

culture driven sales

collection



KELLY BRESLIN WRIGHT

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People as a Differentiated Competitive Advantage

October 17, 2022



“I quit.”

Ouch! Whether via Zoom, over email, or in person, the defeating blow is the same. Especially when spoken by a top performer.

Yet 47.8 million – yes, *million* – workers uttered this phrase last year in the U.S. alone.

That's an average of nearly 4 million each month, meaning 2021 holds the highest average on record (SHRM, 2022), and 2022 has shown no signs of this trend slowing down.

The Great Resignation... The War for Talent... The Great Reshuffle... call it what you will – it's making hiring and retaining top talent much more challenging.

It's a trend not to be ignored or taken lightly by leaders. I, for one, take this very seriously.

Why does it matter?

PEOPLE ARE YOUR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Companies are always jockeying to find a sustainable competitive advantage. Something that will give them an edge over the competition.

As companies search for meaningful ways to differentiate, common themes typically emerge: product, strategy, patents, brand, value.

But there's one key advantage that is often pushed aside and should always be top of the list...

People.

Your people are your top competitive advantage.

Throughout my 30+ years in leadership, I've often been asked about my top business priorities.

There seems to be an expectation that top priorities are, and should be, always shifting. I'm asked what should be top priorities for a start-up? When experiencing hyper-growth? For public companies? With new product launches? When entering a new market or region?

Those asking the questions seem to expect typical answers: revenue growth, cost reduction, operational efficiency, scalable processes, sales team effectiveness. All of these are clearly important, but they have never been (nor ever will be) my top three priorities.

Throughout my entire career, regardless of company, stage, or sector, my top three priorities have always been the same.

#1 Priority: People

#2 Priority: People

#3 Priority: People

Yes, my top 3 priorities have been, and will always be, the same, regardless of circumstance. My top three priorities are people, people, and people.

People develop products. *People* sell products.
People market. *People* engage with customers.

People manage the back office. *People* set the strategy.

People hire people. And *people* manage those people.

People make decisions.

In the end, regardless of your product, market, or strategy, it's *people* who build companies.

If you have the right strategy and product, at the right time, but you have the wrong people, then you are definitely in trouble.

On the other hand, if you have the right people (even with the mistakes and shifts you will inevitably make along the way), you will be best set up for success.

People are your top asset. Your people are your top competitive advantage.

Therefore, we must always treat our people as our number one priority.

THE REALITY OF SALES TALENT

The market is telling us that our biggest competitive advantage is at risk. And you better take notice, fast.

If we dive into sales talent specifically, the picture appears especially grim.

According to new data from Gong's [Reality of Sales Talent Report](#) (Gong, 2022) which surveyed 300+ B2B sales professionals, **45% reported they've actively pursued a new opportunity in the past 6 months.**

Yes, you read that right. At just a moment's notice, nearly half of your salesforce is ready to walk out the door. Scary, huh?

This presents a massive problem. Why?

- Sales team churn hinders sales. When salespeople leave, you will lose revenue from not having sales reps in seat.
 - Replacing sales talent is expensive. Hiring a new seller can cost anywhere from 150% to 200% of their annual salary (HireVelocity, 2022).
 - Ramping new talent doesn't happen overnight, slowing revenue even more and creating interrupted experience for customers.
 - Cultural ripples often show up within your team, as who wants to work on a team where everyone is leaving?

At scale, (think: half your team leaves tomorrow) this has *major* implications on your business.

And the recent wave of tech layoffs and hiring slow downs (Bove, 2022) have only added more volatility to the hiring market.

With many companies slowing or pausing hiring, retaining your top performers has become even more essential.

But *why* are so many sales professionals seeking new opportunities?

Is it better compensation packages? Lack of mobility?
Struggles with mental health and burnout?

IT'S A MOTIVATION PROBLEM

While some companies have turned to increased perks and 4-day work weeks as ways to attract new talent, the survey says... that's not the biggest problem.

When asked, sales professionals said their biggest challenge was difficulty staying motivated.

Motivation was the top challenge, quickly followed by mental health/burnout, lack of career growth opportunities, upskilling, and maintaining work/life balance.

Note: sales compensation did not show up as a top 5 challenge.

We know the past two years of the pandemic and remote/hybrid work haven't been easy on employees or on us as leaders. But these insights highlight just how strained our workforces have become.

Your employees are your greatest strength, but *they are fatigued* and ready to walk.

An unmotivated team can spell disaster for your goals and stagnate revenue growth.

WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

To make matters even more challenging, we have learned that motivation actually looks very different at various stages in an employee's journey.

The secret lies in understanding *where* your employees are in the talent lifecycle.

Attracting employees is different from retaining employees which is different from incentivizing them to perform.

Money doesn't keep people in their roles, but it does play a big part in attracting the right talent. Top talent demand fair pay, so this is a big factor in how candidates evaluate new roles. Plus, this is even more apparent today, in the most competitive talent market we've ever seen.

According to a recent Robert Half survey (Robert Half, 2021) of more than 2,800 senior managers **48% are providing signing bonuses, 43% are giving more paid time off, and 40% are offering better job titles to attract new hires**. Compensation is edging higher with more perks and incentives to attract prospective hires.

Additionally, candidates have more and *better* offers than ever before. When considering what your organization can do to stand out, think about the phases of the talent lifecycle.

After dangling the high compensation carrot, you've attracted the attention of the best talent. But fair compensation is certainly not sufficient to secure top people. Once in an active hiring cycle, top talent's priorities shift. One of the main reasons top talent will accept an offer (or start taking calls about other opportunities) is tied to their manager.

Any leader and company can tempt talent with top dollar. But not every leader is a great manager, and not every company is willing to prioritize people over all else once pulling talent in the door.

Retention is yet another issue. This is where priorities have really shifted in these past years, due to the pandemic, social unrest, and burnout. To retain top performers, mission and mental health become primary drivers.

MISSION MOTIVATES WITH PURPOSE

It excites me to see mission as a top retention lever because having a strong mission has always been one of my passion areas.

Employees now, more than ever, are motivated by working for companies that rally employees around their why. A strong mission provides a unified sense of purpose, and thereby strengthens a winning company culture.

You should be screening whether your employees are passionate about your mission during the *hiring* process. Since mission is a huge motivator correlated to retaining your talent, do your part to ensure new hires are passionate about your why.

MENTAL HEALTH TAKES CENTER STAGE

A Gartner 2020 survey of 52 HR executives found that 94% of companies made significant investments (McRae, 2022) in their well-being programs. 94%!

Why are companies investing in mental health?

According to a recent McKinsey study (Erica Coe, 2021), by offering mental health support, employers increase employee satisfaction and engagement.

Plus, it's *proven* to aid in employee retention efforts.

Modern Health and Forrester Consulting (Modern Health and Forrester, 2021) found that 73% of employees and 81% of managers indicated they would be more likely to stay at a company that offered high-quality mental health resources.

Mental health support for employees is no longer optional. It's the right thing to do – and it drives business outcomes, including both productivity and employee wellness.

At Gong, one of our most unique mental health benefits is our Recharge Days at the end of every quarter. (It's *easily* one of my favorite benefits.)

Once the quarter wraps, the entire company takes a break for two days. No emails, zooms, slacks, or pings. Employees, including leadership, disconnect, refuel, and then come back for the next quarter ready to hit the ground running.

This article's cover photo is how I spent a past Gong Recharge.

IT'S ALL ABOUT PEOPLE

You may have the best product or service on the globe, and your timing might be just right for the market. But this doesn't matter if you don't have the right team.

And, of course, you won't have the right team if you can't motivate and retain your talent.

Any viable company needs to have a good product, a sound strategy, and sufficient market opportunity. But, when you

think about what separates good companies from great companies, these aren't the primary differentiator. These are table stakes.

The difference between good and great all comes down to people.

If you have the right people with the right motivations, you are off to the races. If you have the wrong *unmotivated people*, *everything* is at risk. And current job market conditions make this even harder to get right.

So always remember: People. People. People!!!

3 Traits Executives Need to Thrive

October 10, 2022



There is no substitute for learning from personal experience.

And this rings true, especially for senior leaders seeking to thrive in their roles. We learn and grow from both easy and challenging lessons that define who we are, how we operate, and who we become.

Success comes from recognizing lessons learned and applying them as guiding principles throughout our careers.

Here's one of these lessons.

THE SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS

For all four summers in college, I sold books door-to-door.

This was hardly the “it” job! People thought I was crazy. As my friends sought competitive internships or had fun lifeguarding in the sun, they wondered why in the world did I opt to sell books. As you can imagine, door-to-door salespeople are not always greeted with the warmest welcome when people open their doors.

Selling books door-to-door was incredibly challenging.

It’s likely the hardest job I’ve ever had.

I worked 80 plus hours per week, every week of my summer, selling educational books door-to-door. I lugged a bulky 25-pound book bag over my shoulder as I walked, or often ran, miles and miles from house to house each day.

I knocked on doors for 14 hours per day Monday through Saturday, demoing my books more than 30 times per day. Even Sunday wasn’t a rest day, as we met up for team meetings to prep for the next week.

Here, you can see me and my 4 roommates at breakfast before we started knocking on doors for the day.

But don’t let those smiles fool you – selling books was both challenging and character-building. However, from this experience, I learned the 3 traits every senior leader needs to succeed.

I sold books rain or shine – in sheets of pouring rain and in 100-degree scorching heat.

Dogs chased me and nipped at my ankles.

Police in patrol cars stopped me after neighbors reported me as suspicious.

My bookbag literally caused dents in my shoulders.

And my nickname was Blisters due to the massive and painful blisters on my feet.

**Hundreds and hundreds of doors were literally
*slammed in my face.***

Selling books was hard.

But selling books was character building. It was a crash course in life.

On people. On relationships. On communication.

On success. On failure.

On resiliency. On how to never quit. On how to always get back up.

Those summers taught me guiding principles I still value today. Hard work. Positive attitude. Commitment. Belief. Integrity. Passion. Risk-taking. Thinking big. Being yourself. *Making an impact.*

Selling books helped develop me into the person I am today.

Reflecting on my bookselling days years later, I'm struck by how many of these character-building traits are foundational for a successful career. This got me thinking: how was this summer job the ideal boot camp for leadership?

Selling books was instrumental in teaching me some foundational traits essential to be successful in business.

3 TRAITS SENIOR LEADERS NEED TO THRIVE ARE...

...**Grit, communication, and empathy.**

While all great qualities, a data-driven answer gives a more nuanced and enlightened perspective to the benefits of each.

These traits weren't just helpful on the bookfield. According to the research, data shows that **grit, communication, and empathy** have meaningful and enduring impact. Let's take a look at these three traits.

Grit – I believe grit was one of the main reasons I was successful selling books.

I not only worked hard, I learned to keep on going and to never quit, even when faced with constant rejection. And this wasn't light rejection, as the no's often involved doors being slammed in my face. This work demanded perseverance, drive, dealing with adversity, and the ability to focus on what I could control.

