

Speaker 2: 00:08 welcome to the same side selling podcast dedicated to modern sales and marketing innovation and leadership. Here's your host,

Ian Altman: 00:18 Ian Altman. Hey, it's Ian often. I'm joined this week by Tom Pisello, the chief evangelist at Media Florida. Some people know him as the Roi Guy. He's a successful serial entrepreneur, still a popular speaker and author. We're going to talk about the impending death of the B2B sales rep. What types of attributes are necessary for B2B sales reps to survive and thrive and how to add value with your clients in a proactive rather than responsive way. You're gonna learn a ton from Tom Pisello

Ian Altman: 00:57 Tom, welcome to the show. Thank you. Can you start by sharing something surprising about you that our audience may not know?

Tom Pisello: 01:07 Yeah, I, uh, back when I was 15, 16 years old, I grew up in Long Island, New York, a way out on the island. Well, not too far out in Islip. Many of you have flown in and out of there. Sure. And, uh, growing up I, uh, was a little bit of a kind of a rock musician in school. And, uh, joined a wedding band, a bunch of 30 and 40 year olds. And, uh, I was a wedding singer, quote unquote, on the weekends and uh, kind of cut my teeth in the, in the public eye doing wedding bands at, uh, probably some of the most techie wedding venues and tacky wedding events on long island. And this was in the 80s. So it was all about big care and, uh, we had the big hair and ruffled tuxes and big bow ties.

Ian Altman: 01:56 So were you the inspiration for Adam Sandler's the winning singer?

Tom Pisello: 02:01 I laugh all the time on that. And that's just a rumor. That's just a rumor. But I did meet, I did meet Adam Sandler and I did ask him that question

Ian Altman: 02:13 That's funny. Now I want to see pictures we're going to hit. Exactly, yeah, you got it. You know, and I, I played, I played in a band when I was in the junior high and high school and um, I think it's an interesting experience. I just remember being, I remember being a high school student and we were at, we were as you know, straight laced and boring as kids can get. W and I remember going, we would get booked for college parties and there were all sorts of substances at these parties that we were oblivious to. And I just remember one night, um, like the GIG was over, we're packing up to leave and some guys said, so when are you guys going to start? It was, it was a great, great deal of insight into college life in that time, in that time in America kind of is kind of a scary thing. Um, so, uh, let me, let me ask you, because we want to talk about the idea of the world of B2B sales. Um, so what's the ?

Tom Pisello: 03:21 Yeah. One of my favorite misconceptions and the one that's been debated quite a bit, um, is I remember sitting in the audience, must've been five or six years ago at a forester B2B selling event and a an analyst Andy Hoar gets on the stage and in front of this entire audience of B2 B sales leaders and executives. He basically says 1 million of the 5 million sales reps that are in B2B are going to be out of a job by 2020. And um, he went on to present this new research. They had done some studies and one in five about 22% of B2b Reps. Um, he indicated where could it go the way of the Dodo bird. And um, it was quite surprising. Obviously the audience was aghast and in fact that was the last year that Forrester did an independent B2b, uh, selling, uh, event, uh, that combined it with marketing.

Tom Pisello: 04:24 And they really felt like a lot of these, uh, what they consider kind of low value sales reps were going to be replaced with a, the Internet and folks were doing a lot more self service, certainly a lot more research online. You could order via ecommerce, uh, you know, Amazon and basically the traditional order taker was going to go and, um, be out of business. But they went further than that and they said, you know, AI machine learning, uh, other, uh, technologies, we're going to also put a lot more of the kind of traditional B2B sales rep at risk. So you know, those that kind of show up and throw up about the company, product services, features and price, things that you could find on the Internet, on your own. You're going to be engaged later. And because of that, you're going to need less of them. And so they're going to be at risk. And the only value added, uh, folks, those that are consultants, you know, that the investigate the challenges that you should address and the business value you can achieve or those that kind of helped facilitate and navigate the complex evermore complex buyer's journey, they're going to be perceived still as valuable and in fact they're going to add to their ranks, but not nearly enough to replace out the more commodity sales reps.

Ian Altman: 05:48 So do you have a sense of how that's played out? Because if it was five years ago and we're in 2019 now, yeah, right around the corner or but the, nature of podcasts, someone's going to listen to this a year from now saying, wait, that's today.

