Identifying and Managing Hidden Influencers in the Buying Process

Presented by:

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Panelists:

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Modern B2B buying decisions rarely come down to a single decision-maker. In most organizations—particularly in complex or regulated industries—purchase decisions are shaped by **a network of stakeholders**, each with different priorities, influence levels, and internal relationships. Yet most salespeople still engage only a small portion of that network, leaving unseen influencers to quietly shape the outcome.

This webinar, led by **Steve Gielda (Ignite Selling)** with panelists **Heather Fraser (JPMorgan Chase)** and **Jeff Harris (Flosonics Medical)**, explored how sales teams can more effectively **identify, understand, and engage the hidden influencers** who determine whether opportunities move forward—or stall.

Across the discussion, three recurring themes emerged:

1. **Access is not the same as influence.**
   Comfort relationships often mask the real power dynamics inside accounts.
2. **Value must be tailored to individual success metrics.**
   Stakeholders measure outcomes differently—and selling requires aligning to what *they* care about.
3. **Assumptions slow deals; curiosity accelerates them.**
   The best salespeople validate what they think they know instead of relying on past experience.

The session provided **practical, field-tested guidance** for helping sellers move beyond surface-level account engagement and develop the strategic confidence required to drive stakeholder alignment.

Why This Matters Now

Buying committees are only getting larger, and stakeholders are increasingly distributed across geographies, functions, and reporting lines. In this environment, winning doesn't come from pitching harder—it comes from navigating influence more intelligently. Sales leaders who develop this capability within their teams create measurable advantages in deal velocity, forecast accuracy, and win rates.

The Hidden Layer of B2B Decision-Making

Gerhard Gschwandtner opened the discussion by emphasizing that great companies "harness the collective intelligence of their organization," and selling into such environments requires understanding not just authority, but **influence ecosystems**.

Sales cycles have become increasingly complex, often involving **six to twenty stakeholders** across different functions. Despite this, **89% of salespeople engage with only four influencers**

on average, according to research by Ignite Selling. That gap — the invisible layer of decision power — is where deals are won or lost.

As moderator **Steve Gielda** noted, the goal of the session was twofold:

1. To equip sales leaders with insights to better identify and manage hidden influencers.
2. To introduce the *Influencer Snapshot®*, a tool that helps visualize and navigate complex buying committees.

Mistake #1 - Overreliance on a Single Point of Contact

Problem:
Salespeople often assume that a strong, enthusiastic champion is enough to drive a deal forward. But champions don't always have the influence, political capital, or decision authority needed to get internal alignment. When sellers rely too heavily on one supportive contact, they risk losing sight of the broader decision network—and the deal stalls.

Gerhard added that a simple but powerful question can break this trap:

"Who else was involved the last time your company made a similar decision?"

Heather Fraser stressed that teamwork and planning are essential:

“In my world, there’s always a cast of characters going into a client. If we don’t align our message and goals before the meeting, we risk confusion internally and externally.”

Best Practices:

- Conduct *pre-call planning* to align internal messaging.
- Ask discovery questions that uncover the **true decision network**.
- Don’t confuse access with progress; map out who’s missing and why.

Mistake #2 - Mistaking Authority for Influence

Problem:
It’s natural for salespeople to invest most of their time with the stakeholders who are most responsive and easiest to meet with. But these “comfort contacts” are often not the ones shaping the real decision. Access does not equal influence.

Heather’s example from JPMorgan Chase:

“You might have an executive sponsor who loves your idea, but if the people using the solution say, ‘This doesn’t work for me,’ the deal stalls. You must include all the functional stakeholders early.”

Jeff Harris shared a healthcare example:

“We once went straight to the Chief Medical Officer. It was a great meeting, but then we lost control — he told us he’d ‘share it with his directors.’ Without engaging the real influencers, we were out of the loop.”

Best Practices:

- Use structured tools like the *Influencer Snapshot®* to identify advocates, adversaries, and neutrals.
- Consider timing — reaching out to senior executives too early can backfire if the groundwork isn’t laid.
- Teach teams to distinguish between **authority** (formal power) and **influence** (informal trust).

Gerhard Gschwandtner reframed the issue as an education problem:

“Mistaking authority for influence reflects inadequate sales education. Great decisions come from collective intelligence. It takes a village to raise a healthy deal.”

Mistake #3 - Failure to Uncover Personal Metrics

Problem:
Many sellers speak in terms of benefits, features, or general value—but customers make decisions based on the **business metrics they are accountable for.** If sellers can't connect their solution to clinical, operational, or financial outcomes that matter to each stakeholder, value remains abstract.

Training must help sales teams develop the business acumen to translate product advantages into measurable impact. The conversation must shift from *why this product is good* to *how this solution helps your organization achieve a prioritized result*.

Jeff Harris explained:

"Knowing the key metrics of your influencers is a force multiplier. If you can show how your solution moves their numbers, you accelerate your pipeline."

He described how in healthcare, it's essential to understand both *clinical* and *administrative* metrics:

"A physician champion might not know the hospital's purchasing metrics. If I can help my champion connect their goals with the buyer's goals, they can advocate effectively."

Heather Fraser added:

"Value isn't universal — it's personal. Each stakeholder views value through their own lens. Our job is to uncover what matters to them and frame it in a way that's relevant."

Gerhard Gschwandtner connected this to the evolution of value selling:

"We're at an inflection point. Selling today requires orchestration of data, AI, and guided decisions. The future belongs to salespeople who use AI to uncover stakeholder value faster and personalize it deeper."

Best Practices:

- Train reps to uncover **individual success metrics** (e.g., cost per acquisition, uptime, retention).
- Link your value proposition directly to these metrics.
- Leverage AI or CRM insights to map personal motivators across the buying team.