Although I never knew how the person answering the door would react, I learned to always put my best foot forward and control my own attitude and response.

During these college summers, students often followed me to observe and train. At the end of the day, I'd ask them what they learned.

The answer usually went something like: “Kelly, by following you, I expected to see something amazing. But, no offense, I didn’t. You use the sales pitch word-for-word. You work longer hours, do more demos, and talk to more people than anyone else. You don’t do anything extra special. You just work harder.”

In today’s vernacular, they were saying I had more grit.

In today’s world, **companies often put too much emphasis on prior experience and not enough weight on grit.** Of course, quality is important, but hard work and grit can get you very far.

Research supports this too.

In fact, Angela Duckworth has a large body of work on grit, but one of her most notable studies (Angela Duckworth, 2019) is on cadets from the US Military Academy at West Point.

To examine predictors of success, she conducted an analysis of over 10,000 cadets entering the program. One study finding was that “grit seems to be independent of cognitive ability and has demonstrated incremental predictive validity, over and above cognitive ability, for achievement, particularly for goals and personal significance.”

The research concluded that **noncognitive aspects, including grit, can be better predictors of overall success than cognitive abilities.**

This shows that we should strive to build teams with grit to help us drive high performance and success. We want

passionate people with drive who will work hard and roll up their sleeves to do what it takes to get the work done.

Communication – What you say and how you say it matters. I learned this (you guessed it) selling books.

When knocking on doors, I learned people make a decision in a matter of seconds as to whether they would open their door to let me in or close the door (or even slam it in my face.) The words mattered, but so did tone, delivery, and non-verbal cues. In order to influence someone to open their door, I had to emotionally connect through limited communications very quickly.

This is true of all communications, especially in the workplace. The most effective leaders are excellent communicators.

The data backs this up.

According to [Hailo](#) (Jouany, 2023), **3 in 4 employees named effective communication as the number one leadership attribute**. However, less than 1 in 3 employees feel like their leaders communicate efficiently. Definitely room for improvement.

Effective communication fosters trust. Drives engagement. And leads to improved results. This is an opportunity for us as leaders.

Get communication right, and you'll boost employee morale. In fact, [research shows](#) (Schooley, 2024) that **leaders and managers directly account for up to 70% of the variance in employee motivation and**

happiness. Remember what I said about communication impacting results?

Empathy – In my four summers selling books, I met over 12,000 families in their homes. I saw everything you can imagine — the good and the bad. I connected with moms, dads, grandparents, caretakers, and thousands and thousands of kids.

Selling books made me fall in love with sales, as I got to spend my day hearing so many personal stories. I enjoyed finding ways to connect and help people by understanding their unique situation, needs, and desires. I felt joy when having a positive impact on these families and their kids' education.

I didn't know it at the time, but I was practicing empathy every day.

I was flexing this empathy muscle way before my realization of how critical it would be for my future success.

We are hearing about empathy all the time these days. (Finally!)

The past two years during this global pandemic have taught us that empathy is mission-critical, not only to business success, but also to building community and mutual understanding.

Being able to understand each other's point of view, embracing diversity of thought, and taking all perspectives into account when making decisions matter. Big time!

The positive ripple effect that empathic leaders have across their organizations is staggering.

A new study of 889 employees by Catalyst (Tara Van Bommel, 2021) found **empathy is an important driver for innovation, engagement, and inclusion**. This is even more true in times of crises. The study shows that empathy is more than a nice-to-have; it is a strategic must-have.

As our teams go through tough times, struggle with burnout, and prioritize mental health, empathy fosters increased psychological safety and contributes to positive experiences and cultures for individuals and teams.

Put yourself in your employees' shoes as often as you can. Seek to understand. Think about things from *their* perspective and approach the situation from a place of understanding.

HOW WE IMPROVE

Wherever you are in your own personal journey as a leader or executive, I encourage you to take inventory.

Then I challenge you to take it a step further.

Do you recognize, celebrate, and develop those with **grit**? Pay attention to those who put in the hard work. Those who are passionate with a “fire in their belly”. Invest in gritty team members. They will help your organization thrive.

Want to **communicate** better? Practice active listening. Then ask for feedback on how you can better communicate.

Do you lead with **empathy**? Seek to understand. Be curious about diverse viewpoints and perspectives. Invest in truly understanding the other person's point of view.

Who knew back when I was 18 that selling books would provide me with character-building skills that I'd carry to this day.

These are some of the learnings that stayed with me from The School of Hard Knocks.

5 Key Ingredients Every Company Needs In Their Strategic Narrative

June 17, 2022



Most companies lack a strong strategic narrative.

When I was first transitioning into advising and board work, I met with literally hundreds of executives. Over these coffees, meals, and happy hours, I sat down with over 100 CEOs, more than 30 venture capitalists and private equity investors, and dozens of founders and go-to-market leaders to discuss best practices for growing and scaling a high-performing team.

The vast majority of these leaders were leading companies with disruptive and compelling products, with sizeable market opportunities. Yet, they all wanted to scale bigger, faster—and most felt they could be better at communicating their story to the world.

Digging in, it was clear that many of these companies had internal alignment issues. Sales, Marketing, and Product teams were often on different pages. They had different ideas about what they should be building, who they should be selling to, and what exactly their future should look like.

Without a unifying strategic narrative, everyone had their own unique opinion of the company's mission and why. When five people say (and believe) five different things, it's no wonder why people are racing in different directions.

Your strategic narrative communicates who you are and why you exist. It is critical to get this right.

So, what are the key components of a strong strategic narrative?

1. Mission

Your mission really does matter (Wright, Why Vision and Mission Really Do Matter, 2019). It provides a unifying purpose for why the company exists, providing your True North and a roadmap to get there.

In 6-12 words, mission statements convey your why, along with the essence of your personality and core values. At Tableau, our mission was, "We help people see and understand data." And Gong's mission was to "Unlock reality to help people and companies reach their full potential."

Boiling your essence down to 6-12 words is no easy task.

It's much easier for companies to communicate their what and how, which is why many companies skip defining, aligning on, and communicating a core mission statement. But, this is critical to provide purpose and get all

constituents—employees, customers, partners, industry and financial analysts, and the community you serve—on the same page.

A mission exercise can't be done overnight. Don't force or rush it. You need your entire executive, product, and go-to-market teams committed to investing time together to get this right. In my experience, 2-3 months is a fast timeline for mission and vision projects.

2. Founding story

The founding story revolves around why your company got started in the first place. It answers the question: what problem was so important that our founders decided to take a significant risk and devote their time and energy to solving it?

Every company has a founding story. But, because this story doesn't communicate all the features and functions of your product, many companies leave this founding story out of their strategic narrative altogether. But this is a big miss. The founding story is a crucial part of the narrative foundation which highlights the company's purpose.

3. Description of the status quo

What's the current state around the issues you solve? What is the problem, and what are the most common frustrations it causes? List three to five challenges companies and your prospective customers have with the current status quo. This description of the status quo should articulate the frustrations that your company and solution can uniquely solve.

4. Desired state

What would things look like if the challenges with the status quo were all addressed and resolved? List the corresponding three to five desired benefits—the exact opposites of the status quo challenges—that would characterize a better reality. Just as the frustrations with the status quo map to the challenges your company can solve, the benefits of the desired state should lay the foundation for how your company can help.

5. How to reach the desired state

Only now do you introduce your company and start talking about your products.

Wait until after the prospect or customer confirms that they believe what you believe. That they are frustrated with the status quo as you describe it, and that they are interested in moving to your suggested desired state. If this is true, you can now introduce your corresponding three to five truly differentiated value propositions, along with how they will help achieve the desired state.

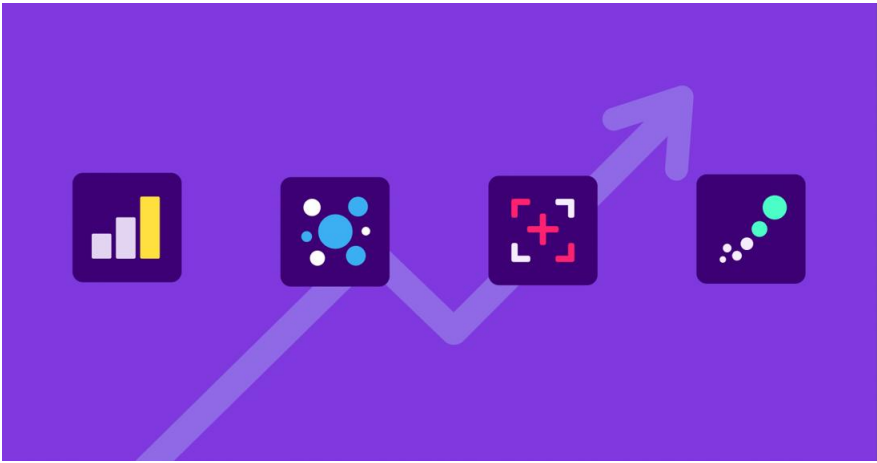
Where most companies go wrong is introducing the problems and the company's solutions without framing it in terms of a bigger picture first.

When companies lack a strong strategic narrative: It creates a narrative vacuum, allowing competitors, industry analysts, and financial analysts to control and dictate the narrative, causing the company to become reactive and without a unifying sense of purpose.

When companies have a strong strategic narrative: It unifies and aligns the entire organization, motivates employees, attracts and retains top talent, and frames all activity with a unifying sense of purpose which helps emotionally connect with all constituents.

You May Leverage Data, But Here's How To Know You're A Truly Data-Driven Organization

February 15, 2022



Not even 20 years ago, “collecting data” was something few companies did. Nowadays, people talk about everything they will do with big data. But back then, companies didn’t even care about small data.

Data is exploding. And it’s becoming more complex and diverse by the day. With the explosion of the internet, ever-growing points of customer interaction, transactional systems, social platforms, and all other sources of data, the sea of data continues to proliferate. Data is created everywhere—with every mouse click, finger swipe, electronic scan, digital imprint—you get the gist.

Over the past few decades, the data evolution has been gaining speed. Companies started with just collecting data.

Then, they began storing data. But then what? All this data led to a challenge: *What in the world are we going to do with all this data?*

The world of data has been due for a change. Data has been under lock and key, only accessible by a small number of analysts or data scientists. This was like having a handful of tech-savvy miners slowly chip away at a massive data gold mine.

Small, technical teams had limited bandwidth. Confining data access to just these few analysts meant companies weren't making the most of their data. Plus these analysts weren't close enough to the business to know what everything meant or what questions to even ask. The world needed tools that made data accessible to salespeople, marketers, recruiters, and all knowledge workers—not just technical analysts.

This stream of events triggered a *data revolution*. Systems and tools like Tableau democratized data, empowering a larger swath of business users to have conversations with their data and answer their own questions.

Yet the data saga continues.

