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Preparing for a Challenge

Skillnet INNOVATION EXCHANGE

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In business, planning is key to success, especially in sales. Research by Salesforce shows that a clear plan boosts win rates by 28%. Planning ensures better team coordination, faster problem solving, increased productivity, and shorter sales cycles, ultimately improving customer satisfaction. Investing in planning boosts your chances of a successful Challenge pitch.

Reading the brief

When a new Challenge is announced, download the customer brief from the Member Hub. The brief varies by project, outlining the issue and relevant background. Read it carefully, highlight key points, and ensure you understand it.

At this point, it's good to check if you understand what the brief is saying. Ask yourself some questions:

- Is the problem clearly defined?
- Who does it affect?
- What does good look like?
- Can you see a potential solution at this stage?

Making a decision to take part

At this stage it's a good time to decide if you wish to take part in the challenge.

Some considerations:
- Do the client timelines work?
- Are you able to provide a solution, or can you partner with another business?
- Can you commit to the process, including giving yourself enough time to prepare a winning response?

It might still be worth joining the Challenge call even if you don't think it's exactly for you.

If it's clear you can help the customer solve their problem, add the Challenge call to your calendar & block out time afterwards for you to write your proposal. Being committed means allowing the time needed for you to submit a quality response.

Once you've done that, it's time to get a better understanding of the corporate who has issued the Challenge.

Researching your Customer

One of the biggest barriers to selling is not understanding your customer. Even if you have the perfect solution, unless you can present it to your customer in a way they understand it will be difficult for them to understand the potential value of your offer.

To help you tailor your approach in a way that will be relevant to your customer, you need to do some research. It shouldn't take too long, and any time spent will pay off later.

Gather Basic Information

Look at website & socials.
Understand the industry, company size, key decision-makers, recent news or developments, and any existing relationship they've had with your company.
Pay attention to the work they do, branding, purpose, messaging.
Who are their customers?

Research Competitors

Investigate the potential customer's competitors to gain insights into industry trends, competitive landscape, and common challenges. This will help you tailor your approach and differentiate your offering.

Identify Pain Points

Dig deeper to understand the specific problem and pain points.
Look for clues in industry publications, press releases, social media posts, and forums. You can also reach out to your network or conduct interviews with existing customers in similar industries.

Look up the Challenge

See if you can discover their job role via LinkedIn. Think about what their needs & goals might be. If you can approach the Challenge from their perspective, it will help you persuade the customer of the impact you could bring.

Setting objectives for the Challenge Call

Setting objectives for the Challenge Call helps you stay focused and cover key points without getting lost in details. Clarify your goal—whether it's understanding pain points, qualifying needs, or gathering info for your proposal.

Re-read the Challenge brief to identify what you still need to know:

- Does the problem need solving?
- Are success measures defined?
- What's the project timeline and scope?
- What's missing from the brief?
- Are there other considerations (e.g., tech, legal)?
- Can you spot partnership or upsell opportunities?

This will help you form questions for the Challenge call.

Planning your questions

By this stage it's likely you will see gaps in the brief that require more information before you can write a comprehensive response. So the next step is to plan your questions for the Challenge Call.

It's good practice to create a list of open-ended questions designed to uncover the needs, challenges, goals, and decision-making process of your customer. Avoid yes/no questions, and focus on open questions that invite detailed responses and provide insights into their pain points and priorities.

When you are planning your questions, think beyond the brief - try not to limit your solution at this stage. It's an information gathering opportunity.

Great questions to ask:

- Can you describe the problem from a user/audience perspective?
- What does success look like: how will the solution be used & solve the problem?
- How does this impact your strategy?
- What is the cost of doing nothing?
- Are there any technology or legal & compliance limitations we need to be aware of?
- Do you have a specific deadline?
- Is there an opportunity to create a pilot to test a hypothesis?