Tom Pisello: 06:01 Yeah, exactly. Well, yeah. So what are the numbers? So, um, it's good because I was just with Mary Shea, another great analyst over at forester, and in fact, one of my favorite, and um, we were having this exact, um, discussion and she said, you know, it's not 1 million today. Um, it's actually 1.5 million and it's ahead of the prediction. So we're not even at 2020 and she's indicating that 1.5 million had been disintermediated. Now where have those reps gone? You know, some have gone on to other

careers. Um, a lot of sales has moved to the channel and to inside sales. And then, um, some of these folks have moved over into new roles like customer success. So it's definitely shifting around quite a bit. However, she did indicate that, you know, the consultants and the navigators are that much more valuable and that they're, they too had been adding to those ranks. Um, sales executives, um, a lot more. So there are more consultants than navigators then predict it, but there's also a lot less explainers and order order takers. Um, and now 1.5 million of those are now in different roles within the organization or in the, in the unemployment line.

Ian Altman: 07:21 So, so what I, what I wonder is given and given the level of unemployment, I'm guessing there aren't a lot of people who have great selling skills sitting around eating bon bons waiting for the phone to route. And it sounds like in many respects, the way that forester is reporting this well people are now in different roles. So they might not have a job but it says sales. But for example, many of the organizations I work with have started a customer success department exactly as what that customer success department drives 40% of the company's revenue.

Tom Pisello: 07:56 Yeah. Especially for recurring revenue companies, subscription company software as a service, they become vital and um, you know, but they too had moved more to be consultant like in a lot less order takers, you know, if you want to renew but you could just go online and renew the contract or whatever renews. So they're there, um, making sure that the customers well supported, making sure adoption is being performed. So they have had to elevate their skills as well. But in a different area.

Ian Altman: 08:24 And Tom, I guess what we're getting at is this, is that it's not so much that gee, the need for B2B sales is declining. Rather the old school order taker stereotypical in your face salesperson that there's less of a need for, but the subject matter expert, the person who was the consultative seller who's really striving to find a fit, are we seeing there actually there actually is an increase in need for that rather than a decrease? Absolutely.

Tom Pisello: 08:56 And companies are having a hard time finding that. So this really to value added archetypes that you can think of. One is the more consultative seller, the ones that go and help you to identify the challenges that you really should be addressing, helping you to prioritize those, a benchmarking you against the competition and trying to give you a competitive edge, recommending solutions that'll fit that and then really helping to predict and then drive the outcomes, positive business outcomes from those solutions. And that's what I call kind of consulted archetype. Then there's another interesting archetype and uh, interesting characteristics that are also very, very valuable and Gartner in their research has hit on this. Um, those subject matter experts are hard to

create and you can use technology and tools like assessment tools, ROI tools, things like that to help enable that consultative sales rep to be good.

Tom Pisello: 09:56 But in archetype that's also very valuable or perceived as very valuable by the buyer and performs well is what Gartner calls it navigator. What's happened in the B2B buying processes. It's really evolved. There's way more decision makers. Corporate Executive Board did a great job of kind of highlighting that. Now we've got these big buying committees, multiple roles on those buying committees. It's hard for the internal champion, it's art for you as a seller to gain consensus with those decision makers. And as a result, even though solutions are easier to investigate, easier to evaluate, easier to buy and deploy, the whole purchase is taking two times longer than expected. And 94% of buyers have participated in a buying cycle where it's just canceled and the team just chooses to do nothing. They're so afraid and risk averse and something comes up to the stakeholders.

Tom Pisello: 10:54 Don't agree. You don't reach consensus and Bam, you've wasted all of that precious time. And so what's happening is there's this navigation concept that's important. So not only do you need to have consulting skills, but you also have to help the buyer to navigate their own journey. And the thought is that you've gone through this before with two or three other companies, or at least your, your organization, even if you're a new sales rep, has gone through this before, they know that you're going to be asked for those security documents, the GDPR documents and the good seller proactively provides those at the right time in the decision making process. You know that they're going to consider two or three other competitors and you're giving them an evaluation sheet. You know, they need a business case for the CFO and you're proactively providing that business case.