Even now as organizations evolve their data strategies, there is a new challenge. Now we track absolutely everything. There's an overwhelming amount of data, and it's easier than ever to collect, capture, and track that data, whether it be in transactions, emails, calls, texts, tweets, LinkedIn posts, Slack conversations, surfing the web, you name it. Every click, every word, every keystroke is a data point that likely contributes to valuable patterns or meaningful insights.

We've moved from data reservoirs to data lakes to data oceans. And people literally can't keep up.

People have analytical tools, but they don't even know what questions to ask. They don't know where to start. Suffering from analysis paralysis, teams fall back on opinions and hunches, as it has become far too difficult to harness the value in the massive deluge of data.

So, what do companies need to do now to distinguish themselves as truly data-driven organizations?

1. Promote reality-based visibility. Data access alone isn't sufficient. Because data resides everywhere, it's harder than ever to collect the full version of the truth. We need to make it easier to create a single source of truth that isn't dependent on people manually entering data into systems themselves.
2. Leverage AI. The human brain alone does not have the processing power to process this immense volume of data — but artificial intelligence (AI) does. Plus, with data evolving and changing so rapidly, humans literally can't keep up with envisioning all the questions that could potentially be asked. Next-generation AI and ML (machine learning) can help— they can turn unprocessed data oceans into actionable and meaningful business insights at scale.

So, here are four questions to help you determine whether your company is a truly modern, data-driven organization:

1. Have we put the data lockdown behind us?

Data lockdowns have gone the way of the dinosaur. Employees are smart and capable. That's why we hired them. Why would we limit them from doing their work

without access to the information needed to do their jobs? Of course, we need to be safe and secure. You can't give *everyone* access to *everything*. But we do need to provide our employees with the right data at the right time to get their jobs done.

Every time someone has a question, the answer can't be, "go find one of the very few highly technical people in our company who has access to the data".

Step one in becoming truly data-driven is to give people the right access to their own data.

2. Do we have software that empowers people to answer their own questions?

Access alone isn't enough. It's baffling. Companies collect all this data and even give people access, but then have only a small army of folks who can operate the systems that generate the answers.

People want and deserve data self-service. We need to provide our teams with the ability to have interactive conversations with their data. To do this, empower your people with a product or platform that enables them to explore, interrogate, analyze, and ask questions to their data in a self-sufficient way.

3. Are we leveraging cutting-edge technology to ensure maximum visibility?

Consider your CRM. It's supposed to be the single source of truth for customer data. But customer interactions happen beyond your CRM. And your CRM relies on manual updates from salespeople entering data by hand.

Manual data entry is tedious and laborious. It's difficult and time-consuming. When you rely on humans as your

primary data collectors, you open yourself up to inconsistencies, subjectivity, and an incomplete view of reality.

Data-forward organizations leverage artificial intelligence and machine learning to ensure they can see the full picture. Cutting-edge AI and ML tools collect data points from everywhere, ingesting and collating comprehensive data to create full visibility into what is really happening.

4. Are we investing in autonomous AI to serve up prescriptive insights?

In addition to capturing data in a more effective and comprehensive way, next-generation AI can provide guidance and propose calls to action. This allows companies to accelerate time to insights and lead their people down the right paths to significantly improve productivity by more fully tapping into their data assets.

Data-driven companies democratize access, empower people to answer their own questions, provide maximum visibility, and invest in AI that can autonomously provide guidance and insights.

It took the earliest homo sapiens almost a million years of evolution to start walking upright. It's taken only a few decades for modern homo sapiens to go from zero data to data oceans and data overwhelm.

That's pretty fast. Yes, we are in the midst of a data revolution. This revolution is happening regardless of how fast you move.

Data-driven organizations have a huge competitive advantage. They have a head start. So what are you going to do? Suggest you jump on the data train now, as it is moving at lightning speed with or without you.

The 3 Stories Every Company Should Know And Share Often

January 11, 2022



Most companies' narratives revolve around products, features, and value propositions.

And while those are definitely important, there's a much bigger opportunity to build emotional connections. When you think about category-defining companies, they're overwhelmingly the ones who engage their customers' emotions through storytelling.

Throughout my leadership career, I've held countless sales kickoffs, all-hands meetings, and keynotes. People tend to retain very little (Boris, 2017) when it comes to wordy decks, bullet points, or numbers. But they remember stories.

When you hear a story, “your brain waves actually start to synchronize with those of the storyteller,” according to NPR (Renken, 2020). We don’t just like stories; we’re biologically programmed to retain them.

When speaking to a crowd, I often share lessons learned from my own parenting experiences, as these personal stories create a more emotional and human connection with individuals in the audience. People are actively drawn into these stories in a way that makes them easy to follow—and more memorable. Now, even a decade later, I’ll run into someone who will say, “Oh Kelly, I remember that story you told about your son - when he came to your office to get a lesson about sales. How is he doing? I know he was really interested in business.”

Companies should do the same. Yes, nail down your mission, vision, and values—that’s a must. Yes, speak to your company’s product—you have to be able to articulate what you do and explain your features and functions. But when it comes time to communicate, frame it all through a narrative lens that drives emotional connectedness. This narrative should communicate your ‘why’ in a way that connects with people.

And to do that most effectively, there are three categories of stories every company should share:

1. Your company’s origin story.

A founding story really helps to share the essence of who you are and why you exist. That’s what personalizes a brand and allows people to relate and say, “Oh, I understand why this matters.”

So, how did Gong get started? Gong’s CEO, Amit, was the CEO of an enterprise analytics company. All was going well

until one day, the team had a bad quarter and missed their number. Amit dug in to try to figure out what had happened. He went to his CRM, but could not figure out the root cause. He listened to some recorded calls, but there wasn't ample time in the day to listen to enough calls to figure out what had gone wrong. He asked around but got varying opinions from his team on what was happening. Nobody seemed to know.

Amit figured this must be a challenge other companies were having too, so he decided to build his own data-driven autonomous system to provide increased visibility on what was really happening with customer interactions. He teamed up with co-founder Eilon, who had previous experience using artificial intelligence, and that is how Gong got started. This is Gong's founding story.

Your company's origin story is extremely valuable. It's what speaks directly to your internal team, your customers, and the world at large about why you exist. This is the essence of your being. Share it intentionally—and often!

2. Customer stories.

Many customer stories focus on quantitative results. Companies will share use cases like, “this company is using our feature or function, and they got this ROI”. These are fine, and we all want to showcase our actual metric-driven results, but they aren't memorable. These use cases don't evoke emotional connections. They are vanilla and quite dry, missing the human element on why the people reading the story should care.

What's better is to be able to tell a story in a customer's own voice, highlighting not only *how* your customer is using your product or service, but *why* it matters. Gartner research highlights how buyers want customer stories

(Gartner, Inc., 2013). Think about how your customer stories can be shared more like human interest stories that showcase not only how your solution solved a company challenge, but also how you made a personal impact on your customer.

Back when I was at Tableau, customer stories often highlighted how the solution helped customers save time, be more self-sufficient, and generate valuable insights, etc. These stories, especially when supported by impressive quantitative results, were good and useful, but they alone didn't distinguish us from other business intelligence companies out there.

The personal customer stories are the ones people remember most. These stories inspire action.

There's one customer story I recall all these years later. It came from a dad whose son played Little League, and because the games were always at 3:30 or 4:00 in the afternoon, he could never make it. But once he started using Tableau, he could do work and analysis that used to take him two weeks in just two hours. With that extra time, he could finally go to his son's games.

When I asked him the highest value he got from the product, he didn't talk about increased productivity or better insights. He said that by giving him time back, Tableau had a profound personal impact, allowing him to strengthen his relationship with his son—and for that, he was deeply grateful. That's the more emotionally connected story. Share customer stories that are more meaningful, impactful, and memorable.

Remember, companies don't sell to companies. People sell to people. And people remember stories about other people.

3. Personal stories.

Personal stories connect your individual employees to the purpose of your organization. These allow your team to showcase why they decided to join the company and why the company's mission is important to them.

These stories are incredibly powerful in customer conversations, discussions with prospective hiring candidates, and with the community more broadly. By encouraging your team to share their own personal stories, a viral network effect can start to take place. The word will organically spread about who you are and why people should care.

For example, I joined Gong after spending my entire career helping build and scale transformative, hyper-growth, category-disrupting tech companies. My passions have always been in sales, data, and culture. In fact, I'm so passionate about sales and how companies engage with customers that I teach a business school course and even launched my own thought-leadership platform on the subject.

When I first learned about Gong, I couldn't believe how one company could tie all of my passion areas into one. So, I joined the board. After just a few months, it was clear that the opportunity was way more massive than I ever could've imagined, so I jumped back into an operating role to become more involved. To me, Gong was not only an amazing company. I had found my personal calling.

That's my personal story.

And I share it often.

Create A Winning Company Culture By Perfecting These 2 Elements

November 24, 2021



A great culture doesn't just *happen* — it's built through care and intention.

Great company cultures require intentional effort.

Culture is cultivated and groomed, not just at the top, but at every level of an organization. Leaders often place focused attention on their strategic priorities, but they don't always apply the same intentionality to building company culture.

Ultimately, the culture within an organization comes from two key elements:

1. Mission and Vision

Mission statements convey who you are and why you exist. A good mission clearly communicates your company's purpose, while also reinforcing your core values.

Take our mission statement at Gong. We “unlock reality to help people and companies reach their full potential.” We truly believe *reality* (insights rooted in data, not opinions) helps drive success. This sentiment appears externally in our marketing, sure — but also internally in meetings and conversations among the team. Our mission informs who we hire, what products we build, and how we make decisions. Our mission is a central part of our culture.

Another example is Tableau's mission statement: “We help people see and understand data.” During my time at Tableau, this mission permeated through everything we did and formed the foundation of our culture. Seeing and understanding data is at the core of who Tableau is.

A good vision statement provides a company's True North. The vision gives a company direction. It provides purpose. The vision is aspirational to everyone involved. This is the essence of the company's why. A good mission drives the company towards this vision. The mission succinctly communicates what the company does and how to help achieve this purpose. Some companies have both vision and mission statements. At a minimum though, a mission statement is critical.

Imagine a world where everyone is given a map but not told the final destination. How can you corral everyone to head in the same direction if people aren't aligned on where they are going. If everyone knows the final destination, there may be many different possible routes to get there, but at least everyone will be headed in the same direction. The fun part is debating the best, strategic, and most direct

routes to the defined endpoint — towards that vision and mission.

A strong mission provides a unified purpose. This purpose is important for all constituents. Companies connect with employees, customers, partners, investors, and the world at large by telling their unique company story. Their vision and mission help tell this story. They showcase the company's unique personality. This helps drive the company's identity. This identity is central to company culture.

2. Core Values

Your company's core values form the foundation of its culture.

Core values are much more than just words written on a wall — they provide the pulse. They're the philosophical stakes in the ground.

Core values (some also call them “operating principles”) should reflect who you are, how people behave, and inform how people interact with each other. They should reflect who you *are*, not who you'd *like to be*. They should reflect your true identity, not the aspirational qualities you'd like people to have.

