

“Speaking with One Voice”

(based on a 2 part Blog which originally appeared in Supply Chain Management Review)

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“Speaking with One Voice – I”

Are you frustrated with suppliers who do end runs around you and your sourcing teams?

Do you wish senior management would stop talking with suppliers, or at least ask you for input on what to say?

Does your supplier always seem to know more about what is happening at your company than you do?

“Speaking with One Voice” is a key success factor in strategic sourcing and supplier relationship management. It’s an important internal discipline, and it doesn’t just happen by itself.

It starts with creating an awareness, throughout your organization, that every conversation with a supplier, no matter how innocent or “technical” it might appear, is part of the overall negotiations process. As a result, procurement professionals – and their internal clients – need to realize that all meetings and conversations should be planned, with clear objectives. All contact points within your company should be identified, and brought into the communications process.

Supply management should have a strategic role identifying, selecting, and managing suppliers. As a result, the supply management organization is the natural leader for creating a “One Voice” discipline in your organization. Part II will describe some proven success factors in making that happen.

“Speaking with One Voice – II”

I recall one challenging sourcing effort, years ago, where the supplier sales rep was arrogant, and smug, when dealing with the sourcing team. And, he had reason to be over-confident – he had contacts throughout the customer’s organization: from the corporate office to plant locations, from the general manager level to the loading dock. This supplier rep was literally “plugged in” to the customer’s organization. As a result, he knew more about the company’s current activities, and near-term plans, than the sourcing team.

It took a while for the sourcing team to realize what was going on, and why it was having difficulty with this supplier rep. But, once it did recognize the issue, it went into action. It identified, over the course of several weeks, all of the internal contacts that the supplier rep had in his network. And then came the brilliant move: it

explained to each of these fellow employees that the supplier rep was “using them” to collect information for its negotiations advantage.

With that awareness created (step 1), the sourcing team then explained the value of “Speaking with One Voice” (step 2). Finally, it requested that these fellow employees abide by some simple “One Voice” rules, and also help deliver certain carefully-scripted messages back to the supplier. In a short period, the once-arrogant sales rep lost his smugness, and began to work constructively with the sourcing team.

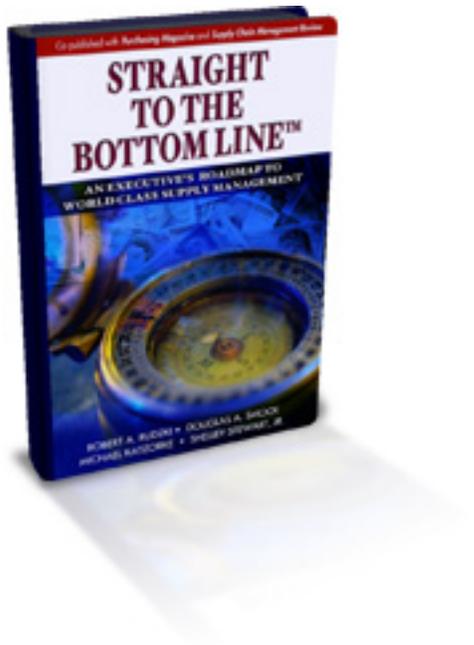
It may sound easy, but creating that One Voice awareness and buy-in throughout a multi-location company is a lot of work. That is the reason that Greybeard Advisors originally created this proprietary program for its training and consulting clients. The 16 minute video program explains what can happen when you don’t speak with one voice. This is done via short scenes or vignettes, based on actual experiences. To highlight its importance, it is distributed to the organization with the explicit support of top management.

In our role as advisors to our clients, we also encourage a written communication from the CEO to all employees. This is typically followed by department and business unit leaders reinforcing the CEO’s message in their own ways (emails, memos, in-person), along with showing the video program to all employees.

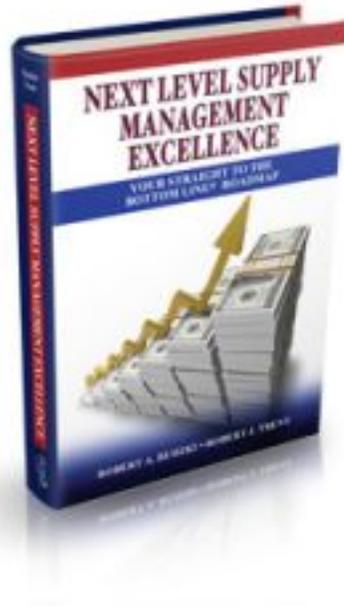
Note: Robert A. Rudzki, President of Greybeard Advisors LLC, and a former Fortune 500 SVP and Chief Procurement Officer, is lead author of two highly-acclaimed books on supply management. He has been a regular contributor and speaker at ISM and other professional conferences, and is a trusted advisor to companies in many industries. Bob decided recently to contribute Greybeard’s “Speaking with One Voice” program to practitioners of the Procurement and Supply Management profession for their use within their companies (not for distribution or resale).



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