

Lessons learned from the Chicago Olympic Bid

...the art and skill of getting things done.

Chicago was obviously looking forward to hosting the 2016 Summer Olympics. The five rings of the Olympic logo were prominently featured across the city on streaming banners and a definite feeling of excitement was in the air. This came after a three year, well planned process costing the organizers \$48 million ending with a vote by the International Olympic Committee on Chicago's bid to host the Summer Games. Unfortunately on October 2, the Committee chose Rio de Janeiro as the winner. It is far less painful to learn from someone else's errors vs. our own. So is it possible for us to learn anything useful from this failed attempt?

From a technical standpoint, Chicago's bid was reportedly the best. They had the three critical components necessary to win: Facilities, Financing and Fan support. The evaluation committee liked Chicago's compact venue, taking advantage of the downtown waterfront with minimum travel time for the athletes and existing facilities that required less infrastructure spending. Chicago also had celebrities and President Obama touting the benefits of Chicago along with an enthusiastic and sports oriented public. Still, Chicago did not get the bid.

There is an art and a skill to getting things done. There are tangible and intangible factors at work in accomplishing goals and achieving results. Chicago focused on the tangible but lost on the intangible. They demonstrated with their plan that they could fully satisfy all challenges with proven abilities to be a reliable partner. They recognized the need for a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities between the stakeholders. They understood the importance of a solid financial plan. What they did not understand is how people choose and how they buy. They did not manage the Olympic Committee, the real "customer" in this situation.

Too often, we sell the benefits of our product or service without understanding the needs of the customer. Does the customer want or even need our product? The first step should always be a mission statement: what is our product, what differentiates us from the competition, what unique benefits do we offer, why would customers want our product and what value does it provide them?

When we focus on the product and not the need, we lose out to those who understand buyer need.

This same concept of selling holds true for those in a job search. There is a tendency to focus inwardly on our skills and past experience and not outwardly on the needs of the hiring manager. If we learn to address those needs we will be much more successful selling ourselves.

One of the challenges for Chicago was dealing with the International Olympic Committee, a highly political, parochial, bureaucratic group, with goals that often were not clearly stated. In our own life we frequently have to deal with people with their own agendas. Playing politics is viewed as a negative but we still must navigate through it. How can we learn from the mistakes of Chicago to influence people to accept our agenda and plan?

Like the five interlocking circles of the Olympic logo, there are five connected steps in any successful selling process:

First- understand the needs of the buyer

Second- identify the values and benefits of what we are selling

Third- target those buyers whose needs line up with what we are selling

Fourth- bring all resources needed to convince the buyer our product satisfies their need

Fifth- deliver what we promise

If we learn to do these five things, we will bring home the gold.

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