

Ian: 00:01 Hey, it's Ian Altman. I'm joined this week by skip Miller. He's the founder and president of M3 learning a proactive sales and sales management training company based in the heart of Silicon Valley. I've invited skip here to talk about his latest book selling above and below the line. We're going to talk about some of the great misconceptions about selling the myth of the decision maker, the difference between above the line and below the line buyers and how to specifically navigate above and below the line to get better results in your business. It's a great discussion. And here's my interview with Skip Miller.

Ian: 00:43 Skip Miller, welcome to the show.

Skip: 00:45 Hey, it's a pleasure being here and it really appreciate it. Thank you.

Ian: 00:48 You betcha. Can you start by sharing something surprising about you that our audience may not know?

Skip: 00:54 Wow. I born and raised in Ohio and uh, um, big Ohio state fan. My daughter just graduated from Ohio state and I married somebody from Penn state.

Ian: 01:04 Ooh. How's that working out?

Skip: 01:07 Once or twice a year. It's a very interesting household on a Saturday afternoon, but um, no, all good. So we've been in California for about 20 years now and I really enjoyed it out here, but those Ohio state, Penn State Games are definitely rivalries that the whole family gets into.

Ian: 01:20 Hey, at least you didn't marry someone from Michigan.

Skip: 01:22 Well that couldn't have happened because we wouldn't allow it. They get offended.

Ian: 01:26 It's, it's funny, my, uh, my, my son who is entering college in the fall was looking at a few different schools. The Ohio, the Ohio State University mean one of them because you have to have the V in front of it and love it on the tour. Any building, any department that has an m in it in the, in the name is crossed out with red tape

Skip: 01:52 and on game on the game week, Michigan comes to Ohio state. Yeah. It's the, it's the, and you can't say any word in classrooms that have ms and so it's hysterical. Hysterical Week. I'm sure it goes both ways. But yeah, it's a, it's a fun rivalry and glad to have some kids who graduated there and experienced all that.

Ian: 02:12 It was pretty funny. I remember there's a special program my son was considering and the professor who runs this program is called integrated business and engineering. He asked my son what schools is looking at, and Michigan was one of them in Maryland, Maryland's one of them. And so a lot, a lot of their competing schools and the professor looks at and he says, well the problem with all of those schools is none of them have any sports teams. And I mean, none of them had any sports team. My sentences, I understand professor, that's pretty funny. And it's funny because here's a guy who's running a running a, um, a department in the engineering school, but he's so passionate about the sport they have. Letic sides just came through, which, I dunno, it was a selling point or detraction to my son, but we thought it was funny to see that kind of school

Skip: 03:02 spirit traditions run deep. You're right. Yep.

Ian: 03:05 And though. I'm though many people would like to know. How do you end up in a, um, in a marriage with somebody who went to a rivalry school? We'll save that for another day. And I want to talk more about your expertise and what you have in your book selling above and below the line. And it's something that Jason Bay was a guest on several episodes ago, said, oh you gotta talk to skip. And that's how we met. So for starters, what's the biggest mistake that you see businesses make when they're selling to quote the decision maker?

Skip: 03:40 Yeah. Um, first shout out to Jason. So I appreciate the call out. I'm on a mission to destroy the term decision maker because I think there's two and I've labeled it below and above the line. And the below the line buyer is the one that we love talking to. They want to talk about us, we want to talk about us feature benefit, competitive advantages and, and they get excited about presentations and demos and stuff and we get with them very early. They're typically the ones who call in are we prospect too? And they're very, very important in the deal. But energy for the deal is going to be what we call above the line. I got, you know, a \$20 million problem. I've got a new product out there that I'm expecting a hundred million in. I think I've got 60 70 80 in the bank. I got a \$20 million gap. If I buy this thing that you're trying to sell me, it'll make a dent in that gap. The below the line buyers unaware of that happening, they're typically given a budget to go buy something and the above the line buyer sitting there going, I sure hope something happens cause we need to close this gap. So identifying that gap, the business gap early in the sale I think is the biggest mistake people make in the, you know, more mid market enterprise type sale.

Ian: 05:05 It's something that I speak about

quite often, which is too often people focus on what it is they're selling rather than focusing on why the client's organization needs it. And so it's that. It's that whole notion of well we have this feature and this capability and I'm trying to hit my number this quarter instead of to your point. What's that gap that they're trying to solve from a business standpoint that candidly, the below the line buyer may not even realize is the real driving force behind this purchase.