Mistake #4 - Assuming What They Know Is Enough

Problem:
In most organizations, stakeholders do not share identical priorities. Clinical leaders may focus on patient outcomes, procurement may prioritize cost control, and operational leaders may be focused on efficiency or staffing constraints. Sellers who speak to the group as if everyone shares the same motivation will struggle to gain consensus.

The more effective approach is to understand what matters to each stakeholder, and then tailor the value story to connect your solution to their individual success metrics.

Heather Fraser said:

"It's easy to fall into the trap of thinking, 'I've seen this before.' But every client is unique. I've learned to reframe my assumptions as questions — to validate, not assume."

Jeff Harris highlighted culture as the cure:

"We've built a culture of questioning everything. On my team, it's a safe space to challenge ideas. We hunt for 'micro-assumptions' that could derail a deal."

Gerhard Gschwandtner added:

"Experience builds intuition — but it can also build illusions. The antidote is curiosity over certainty. Don't sell through your assumptions; sell through your awareness."

Best Practices:

- Encourage leaders to create a *culture of inquiry*.
- Use deal reviews to challenge hidden assumptions.
- Reward curiosity, not just confidence.

Mistake #5 - Not Effectively Leveraging Advocates

Problem:
Deals often stall not because customers don't see value, but because they don't see **why action is necessary now.** Many sellers focus on selling their solution rather than helping customers clarify the cost of waiting—lost capacity, continued inefficiency, delayed outcomes, or competitive disadvantage.

Urgency is created when sellers help customers compare the impact of acting now versus continuing the status quo. When the customer sees the consequences of inaction, momentum increases naturally—without pressure.

Jeff Harris explained:

"Reps assume their advocates are promoting them internally — but many aren't. You have to give them 'homework.' Ask them to validate, introduce, or test your message."

He distinguished between advocates *with* and *without* decision-making power:

"Non-decision advocates are like internal ChatGPTs — they have deep insight. Don't overlook them."

Heather Fraser described how her team empowers advocates:

"When we share decks or materials, we design them assuming they'll be circulated internally. That way, the advocate carries our message accurately. We treat them as force multipliers."

Best Practices:

- Equip advocates with clear talking points and collateral that reinforce your value message.
- Test the strength of advocacy by assigning small actions.
- Recognize that "nice people" aren't necessarily champions — true advocates act.

The Influencer Snapshot® Tool

At the core of the session was Ignite Selling's **Influencer Snapshot®**, a 2x2 mapping tool that helps visualize the political landscape of an account.

The Four Quadrants:

	Advocate	**Adversary**
High Influence	Key champions who can drive organizational consensus.	Dangerous blockers who can stop deals.
Low Influence	Informal allies who provide information and access.	Skeptics who can be neutralized.

Questions the Snapshot helps answer:

- Who are we missing?
- Who is the competition speaking to that we're not?
- How can we elevate or neutralize influence?
- Who can help us turn adversaries into allies?

Steve Gielda's example:
If a CFO and Head of Customer Success are adversaries, the rep can:

1. Strengthen the Head of Revenue Growth's advocacy to offset the CFO's resistance.
2. Neutralize dissenters by engaging mutual stakeholders in joint meetings.

The tool forces strategic conversation about *how* to win, not just *who* to call on.

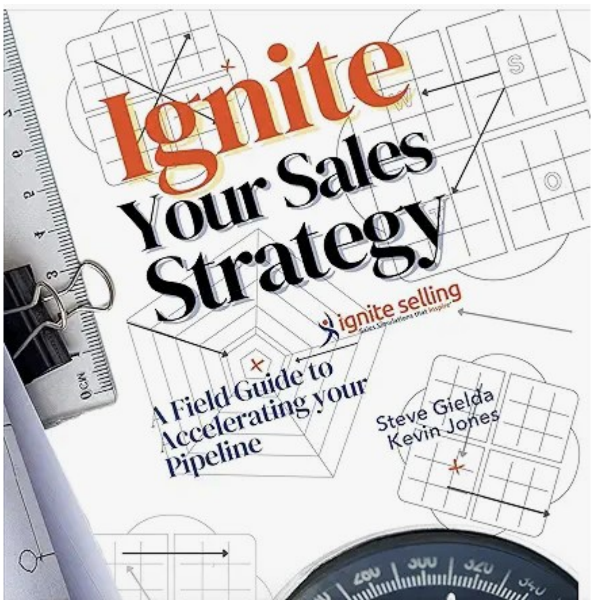
Key Takeaways:

DO reach beyond your comfort zone.
DO validate what you think you know — multiple times.
DO uncover and align with individual business metrics.
DO find peers or managers who challenge your assumptions.
DO proactively leverage advocates to neutralize adversaries.

Steve concluded with: "Selling today is about orchestrating trust across networks of influence. The salesperson who sees the invisible — the unspoken forces inside the buying committee — becomes indispensable."

Next Steps:

All attendees will receive complimentary access to the *Ignite Selling Influencer Snapshot e-learning module* and a chance to win an autographed copy of *Ignite Your Sales Strategy: A Field Guide to Accelerating Your Pipeline*.



Link to *Identifying and Managing Hidden Influencers in the Buying Process*:
https://youtu.be/du8MlRtk8o8

Contact Steve Gielda: sgielda@Igniteseling.com

Visit: www.Igniteselling.com

Special **BONUS** Whitepaper - Avoiding the Most Common Sales Mistakes: Making Assumptions

Click on this QR code to gain free 30-day access to the Ignite Selling Influencer Snapshot e-learning module.