

Selling in a Recession: The Best Recession Sales Strategy

I have no doubt that our economy is already in a recession. Whether or not they'll admit it, the Federal Reserve's recent actions surely prove this as well. However, I would like to offer two of my own economic indicators that truly reflect the dismal state of the economy.

1. In my recent conversations with sales leaders across all industries (technology, finance, manufacturing, etc.) there is a foreboding sense of gloom about the coming months. In most cases, they tell me that sales are down or flat since January. Regardless of their past successes, they feel saddled with annual quotas they will be unable to achieve.
2. Over the past ninety days an ever increasing number of VPs of sales and sales executives have contacted me because they have lost their jobs through "reorganizations". They are panic-stricken they won't find work. For them the old adage applies, "A recession is when your neighbor loses his job, a depression is when you lose yours."

Selling in a recession is not only difficult, it's downright scary. Knowing how to appeal to the "*Bully with the Juice*" is a mandatory strategy in tough times like these because even though you may win the selection process, you still haven't won the business. Who is the Bully with the Juice? The Bully with the Juice is the financial decision maker who will ultimately approve the purchase. It's the person who controls the company's purse strings. He could be the CFO, VP of finance, VP of purchasing, or even the president. Unfortunately, this person has the economy on his mind and is less likely to approve spending money more than ever.

There are many different ways to classify people involved in the selection process during the sales cycle including title, influence, and orientation (technical, business or financial). Another interesting characterization is a person's insistence that things be done his way. This is called being a "bully."

A bully will get his way at any and all costs. Being a bully is not necessarily a negative term, nor does it mean that the person is physically intimidating. It is simply the description of people who will tenaciously fight for their cause.

Another concept by which people can be measured is if they have "juice." Simply put, juice is leadership, authority, and charisma. During the selection process you will encounter bullies and evaluators with varying degrees of juice. However, only one person within the customer's organization can be the Bully with the Juice. Even after the vendor selection has been made, releasing the funds must be approved by the ultimate decision-maker, the Bully with the Juice. Single-handedly, he imparts his own will on the selection process and will approve or deny the purchase to be made.

The Bully with the Juice is the company's equivalent of emperor Caesar. Only he can give his thumb up or down on the life-or-death decision to spend the company's money.

So even though you have won the evaluation and been assured that a purchase will be made, you are actually in the most critical part of the sales process. You must win the approval of the Bully with the Juice.

Some people believe that the economy has changed the way products are purchased. People will argue that some purchases are truly made by committee without a Bully with the Juice. While a committee does put more fingerprints of accountability on the product selection, behind every committee (and its creation) is a bully who has the juice. In addition, every committee has to present its recommendation to someone, and that person is the Bully with the Juice.

There are four important rules regarding the Bully who has the Juice. First, if you cannot accurately determine who the Bully with Juice is in your deal and none exists, be prepared for no decision to be made. It takes a Bully with the Juice to make a major purchase happen. This is a reality in today's economy. Second, if there is a bully with the juice in your deal and this person will not meet with you, always assume they are aligned with someone else or are against the purchase from being made at all. Therefore, the deal is lost. Third, if a Bully with the Juice does exist but you aren't able to identify the person, be prepared to lose. You are in a position of extreme risk because you have no idea which economic decision-maker you must win-over. Finally and most importantly, you MUST meet with the Bully with the Juice as early as possible during the selection process! This is the only way to know whether or not a deal really exists.

Salespeople are constantly placed in an environment where they must differentiate themselves and their product from other attention-getting solutions. Under these circumstances, the salesperson's job is to create a relationship with detractors as well as supporters. Ultimately, there is one person who makes the final decision and truly matters. In today's economic malaise, it is the *Bully with the Juice* who reigns supreme.

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