When thinking about core values, ask:

- What are the top behavioral attributes of our highest performers?
- When hiring new people, what behavioral attributes do we most desire?

At Gong, “challenging conventional wisdom” is a core operating principle. This value relates to how individuals

behave at our company and extends through our communications. People often remark on our creative and unique marketing, and this is possible because our marketers are empowered to be creative, edgy, and to challenge conventional wisdom in a way that emotionally grabs and connects with our customers and community.

Some companies have three or four core values — others have eight or ten. There's no set rule on how many you should have (although 20 is too many). Once you identify your core values, these too help shape your company's personality and identity. Your values influence who you hire, how you interact with your customers, how you prioritize, and how you make decisions.

So, why should you invest in a strong company culture?

Because companies that do perform better on just about every level (LevelingUp). A great company culture:

- **Attracts the right talent.** A strong culture is compelling to high-caliber people who desire a workplace where they can drive impact and thrive. It allows companies to attract not only *top* talent, but the *right* talent. And when employees feel aligned with the company's purpose and core values, they better enjoy their environment. This satisfaction shows in their work — not to mention their conversations, Glassdoor ratings, LinkedIn profiles, and more. All of this attracts high performers who have the same beliefs as you do.
- **Retains that talent.** Most of us spend around 90,000 hours (Henley, 2018) (about a third) of our lives working. If you succeed in crafting a great culture, people will genuinely enjoy coming to work (SelectOne LLC). In fact, research (Deloitte

Development LLC, 2012) by Deloitte shows a strong correlation between employees who claim to feel happy at work and those who say their company has a strong culture. And when employees feel happy at work, they'll stay loyal for the long haul.

- **Intrinsically motivates people.** A strong mission and core values tie everyone to a central and unifying sense of purpose. And in today's corporate landscape, purpose-based motivation is more urgent than ever. Recent data from Mercer (Mercer, 2018) suggests that "thriving employees are three times as likely to work for a company with a strong sense of purpose."
- **Leads to better results:** Numbers don't lie. Companies with strong cultures perform better. Research has shown that companies with strong cultures have seen a 4x increase in revenue growth (Lauren Beechly, 2022).

The most successful organizations now and in the future need to approach culture as strategically as they do revenue. Because at the end of the day, your mission, vision, and values aren't just words. They're the foundation of your culture, which attracts, retains, and motivates the *right* people to bring your company to its full potential.

Best Practices to Achieve A Board Seat

March 6, 2020



This week we celebrate International Women’s Day. A day to celebrate all the amazing women in the world. A day to support women who are trying to accomplish more amazing things. A day to prop each other up, provide mentorship, spread allyship, and share stories.

Currently, I’m focused on board work. Boards are getting significant attention lately. There is much talk about women on boards, but there are still few women who actually sit on them. International Women’s Day is also a day to acknowledge and recognize that there is still work to do. In honor of International Women’s Day, here are some learnings from my personal board journey.

Three years ago, I started a new phase of my career. I wanted to be on corporate boards. People told me getting on a board was a long, tough endeavor. They said the process was much harder than finding an operational role. Especially for women. People were absolutely right!

As my board journey began, I figured the best way to start was to jump in with two feet. Over the past few years, dozens and dozens of other women have shared their own board experiences with me. Everyone has a different path. So much of finding the right board is finding the right fit where you can be your authentic self.

I'm a salesperson. I always have been. Sales is in my DNA. Thus, I approached achieving a board seat as a salesperson would.

Here's a little bit about me for context. I have always been in sales. From childhood, I was the one selling candy bars and cookies. My four summers in college were spent selling educational books door-to-door. I have sold products for multiple industries – training, mortgages, and software. My longest tenure was at Tableau Software, where I started as Tableau's 10th employee and first salesperson, joining one month before we launched version 1.0. During my 12-year tenure at Tableau, where I was Executive Vice President of Sales, we grew the business from \$0 and 10 employees through an IPO and global expansion to a multi-billion dollar public company with 3400 employees and ~\$850m in revenues. I retired from my operational role at Tableau at the end of 2016 with the expressed interest to transition my career to include board work. I currently sit on four corporate boards: one public (Fastly) and three private (Lucid, Amperity, and Even.)

Through this process, I've learned a lot. For those of you who aspire to eventually be on a board, whether public, private, or non-profit, you may find some of my lessons learned useful. My journey has been greatly assisted by everyone who came before me, and these tips hopefully will help pay it forward.

Here are my top 10 tips for achieving a board seat:

1. Know Your Personal Mission

Each person has a north star. A personal mission and purpose. Ensure that when you are looking for a board seat, you remember your personal mission. What is important to you? What kind of companies speak to your passions? What is your ideal company culture? What are your core values? Focus on companies that align with your personal mission. Always remember your north star.

2. Be Clear on Story and Value

What is your story? What are your value propositions? Your story can't be vanilla. It must be yours and only yours. Include your differentiated value propositions. What makes you stand out? Since people emotionally connect with stories, tell your unique story in your own voice. Pull out themes and experiences that showcase who you are and illustrate how you can help. Nail your personal elevator pitch. This isn't just a list of bullet points. This is who you are. Your story should communicate the essence of you. And your story should pop!

3. Build Your Board Bio

Your Board Bio communicates your unique story and differentiated values. Your board bio is different than a resume. Resumes highlight the what and how. Board bios showcase your why. Your bio should have a good introductory paragraph that sums up who you are, not just what you've done. Identify your strengths, including how and why you are an expert in your key value areas. A bio includes a headshot, is written in third person, and should

incorporate key words that recruiters and boards search for, such as leadership, transformation, P&L, global, strategy, etc. Advice for writing a board bio is analogous to the advice we give our kids when writing their personal statement for college applications. Differentiate yourself from everyone else in a memorable way. Your board bio is a document that showcases and celebrates you.

4. Define Top Ten Lists

There are many companies and organizations out there. Before you start looking and interviewing for board seats, think through what you are seeking. I recommend three Top 10 lists:

- Top 10 Board Criteria (i.e. Private/Public/Non-Profit, Industry, Company Stage, Geography, Functional Expertise, Board Composition, Culture, Category, Size, Strategic Priorities, etc.)
- Top 10 Values You Bring (Flush out a list of 10 values, expanding your top differentiated values)
- Top 10 Ideal Companies (Good to write down a wish list. The college application analogy works here too, so you may want to have multiple top 10 company lists – Target, Reach, Someday)

5. Build Your Plan

Act with intention. You need a strategy. Make a plan. Don't just sit around and wait to be discovered. Your plan should not be to write your board bio and sit

around and wait for the right board to come find you. Who you are will help determine your best strategy. Embrace your story to come up with your own unique approach. Like a project plan, build a plan and execute on it. Your plan will have many components and will include networking, relationship building, board education, writing your board bio, and doing everything else listed in these tips. Build a list of action items and to do's along with a timeline and project plan for what you can control. Then go do it!

6. Develop Your Brand

What's your brand? Your personality? Your purpose? Develop this all into your personal brand. What is the product you are selling? You! Be thoughtful and purposeful. Be consistent with the message. Show your own unique personality. Be intentional with what you say, what you post on social media, how you market yourself professionally, how you act... During the recruitment process, ask yourself if these boards and companies showcase and develop your brand. If not, you are in the wrong discussions.

7. Make Yourself Known

You need to stand out from the crowd. Be memorable. In order to do this, you must get out there! Getting out there is much more than talking to a few recruiters. It's more than networking and relationship building. You need to be proactive. Unfortunately, getting on boards is largely about who you know and who knows you. Hopefully, this won't be the case forever, but it is the current situation. Most companies add new directors who

are already known or connected to the board or executive team. Solely knowing you is not even enough. People must also be aware that you are actively seeking board seats. Your name should be top of mind when board conversations arise. So how can you make yourself known? For illustration, here's what I did. Remember, I'm a salesperson, so I engaged this process with a sales approach to drive awareness and build pipeline. I met with legions of board directors, dozens of venture capitalists and investors, and many board recruiters. I spoke regularly at CEO Summits, CFO Forums, executive panels, Go-To-Market events, and as a guest speaker at universities and conferences. Co-chaired my college and business school reunions, joined multiple women on board organizations, enrolled in board education programs, published articles, did podcasts, developed and taught a business school course in my area of expertise, and became active on social media. As a result, I made many connections which led to an inordinate amount of coffees (ironic since I don't even drink caffeine!) Hundreds and hundreds of meetings. Including meetings with 80 CEOs. The main takeaway here is that it takes effort to make yourself known. Market yourself. Get the word out!

8. Be Authentic

You, yes you, are joining the board. Be true to yourself. Be who you are. Not who you think you should be. Or who you think the board wants. Be yourself. Embrace who you are. Sometimes I talk to women who so desperately want to be on a board, they will talk to anyone who reaches out. People recommend just get on your first board, and the rest will come. This may be true to a point, but you do

need to find the right fit. You wouldn't take any job. So don't just take any board seat. Be choosy. You want a board where you can be your authentic self. Where you are true to your personal mission, you can offer great value, there is a good cultural fit, and you are excited about the opportunity. Find the right board, not just any board.

9. Have Patience

Be patient. This is not a sprint. It's more like a marathon. Factor this patience into your planning. Getting a board seat isn't like getting an executive role. The process is different. You will have a plan, but the plan isn't completely in your control. This isn't like an operational project plan where if you follow all the steps, you will finish the process and achieve the desired board seat in a specified time frame. Why can getting on a board take a while? Operational needs always take priority. Board seats rarely keep the CEO up at night. Plus, there are so many constituencies involved in adding a board member. Building a board is a big puzzle, and board members fill a complex matrix of skills and committees. Getting on a board could take literally years. Be patient.

10. Own The Process

As you embark on this board journey, remember you are in charge. Be proactive. Don't sit back and wait. You need to do everything within your power to make achieving a board seat your reality. Take control. Own the process.

Happy International Women's Day and Good Luck!

Tips for Interviewing for Behavior Traits

October 14, 2019



When it comes to talent, we all seek team members with ideal behavior traits. When recruiting in Sales, we want those with Characteristics of a Great Salesperson (Wright, Characteristics of a Great Salesperson, 2019). Many of us involved in the recruiting process, whether recruiters, hiring managers, or peers, are well versed at interviewing for skills and work experience. Behavioral interviewing for traits is trickier and more nuanced than questioning for skills and experience.

What are the best ways to assess these characteristics during the interview process? Knowing how to best read resumes for these traits is a helpful first step (see Resume Screening Tips for Behavioral Traits (Wright, Resume Screening Tips for Behavioral Traits, 2019)). The best forum to tease out these behavioral traits is during the actual interview itself. Ensure that during the interview you allocate sufficient time to use behavioral interview questions to flush out these characteristics along with the

typical questions to evaluate relevant skills and experience.

