feedback threw me back in my seat.

“Caroline, even established companies do not know what they are doing. Most customer success managers are too technical, too junior, or too scared to call me. Last week, I sat in a meeting with a customer success manager who had been repeating over and over again the word ‘crisis’ within less than 3 sentences.”

“Were you in a crisis?” I asked.

“Not at all,” he laughed. “But I had screamed high to the number two of the company because I could not get the attention I needed nor deserved”, he

winked.

“So what happened?”

“Well, I asked her why she had mentioned the word crisis 5 times, what was the crisis about. She told me someone had said I was unsatisfied. So I asked her our favourite question.”

And both said “why?”, smiling.

Of course, the poor lady had no clue, no one had told her, because no one, even her boss, had asked what was wrong. And, she had not dared to ask the CTO. The customer success manager had not called him once since the deal was signed. Was it her fault? Obviously not. She was probably too scared to “call high”, not empowered to do so, or maybe even blocked by the account manager (sales rep) who had moved on to other deals to close.

“There is no need to be afraid, Kemp. We are partners.” – The Invisible Man

Revenue architecture tip: even if you believe you have more solution stickiness because of a significant investment (people and money) from a top customer, your short term reputation is at risk when you drop the ball after a deal. I often say, think about your customer experience and the consequences of anything else but the state of the art delivery.

This was too easy. My friend was complaining, but I had to challenge him. Look, I said, you are not the easiest person to have access to. Imagine all those SDRs who are mandated to make endless calls to C-levels. He laughed. Not a chance they'd get a meeting with him, not with automated emails cadences and a lack of personalisation. But was it really his fault for being cautious of is it about his most valuable asset: his time.

“All right, you fools. You've brought it on yourselves! Everything would have come right if you'd only left me alone. You've driven me near

madness with your peering through the keyholes and gaping through the curtains, and now you'll suffer for it!" – The Invisible Man

Revenue architecture tip: your SDRs need training. They are junior and should not "call high" without a proper understanding of who they are calling, why they are calling, and what value they can bring to that person/the account. With quantity calling/emailing, at best, they will have a very low response rate, at worst, they will damage your reputation.

"Look", my CTO friend said, "I have nothing against the salespeople; but can't they do a bit of the work? Most sellers come to meetings empty-handed, without preparation. This annoys me the most. Don't you teach people how to know my business strategies and issues before meeting me?"

"One day, I'll tell you everything. There's no time now." – The Invisible Man

I cleared my throat. "Yes, as a matter of fact, I personally do and care about it deeply. But not all companies teach their sales rep how to properly prepare and, even when they do, not all the salespeople care enough to take the time and do it thoroughly."

Revenue architecture tip: prospect and customer experience is all about how you make your interlocutor feel. Doing the proper research, even if it is wrong, will be appreciated. When you take someone's time, especially to sell something to them, try to show some respect by preparing for it. – failing to prepare is preparing to fail-

We concluded our talk about what I thought this article would be about: the decision-maker. I wanted to know his thoughts when mine were obvious: the decision-maker *is* this invisible man. You cannot get it more wrong. There is no such thing as one person making a decision when selling to fortune 500.

“There you are! A present from the Invisible Man! Money! Money! Money! Money! Ha-ha-ha!” – The Invisible Man

Sellers think that by going high, at the top of the organisation, they will sell faster. But then my CEO looks at me and asks, ‘what do you think’ and it can go both ways. Even when I want to buy a solution and build a strong case, I have to move things internally. The buying decision process is never about one person. It cannot be one person to decide. There are many people moving multidimensionally. For example, most people leave the procurement behind when they would gain months by involving them from the start. Going to the top is great for those who have done their homework and validate that they have built champions down the line. Otherwise, you may just look like a fool.’

“You said Champions” I noticed.

“Well, I read your book, now I know.”

What are the things I validated with a top executive buyer during this lunch that can benefit startups, scaleups and established software companies?

1. Sales development reps have close to no chance of getting the attention of senior executives unless they have done a hell of a lot of prep work and used personalisation in their approach
2. When Customer Success Managers inherit a situation they hardly know anything about it reflects on the reputation of the entire company. Worse, when they are not empowered and trained to deal with high level executives it can put the revenue at risk.
3. Apparently some sellers still cut corners when engaging with prospects, lacking proper preparation before a meeting.
4. There is no such thing as: have you met the decision makers, so please, sales leader, stop asking that question! Instead, question the mapping of the opportunity and the account, who do we talk to and what are the influences... the budget owner can own a small budget compared to your value. Push the walls, increase your value by listening, understanding your prospect issues and laying out a plan to solve them.

Think this is not happening to your organisation? Look closer, it is not that....invisible.

“But, these are trivial difficulties. We shall find ways of defeating everything” – The Invisible man

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