

Wildly Accelerate Revenue Growth by Teaching Your Sales Teams the Tools of Design Thinking

Snapshot

Imagine going on a journey with your client that led to a masterful, unheard of solution, built commitment to a long term partnership, and added to your bottom line. We are combining the best of Design Thinking with other tools and processes to do just this.

Our premise is that design thinking can inform and transform the sales process as it:

- Is a process that connects you DEEPLY first with your customer's needs/interests as the driver for your solution
- Encourages co-creation
- Pushes one to iterate on an implementable solution versus deliver a final solution and hope it sticks
- Expands discovery and delays solutions generation
- Offers a proven playbook for breakthrough success

Design Thinking is an innovation process that is customer centric and guides people through a series of steps in order to discover novel insights and solutions. It calls for us to suspend our beliefs and assumptions about the answer/solution, empathize with our customers, seek non-obvious insights that can surprise even our customer and translate this into never before considered solutions. Design Thinking also calls for testing new solutions several times so that you can get feedback and develop the best solution.

Using Design Thinking methods in a sales process leads to better, bigger and longer customer relationships. And we have the stats to prove it.

Challenge

Sales people have a reputation for going for the close, seeking solutions quickly, having a propensity for action, and proposing "the answer" sometimes at the expense of deeper listening and a more strategic partnership. We do not have the most golden reputation in the collective consciousness of our society. A profession in sales is listed among the not-so-favorable careers of lawyers, DMV workers, and United States congressmen. But the truth remains that there are a lot of us! Statistics show that nearly 13% of all the jobs in the U.S. are full time sales positions and the private sector employs three times as many salespeople as all fifty state governments combined employ people. As Daniel Pink says, "If the nation's salespeople lived in a single state, that state would be the fifth-largest in the United States."

Although there are many caricatures of sales – some of which may be true – we are on the front lines of most of our organizations. We are driven and persist in the face of obstacles, willing to work hard and take risks, and excel at identifying opportunities. Our successes or "failures" are often in public view, defined by a number, and we shoulder the pressure of an organization's angst of winning in the marketplace. Bridging the gap between customer and organizational interests, we are balancing on the tightrope of contrasting demands.

RESOURCES

Challengers Sale

Daring Greatly – Brene Brown

Drive – Daniel Pink

Change by Design – Tim Brown

Empathic Civilization – Jeremy Rifkin

To Fall in Love With Anyone, Do This (New York Times), February 13, 2015

To Sell is Human: The Surprising Truth About Moving Others- Daniel Pink

Our nature, combined with the realities of corporate quarterly and even monthly revenue pressures, challenge the best of us to slow down, listen well and co-create with our clients.

And then there are the stats:

- Buyers are between 60% to 90% finished with the buying process before they engage with sales, according to Forrester.
- Research by the Corporate Executive Board (CEB) reveals that the strongest source of differentiation between vendors isn't their marketing, their products or their pricing, but the quality of the sales conversation. In fact, CEB found that 53% of customer loyalty is attributed to the customer's buying experience.
- 80% of sales requires 5 follow-up calls after the meeting, and 44% of sales reps give up after 1 follow-up.

Opportunity

Successful sales professionals master both the art and science of sales. They have done the market analytics, understand the organizational goals of their potential client, manage internal forecasts, become experts in the product and services they are offering AND they listen well, are intensely curious, empathize and are creative.

Most of sales training is focused on the science of sales and yet we know, if sales professionals are not empathetic, good listeners, authentic, likeable, passionate, and willing to co-create (the art), they are compromised and it impedes how far they can go.

Focusing on the art of sales is starting to show up in the marketplace- the Challenger Sale, for example, StoryLeaders, and Selling with Noble Purpose. We need more of it, and, the piece that still seems to be missing is the notion of co-creation. Studies show that when people are involved in a process, they are more committed and have a sense of ownership. Yet, sales is still discussed as a one way street- we sell to the other; we offer, they buy, we have to challenge their thinking and provide insight and maybe we can convince them better than the competition.

There is an opportunity to reframe the customer relationship to be about co-creation. We each bring something to the table. When there is mutual appreciation we can play as equals and have the best shot at creating something transformational for both parties.

Design Thinking, offers a codified, innovative process for transforming customer centricity into real empowerment and co-created novel solutions. It is a process that demands empathy, expands discovery and stalls solution generation until the best solution has emerged. It offers tools and techniques to sales professionals that will help develop the art side of their practice AND it also offers a process that can be used with clients for co-creation. You can even use design methods to better connect with and influence your key internal stakeholders, whose support you may need to support customers.

We are not the first to think about this. Already organizations such as Salesforce, IBM, Fidelity Investments, GE, Actelion, and SAP are using Design Thinking to transform sales and their client relationships. And we need more companies to embrace this approach as it is more valuable for the seller and the buyer.