Here are 20 behavioral interview questions:

20 Behavioral Interview Questions

1. Tell me your story. What is your story that brought you to this time and place?
2. What are your biggest strengths? What are your biggest development areas?
3. What are some of your personal and professional goals? What are you doing to make progress towards those?
4. If I was a fly on the wall in your performance review with your direct boss, what would I hear?
5. How would your best friend describe you?
6. How would your peers describe you?
7. Culture is talked about a lot these days. What is your ideal company culture? Why?
8. As we reflect on our careers, we all have a favorite position or chapter - a role where we thrived the most, learned the most, were the most passionate about the company, or had the best relationships. What was your favorite role and why?
9. What are you passionate about and why? What do you do to feed that passion?

10. As you reflect on your career, what is a key learning about yourself? How has this learning impacted you?
11. How would you describe your communication style?
12. Tell me about a time when you had to communicate some tough feedback. How did you handle the communication?
13. When is a time that you raised your hand to take on a role that was additive to your direct responsibilities? Why did you raise your hand and take initiative?
14. Our roles often require working in groups and on teams. What is your typical role on the team? Can you share an example?
15. Describe a situation when you worked on a team where everyone didn't agree. What was the situation, and what did you do?
16. We all deal with conflict – whether conflict with our boss, with a peer or teammate, or with an unhappy customer. Describe how you deal with conflict? Can you provide an example?
17. Tell me about a challenging time when things didn't go as planned. What happened and what did you do?
18. Describe one of your favorite customer interactions. What happened, and why is it your favorite?
19. What are you most proud of?

20. (For salespeople and sales leaders specifically)
There are all types of different salespeople. How
would you describe your sales style?

Happy Interviewing!

Resume Screening Tips for Behavioral Traits

October 2, 2019



After publishing [Characteristics of a Great Salesperson](#) (Wright, Characteristics of a Great Salesperson, 2019) last week, I received many questions inquiring how to screen candidates for these traits during the interview process. Many of us involved in the recruiting stages, whether hiring managers, peers, or recruiters, are well versed at interviewing for work experience and skills. Virtually anyone with basic training can read a resume to assess if an individual has “been there, done that” and has prior experience with specific job responsibilities.

Identifying behaviors and traits on a resume is much harder than spotting skills and experience. Many recruiters and hiring managers spend as little as 60 seconds per resume. How can one assess traits from the limited words on the page? You can read resume bullet points for experience,

but you need to read between the lines to find indicators of behaviors and traits. Look for key words and phrases to help identify desired characteristics.

Here are 10 tips for helping screen resumes and LinkedIn Profiles to help identify ideal traits identified in [Characteristics of a Great Salesperson](#) (Wright, Characteristics of a Great Salesperson, 2019).

10 Tips for Screening Resumes/LinkedIn Profiles for Behavioral Traits

1. Entrepreneurship?
 - *Look For:* Founder of something? Experience at start-up or small, incubated new business/venture at larger company? Launched or started a club or organization?
 - *Helps Identify These Characteristics:* Risk-Taker, Initiative, Belief

2. Signs of Competitive Spirit?
 - *Look For:* Athlete? President's Club or Winners' Circle? Consistent top performer?
 - *Helps Identify These Characteristics:* Goal-oriented, Competitive, Tenacious, Resilient

3. Depth of Involvement?
 - *Look For:* Company and role tenure? Leadership and teams? Participation in clubs, non-profits, or organizations? (Beware of "pancake resume" – frequent job flipping.)
 - *Helps Identify These Characteristics:* Passionate, Accountable, Hard Worker

4. Commitment to Learning?

- *Look For:* Continuous Learning? Ongoing training? MBA or Post-Grad Certificate? Soft skills training on interpersonal skills, communication, or public speaking?
 - *Helps Identify These Characteristics:* Growth Mindset, High EQ, Empathetic
5. Word Choice?
- *Look For:* Active vs. passive verbs? Purposeful word selection?
 - *Helps Identify These Characteristics:* Confident but not Cocky, Passionate, Positive Attitude, Big Heart
6. Team Player?
- *Look For:* Balance of individual and team elements? Tenure on same team? Recognition from peers?
 - *Helps Identify These Characteristics:* Team Players, Empathetic, Confident but not Cocky
7. Leadership?
- *Look For:* Leadership roles? People development? Mentorship? Sponsorship? Quantifiable measurable results?
 - *Helps Identify These Characteristics:* Good Listener, Empathy, Accountable
8. Grit?
- *Look For:* Positions requiring repetitive hard work? Character-building roles? Perseverance?
 - *Helps Identify These Characteristics:* Hard Worker, Tenacious, Resilient, Growth Mindset

9. Impact?

- *Look For:* Impact on People? Use of words like employee, customer, partner, satisfaction, engagement, success?
- *Helps Identify These Characteristics:* High EQ, Passionate, Empathy

10. Superior Resume Organization and Flow?

- *Look For:* Cohesive Story? Differentiated Value? Professionalism?
- *Helps Identify These Characteristics:* Compelling Storyteller, Challenger, Goal-Oriented

Characteristics of A Great Salesperson

September 25, 2019



Companies strive to hire the best salespeople possible. In my line of work advising Sales, people are always asking me how to identify these top salespeople. Often, recruiters and hiring managers over-index on prior sales and resume experience. Although past experience is relevant and important, prior sales tenure is not the only or strongest predictor of sales success.

I have worked with thousands, literally thousands, of salespeople in my career. The best salespeople have varying backgrounds and experiences. Some have spent years, even decades, selling. Others are new to the sales profession. Some are extroverts, while others are extreme introverts.

Good salespeople come with all different stripes.

Although backgrounds, resumes, and prior experiences vary, the best salespeople have common traits. The greatest salespeople I've encountered have these universal characteristics.

Top 20 Characteristics of a Great Salesperson

1. Compelling Storyteller

While many salespeople are more than effective communicators. They also are compelling storytellers. They don't just share facts and pitches. They share personal stories, customer stories, company stories. They are vulnerable. They speak with their own voice. They emotionally connect. When they speak, people are drawn in, listen, and pay attention.

2. Good Listener

Many salespeople may appear to be listening, while they are actually processing in their minds what they will say when the other person stops talking. Great salespeople, on the other hand, are good listeners. Active listeners. Engaged listeners. They have eye contact. They pay attention. They understand both the content as well as the intent of what others say.

3. Hard Worker

Great salespeople have grit. Some people may argue quality over quantity, but much of sales success is determined by the law of averages. Sales success is highly correlated to hard work. You know the old saying, "Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity." The best

salespeople work hard to find ample lucky opportunities.

4. *Challenger*

The best salespeople are challengers. They respectfully challenge the status quo. They are thought leaders who teach and lead others to think and do differently.

5. *Risk Taker*

Great salespeople take risks. They step outside their comfort zones on a regular basis. This makes sense, as only true risk takers would be willing to have a significant portion of their compensation at risk. Who else would sign up for a gig where your performance is reset back to zero every year, quarter, month, week, or even day?

6. *Empathetic*

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. Empathy is woven into the way top salespeople operate and behave. They are able to put themselves in the other person's shoes, fully understanding the other side's perspective and point of view.

7. *Passionate*

Great salespeople have fire in the belly. They are passionate individuals with strong conviction. This passion provides fuel and motivation. When you are around these individuals, you can feel their passion. It is contagious.

8. *Goal-oriented*

The best salespeople are goal-oriented. They set goals all the time. Big goals, little goals – it doesn't matter. Activities, calls, meetings, customers, bookings... And let's not forget the obvious. Salespeople are always chasing their biggest goal – quota.

9. *Competitive*

Salespeople not only love achieving their goals, they love the competition associated with these goals. The best salespeople are intensely competitive. They compete for everything. They like to land the first deal, the biggest sale, even that contest or SPIFF. The thrill of the race is part of the fun. They love to compete, and they certainly love to win. This is one reason why competitive athletes make such great salespeople.

10. *Confident but not Cocky*

The ego continuum can be tricky. Salespeople should be confident, but not cocky. Good ones are authentic and comfortable in their own skin. While they have a strong sense of self, their egos are in check. They prop others up and give credit where it's due. They are not the beat the chest types. Words to describe them include assertive and confident, but never arrogant or narcissistic. If you see signs of big ego, run the other way.

11. *Initiative*

The best salespeople show high initiative. They know how to motivate themselves. They are the

ones who raise their hands even when not asked. Top salespeople operate as CEOs of their own territory. They are builders and self-starters who consistently take initiative.

12. Team Players

Although great salespeople can be independent and self-sufficient, they are outstanding team players. They realize that the collective team can accomplish more together than a bunch of individuals acting alone. They are supportive, respectful, and positively contribute to the strength of the team.

13. Tenacious

They have sheer determination. Perseverance. They never give up. Top salespeople never quit. When the going gets tough, they keep on going.

14. Accountable

The best salespeople are accountable. They know the meaning of extreme ownership. They take full responsibility for their actions and results.

15. Resilient

Salespeople face failure day in and day out. The sales profession is filled with way more no's than yesses. Dealing with no's all day long can be frustrating, stressful, and exhausting. The best salespeople are able to bounce back. A salesperson without resiliency won't last long.

16. Growth Mindset

When you are knocked down a lot and asked to continually get back up, it's best to learn from your mistakes. The best salespeople are eager to learn. They are coachable. They love self-improvement. They are always looking to get better. A growth mindset is key.

17. High EQ

Emotional Quotient is critical in any job that requires effective communication and connection. Top salespeople have high emotional intelligence and superior interpersonal skills. They have situational awareness. They can read the room. IQ alone won't cut it.

18. Positive Attitude

It's hard to find a top salesperson who is a glass is half empty type. Great salespeople are glass is half full.

19. Belief

The difference between a good salesperson and a great salesperson is often belief. Mind over matter. Rockstar salespeople believe in the opportunity, in the company, and, most important, in themselves. They visualize winning. They think big and believe big which helps them go big.

20. Big Heart

The greatest salespeople care about others. They truly want to help. They have good moral compasses and strength of character. The best salespeople,

and the ones you want for your team, are full of heart.

Ingredients of an Effective Meeting

September 25, 2019



In this day and age, meetings consume a tremendous amount of our time. If we aren't careful, our entire calendars could be filled back-to-back with meetings day in and day out.

A good meeting makes a huge difference. An effective meeting requires intentional and thoughtful planning, as well as good execution. This is true for all meetings, whether internal, customer-facing, networking, executive, board, etc. Our time is far too valuable to spend in poorly planned or executed meetings. The elements of running an effective meeting are quite straightforward – we aren't talking rocket science.

10 Ingredients of an Effective Meeting:

- 1) Purpose

Each meeting necessitates a purpose. Everyone should be clear on why this meeting is being called in the first place. This purpose will help you focus everyone and move the ball forward. Meetings should be more than a series of status reports and updates. An effective meeting requires sufficient pre-planning. Meetings that are pulled together minutes before they start are almost always problematic.

2) Agenda

Have an agenda. This agenda should cover everything that needs to be covered. Ensure every agenda item is critical for everyone in the room. Each agenda item should have a time allocation.

