



Keith Eades:

‘Job Maturity’ more important than ever

Three roles in sales according to Keith Eades

The salesperson as micro marketer, visionary and provider of value

THIJS VERHEES INTERVIEWED KEITH EADES, OWNER OF SALES PERFORMANCE INTERNATIONAL AND AUTHOR OF BESTSELLING BOOKS LIKE “THE NEW SOLUTION SELLING” AND “THE SOLUTION CENTRIC ORGANIZATION”. IN A STRONGLY CHANGING COMMERCIAL WORLD, EADES GIVES US AN INSIGHT IN THE THREE ROLES A GOOD SELLER NOWADAYS SHOULD PLAY.

Interview **THIJS VERHEES** Text **NATASJA SUSELBEEK** Images **MEES VAN DEN EKART**

The book “The Challenger Sale” by Matthew Dixon and Brent Adamson has shaken the sales world. One of the critiques on the book is that it tells nothing new. Eades has his own ideas about that. “The idea behind the challenger is that a salesperson has got to add real value and to help the buyer see things he did not see before. He challenges the existing situation to new concepts and adds value by doing that. That is a valid and respectful idea. Is it new? For sure not. It does have a new jacket. The world that I wrote about in “The New Solution Selling” is the world of the solution. The focus of this is at the customer. As soon as the customer shares his problems or challenges, you are getting an important responsibility. You

either help him to find a way to solve his problem with a whole new view to his reality, or if he already has an insight, you look together with him for an even better solution. That is the essence of the concept with which we are working now for more than ten years: finding

problems and creating or reengineering a vision. That is exactly what challenger does. So, no, it is not a new idea, but the packaging is new.”

A MISUNDERSTANDING

One of the critiques on the principle of Solution Selling is that it is only applicable in large, global organizations and that it would be less applicable in smaller companies. Eades takes the edge of that: “Solution Selling is a philosophy that is focused on the customer. That philosophy works as well for a multinational as for a one-man company. It is

certainly so that our methodology fits well in long and complex sales cycles where following a process is essential. However, smaller organizations do also benefit from an optimal use of the sales budget. That is exactly where Solution Selling makes the difference. Neil Rackham talked about the importance of qualification in his interview with Sales Management, and that is something where our methodology excels. Especially for SMB this can be the big difference.”

THE MICRO-MARKETER

According to Eades, nowadays there are three discerning roles that a good seller should master. One of those roles is the ‘Micro-Marketer’. “The thought that a seller should only do one thing, is naïve. The last ten to fifteen years, the sales world has dramatically changed, amongst other reasons because of the rise of the internet. If people are planning a major purchase, they first search the web. They check what is available and search for information. That is how they form a ‘Buying Vision’. Most buyers have already done more than 50% of the buying process before they contact a seller. So if the phone rings, a seller needs to have a totally different conversation than he had in the past. The buyer already knows a lot. What we need to realize is: what can we do in the first part of the buying process, in which we are not involved. That is the role of the Micro-Marketer. The Micro-Marketer develops *himself* as a brand, by joining conversations that take place on Social Media like Twitter and LinkedIn. That is not anymore only the domain of the marketing department. Your audience needs to see that you are an expert in your domain and that you are sincerely committed to the success of your customer. By doing that you build credibility.”

**In today's world
you will have
to be a holistic
salesperson**

COVERSTORY

**If you want to grow,
you'd better do what
the big boys do**

**THE VISIONARY**

The second role is the 'visionary' role. "People think in a visual way. The role of the seller is not only the consultant who diagnoses the problem, but also the role of advisor who helps the customer visualize what the world looks like with the new approach that is introduced by his solution. And to present that in a way that the buyer wants to take action."

THE PROVIDER OF VALUE

The third role is what Eades calls the 'provider of value'. "Often people want to take action but in the end they back out because they are not sure if it really brings in enough return. Companies often have the money available, but they are afraid to spend it. Afraid of the risks. To be effective in the sales game, we need to understand that and we need to be capable of convincing the buyer that he should take action right now. In the end, our customer cannot afford doing nothing." These three roles are part of the collaborative sales, says Eades. But is one seller able to play all these roles? "Of course a seller needs to be supported by product experts or other supporting functions, but in today's world you need to be a holistic seller. And with the right training and the right tools, it is not that difficult."

'JOB MATURITY'

According to Rackham, in the previous edition of Sales Management, sellers should be better educated. He says that 90% of the sellers is not sufficiently educated. Does Eades agree with that? "I would like to see it more comprehensive than only in terms of education or training. Sellers need to be 'mature in their job'. They need to be able to handle complex situations they are facing together with their customers. If you only train them on product knowledge, then that is the only subject they can talk about proficiently. But to the buyer that might not be relevant at all. Companies spend 80% of their budgets on product training for sellers. But we should educate them how to find and solve problems. This maturity is nowadays more important than ever. Buyers want to do business with people who understand them as a person and who understands their problems and situation. That is the basic principle. The foundation of all good sellers should be formed by their 'job maturity'."

