

Case Study Series

Herman Miller Asia Pacific Instill Best-Practices and Common Process in Cross-Cultural, Multi-Language Sales Teams

CASE PROFILE

Company Name: Herman Miller, Asia Pacific

Industry: Office furnishings and Office Environments

Sales Team: Salespeople, Managers, Distributors

Location: Asia Pacific region

Key Challenges:

- Lack of common process
- Multi-language sales force
- Building relationships with distributors

Solution:

- *Strategic Selling*® instilled a common process and methodology for developing complex B2B sales solutions across a multi-national, multi-channel sales force.

Sources:

- Jeremy Hocking, Vice President of Herman Miller, Asia Pacific
- Guy Fraser, Miller Heiman Distribution Partner

The Challenge

Herman Miller is a global business with a presence in most countries in the world. When Jeremy Hocking, Vice President of Herman Miller, took over the Asia Pacific general management role in 2008 he realized he needed to strengthen his team's ability to sell complex solutions, often to large complex clients.

Summarizing the situation Jeremy Hocking said "The future of our business is customized furniture and office design, much of it transacted through distributors. The training background of the team to date is mainly product and service training. So to meet this challenge, the team need to become much more customer focused as well as being able to navigate complex business structures with several decision makers, including working through the distributors."

Jeremy recognized that the team needed a consistent method of working that the whole team, including

their managers and the distributors could use. He also knew that training everyone in this would also be a motivational tool. “Part of my strategy is ultimately to roll the methodology out to selected distributors as well as to our own team, both as a means of improving their professionalism and also developing loyalty,” he said.

The Miller Heiman Solution

Jeremy had experience working with Miller Heiman’s *Strategic Selling*® methodology and keen to adopt it for his Asia Pacific team.

However, his first concern was whether it would be suitable for an Asia Pacific team since many team members would need to study and apply what they learned in Chinese or Japanese. He also realized that to make any methodology effective, the key was to ensure that it became part of regular practice among team members.

In discussion with Guy Fraser at MDS, an Asia Pac Miller Heiman distributor, Jeremy agreed to follow a three stage process. This consisted of briefing team line managers before the training followed by the training itself and then a follow-up review of team Blue Sheets a few weeks afterwards.

Pilot Program

The advanced briefing process was a series of two-way conversations with several line managers who were leading or sending team members to the pilot training.

“The most important thing that this did was to make sure we understood that this was not ‘two days away from work’ – that it was a key opportunity to apply to learn a more efficient way of working by applying collective rigor to the most important current projects that we have to close. It also enabled us to make sure that Guy understood the business issues that we were dealing with,” one of the pilot participants said. Guy Fraser facilitated the pilot program in Hong Kong.

Multi-Language Workshops

“We had a fully-briefed management team being lead by a hands-on GM so the level of motivation and engagement was very high and we could cover a great deal of ground in the time,” Guy said. “This was despite the fact that we had a very multinational group including delegates from Japan, China and the UK. This also meant that when we came to do on-line Blue-Sheet reviews a few weeks later, most submissions showed a very high level of best practice. In conversation with a senior manager a year or so later he remarked that we are ‘consistently churning out Blue Sheets and benefiting from their use.’”

The first stage roll-out of the program was held in Shanghai, with a workshop delivered in Mandarin Chinese. Other *Strategic Selling*®, workshops were held in English. Fifty team members have been trained so far and the program is on-going.

“The teams in Singapore, Hong Kong and Shanghai have responded to this very well and are finding it helpful in tackling the business which is extremely competitive, so we will be moving forward to train the rest of the team in *Strategic Selling*®,” said Jeremy Hocking after the event.