3) Objectives

The meeting should have overall objectives. Each agenda item also has specific objectives. State the objectives up front. These objectives should be measurable and specific. At the end of the meeting, the group should be able to revisit the stated objectives and agree to whether the objectives were met or not.

4) Attendee List

Limit the attendee list to those who really need to attend. Beware that large meeting sizes can be counter-productive to making progress. Simultaneously, be inclusive of critical stakeholders and decision makers. Be respectful not to waste valuable time for those whose presence is non-essential. (Good idea to invite individuals as

required or optional, so long as there is acceptance that optional attendees may skip.) For standing meetings that have set attendee lists, ensure all agenda items are relevant to the entire audience. If some topics are relevant to only a sub-group of attendees, plan separate or follow-up meetings with the sub-groups.

5) Pre-Reading Materials

Distribute any required or suggested pre-reading materials ideally 48 hours, and no less than 24 hours, in advance. Given that people have packed calendars filled with other meetings and commitments, allot sufficient time for attendees to read and digest materials and collect their thoughts to best prep for a productive session. Sending reading materials with ample time for attendees to read and process will not only improve the meeting's outcome, this also demonstrates a level of courtesy, professionalism, and respect for others' time. Note, the longer the pre-reading packet, the longer the lead time should be for materials dissemination.

6) Discussion Topics/Questions

To help lead and navigate the meeting, have specific topics or questions for each discussion item on the agenda. Include these questions in the pre-reading materials, so attendees can form some thoughts ahead of the meeting. These specific topics and questions, along with the objectives, will help narrow the scope of each agenda item.

7) Meeting Owner

Each meeting must have a specific overall meeting owner. Distinct agenda items may also have distinct individual owners. Be clear on who owns the meeting and who owns each item. The owner needs to maintain control. This meeting owner leads the meeting, is the time-keeper, directs when and how to move through agenda items, decides which topics to park for future follow-up, and manages unruly participants.

8) Time Management

Meetings should start on time, end on time, and hit all agenda items, unless there is agreement that an agenda item is given extended time or punted. Worst meeting is a meeting that starts late, runs late, and doesn't get through the agenda.

9) Summary of Progress and Next Steps

Towards the end of the meeting (and possibly also at the end of each agenda item,) summarize progress. Ensure you circle back for this review, so everyone leaves the meeting on the same page with regards to learnings, take-aways, and decisions made. Before the meeting concludes, lay out specific, actionable next steps with assigned owners to each next step. Ask if anything is missing to compile a comprehensive list. Gain agreement on all next steps, deliverables, and owners. Whenever possible, nail down the follow-up dates and times.

10) Close

Do a final wrap-up. Thank people for their time. Say a few closing words. This section can be just a sentence or two. Best to intentionally wrap and end

instead of rushing through the final agenda items as everyone runs off to their next meeting.

Happy Meetings!

How To Stand Out From the Crowd

September 11, 2019



Last week, I posted a tip about how writing a personal note could help you stand out from the crowd. In this time of prolific email, texting, and social media, few people take the time to write a hand-written note.

I keep a file called “Letters to Keep.” Whenever I get a hand-written professional card with a meaningful message, the letter goes in this file. I have cards and notes from past co-workers, students, mentees, people from my teams, and others. These messages light up my day. They mean a ton. So, of course, I keep them.

Over the years, my kids would claim I nagged them to write hand-written notes. Mostly because this is the right thing to

do. Notes show appreciation, good manners, and ensure kids know how to actually write in long-hand. They weren't encouraged to write these letters to stand out and be remembered, but this has already happened. My 18 year-old son had an internship last summer. He wrote thank you notes to everyone who helped him through his experience. I didn't see or read his cards and had no idea of their content. These notes did have an impact. In fact, one recipient said he was so impressed that he kept the note.

Seems like many people have "Letters to Keep" files.

Yes, hand-written letters sent snail mail do make a real impact and help you stand out from the crowd.

In my initial post, I also asked others for their tips and best practices. Several added spins on the hand-written note, while there were other great unrelated tips too. I have a few more of my own tips too.

These tips aren't required behaviors. They aren't even expected. These tips will help you surprise people. Impress people. Delight people. These will prompt people to remember you, in both personal and professional situations. These tips will help you stand out from a crowd.

Here is a list of ten of those tips and best practices, not in any particular order.

1. Write a hand-written note and send snail mail
2. Remember and use people's names. People love to hear their own names
3. Give meaningful, detailed compliments
4. Catch people doing things right
5. Smile. A smile can really light up someone's day
6. Always go above and beyond with your research

7. Send an anniversary card every year (whether personal or professional)
8. Use video messages or personalized TouchNotes instead of text
9. Remember birthdays and send a physical birthday card
10. Recognize and thank significant others who support (and makes sacrifices for) those people who do something extraordinary

Takeaways from Teaching Go-To-Market Strategy

June 6, 2019



I just finished teaching the inaugural course on Go-To-Market Strategy at the University of Washington Foster School of Business. What an incredible experience! Thank you to the amazing students who challenged me and pushed my way of thinking.

These MBA students are highly talented and diverse. They are future leaders in all industries and in all functions. It's crazy that most MBAs graduate with little exposure to Go-To-Market and Sales. How can one have a comprehensive business perspective without understanding the sales side of the house? I was excited to share my passion about Sales and hopefully leave these talented students with some practical learnings and applications which will help them regardless of their chosen field.

As we closed out the last class with their final Sales Audit team presentations, we summarized with four key takeaways:

- 1) **Regardless of function, all leaders in an organization should understand the basic elements of a go-to-market strategy.** Go-To-Market and Sales are clearly critical drivers of every company's success. A large proportion of most company's employees are in sales and field operations. These teams drive revenue, represent the company's brand in the public domain, and are largely responsible for customer engagement and success. Go-To-Market is not just the responsibility of Sales. The entire company owns Go-To-Market.
- 2) **The most successful companies have holistic go-to-market strategies which reinforce the company mission, values, and story.** An overarching umbrella go-to-market strategy drives alignment and decision-making across all company departments and functions, from the CEO to product, operations, marketing, and sales. Companies with a strong sense of purpose which permeates everything they do have a significant competitive advantage with their customers and create a positive culture and workplace for employees.
- 3) **Everyone is a salesperson.** Each and every one of us is a salesperson, regardless of our chosen profession. We sell ourselves and our ideas each and every day. Investing time and energy to learn how to best sell ourselves is an investment which will pay back huge rewards and dividends.

- 4) ***We should each have our own personal go-to-market strategy.*** Yes, companies need go-to-market strategies. So do individuals. We should each know and hold firm to our own purpose. Our own mission statement. Our personal core values. We should be able to articulate our key strengths and differentiated value propositions as an individual? Just as companies make decisions which align with their purpose, we should each make our decisions and career choices to best direct the path to our own personal true north. We should each have our own go-to-market strategy, so we can bring out our true, authentic, and best selves.

In closing, I'd like to thank each teacher, instructor, and professor who has ever taught me. This experience has given a much greater appreciation for everyone in the teaching profession. Phew, teaching is hard! Building a curriculum from scratch, figuring out how to communicate concepts in bite size chunks, keeping students interested and actively engaged, and leaving students with practical learnings they will remember and apply after leaving the classroom require a tremendous amount of hard work, effort, and preparation.

To my Foster MBA students, congratulations as you graduate and/or embark on exciting new chapters. Thank you for teaching and challenging me. For those of us who teach, we know the secret – the teacher may reap more meaningful and impactful rewards than the students.

Why Vision and Mission Really Do Matter

April 23, 2019



The best companies have strong vision and mission. Of course they do. This should seem obvious. But unfortunately, it isn't.

Many get confused by what vision and mission are. They may think that vision and mission statements are just words on a wall that don't matter. This is wrong. Vision and mission do matter. In fact, they matter a lot!

A vision provides a company's True North. The vision gives a company direction. It provides purpose. The vision is aspirational to everyone involved. This is the essence of a company's why.

A mission drives the company towards this vision. The mission succinctly communicates what the company does and how to help achieve this purpose.

I advise many companies about their go-to-market and sales strategies. One of the first questions I always ask is “What is your mission?” You’d be amazed how many executives, even CEOs, can’t answer this simple question. In some instances, each executive is very clear on the mission. The problem is, sometimes, different executives have different definitions of the mission. And they wonder why there isn’t alignment or clarity of focus?

Other times, execs are just misguided by what a mission actually is. Who can even count the number of times I’ve asked a CEO the company’s mission, and the answer went something like this: “Our mission is to get 25% market share in our space.” Huh? That’s a goal. Maybe an OKR (Objective and Key Result.) That’s definitely not a mission.

Why do vision and mission matter?

1. To provide a single unifying purpose for why the company exists

Ideally, every person in an organization, from the CEO down to each individual contributor, can succinctly articulate the company’s vision and mission. The vision and mission provide a sense of “why”; a clear sense of purpose.

2. To define the company’s True North and the roadmap to get there

The vision sets the True North, an aspirational goal a company can work towards in perpetuity. The mission defines the what and how, providing daily

inspiration guiding the strategy and operations on the roadmap towards True North.

3. To influence culture and values

Companies thrive when employees are passionate about what they do. Employees thrive when they feel connected to their company's purpose and can make daily progress and impact driving towards that purpose. A company is more likely to have a strong culture when people come to work every day passionate about their company's vision and mission. People positively unite and are more productive and cohesive when they work towards a common purpose.

4. To drive alignment and inform decision-making

How can you create a map of where to go if you don't know the final destination? How can you corral everyone to head in the same direction if they don't know where they are going? Imagine a world where each person has a car and is told to drive but isn't given an endpoint. People may drive to interesting locations, but they will end up all over the map. If you have the same starting point and identify the same final destination, there may be many different possible routes, but at least everyone is driving in the same direction. The fun part is debating the best, strategic, and most direct routes to the defined end point.

5. To communicate who you are and why to the world

Who are we? Why does anyone care? Why are we different from everyone else? We struggle to answer these questions. Companies connect with

customers, employees, partners, investors, and the world at large by telling their unique company story. Their vision and mission help tell this story. They give a company its personality; its identity.

Vision and mission are important! Vision and mission ensure everyone on the journey has a unified purpose and is headed towards the same final destination.

Inspiring Belief

May 29, 2018



One of our most important jobs as leaders is to inspire and motivate our teams. We set the vision and help people think big. Inspiring belief is essential. To achieve peak performance, everyone on the team must believe our goals are not only possible, but realistic and achievable.

What are the best ways to inspire Belief?

1) Paint the Picture

Help individuals feel and taste success. Professional athletes do this all the time. Help your team imagine what it will be like to win. Paint the picture of winning, incorporating all senses. Where will you be? Who will be there? What will you see? How will you feel? What sounds will you hear? Once you help your team create a visual picture of winning, it's much easier to focus on the goals and build your team's motivation to drive towards that visualized picture of success.

2) Instill Friendly Competition

Match up people and teams. Everyone likes to compete and win. Sales teams do this all the time in ways both big and small – from President’s Club reward trips to little contests. Awards for Employee of the Month and Top Team go a long way in building belief and confidence, while also fostering environments that recognize hard work and peak performance.

