

# Local Tech Wire

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## A sales executive's story



**Joe Harris**

**By Joe Harris, Special to LTW**

*Editor's note: Joe Harris is a successful technology salesman and sales manager.*

**RALEIGH, N.C.** - "I know when Joe Harris walks into my office I can trust what he tells me." These were the words of the Chief Information Officer (CIO) of a Fortune 100 international corporation. The occasion was the introduction of the Vice President to whom I reported after the sale of a local technology services company to a larger national company. My new VP was assuring the CIO that the transition from one vendor company to another would be smooth. Would it be smooth?

On behalf of the smaller company, I had 25+ IT professionals under contract providing services to the Fortune 100 client company. The CIO interrupted my VP and said, "Please confirm that Joe will still be responsible for my company under the new contract". When the VP replied in the affirmative, the CIO made the above statement and added with "no further explanation is necessary".

How does a salesman evolve from the stigma stated in the joke; "How can you tell when a salesman is lying? His lips are moving!" To the trust included in the opening statement of this article? It's more than that, much more.

In the remainder of this article I will explain my relationship with the CIO and several additional C-Level executives and mid-level managers with whom I have a similar relationship. In his book *How to Hire a Champion*, David P. Snyder emphasizes the importance of character in sales people pages 76 -82 and other references to character throughout the book.

In this article when I use the word salesman, I am generally referring to sales representatives, both men and women, who sell big dollar items (\$300k or larger) that entail long sales cycles and the necessity of the client viewing the salesman in a consultative role i.e. not your card carrying snake oil peddler.

In the area of character, I was blessed with growing up in a stable home and being reared by parents who lived by the golden rule and instilled that value in me and my siblings. My paternal grandfather said...and meant, "A man's word is his bond!" That was not a cliché to him.

So years later when I began my sales career with Digital Equipment Corporation, it was second nature for me to always honor my commitments to my clients, managers and colleagues. Such commitments included always arriving on time, or typically a few minutes early, for appointments both with clients/prospects and within my company.

For the benefit of the cynics let me admit at this point my motives in establishing trust with executives empowered to buy my product or service were not completely altruistic. Ever hear the saying, "People buy from people ---whom they like and trust!" By developing trust with my client executives, I made it easier for both of us to transact business. They received a product or service that provided a solution to a business problem. I exceeded my sales numbers and got paid.

I can sell anything that I understand and believe in. This is good because since the early nineties I have been downsized twice and sold once (my company). Being sold is much better than being downsized. When you are downsized, you receive some type of severance package based on length of service. When part of the small technology services company was sold

to a larger company, I was the key person for the portion of the small company that was sold and negotiated a good compensation and benefits package.

One source cites three characteristics that are necessary for a salesman to be successful:

1. Enthusiasm
2. Product/service knowledge
3. Strong work ethic

When I transitioned into new jobs, I brought numbers 1 & 3 with me and only had to acquire working knowledge of the new company's line of products/services to be successful. Enthusiasm may be an understatement; passion for your company and products is more descriptive of the desired emotion. You must be passionate in your sales presentations and discussions or your client/prospect will sense your lack of belief in company and product. That translates into no sales or loss to competition.

More on how I became a trusted advisor to several C-level and mid-level executives. In today's economy all executives in transition are encouraged to network extensively to find a new position. The advice is to always keep your network active. Help other people and they will help you. There are many active network groups in the RTP area and most are based on LinkedIn the professional networking system. Employed executives have formed a group known as TAFU (To Avoid Future Unemployment).

When I started with Digital Equipment Corporation (Digital) I was familiar with using referrals, which I worked from my network of social and professional contacts, to set appointments. My first account assignment with Digital was the Raleigh, North Carolina facility of a Fortune 100 telecommunications company that was an IBM stronghold. It quickly became obvious that if I was to make quota my first year I had to win a major sale against IBM. This was during an era when IBM was the dominant force in the computer market. The major tenet of IBM's approach to account control was maintaining relationships with top client executives.

One of the major lessons that I learned in my sales training was "call high and call often". My sales campaign began by bringing Digital's National Account Manager for the Fortune 100 telecommunications company to Raleigh to meet with the General Manager of the Raleigh facility. I had a golfing relationship with the General Manager so it was comparatively easy to schedule an appointment with him. Once the word got out on the plant grapevine that I had access to the general manager, I could arrange to meet with anyone involved in the computer acquisition decision.

Some of my colleagues were betting that at the last moment IBM would call high in the organization and reverse the decision to award the contract to Digital. This bet was based on IBM's typical modus operandi. Digital won the contract and I was promoted to Enterprise Account Manager/National Account Manager for the Fortune 100 international corporation cited in the opening paragraph.

Fast forward several years, I had been downsized from Digital and was serving as Mid-Atlantic Business Development Manager for a small high tech services company in Raleigh. The Y2K phenomenon caused a spike in demand for IT professionals. We developed a service dubbed Technology Boot Camp to satisfy our clients need for a large number of IT professionals at a reasonable price.

Through my relationship with the CIO, I sold several Technology Boot Camps to his company as well as other companies. He invited me to speak at a national conference of the CIO Alliance in Las Vegas. This resulted in a relationship that I developed with the CIO of a large auto parts supplier and ultimately a million dollar sale of a Java Boot Camp. The Technology Boot Camp service provided millions of dollars in revenue and profit over a period of years to the companies I represented.

In the interest of brevity I will just highlight a few other instances where my ability to rapidly establish trust with executives resulted in major sales:

- My relationship with the CIO and Group Vice President resulted in multiple sales, including a large management consulting contract, to the second largest tire manufacturer
- By developing a trust relationship with the Chief of Emergency Medicine, Director of Emergency Department Nursing, Chief

Administrative Officer and Chief Information Officer, I closed the first ever sale of an emergency department software product to a large area hospital. That product is now used in over 200 hospitals in dozens of states and is known as Allscripts ED. This sale of this unknown product from an unknown company displaced an installed competitive product that had strong name recognition in the emergency department sector.

- Recently my trust relationship with a leading optometrist resulted in the largest sale to an optometry practice in the company's history.

In summary trust is important in business and life. The approach that has worked for me is a combination of professionalism, maturity, good judgement, humor and dressing appropriate for the setting/occasion. I showed up on time for appointments and always followed through on my commitments.

Good luck in your quest to become a trusted advisor.

*About the author: Joe Harris is a successful technology salesman and sales manager. His success encompasses the sale of computer hardware, software and services. In addition to his personal sales success he has built high performance sales teams for multiple companies. In addition to regularly exceeding his sales quota, one of his significant accomplishments was the introduction of a software product for hospital emergency rooms that is currently used in more than 200 hospitals nationwide. He attributes his success primarily to his ability to establish trusting, prosperous, short and long-term relationships with C-level executives and mid-level managers. He can be reached at [jharris11@nc.rr.com](mailto:jharris11@nc.rr.com)*

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