

# Sales Leader Lab Convention 2019

*From Value-based Selling to the Value-adding Salesforce*

Fundamental changes in customer expectations ask for a fundamentally different way of selling. A fundamentally different way of selling asks for a different way of exchange about sales. That's why the 2019 Sales Leader Lab Convention at Lufthansa Center Seeheim was held in a different format as compared to former years: an interactive workshop for 30 executives from various industries.

## **A "solution" is not what most vendors would think**

As Andreas Goldmann from NewLeaf Partners Europe GmbH explained, traditional concepts of value-added in sales do not work any longer. In the age of information overload, customers do not need vendors to explain product features or benefits. At the same time, the complexity of their selling environment has massively increased: The number of people involved in a typical B2B purchase has increased from five to more than eleven since 2017. 15% of buying time is spent on de-conflicting. Consequently, 77% of buyers find buying difficult or even regret their purchase. According to numerous studies and customer feedback, buyers now consider the value of a "solution" less in the software and services that it contains – because these components are largely interchangeable. Rather than that, the true value of a buying relationship surfaces when the vendor successfully supports the buyer in navigating his complex buying environment.

## **Customer needs are driven by discreet tasks and are not linear**

There are two key implications of the shift in buyer expectations: Firstly, sellers need to understand what the individual tasks are that the buyer must complete to move the sale forward. These tasks are often completely outside the seller's traditional remit. They comprise analytical tasks; change management; political management; and other areas that are typically not associated with "solution sales". A customer who purchases a "solution" – be it software, machinery or else – needs to be analyst, manager, salesperson, politician, coach, controller, and lawyer, all at the same time. The buyer's tasks and associated roles are not embedded in a linear process, but they may be erratic and iterative. The vendor will provide an "effective solution" if he can support the customer in fulfilling on these diverse tasks.

## **A "solution" requires different sales skills and approaches**

NewLeaf's Dr. Michael Scherm subsequently detailed out that Account Managers now need to acquire a set of skills, tools and methodologies that are different from the traditional Account Manager's toolkit and span a range of areas outside the realm of traditional sales organizations. No single salesperson will be able to effectively act as general manager, technical expert, change manager, lawyer, project manager etc.- all at the same time. Only a balanced team with changing leadership according to the customer's current sales task will be able to do the job.

Agile frameworks such as Scrum suggest how such a diverse team can be managed in a highly dynamic and diffuse selling/buying environment. “User Stories” help to focus the team (ideally an integrated buyer/seller team) on the customer’s real needs and break these needs down into a backlog of specific customer and vendor tasks. The sales backlog can be effectively managed with the help of a sales Kanban board. Concepts like Scrum’s “story points” support the team in the prioritization of its tasks without getting caught in counter-productive detail as Michael Scherm explained. Iterative and highly disciplined meeting cadences as used in Scrum and OKR ensure continuous feedback, exchange and development – a key success factor in a highly dynamic buying/selling environment.

Participants put these findings in context of their own business environment during various short exercises.

***Trust as the basis for intimate collaboration – How little tweaks in attire and behavior can help to create trust***

Getting to the core of a customer’s buying tasks requires an in-depth, collaborative relationship



and a lot of trust between buyer and seller. Professional actor at the English Shakespeare Company and business coach Elliot Russo focused on three verbal and non-verbal tactics

that help salespeople to establish this trust: 1) The use of stories 2) Breathing technique as a way to underpin confidence 3) A Released jaw: key to engagement.

Every story needs a hero. Every story needs a stimulus, tension and conflict. Elliot Russo showed how these elements, together with tactics such as lens shift and tactile imagery create powerful stories that engage customers on an emotional level, creating an immediate resonance between buyer and seller.



Sellers present their stories in a credible and emotionally engaging way when they emanate security and stability. Various techniques that actors use cater to that end: For example, the “Alexander technique”, a particular way of standing and posing, relaxes the voice and leads to a fuller voice - which is instinctively considered as more secure and trustworthy by people than a thin, high voice. Conscious breathing during conversations increases this effect. Every salesperson should therefore observe the rule “One Thought – One Breath”.

In addition to posture and breathing, salesperson create trust when they are mindful of the tension in their jaw. In another eye-opening little exercise participants experienced the effect of jaw tension simulating a conversational battle with their peers.

## **The psychologist's view to help buyers deal with uncertainty**

While Elliot Russo's exercises aimed at creating trust and certainty, psychologist Eva Röttgers talked about how salespeople can deal with uncertainty. The complex and rapidly changing



sales environment conveys high levels of uncertainty both on the customer's and on the vendor's side. The human brain is not made for dealing with long-term uncertainty. Eva Röttgers depicted the "outer and inner landscape" and showed the different mental stages through which people go when they are confronted with uncertainty: from comfort to stress to survival mode. Salespeople need to recognize in which state their buyers are at a given moment. They can help the individual buyer deal with it using various corresponding tactics: For example, decision paralysis as an impulsive reaction to uncertainty can be countered with a mindful approach that unlocks the decision paralysis step by step. When buyers ignore problems – a typical reaction when human beings are overwhelmed by complexity and stifled by uncertainty – a more analytical approach that breaks down the buyer's issues into small and manageable pieces – unlocks the buyer's mind. Impulsive buyers will profit from an approach that opens up perspectives and widens their horizon.

## **Conclusion**

The highly interactive workshop laid out how sellers can generate value in today's world of information overload, complexity and uncertainty – thus creating an "effective" solution for the buyer. This question was illuminated from three different angles: 1) From a technical perspective, showing how agile tactics and frameworks such as Scrum and OKR help to map buying and selling tasks. 2) From a personal angle, creating trust and confidence as the basis of a collaborative relationship between buyer and seller. 3) From a psychological angle, discussing what sellers can do to help buyers deal with the complexity and uncertainty associated with today's buying activities. Participants went home with plenty of ideas and practical exercises for their sales teams and their own life as executives and managers.