Skip: 05:37 Yeah, they, they got a budget for a reason. You know, they didn't get, you know, \$100,000 to go buy something just because, you know, they needed a new shiny bauble. They got \$100,000 budget because of the above. The lie buyer has said, I got a gap, I got an earnings gap or revenue gap, a market share gap or whatever the gap is. However they're measuring thing. It could be net promoter score, it could be, um, you know, uptime availability for the it function. There's a lot of, you know, most above the line buyers have goals. And the cool thing about goals is they're never met. They're either short called a deficit or they could rock it through him called an upside. So either way, a deficit or upside, you have a gap and people will make investments to either close that gap or expand that gap. If you look at business that way, you definitely have a great argument to go to the above the line buyer early in the call rather than work with the below the line buyer and then try to go over their heads, which they're not going to like. I mean it just, you just get in this rat race.

Ian: 06:47 Yeah. And that, and that whole notion of the trying to do the end around immediately puts it into the penalty box or at best sucks you into the vortex of evil. And those are those scenarios where it just can't happen. So what are, what are some of the things that you suggest to people and that you cover in the book is in terms of how do people make that transition? How does a seller make the transition from the below the one buyer so that they now include the above the line buyer?

Skip: 07:16 Well, think about it, right? Um, I've got a problem with printing workbooks. You know, we're, we're very busy now and we're going to go to need a 20% more throughput in my workbooks, so we need to buy a new printer. All right. I don't care if it's a brother, a xerox or re, I don't care. So I go to my office manager and say, buy a printer and they're going to pick one and I'm sure it's really going to be good and they've got to come to me and say, skip, maybe it's 10% over the budget you gave me. And I'm like, okay, fine. And by the way, the salesperson would like to ask, you know, if you want to see a demo of the printer, I bet you at Prince. Okay. I, you know, now to my office manager, which this story is actually in the book, right?

Skip: 08:00 It's a true story. Um, to my office

manager, she does want to see a demo. She's the one who's got to figure out, you know, when a jams how to and jam it, you know, where the cartridge, you know, that's important stuff. But to me, I want it to close my 20% production gap. That's what I thought. I, so when a salesperson gives an executive summary of a below the line reason to try to get to me, I'm like, I appreciate that, but I've given my office manager approval to buy the printer, I'm fine. But if they want to talk to me about my gap because by the way, they may have some other solutions that also help close my gap. You know, extended warranties or you know, leasing multiple printers based on job function. El, I mean there could be a whole bunch of, but don't come to me about your features and benefits come to me asking me why did I give my office manager budget to buy a printer? What was the problem? What was the gap? That's the thing we've got to do earlier in the cycle and and that, and that's the reason you can get by the, the your work with your below the line buyer. What's, here's the magic word, Ian, what's caused you to get a budget for this or what's happened in the business that's caused them to say we got to do something different. And using that word cause which actually implies motivation should get you a little bit better upstream.

Ian: 09:19 Yeah, it's, it's, um, yeah, we also, we often use the phrase, um, what inspired you to look to look for a solution right now. Yeah. And it's, you know, similar, similar concept, which is, so what inspired that? Okay. So, Geez, so right now, so you got a shortfall of 20%. What do you think caused that? That shortfall of 20%. Oh, hold that. Okay. Well, do you think that over time that's going to continue or is this just a blip?

Skip: 09:46 You're exactly right. And now we're not talking about a printer, we're talking about your gap. And I don't know, quite frankly, if our stuff can help here or not yet, we're not there yet. Rather than, you know, I can't wait for them to shut up so I can, you know, throw out a 20 minute demo so they can see our value as exactly.

Ian: 10:04 Our value was so great that we want to discount it. Man. That sounds great. It is so good. It's so great that we're getting need to discount it.

Skip: 10:12 You're exactly right. You're exactly right.

Ian: 10:14 Yeah. And that's, that's always the stuff that just, you know, just, it's painful to watch because you're thinking, okay, um, we don't, that's not an area we want to focus on. And it's never about price and especially the, the below the line, the below line customer is thinking to themselves, well, okay, I just need to get this job done. And the above the blind buyer is the one who says, wow, if you can better solve my problem, if I have a greater

confidence that I'm going to get a better result with you than somebody else, that I may be willing to spend quite a bit more because you're giving me something totally different. Whereas the below the line buyer just says, look, I was told to get a widget. You guys have widgets, right?

