

Sales Eats First

By Noel Capon and Gary S. Tubridy



Review by Cameron Hyde

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Maybe it is because I have succumbed to today's culture of sound bites and YouTube to capture the news and views of our time, but I often find it challenging these days to plow completely through the average business book. Not so with *Sales Eats First: How Customer-Motivated Sales Organizations Outthink, Out-Offer and Outperform the Competition* (Wessex Inc., 2011), Noel Capon and Gary S. Tubridy's latest collaboration. It is not that the book's relatively small size (155 pages) makes it a fast read—quite the contrary. A good business book, I believe, causes us to return to resonating passages to reread, clarify, internalize and validate core thinking with our own experiences. I read this book in a week or so stopping frequently to reread my highlighted notes. I wanted to ensure I had internalized both the stories from sales and business leaders and the salient points the authors made about how sales has emerged from the ashes of the post-recession world.

Before going further I need to come clean about something. I have been selling in a business environment for exactly 45 years to the day as I write this review. I have felt that regardless of my roles over my post-college career, I was

always a sales guy at heart. As a former chief executive officer of my company's Canadian organization, I thought I was in fact the lead salesperson and accountable to customers, employees and shareholders to be out on the front lines listening, selling and adding value. Real business is done on the front lines in the customer's environment, not in headquarters' meeting rooms. "Nothing happens until a sale is made," and "No one gets a paycheck until salespeople successfully execute their responsibilities as the interface between their companies and their customers." These quotes appear on Page 1 of the introduction before the

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book even truly begins. As was said in the movie *Jerry Maguire*, my response to Capon and Tubridy was, "You had me at hello." I could not wait to read on. But from this very basic opening, an interesting story emerged of how the modern business-to-business sales organization must develop and deploy major intellectual capital.

Today's top-performing companies are "customer-motivated organizations," and the writers use stories from a wide array of respected sales leaders to craft a clear message reflecting the five key areas in which these companies excel. I will expand on just a few points that particularly resonated with me and kept me reading with keen interest. May they stimulate

you to pick up this book, read it and take new steps to help your company accelerate growth. I have spent the past several years collaborating with my company's leaders about our largest global strategic accounts and of course growing our business in the process. I arrived in the role in late 2008 after many years supporting channel partners across North America—an interesting, challenging time to take an assignment to grow business with the largest financial institutions and manufacturing companies in North America and Europe. Thank goodness we, like others, chose to excel at some of the things outlined in these passages.

Once I read this book, it was clear we needed to continue working hard at things that we knew were inherently right and adjusting to those where other organizations have shown the way.

Advancing "the science of sales with the art of customer relationships" is at the epicenter of the guidance from business leaders and the authors. Marketing and sales need to be equal partners collaborating to deliver the right analytics, proper segmentation, value propositions that resonate and powerful results to the customer's and your bottom line. Our experience reinforces that bringing together the right talent, accounts, approach, focus and information yields the clarity to deliver on performance expectations. Many organizations are clearly shifting from generalists to specialists to

maximize impact on a knowledgeable decision-maker. Intellectual capital is at a premium. However, global clients with centralized procurement have enormous complexity and desire the worldwide consistency, continuity and collaboration delivered through an overall executive account leader.


Tubridy point out is the need to fail quickly, learn and move on. Fail or scale is the experimental model. The payoff for creative risk-taking is the discovery and development of best practices.

I have touched on only a few key aspects that make this a must-read not just for sales leaders but everyone



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“Leading from the front” is a consistent theme across all these successful organizations. “Living the mission” helps defeat commoditization and drives strong margins with a shared grand vision that permeates the psychology of sales and all other employees, creating trust and differentiation with the customer. Salespeople are much more than “coin-operated.” They must be inspired and motivated by a larger mission. Integrity is at the core. For me, “making loud mistakes” resonated so meaningfully after all my years in sales. Great selling organizations today are characterized by being “change-friendly,” where people have freedom to fail in order to learn and adapt. Hiring creative, resilient people who revel in experimentation and always asking questions such as, “Can we do better, what did we learn, what did not work, and what do we need to adjust?” help enable this culture. I believe that my company’s global accounts strategy represents a petri-dish style for leading new approaches through constant experimentation. What Capon and

across the executive suite. What comes through is that companies can design great things, innovate by thoughts and functions and revolutionize processes for breakthroughs, but without selling to the customer, all this sits gathering dust on the traditional or online shelf. Make *Sales Eats First* the next book you read, and share it with others at your organization. Begin building your future growth plan with the customer at the center and sales as a critical player at the table. 

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Speaking to your original question: Which SAMs would say that executive insight is an absolute requirement to successfully winning or keeping a key account? I would say that rarely will you make a sale to a C-suite SVP or president, although they will add to your power and credibility with their managers. These are extremely valuable meetings for reasons articulated above. However, I can assure you that failure to develop and nurture a C-suite contact program can easily lose you your business. Don’t know how to do it or what to say? There are many training programs that I have attended that really took the mystery and fear out of C-suite calling.

Christian Maurer, lecturer at Reutlingen University’s ESB Business School: Lee makes a very interesting observation, which is corroborated in the excellent book *Selling to the C-Suite: What Every Executive Wants You to Know About Successfully Selling to the Top* by Nicholas A.C. Read and Stephen J. Bistrutz. They recommend to call to the most relevant executive, the one person that is most concerned by an organizational pain (which at this level is also a personal pain) and is to gain the most from solving the pain. 

Editor’s note: Readers may follow and join the full conversation at www.linkedin.com/groupitem?view=&gid=126482&type=member&item=74768087&trk=group_search_item_list-0-b-ttl&goback=.gna_126482.

Additional resources

For more information on this subject in SAMA’s library, the editor recommends: Dan Kosch and Mark Shonka, “From deal breaker to deal maker: how to research correctly,” *Velocity*®, Vol. 12, No. 3/4, Summer/Fall 2010, www.strategicaccounts.org; and Conrad Smith, “On-demand webinar: how strategic account managers use financial data to engage customer executives,” Sept. 21, 2010, www.strategicaccounts.org.