

## *Lessons in Leadership from CTPartners*

# This is how you sell by Ashwin Rao, CSO of Collabera.

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[Ashwin Rao](#), Chief Sales Officer of [Collabera](#), an on shore and off shore IT services firm, tells us how how you sell effectively when your space has become largely undifferentiated.

It's a great question, even though I firmly believe that ITO/BPO services are far from commoditized. But if customers have that impression – if they are beginning to push back and say, “A Developer is a Developer so, From now on, it's just price” – then the question needs to be answered.

The answer is embedded in the word “services”. I think it is virtually impossible for services to be of uniform quality from one company to another. If you're selling a service, you have the opportunity to differentiate. True, it is harder when your customers don't see your differentiators. But that just means you need to work harder at making your differentiators visible. First to yourself, then to your customers.

Where to look for your differentiators? Three places occur to me immediately:

1. Energy or Passion – You, as an individual, purchase “commodity” services all the time. Laundry, medical care, car repair – you have many comparably-priced options for almost any service you need. What makes you a loyal customer in some cases and not in others? In many cases it is the energy exhibited by those who provide it. A doctor who takes an active interest in your complaint and questions you energetically to diagnose it. The launderer who takes pleasure in pointing out the buttons they replaced for you. The mechanic who insists on riding around the block with you to make sure you don't still hear that sound. In their own ways, they are binding you to them with their passion and energy. You pay them with your loyalty; you don't shop those providers on price.

Jack Welch's first two Es of Leadership are Energy and Energize. Go along on the next sales call with your ITO and BPO salespeople. Do they exhibit energy and passion about your services? If not, you are forfeiting differentiation that is virtually free to you.

2. Innovation – It's great if your technology team can invent a grand new technology that leapfrogs you past your competition, but that's rare. What does not have to be rare is the every day, every way kind of innovation that refreshes the customer experience at every stage of the relationship.

To innovate, make sure you regularly question how things are done now. Encourage your people to do the same. If you've been using the same tool for years, ask why. “This is how we do it here” might lock in best practices, but it can also impede innovation. Encourage experimentation. “I wonder if we could get even better results if we...” If I were a customer, and your sales person

came to me and said, “We’ve been thinking, we have a new idea for you – would you be open to trying this?” I wouldn’t think “commodity”. I would think “trusted advisor.”

3. Expertise – When I hear a CIO talk about the commoditization of ITO/BPO services, I can’t help thinking about the commoditization of CIOs: “Surely by now, if you’ve seen one CIO, you’ve seen them all.” Not really, but you get my point. In ITO/BPO services, there ARE experts who have earned the appellation, just as there are amateurs who have not. The former bring extraordinary value to our customers. They are profoundly differentiating. Expertise is not amorphous – it is measurable and demonstrable. By contrast, amateurs can be costly for customers.

In his book *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell writes about violinists, “By the age of twenty, the elite performers had each totaled ten thousand hours of practice. By contrast the merely good students had totaled eight thousand hours, and the future music teachers had totaled just over four thousand hours.”

Where in your company do you truly have 10,000 hour people? Where do you have expertise that outweighs your competitors? Have you quantified these areas of expertise? Do your competitors sell amateurs as experts? Do your salespeople know precisely how your true experts increase value for the customer? If not, you are underselling one of your greatest assets, making a commodity of a powerful differentiator.

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