CONSISTENT RESULTS

Regarding micro-marketing, if sellers build their own brand, there is a risk that they leave the company and take the

brand with them. What then? "Turnover is unavoidable in every organization, if it is either a sales department with two sellers or with thousands of sellers. People change and time keeps ticking. It is very important that all sellers follow a repeatable model, that can be easily adopted by every new hire. We give our customers the process and the right tools to employ their sellers fast, efficiently and with repeatable success. You change the seller, but not the way how the organization sells. That is how you achieve consistent and repeatable results."

THREE TRENDS

Like Eades said before, the sales world is changing fast and drastically. How does he see the future of sales? "First of all, there are less and less sellers in this world. The way how people buy has changed, so the role that sellers play needs to be radically different. It is important to differentiate yourself by how you sell. You need to be unique and add provable value as a seller. That is why it is so important to build a brand around yourself as micro-marketer. Besides the fact that there will be less sellers, a big trend is the mix of methodology and technology in sales. The way how people learn, is going to

change. People want to ‘learn by doing’ instead of being sent to a sales training for a couple of days. That old training world almost does not exist anymore. The new way of learning is that you define the process for them, give them the right tools and put it online so they can learn ‘as they go’. Moreover, there is a big connection between the way how we teach, what we teach them and their business success. If we hire new people, we only want to hire people who either possess the competences – or are able to gain these competences – to achieve desired results. We are not just hiring and training people anymore, that has become way too expensive. We are going to do that in a far more concrete way and link it to their competences, so we can achieve the best business results. What we just discussed, the declining number of sellers and the mix of technology and methodology are trends we see in the market now and will be playing a bigger and bigger role in sales management in the near future.”

CHANGING

So will that then also drastically change the world of sales training? “My organization is one of the five best and largest sales training organizations in the world. We probably train more people in a year than most organizations in their entire life span and I can tell you that my world is changing. And that we need to adapt to that change. So that is what we do and we even take a leading role in that change. The world of personal sales is changing dramatically and everybody who is not changing with it, will lose an important part of competitive power. With that, Neil Rackham was totally right.”

OPPORTUNITIES IN THE NETHERLANDS

The trends that Eades sees are world-wide but he also sees a special trend in Northern Europe, including The

Netherlands. “Europe nowadays is the place where we train most people. The reason for that is that there are many multinationals located in Northern Europe. These are smart organizations, who understand both the necessity and the value of a solid methodology and want to achieve predictable and repeatable results. We never did as much business in Europe as now. If we specifically look at the European market, like the Dutch market, we see a lot of big companies that often consist of multiple smaller or mid-sized divisions. And especially these smaller or mid-size entities within a company need a repeatable process. In that way they can gain access to enterprise accounts and large organizations. Following the process around the customer and using the three roles I described earlier is crucial to do that. It doesn’t matter how big you are, it matters what you can mean for your customer. If you are a small organization and you want to grow, you should better start early and do what the big boys do, because that is the way you grow big too. That is the opportunity we see in The Netherlands too. And the good news is that we now have people on the ground, like René Voogt, to help us make it happen.”

ADD VALUE

Next year, Eades’ new book called ‘Collaborative Sale’ will be released. “The basic principles of Solution Selling are especially in these times very important. What happens if the world of offering solutions finds the new buyer? That is what we call ‘Collaborative Sale.’” For the last time we discuss something Neil Rackham said. Namely that the way companies sell will become a discerning factor. According to Rackham it will no longer be the products that make the difference, but the way sellers approach their customers. Does Eades agree with that? “100%. It is not about what you sell, but how you sell. What value do you add to the situation in that exchange. If you do not add value as an individual, besides what your products or services do, the sales world does not need you. In the need for cost savings everything in the supply chain that does not add value, is removed. Offering a solution is about the customer, defining problems,

looking for reasons and solutions. As sellers we need to do that well, because that is how we add value. The seller is the unique value that the customer should recognize in the exchange. It is not enough to just say it. You need to make it tangible, by following the right process and using the necessary tools. ●



Keith Eades

In 1988 Keith Eades founded his company Sales Performance International (SPI) that nowadays has customers in more than 50 countries, including The Netherlands. He is a respected speaker and bestselling author. SPI is located in North Carolina in the United States and is one of the largest organizations for sales development in the world. The ‘Solution Selling’ methodology he developed is applied worldwide by top 500 companies.

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