



CI Corner

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Dear CIC: I am the CI manager at a medium-sized firm within a highly competitive business sector. Despite my being in this position for several years, there is a disconnect between the CEO and myself regarding the CI requirements of the company. How should I remedy this situation?

Dear CI Manager: The misunderstandings you're experiencing in dealing with your CEO may be the result of differences in culture or world view. Like all CEOs, yours has a culture of optimism that often supersedes any tendency towards realism or objectivity. Even during a time of economic crisis, CEOs rarely speak of future prospects in terms of doom and gloom. They aim at making decisions, any decisions, even though they may lead to a repeat of past failures.

As a CI professional, your outlook is more like a culture of scepticism, asking questions to better understand issues without bias for or against the objectives sought by the company. The CEO, as a decision-maker, seeks to articulate and advance the company's (or his/her) agenda.

The trick is to strike a balance in providing objective, even-handed and ac-

tionable intelligence, on the one hand, and presenting intelligence that is (or appears to be) close to the objectives sought by the CEO, on the other hand. In other words, it makes no sense to provide intelligence that upsets the CEO so much that he or she won't use it. At the same time, neither does it make sense to give the CEO an intelligence report that has no basis in reality but essentially tells the CEO what he or she wants to hear.

Ongoing Personal Dialogue. Dialogue is the key to avoiding misunderstandings leading to disastrous policy decisions. This seems elementary, yet in far too many situations there is a complete lack of communication between CEO and CI manager. Don't rely on letters and emails – the CEO sees too many messages already. Focus on face-to-face dialogue and on exchange of ideas (remember that from back in the old days?). Whether it is a quick two-, five- or ten-minute talk, or a meeting over lunch, regular contact helps CI managers to know the changing needs of their clients.

Taking the Initiative. Anyone who has set up a CI department knows that asking a CEO to articulate intelligence

needs usually results in a long list of topics that has no rhyme or reason. Taking the initiative by proposing intelligence topics helps the CI manager to control how CI resources are to be used. Furthermore, inviting the CEO to add or modify the proposed CI topics helps the CEO to articulate the intelligence needs that are of the highest priority to the company

Institutionalize a formal feedback mechanism to get reports on your efforts. This approach will help refine future tasks.

Such efforts will help the CEO to better understand you as a professional and better appreciate CI as an important tool in the decision-making arsenal for C-level executives. It will also help you to understand the CEO and make accommodations to his or her needs without compromising the quality of your work.

Tip: Consider publishing a "Consumers' Guide to CI," outlining what CI is, ethical guidelines, the requirements to make it work for your company, and what it can and cannot do.

A monthly column devoted to answering questions relating to competitive intelligence

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