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It's all about who you know and what they know

Have you ever been sitting in a corporate meeting trying to explain why global trade compliance is important, and all you get back are blank stares?

Over the years I've come to realize that a company's lack of understanding of the basics of global trade has absolutely nothing to do with the concepts being obscure or difficult to understand.

The issue is everyone is carrying such a huge workload they can't conceive of taking on additional tasks, so they feign disinterest when you speak to them. Corporate employees have become experts at the blank stare and use it as a tactic to defend against the wall of work that they are constantly facing.

The reality is that global trade is really cool, and if more people knew about it, they would want in on it. It is literally the lifeblood of a company and can make a huge difference in profitability and shareholder value.

Global trade is inherently intertwined with a company's everyday operations, but many global trade professionals fail to communicate global trade's strategic value for one of two reasons.

First, they operate as an island, responding to issues as they come up and never formulate a strategic plan for global trade. I'm afraid that just won't fly for global trade or any other role within a company.

The second reason for failure of a global trade program is way more subtle. The failure doesn't stem from a lack of effort to share, but from the way communications are framed. The goal is to remove communications barriers around global trade.

When meeting with colleagues from other departments, take the time to ask what they are working on. Nine times out of 10, they are working on something that ties directly to global trade.

Believe it or not, it comes down to basic concepts such as:

- What is the product.
- Who is involved.
- Where is it coming from and going to.
- Why is the transaction taking place.

Departments that work with products, materials, test equipment, software and technology include engineering, research and development, product marketing, sales, quality assurance, support and field services. These departments have much of the information that is critical to global trade such as product classifications,

country of origin, valuation and technology transfers, so it should be easy for you to introduce these concepts and find a way to work global trade into their existing processes.

Departments that work with customers, vendors, contractors, banks, employees and service providers include sales, marketing, human resources, manufacturing, finance, purchasing and operations. The concept of screening the parties they interact with is already very familiar to them. Human resources performs background checks. Sales, purchasing and finance perform credit checks. Manufacturing and operations perform business viability analysis. Asking them to conduct another check to ensure that the parties they are doing business with will only assist them in selecting qualified partners. And the fact that they are fighting terrorism and protecting their country is usually a big boost.

Departments that know where items are coming from and going to include sales, purchasing, logistics and supply chain. Engineering usually knows where the technology comes from and directs where it is going to. Critical global trade concepts that they would be concerned with include sanctions, embargoes, boycotts and license management. Sales are usually very interested in understanding concepts that would restrict a sale or help them reduce their client's costs. A robust global trade program can actually help reduce barriers to sales and increase a company's competitive advantage.

Sales and marketing usually understand the reasons why a customer is buying a specific product. Being aware of global trade concepts such as diversion and other prohibited uses of products will help sales and marketing avoid costly sales efforts on transactions that cannot be executed. They also understand why a transaction is taking place. This is critical information that will help identify red flags not only for global trade but for the company as well.

Although your primary function within your company may be global trade compliance, taking the time to understand the drivers behind other departments' initiatives and priorities will help you to craft your communications in such a way that the other departments will actually embrace global trade.

My challenge to you is to help everyone in your company get as excited about global trade as I am.

BPE is a global trade consulting and training firm.

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