Tom Pisello: 11:44 So, you know, at every stage what the barrier is going to be, what they need to do internally to gain consensus from that buying committee. And you're facilitating that buyer's journey. You're helping the buyer to navigate it because, and this, according to Gardner, two thirds of the buyer's journey time, two thirds of it is gathering, processing and deconflicting information. So there's the friction. And so there's one end that, you know, you're, you're basically as a consultant archetype, you're, you're the inspiration, you're the spark. Um, you're the advisor. And then there's this other aspect where you're the one that's um, either removing the friction as the navigator. And I think that those two skills, if you're able to instill those in your sales force through learning, through a sales enablement platforms and through the skills of who you hire and who you put into those roles, you know, those are the two key, um, archetypes that we need to kind of build within the organization. And those will be the value added resources that your

buyers value, which is the most important, the buying experience. And that will help you to increase that sales performance that you so desperately want.

Ian Altman: 13:02 Well, I'm glad, I'm glad you brought this topic up because if something that I think is overlooked often, and it's something that when when I speak, I, I share a fair amount, which is oftentimes the client, the seller will come in and the clients is, Oh, here's what I want you to do next. I want you to do this. I want you to do this. I want you to do that. Um, and it makes no sense. It's actually isn't in their best interest. And sellers get really frustrated by this. And people talk about, oh, but that's just, that's the, that's the buyer's journey. That's a process they're going through. And one of the, one of these suggestions that I make, I'm interested to get your thoughts on it, is what I tell people is, look, one of the best things you can do is come in with, with something that early on in the process you say, you know, there, there's a process that we've seen from doing this for years.

Ian Altman: 13:55 There's a series of steps that we see the companies who get the greatest return tend to follow or are you open to us sharing that with you? And very often we'll say, oh yeah, great. And now we get to help them understand the steps along the way and who might be involved and where there's communication and it's not just during the sales process, but we have to think about is here are the steps that help you as a client get the greatest return on whatever it is you may be investing in. It's part of the evaluation itself, but it's also in, once you buy here are the next four steps young. Sure that you get the best results. So, so what's your, what's your take on that?

Tom Pisello: 14:38 Yeah, I'm totally with you. So sellers have been trained to be really responsive to customers and of course that's a good thing, right? So when they request a presentation, give presentation, when they were requested demo you, you go and do the demo. But unfortunately it seems to be like, um, they're responding exactly to that and they're not asking enough questions to make sure that that is the best next step or that is the exact route that should be taken. So I do think that there are a lot of opportunities to reframe and I think there's a lot of opportunities to cocreate the journey with the customer as opposed to just responding to requests and being kind of their puppet because they don't know the right process. And you do because you've been through it three, four, five, six times. And a lot of times they're surprised by steps in the process that they didn't realize they had to go through.

Tom Pisello: 15:36 And unfortunately, when we see sometimes sellers that are surprised by the same thing, oh, I can't believe this customer's asking for, um, you know, our, our SSAE 16,

um, certifications or documents or audit documents, I can't believe they're asking for from penetration. GDPR. Yeah, exactly. Everyone is asked for it yet sellers see is still seem to be frustrated. And then where is it is the other question that that sometimes you get, it's like where can I find that so well it's exactly in the same place it was last time and it's in the repository and you know, and so, um, you really have to teach them to own that journey and to be experts in that journey as well as experts in the business problems in the concentrate. And that's a lot right to, to own and manage as a sales rep because you not only have to be expert in the solutions, you also have to pivot to be expert in the business problems and the use cases that you're solving for the customer and the value you can derive.

Tom Pisello: 16:35 And now we're saying, okay, you also need to be expert in the process and the journey that they're going to go through and be proactive in that journey. Now, the good thing is if you are able to make the pivot that you talk about Ian when another great piece of Forrester Research is 74% of sellers who are able to help the buyer set the agenda and take ownership just like you're talking about, they get the deal and 26% they when the shootout. So it's about engaging early. It's about helping the buyer to understand the journey. It's about solving specific problems with your solutions. Don't just jump to the solution and then you're in a shootout with the other solutions, you know, basically go in and identify the unique problems and challenges you're going to solve and get out of that demo RFP response mode and instead help them to really manage the buyer's journey and, and set the agenda.

Ian Altman: 17:35 And these are, these are all themes that our audience will make perfect sense. And these are all central components to same side selling, which is all about figuring out what we're trying to solve for them. The example that I often give people when they don't quite get this, as I say, look at this way. Imagine if you had some sort of procedure going on, you were about to have surgery. would you want the doctor who looks at you and says, so, uh, how do you think we should do this? You don't, you don't want the doctor asking you where they should cut. You want a doctor who says, look, so here's the process. Here's the prep you're going to get here at this time. We're going to do this. We're going to mark this area. You going to take you into this area here, the antibiotics we're going to prescribe.