3) Surround Yourself with Others who Believe

Think of an Olympic team. Olympians surround themselves with other athletes who believe winning is possible. They together do everything within their power to compete at the top of their game and win. Every single member on the team, especially the team leader, must believe.

4) Always Have a Stretch Goal

Think of Norman Vincent Peale’s quote, “Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you’ll land among the stars.” March towards the stretch goal, not the target.

5) Have Fun with Numbers

This is the real key. Break goals down into small, manageable bits. For instance, take a sales rep. Look at her stats - total meetings, lead conversion, transactions, average order size, close rates, etc. Slice and dice her numbers to show what is possible if she improves just slightly on one or two metrics. Incremental improvements have big impact. These

baby steps are easier to digest and believe. Building belief is often a simple game of data. Break the data down into believable bite-size chunks.

Think Big, Go Big!

School of Hard Knocks

April 10, 2018



For four summers in college, I sold educational books door-to-door. This was not the “it” job everyone aspired to. Definitely not glamorous. As you may imagine, door-to-door salespeople are not typically granted with a warm welcome. This summer job was unique. I feel lucky to have chosen this path to start my career. Anyone who has sold door-to-door will champion the lifetime benefits reaped from participating in the School of Hard Knocks.

The day after completing my freshman year at Stanford, I jumped into a caravan of cars headed for Nashville. We were about to start our summer jobs with The Southwestern Company, which has employed college students to run their own business selling educational books door-to-door since 1868. After 40 hours driving on Interstate 40, we arrived. We spent a week at an intense sales school that taught basic selling skills and the principles of running our own business. After a week in

Nashville, we hopped back into our caravan and continued North. This is how my adventure began.

A day later, we arrived in the affluent suburb of Millburn, NJ. First order of business – find a place to live. We visited community centers and places of worship until we found a lovely family who rented six of us two rooms in their home for \$25 each per week. Believe it or not, there are families out there excited to host college students working for the summer. They just aren't always easy to find. Second – visit town hall to get a solicitation permit. Lucky me, this little card was an important ticket. Next – figure out how to get around since I didn't have a car. Knocking on a few doors did the trick. Someone lent me an old bike that was taking up space in the garage. Success! I could now start selling books and embark on my college career.

Selling books door-to-door is hard. Incredibly hard! Definitely the hardest and most challenging job of my entire career. For four summers, I worked 80+ hours and 6 days per week, 14 hours per day, doing at least 30 demos each day. I spoke to thousands and thousands of families every summer for four summers. I sold books rain or shine – in sheets of pouring rain and in 100+ degree scorching heat. I lugged my 25+ pound bookbag up and down streets, often running, for miles until I had dents in my shoulders and blisters on my feet. Barking dogs chased me down driveways and over hedges. Police in patrol cars got to know me by name. Hundreds and hundreds of doors were literally slammed in my face. The bookfield was rippled with adversity any way you turned. Tough, yes, but oh how I grew dealing with so much adversity.

Selling books provided a crash course in life. About people. About communication. About the principles of success. About failure. About financial independence. About self-

motivation and perseverance. These four years were character-building in every way.

These summers provided an intense overview of human psychology and behavior. I saw the best in people, and unfortunately, also the not-so-good. By meeting so many families, we saw it all. Most of what you can imagine happens in any given neighborhood, we encountered. My days were made by little acts of kindness from people who answered the doors. These individuals helped me craft the vision of the type of person I aspired to be.

Selling books taught basic skills that aren't taught in school: how to start a conversation with virtually anyone, the importance of gestures and non-verbal communication, how to be acutely aware of your surroundings, and even how a simple smile can make all the difference. The experience acutely illustrated how much relationships matter and the importance of family. Other key lessons were control what you can control, always treat people with kindness and respect, and never ever give up.

Selling books pushed me into independence. Here I was, a self-absorbed teenager on my own 3,000 miles away from home. Problem solving, thinking on my feet, and being self-sufficient were all necessities. Accountability was not optional, as when I made mistakes, there was only myself to blame.

Oh, there were times when I just wanted to quit. When door after door was slammed in my face, when nobody was buying, when I was feeling sorry for myself. Sometimes it was hard to go on. Yet, I learned how to pick myself up, regardless of the circumstance, and to keep on going.

Selling books introduced me to guiding principles for both my career and for life. Hard work. Positive Attitude. Commitment. Belief. Integrity. Passion. Risk-taking. Thinking big. Being yourself. Making an impact. Who knew that a summer job could be so formative? No, selling books certainly was not glamorous. But who needs glamour when you have the School of Hard Knocks.

Diversity of Thought

March 26, 2018



Diversity is a central topic these days. Of course, diversity is critical due to the inherent needs for more equality, fairness, and representation. But there is another reason diversity is important. One of the most powerful benefits of diversity is diversity of thought.

To stay competitive and relevant, great organizations must constantly self-examine, improve, grow, and evolve. They need to challenge the status quo. Good business necessitates examination from every angle to uncover new approaches and discover new opportunities.

People operate within their own perception biases. They are attracted to people who look, act, and think like them. They are drawn towards others with similar experiences and backgrounds. They recruit people from within their own networks. If companies do not proactively focus on diversity, they end up with teams of people who think and act alike.

Homogeneous backgrounds lead to homogeneous thinking. Homogeneous thinking limits the realm of possibility, which thereby narrows pathways to new opportunities.

Great ideas are often bold and innovative. They can be risky. They typically require a compelling pivot, redirection, or shift in thinking. By engaging in healthy debate and evaluating problems from multiple angles and perspectives, a team can craft better solutions.

Our individual thinking, just like our perception bias, is shaped by our own experiences, environment, education, culture, and personality. Companies serve diverse customers. These customers come from all different backgrounds – race, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, age, economic status, geography, etc. Thus, companies need diversity in their teams, in their leadership, and in the boardroom to best understand and serve these different constituencies.

A Deloitte 2013 publication called Diversity's New Frontier states, "Diversity of thought goes beyond the affirmation of equality...Diversity of thought can bring an organization three key benefits: 1. Diverse thinkers help guard against groupthink and expert overconfidence, 2. Diverse thinkers help increase the scale of new insights, and 3. Diverse thinkers help organizations identify individuals who can best tackle their most pressing problems." ([Diversity's new frontier - Diversity of thought and the future of the workforce](#) (Anesa "Nes" Diaz-Uda, 2013))

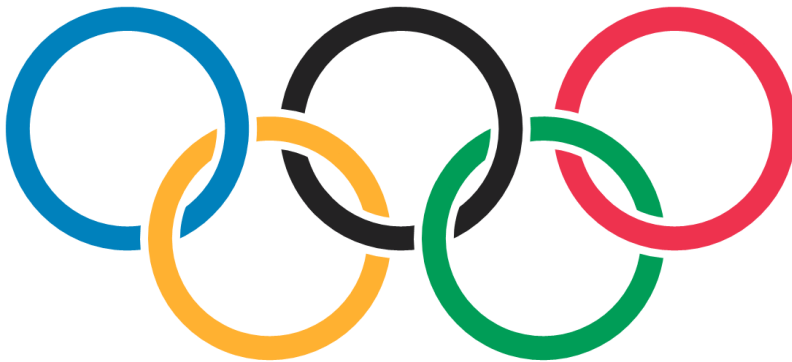
The more diverse the participants, the broader the viewpoints and perspectives. The more creative the problem-solving. The more thinking out of the box. The more innovation.

As the saying goes, “Ideas can be life-changing. Sometimes all you need to open the door is just one more good idea.”

May the best idea win.

Building An Olympic Team

January 11, 2018



Great companies have high performance teams. How are such teams assembled? What are the common traits of these top caliber teams?

Think of your team as an Olympic team. Olympic athletes are at the top of their game. Olympians think and know they can win. They do everything within their power and control to set themselves up for success. This does not mean that Olympians win every time, but they leave nothing on the table each time they compete.

The best teams operate like Olympians. The best leaders operate like coaches of an Olympic team. They surround themselves with Olympic athletes who consistently give 100% effort, want to win, and believe that they can and will win.

There is quite a bit of research on common traits for Olympians. These behaviors are similar traits needed for high performers throughout business as well as sports.

High performing Olympians:

1) Are Risk Takers

Olympians expect adversity. Olympic athletes are willing to step outside their comfort zone, to forge into new ground. Olympic athletes are not afraid of failure. In fact, they welcome failure. They realize we learn and grow more from our failures than our successes. Strong performers have the courage to take risks and push their boundaries. This leads to growth, development and higher performance. Nadia Comaneci, Gold Medal Gymnast explained, “I don’t run away from a challenge because I am afraid. Instead, I run toward it because the only way to escape fear is to trample it beneath your feet.”

2) Control Their Thoughts and Emotions

Olympians understand the power of thoughts and emotions. They focus on being positive and optimistic. Olympians view their glass as half-full rather than half-empty. They motivate themselves by thinking what is possible, not by focusing on hurdles and obstacles. Olympians know they can control only their own thoughts, reactions, and feelings, not what others think or do. They focus on what is within their own control and do not worry about the rest. Venus Williams, tennis champion and Olympian, explains how controlling your thoughts are vital, “Tennis is mostly mental. You win or lose the match before you even go out there.”

3) Have Purpose and Vision

Olympians have purpose and vision. They have a clear mental image of what they want and where they plan to go. Olympic athletes visualize what it

will feel like to break that finish ribbon or touch the wall first. They imagine the winning moment involving all senses – see who will be there, feel the energy, hear the crowd. Olympians have been training their entire lives for this very moment. They feel strongly about what they are doing and why. They know their purpose, and this motivates them every day. Muhammad Ali, Olympic Gold Medal boxer, stated this well, “Champions are made from something they have deep inside them – a desire, a dream, a vision.”

4) Surround Themselves with Other Olympians

Olympians surround themselves with strong teammates. Olympic teams are filled with A-players. Everyone on the team is at the top of their game. People do better when surrounded by others who are incredible at what they do. This elevates each individual as well as the entire team. Olympians don't strive to be the big fish in a small pond. They want to compete with and against the best of the best. They want to join teams where every person is top talent and a challenger. This makes everyone more likely to improve and win. Teams win together, with and because of each member on the team. Michael Jordan, Basketball Hall of Famer and Olympian talks about the importance of teamwork, “Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence wins championships.”

5) Believe

There is one trait that is consistent with top Olympic athletes: Belief. Olympians believe in their heart of hearts that winning is possible. They know exactly what needs to be done to win, and they focus on

achieving every milestone to get there. To win the Gold, Olympians set new records and push the limits of what others think is possible. To achieve big, one must think and believe big. Florence Griffith-Joyner, Gold medalist in track and field stressed the importance of belief, “I believe in the impossible because no one else does.”

You want to be on a high performing team that operates like Olympians? Think and act like an Olympian. Push yourself beyond your comfort zone and take risks. Control your thoughts, as you are what you think. Find purpose in what you do and visualize your own success. Remember, the team matters. Surround yourself with other champions. Lastly and most importantly, think big, and you will achieve big.