Skip: 10:59 You're, you're exactly right. And you know, if we could focus on two things in the book, sure. Train trains and time traveling, um, that those are really good reasons for the sales people and managers to go to above the line buyers earlier. Um, and I think in the book we talk about this, imagine the above the line buyer, the VP, the CSUITE, whatever we're gonna call them as the train station master and each c suite, you know, VP, senior VP, you know, business owner has initiatives and they have two, three, four initiatives. They never single threaded. So as an above the line buyer, if what you're offering can make a dent on track two, three, and five in my train station, this is great. Now the below the line buyer is the conductor on track one. So He's already, or she's only focused on that train, but to the above the line buyer.

Skip: 11:57 For example, if you're selling something to the sales organization and you talked to the VP and you say, what are your initiatives for the year? While I got it ramped my salespeople faster, we're hiring a bunch of people. I can ramp them faster. My manager's got to be better at managing a, we got to have a better compensation program. They'll have initiatives. Now if you can actually make a dent on two or three trains in the station, watch how much energy this deal is going to have. So to the below the line buyer, you sit back and say, what other initiatives does your boss or your boss's boss have that this may be effective? And the below the line buyer's going to go, I don't know. And I don't care. I'm in charge of track one and that's what I'm all about. And as a salesperson, you could sit back and say, I appreciate that, but my job is to make sure any investment you make in us is maximize within your company.

Skip: 12:50 And if we can affect other initiatives that are out there at the same time, it maximizes everybody's win-win here. So how do we find out what other initiatives are? You see where you're going with that absolute right to the ATL (above the line) suite and not getting stuck on track one. Exactly. Yeah. So if you hunt for trains and really have a desire to find out what initiatives are out there. And Ian if the initiatives for the top line buyer, are paint the fence go on vacation and buy a house. If they're not in your wheel house, well the buy window is not open right now. Theoretically those trains, we'll leave the station and new trains will come in next quarter so there's always something going. So if if your listeners can actually sit back and hunt for trains and identify the gaps on those trains, I think that's a major reason to go to ATL early in the process.

Ian: 13:41 If you don't already have your copy of the new same side selling second edition, the one with the red cover, then visit side-selling.com or go to any place books are sold and if you do already have your copy, I would be amazingly grateful if you took the time to post an honest review on Amazon. You have now you mentioned, you mentioned the idea of trains and time traveling.

Skip: 14:08 Think of in the book we describe it as two dimensional versus three dimensional. In a two dimensional world it's either here and now. If I have something broken in my house, I get in my car, I go to Home Depot, I fixed it, I win. Yay. Above the line. Buyers are always thinking in the past, the present and the future. The past is restorative. How do we get things back the way they were and the future is strategic. If I buy this today, how's it gonna affect me? You know, three, six months from now, most salespeople are two dimensional. We'd go to a buyer and go, what's your problem? They go, here's my problem. We go, we could fix that. We win. Yay. That's very good at below the line. But above the line you need to ask questions like, what's the last six months that's caused you to say you got to make a change? Or if you buy this now, what's going to affect the next three, six months? What are the outcomes expected for an investment like this? You ask a below the line buyer that they're going I don't know. I was told the Baidus so we got to stop being two dimensional when we get a chance to go to three dimensional ATL and ask either past or future type questions.

Ian: 15:14 And it's interesting because one of the things I'm interested in your take on this, one of the things that I find is that people will say, well the person I'm dealing with doesn't have the answers, those questions. And I say exactly. And so what happens is when we ask those questions they say I have no idea. Okay, well who? Who might know the answers to that? So and so our VP of this division,

Skip: 15:34 right? What, why, why do we want to get them involved? Because from an investment standpoint, which this is, it may affect other things within the company and you may be able to maximize an investment on many different initiatives. How do we find, we're not trying to over complex the sale here. We're trying to bring energy to it. Cause I can guarantee you if you talk to an ATL and your stuff can actually make a dent on two or three trans I could for for one for \$1 I could make a dent on three trains were where does this go wrong? So hunting for trains and time traveling, you know, what are some of the initiatives that you're in the second half of the year that are going to cause you to sit back and go, I got a problem or what's happened in the first quarter that's, you know, that you've missed and said, you know, this May, if we don't fix this, this may be a problem. If we don't do that to ATL. And we stayed two dimensional

to ATL. Hi, what are your problems right now? Um, I dunno, get you out of my office. That's my problem right now. They don't, every atls meeting is about the last three, six months or next three, six months. Your questions have got to be that way. When you get the Atl, they can not be two dimensional.