Ian Altman: 18:22 Here's all the stuff we do beforehand. I'm going to give you very little information about the actual surgery cause I don't want to freak you out. And then here's what the recovery looks like and Ge, right now you're in this high risk because of this situation and a month from now you'll forget even had the procedure. That's what, that's what we're looking for as customers, which is I want someone who understands my situation, can help me understand what happens if I don't solve it and can show me

what the outcome's going to be. And what steps I have to follow to get there.

Tom Pisello: 18:56 Exactly. And that prescriptive kind of route is exactly what you need to do. And what these two archetypes are so adept at, uh, the ones that are going to be successful. The ones that we want to put in place so that we as sales leaders are successful. And it's not a matter of, you know, just blindly prescribing. Right. And it's not a matter of asking the buyer, um, questions throughout the process, you know, do you, you know, here's what I'm prescribing is the treatment. Here are the side effects or you know, he, here's the course of action that we want you to take. Does that map, you know, to, to your lifestyle? No, you can't take pills. You need liquid. Okay. So there, there's a give and take here. And I think people shy away from this because they're like, well, I'm not going to go in and tell them how to buy. They already have a buying process. Get you're right in some ways, but you're not in others and that they have not bought your solution before. They really don't know how to buy it and they,

Ian Altman: 19:58 and, and Tom what I would argue is this, is that one of the things that I think people get trapped in sometimes as they get trapped in this notion of, so, so let me tell them how to buy. And I think that you can sometimes get pushback if you're a seller walking in to say, here's what you should buy our stuff. So the, the subtle distinction that I try to introduce to this is this notion of here's the process that we followed with people who have gotten the best results, the best outcomes. And I guess what part of that is the process of buying, but part of it is also the process of after you buy it, how do you realize those results? And if you're, if you're helping someone discover the process to go through the, generates the best results, they're probably going to be way more than if you just said, here's the best way for you to buy from us. Because let's face it, too many salespeople have lied to people in the past. So the client may for some uncanny reason, not trust your process for how to buy.

Tom Pisello: 21:03 Totally agree. And who gets involved in the process, who buys into the solution and the predicted outcomes, um, important. Who's involved once the solution is installed to assure success again? So it's all part of the process to basically assure the outcome and really focus on that. And a completely agree.

Ian Altman: 21:25 Yeah, it was, it's funny, I was, I was working with a company recently who does a lot of work in the hospitality industry in terms of managing food costs. And so people were complaining, they said, well, the problem we have is that, you know, whether it's a general manager or whether it's a purchasing person or a senior executive, they're bought into this program that's going to reduce their food costs. But then the chef is resistant to

participate. And I said, okay, well, so how important is it? The chef is bought in? This is a 100% of the have to be. They have to be bought in. I said, okay, so what if you help them illustrate that in order to get the best results at step three, you have to have the chef involved.

Tom Pisello: 22:07 Well, can we tell them that? Absolutely. I mean, do you think they not? You think they don't want to get the best results? Of course they do. And so when you map that out, now here's the funny part. Imagine you're talking to two different vendors. One vendor is talking about the stuff they want to sell you and the other vendor is talking about how you're going to get the best results for whatever you're considering buying. Who would you rather work with? Well, naturally the person focus on the results and it pivots everything. And you may actually be willing to spend more to the people focused on the results than the other people. Or as I like to say, how much less would you have to pay for it to be a good deal if you don't get the results that you need?

Tom Pisello: 22:47 Completely agree. And that's really where the experience becomes one of the key differentiators and why the consultant and the navigator are the proper archetypes because they're, they're truly creating a different buying experience. And as solutions start to, from a buyer's perspective, appear very little differentiation between the, the solutions they have. Um, for example, in our sales enablements face that, um, that we sell into at media fly, there were a number of different providers. In fact, there seems to be a new one every tag, and it's very hard to quickly understand the differences between the solutions. But we go in with a completely different experience. When we go to engage with customers, we introduce value and outcomes very, very early in the process. We don't talk the solutions. We talked about a methodology called evolve selling and a set of practices that will ultimately get you to the outcome and don't introduce the solutions.