Guardian of the Culture

September 18, 2017



Company Culture. This concept is discussed over and over. Companies spend massive amounts of brainpower and time debating and crafting their ideal culture.

Much of the discussion centers around defining the right culture. But, there is another question that must be addressed. Once the culture is defined, who is responsible for protecting and reinforcing that culture. Who is the guardian of the culture?

You may be surprised by the answer. Many believe the executive team is responsible for maintaining the culture. But this alone isn't sufficient. The cultural tone may be set by the management team, but culture isn't and can't be only top-down. Culture is top-down, bottoms-up, and sideways.

If culture emanates from all sides, then who is the guardian of the culture? The answer is simple. YOU are the guardian of the culture.

Regardless of position, each person in a company helps shape and mold the culture. Companies and employees should be intentional about protecting their culture. Each of us are responsible for guarding the culture.

Now that you know you are a key guardian of the culture, how do you guard it?

1) Hire cultural fits.

Fill your team with people who share the same values as you and your company. Interview for the personal attributes desired. When assessing candidates, focus on more than just experience, resume, and skills. Assess cultural fit. If cultural fit is questionable, the candidate should be a clear no-hire.

2) Praise those who uphold the culture. Come down quick on those who don't.

Publicly compliment and praise those who positively contribute to the culture. Find ways to hold everyone responsible and accountable for the culture. You may even include adherence to cultural values in performance reviews. People who are negative influences on the culture need to go immediately. The long-term destructive impact on keeping a bad cultural fit will cost much more than any short-term pain resulting from making a change.

3) Uphold your cultural values.

Work at a company whose cultural values align with your own personal values. If you live your life in a way that is consistent with how the company operates, you have a good match. On the other hand, if company values are divergent from your own personal values, you will find it difficult to be a guardian of the culture.

- 4) Be a walking, talking example of your culture. Practice what you preach.

Actions speak louder than words. It's one thing to talk about the culture or to ask others to abide by it. It's another for you to live and breathe it. Operate in accordance to company values all the time. Practice and reinforce the culture every day.

Being a guardian of the culture presents you with a big opportunity. It is also a big responsibility. You personally help craft and mold the culture for yourself and your co-workers. A company's culture takes shape and evolves based on the people on the team. This includes you.

There you have it. You indeed are the guardian of the culture. Guard well.

Power of Belief

September 12, 2017



Before accomplishing great things, one must have belief - belief in the opportunity, belief in the potential, and most importantly, belief in oneself.

This is true regardless of the goal. Think about star athletes striving for a world record, entrepreneurs building a new venture, or astronauts making discoveries in space. People who accomplish great things think big and have an unwavering belief in themselves and what they can accomplish.

One of the best illustrations about the impact of belief is the story of the four-minute mile.

It was the middle of the 1900s. For decades, runners had been attempting to break the four-minute barrier. The mile record had stood at 4:01 for 9 years.

Medical doctors and experts claimed it was impossible for a human to run the mile in less than four minutes. Impossible! In fact, data and tests were used to “prove” that the human body just wasn’t physically capable of running that fast.

On May 6, 1954, Roger Bannister broke the four-minute mile. Roger, a 25-year old medical student from Oxford, ran the mile in 3 minutes and 59.4 seconds.

How did this happen? How did Roger achieve the impossible?

Yes, Roger had practiced and practiced. But practice alone didn’t cut it. Many other runners had practiced more than he had.

Roger had extreme belief. He had huge confidence that he could do what others considered undoable.

He didn’t just have raw, unfounded belief. He solidified this belief by breaking down his goals into bite-sized chunks. He practiced each leg of the race, managing what was within his control. Roger knew and tracked his best times for each split. When he added all his best splits together, the sum of the parts showed the time was feasible.

Roger broke the four-minute mile and shocked the world. But, the most interesting part of this story isn’t Roger’s accomplishment. It’s what happened next.

Just two months later, another runner broke Roger’s record and ran 3:57. Then, one after another, additional runners broke the legendary four-minute barrier. In the last 50 years, the four-minute mile has been lowered by 17 seconds. The current record now stands at 3:43.

Roger not only broke a long-standing record. He busted through a belief barrier. Often, it's our own beliefs that hold us back. Similarly, it's our own belief system that allows us to accomplish incredible achievements. Once Roger broke the four-minute mile, he proved the human body could indeed run that fast. The rest of the world saw what was possible. Other runners now also believed.

There is a concept called the Law of Belief. This law of belief asserts that if we believe thoughts for long enough, we are more likely to make those thoughts a reality.

As you set your own goals, how are you solidifying your belief? How are you breaking down your goals into believable, bite-sized chunks? How are you convincing yourself that your goals are possible and realistic?

Since our beliefs become our reality, we should be paying a whole lot of attention to these beliefs. Henry Ford summed it up well, "Whether you think you can or you think you can't, you're right."

Proud To Be A Salesperson

August 14, 2017

Proud to be a **SALESPERSON**



Are you in sales? I am. I love the sales profession! Unfortunately, there are some negative stereotypes of people like us. We know the image: the pushy, aggressive, rude type out to selfishly make a quick buck. Those types of salespeople do exist. But those words are opposites from how I would describe the salespeople I know. Our profession's stereotype needs a public makeover.

Here's an alternative stereotype for salespeople. These words seem a more accurate description for people in our profession today.

1) **Passionate.**

Salespeople are full of emotion. They strongly believe what they are selling will truly help others and have a positive impact on the world. Salespeople operate with such deep conviction that their energy is captivating to those around them. I describe this passion as the "fire in the belly". This passion is not only engaging and contagious, it also motivates others to action.

2) Hard-working.

Salespeople work their butts off! They are some of the hardest working people around. It is no surprise that the best salespeople are almost always the ones who work the longest, smartest, and hardest. Salespeople are disciplined, organized, and efficient with their time. They go above and beyond to make things happen. They do whatever it takes to get the job done.

3) Risk-takers.

People who like the “safe” road don’t go into Sales. There is just way too much uncertainty. Salespeople are courageous. They embrace the unknown and welcome change. They aren’t afraid of failure, and they put themselves in uncomfortable situations daily. Salespeople regularly step outside of their comfort zone. They face risk and adversity head-on, push boundaries, and love a challenge.

4) Fantastic communicators.

Salespeople build connections. They get others to open up. How do they do this? Through communication. Engaging, interactive, and compelling communication. They are master storytellers. They speak with empathy. They interact with others and ask questions in ways that evoke meaningful dialogue and exchange. Sure, many salespeople could probably improve their listening skills (myself included,) but they relate to others in a way where people feel both heard and understood. Through effective communication, salespeople build trust and mutual respect.

5) Full of heart.

This is my favorite characteristic. Salespeople are full of heart. They truly care about other people. Salespeople do what they do because they want to have a positive impact – on their company, their co-workers, their customers, and the world at large. Salespeople have an ability to emotionally connect with others, building strong and lasting relationships. This characteristic not only makes for a great salesperson, but also a great person. Good people – that’s what salespeople are.

No wonder salespeople are in great demand today. Companies need people like this to survive. Who wouldn't want to fill their workplace with passionate, hard-working, risk-taking, fantastic communicators who are full of heart?

I'm proud to be a salesperson! Thank you to all you salespeople who have changed our profession's stereotype for the better.

5 Tips for Breaking Down Belief Barriers

December 3, 2014



People ask me all the time what it's like being a woman in sales in the technology industry. The truth is that I did not think about the lack of the number of women in a field as part of my career consideration when entering the industry. I love helping and interacting with people. To me, this was sales. I am drawn to fast-paced environments where I could have an impact. To me, this was technology. Selling technology is what I wanted, so I went after it. And it's worked for me. I started as the first salesperson at Tableau nearly a decade ago, and now I head up the entire sales team for one of the fastest growing software technology companies in the world.

I have always loved sales. Sales was my calling since I was young. I was that kid who always wanted to sell everything. I sold candy bars in school. I raised the most money in fundraisers to win the cool prizes. While those I knew went to sporting events and concerts, my friends brought me to help buy their cars. Yes, I really did help buy a lot of cars.

What can I say? Negotiating was a form of entertainment for me.

Each summer while at Stanford, I sold educational books door-to-door. Want to learn about sales? Sell something door-to-door. It is hard. Very hard. Imagine carrying a big book bag in the hot, sweltering sun or pouring rain door-to-door for over 80 hours per week – and getting lots of doors slammed in your face. I learned to shrug things off, focus on what I can control, and to roll up my sleeves and keep on going. My focus each day was to do my best and talk to at least 30 families no matter what. I believed I could do it. And as a true competitor, I wanted to sell more books than anyone else. Why? Because I believed I could.

This really sums up my leadership philosophy. **Belief.**

People ask me all the time about the difference between a good salesperson and a great salesperson. My hunch is that people expect me to say preparation, product knowledge, hard work, and communication skills. Yes, good salespeople do those things. But, they are just the baseline. **Belief** is what makes the real difference.

Being a great salesperson is like being a great athlete. Why does a gold medalist win? Of course Olympic athletes prepare and train. They practice and work hard. But they also visualize breaking the ribbon at the finish line. They imagine standing on the podium to receive their medal. Olympic athletes fundamentally believe they can and will win.

What are the best ways to inspire Belief?

1) Paint the picture. Help individuals feel and taste success. Help people visualize success. Ringing a bell

when closing a big deal, showcase potential rewards, and make a big it a fun and big deal about awarding them.

2) Instill friendly competition. Everyone likes to compete and win. Run contests all over the place – most transactions, biggest sale, top team. Publish every person’s quota attainment. When quota is attained, attach a visual or a catch phrase that everyone can grab on to and keep excitement up.

3) Surround yourself with others who believe. Can you think of a winning Olympic team who had even one athlete who thought a win was impossible? Absolutely not. Every single member on the team, especially the team captain, must believe.

4) Always have a stretch goal. Remember Norman Vincent Peale’s quote, “Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you’ll land among the stars.” March towards the stretch goal, not the target. Think BIG.

5) Have fun with numbers. This is the real key. Break all goals down into small, manageable bits. Take a sales rep. Slice and dice her numbers – total calls, lead conversion, transactions, average order size, close rates. You can probably play with the data to show the path to her goal by improving just one or two metrics. Now show her what happens if she improves on all metrics, and her belief is at all new levels.

Our job as leaders is to break the belief barrier. Belief is critical for all leaders, whether in sales or any other department. We inspire people to believe they can do way more than they initially thought possible. People want to be part of an Olympic team, so our job is to fill our teams with athletes who think big and believe.

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Kelly has been a Board Director at public and private companies, including Fastly (NYSE: FSLY), Plum (NASDAQ: PLMI), Gong, Lucid, Even, and Amperity. She has advised many technology companies, including Dropbox, Asana, data.world, Hyperproof, and Cien. She is an adjunct professor at the University of Washington's Foster School of Business.

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