Ian: 16:45 Yeah. And it's I, what I find fascinating is that simple questions can give those people included. So the, the unsophisticated seller might say, well how do I talk to them? Which immediately creates an adversarial trap as opposed to if you said, oh well so it sounds like there may be some other initiatives that, that your boss or, or that this person of this title has as well. What's the best way for us to include them in this discussion? The way it's comfortable for you. So now it's non threatening, it's how are we together going to include them to make sure that Gee as a business, you get the greatest return per invested dollar

Skip: 17:26 and how many salespeople are taught. If you're going to have a demo, make sure you get c suite into the demo. You're like, we're training our people wrong because ATLS and BTLs value props are different.

Ian: 17:42 Yup. And it's absolutely true. And it's so funny because I think the thing that I love is that in selling above and below the line, you have many different examples and scripts and stories that help illustrate this point of the difference between above the line and below the line buyers. And it's something where I have been telling people, look, the the person who is likely to give you the most time is also the person who probably has the least influence. And the person who probably has the most influence and the most authority is the person who is likely to give you the least amount of time, but they're going to have the most, the most perceived value in what you have if it's a fit for them. So the person says, Oh yeah, I can meet with you this week and next week and the following week and the following week, they're managing one one track at best, and they're just focused on, I just want to get this widget. And everything's a commodity to me.

Skip: 18:37 Yeah. And in our sales training efforts. When someone says, the reason we want sales training is we want our people ran faster. I'm like, okay, what else? Because if you're going to ask our company to come out and do some training for your people and stuff, you know, what are your initiatives for the year? Because if we only can affect one, it better be like a TGB train. Um, because if it isn't, I mean, what are we doing here? What, you know, if we can affect two or three initiatives at the same time, why wouldn't we take advantage of that? So I mean it's the same for every SAS businesses, hardware, software, enterprise. I mean we've got companies that sell shoes. We have companies that sell air

conditioning units, HVHC stuff. It's pretty similar. There's typically two decision makers. And to get to them early is that is the way you do it. Asking cause hunting for trains and time traveling are, are good tactics to try to get the Atl as soon as you can.

Ian: 19:32 There's one other concept be covering the book that I want you to share with our audience, which is oftentimes people will say to me, look, so yeah, I get all this stuff and more prospects when we do this. Great, but when we get an inbound opportunity, people just call up and say, yeah, we've already done our research, we're interested in this thing that you guys have. So what's your advice for people on those inbound opportunities to make sure that we're looking beyond just the below the line person? Because let's face it, more often than not, those inbound opportunities come from somebody who's below the line, not above the line.

Skip: 20:03 Of course they do. Um, we have a tool, I'm sure you're referring to a tool called trumpeting and trumpeting. His goal is to not have an ATL car. You back Trump. And his goal is to make noise air go in the name. So if I get an inbound lead from a company and I do a little homework and I find out that this could be a pretty good, good opportunity for us, I get out of their a company's website and I find three or four web execs, web exact sir executives on the website, and it could be COO, VP product, VP marketing, VP engineering, whatever they are. And with one email to four people, no CC's nor everything to Bob. Fred and Mary and Debbie, we've received an inquiry. If you are a company, we plan on answering that. If there's a reason to for you to get you guys involved, we'll be in touch.

Skip: 20:55 Thanks again. Loving kisses Skip. So these people are going to get this email. I've got to go. What the heck is this all about? I mean John, you know they, it's going to create noise which is great and it is an ATL touch. So now you follow up with the inbound lead. Hi John. Thanks for your inbound. What's up? And if it really gets exciting, go back and give an update which we'd call a status email to the above the line buyers now so you can get them involved earlier. Ian, before you contact the inbound and if you're going after two different value props one all about the features and benefits of your, of what you offer and the others, the financial, you know, impact that it's going to try to address that. It's a logical good first step. Trumpeting does work and we've got tons of people who do it and call back and say skip or your, your trumpeting stuff actually works. We say thank you. So getting above early, just touching ATL, same you guys inquired us. That means you're asking for our resource and resources is expensive. So I want to let you know we plan on following up on that so we are going to generate some resources of our company to answer your inbound. Now if it really gets exciting, we're going to be in touch. That's all you're saying. But it is a good touch to ATL.