Tom Pisello: 23:56 You know, sometimes to sellers frustration till much later because they're being asked for demos. And we basically say, look, it's not about the demo because all these solutions after they see two or three are going to look the same and they're going to get confused and freeze. It's more about making sure that they're addressing the right challenges that their sellers are having, that they're, they're focusing on the right issues that are a priority for them and that they understand the outcomes that can be generated. Because once they know there's an outcome big enough to solve, then that's a whole different. Um, you won't get a buying process that devolves into a no decision. They'll know it's a big enough issue where sellers are spending five hours a week customizing 200 page PowerPoint deck to deliver to customers and briefings, and that's costing \$5 million a year for that salesforce. You know, obviously that's a big problem to solve and spending half a million

dollars on that is a huge return on investment. And think about it, not just saving the 5 million in productivity loss, but the 20 to 50 million in lost sales because they're not selling when they're customizing those presentations. So you get it focused on the outcome and then you eventually tie the solution to it. So completely, um, with you Ian in terms of the approach and that different buying experience is really the differentiator, not necessarily to the solution that you're selling anymore.

Ian Altman: 25:33 Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's, that's a part of that I think a lot of people overlook, which is good. No, I'm going to win because I can check more boxes on feature set. no, you're going to win when the client feels they're going to get better results from you per invested dollar than with somebody else.

Tom Pisello: 25:48 Yeah. I think, I think you when, when you, when you tie, so when we think about the buy buttons that are in the brain, emotions is a big driver. Some claim that it's responsible for about 90% of the purchase decision. We think it's more like 50% and then you have logic and trust as the other two components kind of at what the site 25% a piece. And you have to hit on all three of those buy buttons and in particular in a specific order, in the methodology that we've created. And in that you've got to trigger the emotions first. So if you're the seller that goes in and can help really identifying and illuminate those pains and amplify them to the point, not artificially, but amplify them to, as I said, like with that, that sales example, your sellers are spending five hours a week minimum customizing these unwieldy powerpoints, um, there's gotta be a better way.

Tom Pisello: 26:44 You know, it's costing you so much money, lost, selling time, lost productivity, and here's what that amount is and the cost to do nothing. Then they're emotionally bought into solving that problem and that really needs to be the first thing. Then second, you need to kind of tie that to logic and justification and say, um, you know, here's what the solution can provide in a presentation wizard that'll automate all of the assembly and get them, you know, 95% of the way they are. And then they're just putting some minor tweaks in and personalization and they're not dealing with those big decks anymore. And then here's how much you could save from that. And then trust throwing, putting up and showing them and providing with them three, four case studies of people in their industry that have solved that exact problem with their testimonials right there and exactly how much they saved. And so that triplet in the storytelling that you're getting into, we'll help them to emotionally logical and credibly connect with what you're trying to do. And, and that's kind of the reshaped experience I think that we have to deliver to the prospects.

Ian Altman: 27:53 Yup. You know what? I love it and

tie it ties so closely with the concepts of same side selling that I think that our audience right now is all probably nodding their head going, yep, Yep, Yep. But there may be, it may even be an amen out in the audience.

Tom Pisello: 28:08 Now, the chief evangelist at my new title Title I like hear in Amen

Ian Altman: 28:15 and it occurs me, we did not have a chance to talk about the frugal nomics survival guide. So we'll have you back to talk about that at a future date. Tom what's up, what's the best way for people to connect with you and learn more about what you're doing.

Tom Pisello: 28:30 Yeah, Tom, uh, Thomas Pisello on LinkedIn and @TPisello on Twitter

Ian Altman: 28:37 and deserve all knows their two L's in that and it will all be in the show notes. So Tom, thanks so much for sharing your wisdom. Love the conversation.

Tom Pisello: 28:46 Thanks again. Great conversation.

Ian Altman: 28:50 Tom's messages resonate so well with the same side selling audience. Let me give you a quick recap of the key things that I think can make a difference in your business right away. Remember those B2b reps, kinda the old school people, those jobs are going away and even then they've renamed them and put them in other positions. The real key is figuring out which role you play in the organization. Are you one of these consultative subject matter experts for you in navigator who's helping people through the process? I love that piece of forester of research that says 74% of those who set an agenda ended up winning the business. There's a great lesson in there, and the remaining 26% are just hopeful they're going to win in the shootout and you don't want that to be you. Remember, this show gets its direction from you, the listener. If there's a topic I should cover or a I should have on the program, just drop me a note to [ian@ianaltman.com](mailto:ian@ianaltman.com) have an amazing week. Add value and grow revenue in a way everybody can embrace, especially your customer.