

THE INTERNATIONAL

Journal of Sales Transformation

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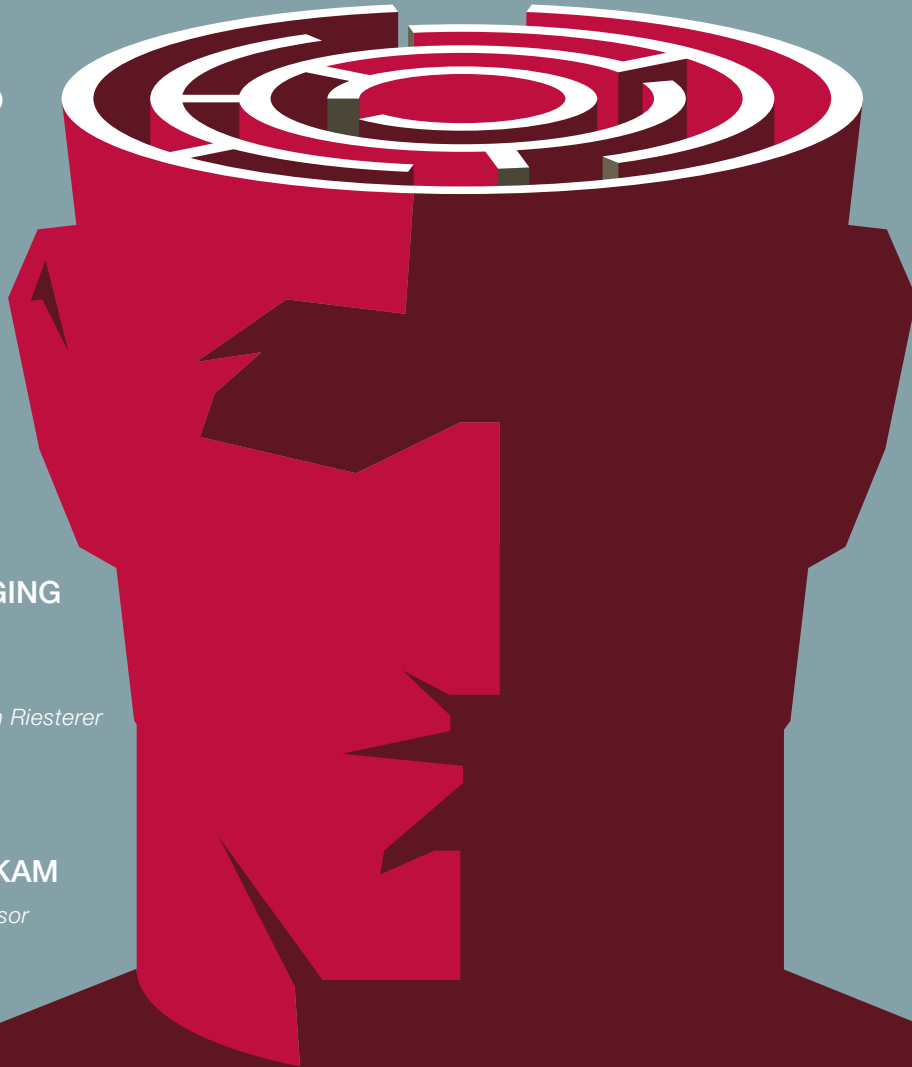
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Filling the value vacuum

✍️ Bob Apollo

The precise proportions vary a little depending on which researcher you listen to, but the general conclusion is remarkably consistent: the majority of meetings with salespeople generate little meaningful value for the potential customer. They often turn out to be a complete waste of their time.

A big part of the explanation can be found in studies which conclude that customers value business expertise four times more highly than product knowledge¹ but that the average salesperson is four times more comfortable discussing product details than having a business issue-focused conversation².

Given this imbalance, perhaps it's no wonder that it has become so difficult to persuade a prospect to accept an initial phone call or a meeting, or to get them to agree to advance beyond the initial stages of a sales interaction. They simply don't see the value in spending any more of their precious time.

Of course, top sales performers stand out as the exceptions but, if the sales profession is going to fill this "value vacuum", we're going to have to do it by equipping all of our salespeople to create some meaningful value for the customer before we expect to get any in return.

Business conversations

Giving our salespeople yet more product training clearly isn't going to solve this problem and will probably make it even worse. Instead, we're going to have to equip every member of our sales organisation to have value-creating business-level conversations with their prospects.

This is a harder fix, but a necessary one – and we're going to have to tackle one of the root causes of the problem first. You see, the problem often starts with how we choose to market and position what we do. Rather than promoting our product, we should be promoting the problems we solve.

That at least gives our salespeople a head start, because it allows us to lead with the customer's issues and not with our solution. But then we're going to have to coach them to stick with the problem, and not leap straight

to pitching our product or service the moment the customer acknowledges a need we think we can solve.

Huge advantages

Starting and staying with the problem brings huge advantages: it encourages the customer to talk about their situation, and it gives us the opportunity to share our experiences of helping similar people in similar organisations to address similar issues.

It allows us to probe for the consequences of the issue, to understand who else is affected and how they have been impacted, to learn how they might already have attempted to deal with the problem, and to judge whether the issue is currently regarded as merely irritating, truly important or genuinely critical.

We need to do this *before* we give into the temptation to pitch our company or our product in any level of detail. We need to do this because these are the conversations that our prospective customers value. We need to do this because these conversations educate and stimulate our prospect and build trust in our expertise. And we need to do this because we will end up learning things that will be of tremendous value to us.

Issues, anecdotes and the right hires

We need to train our salespeople to understand their prospect's most



About the author

Bob Apollo is the founder of UK-based Inflexion-Point Strategy Partners, the sales process improvement specialists. Following a successful career spanning start-ups to corporates, Apollo now works with a growing client base of B2B-focused scale-up tech-based businesses, helping them to systematically establish their uniquely relevant value to their customers.

common business issues. We need to equip them with stories, examples and anecdotes that reflect our collective experience. We need to coach them in the use of our customer's business language, and not just on our arcane product terminology.

And, of course, we need to hire the right people in the first place. Genuine industry experience can, of course, help. But it's even more important that we hire salespeople with the necessary curiosity and emotional intelligence that will equip them to create and capture mutually meaningful value in every customer interaction.

Filling the value vacuum will require that we raise the bar in both our recruitment and development of salespeople – because, if we don't, our customers will be even less keen to engage with us in the future.

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¹ SIRIUS DECISIONS.

² FORRESTER.