Ian: 22:12 Yep. Well and I think that is something that the point that I want to make sure that people got is that this is not Gee now I'm circumventing the person who contacted me. It's just you're establishing that contact before you responded. Initial inquiry, you're opening up that channel of communication. In my prior business, I remember we did a lot of work in the insurance industry and there was the people at the time of Zurich Insurance, their it organization would reach out to us and when they did, we had a direct line to the CEO and I would send a note to the CEO that says, Hey, your team asked us about this. Um, we're really looking forward to helping them and seeing what we can help. Just say curiosity. I want to make sure, is this something that is a strategic initiative where you want us to keep you informed or is this something that um, is hey, they may be pursuing but it's not that critical for you. I just want to make sure we're giving it the proper attention.

Skip: 23:06 As long as you don't talk about yourself and it turns out about their issues and challenges trains in their station. Hi we just got this inquiry. We plan on following up on this. If you want a personal demo of our stuff or if I can send you anything about our stuff, let me know. That's about us. We call that being about the dog. No dogs, no Wolffian make it all about them if you're going to actually do that touch.

Ian: 23:28 Exactly. Yeah. The, the, you know, the notion of, I often refer to it as the people are, people are um, are infected with something called access displacement disorder, which is when they believe the acts as the earth has shifted in the world now revolves around. And so that notion of, look, no one cares about your stuff. They only care about how it affects their world. So when we reach out to potential clients, we want to be able to say, look, here's my understanding of your situation and if my understanding is correct, I think we may have a solution. But before we go any further, do we have that right? Is that your exact situation or have we missed the Mark A. Little bit and then we were first talking about them rather than talking about ourselves.

Skip: 24:14 We did some research on that. It's in the first chapter or two of the book that the neuroscience of selling where, um, 60 to 80% of the time we ended up talking about ourselves based on, you know, social media and stuff and the neurons in the brain that are related to good food and great experiences are the same neurons that get excited when we talk about ourselves. So what research has found is talking about yourself is inherently pleasing, even if no one is in the same room listening. If you talk about yourself with no one around, it's still feels good.

Ian: 24:46 Yeah. And so the challenge is that the salesperson wants to feel good, might want to talk about

themselves, but we have to remember is if we let our client talk about themselves, they're going to feel good.

Skip: 24:56 And that's the whole point that builds energy, right? And to do that, have them talk about themselves in the right value case, the below the line buyer, very important, but features and functions. They're responsible for making the thing work. The above the line buyer. It's a fiscal issue. You know, how is this going to affect my goals? And objectives. Is it good to, you know, you know, get me more money or it's lower my cost or know, reduce my risk to different value props and it, without going early with both value props, these deals go through the whole sales cycle at the end you've got nothing left to stand on except maybe a discount or a free hat or, or whatever you got to offer. You're not really doing a good job getting energy

Ian: 25:37 or the free hat. I love it. I love this concept of selling above and below the line. What's the best way for our audience to connect with you and learn more about what you're doing?

Skip: 25:50 Sure. I mean you can get the book on Amazon. I think it's on audible as well and stuff. Um, do you want to get ahold of us? It's m three stands for Miller and his three kids, uh, m3 learning.com. And uh, happy to answer any questions anybody has.

Ian: 26:02 Thanks so much for sharing your insights. And uh, I encourage people to run out and get a copy of selling above and below the line and for my audience. And the same side selling world. I think you'll see that this was a concept that very, very well aligns with same side selling, so no one's going to be confused. It's a good thing to have both.

Skip: 26:21 Thank you.

Ian: 26:23 Skip shared some great insight. Let me give you a quick 32nd recap of what I think you can use and apply to your business right away. First, destroy the idea of just a single decision maker. You've got people above the line and below the line. Remember that people below the line, maybe seeing the world from a two dimensional viewpoint and above the line executives are looking at the three dimensional view of the past and the future. That means that we use this model of the train tracks above the line being the train station manager and below the line being one track. So we want to focus on the things that are relevant to each individual. It may not make sense for the above the line person to attend a demo in a technology company. Remember, this show gets his direction from you, the listener. There's a topic and against should cover, or a guest I should have on the program dropped me a note to ian@ianaltman.com have

an amazing week. Add value and grow revenue in a way everybody can embrace, especially your customer.