25 B2B Sales Myths Debunked

How to get from 0 to 10 million annual revenue without trial & error

Manuel Hartmann
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How we got here in the first place

0-10k: Closing your first deal

1. Build it and they will come
   - Product cycle of death: Building more will not lead to selling more
   - Nobody waited for you. Few people will buy on their own
   - Sell first, build the RIGHT thing, sell more of the same thing

2. I’m not yet selling
   - Startup “sales” is ⅓ business model, ⅓ go-to-market and ⅓ sales
   - Pipeline today might mean 0 sales in the next 3-6 months
   - Revenue is the primary driver of value creation.

3. I do fundraising first, sales later
   - Stories are OK, traction is good, financial independence is great
   - Why customer money is worth a multiple of investor money
   - Show me your sales & I’ll show you the investors & terms you get

4. Product-driven growth is the way to go
   - Fine. Once you know the product to build that drives growth.
   - Words talk. Money walks.
   - Product-driven growth is expensive

5. Incubators / Accelerators will teach me B2B sales
   - Reality says no. Because they are not built for that.
   - Fix sales BEFORE you join to get maximum value
   - No startup ever died of too little feedback

10-100k: Selling - and invoicing(!) your 1st 100k

6. I have enough leads from my network
   - Your professional network is (typically) not your Ideal Customer Profile
   - “I have a large network” is the lamest pitch of any sales person
   - Predictable revenue comes from repeatable outbound sales

7. Deals will close within weeks
   - Trust drives speed. Case studies, credibility and authority build trust
   - Everything always takes longer than expected
   - SMBs first, Corporates second

8. I don’t need a CRM, it’s all in my head
   - Your head is great. But you want to build a business, right?

100-250k: Closing 5 deals in a niche

11. I know what the customer wants
   - Prescription without diagnosis is malpractice.
   - Doctors lose their license for that
   - Stop selling, let people buy. Think buyer journey, not sales process.

12. It’s time to sell big tickets to corporates
   - Big tickets take big time - duration and time investment
   - Big corporates love letting others trying and failing or succeeding first
   - Don’t be(come) dependent on 1 or 2 big customers

13. It’s time to hire a VP Sales
   - A VP Sales leads 3-10 sales people. Do you have 3-10 sales people?
   - There are 48 types of VP Sales. Make sure you get the right type
   - VP Sales are a big investment. Can they add 500k+ in annual revenue?

14. It’s time to expand to new verticals
   - Focus on a niche. At all times. Then take the next closest niche.
   - Expansion is dilution. Dilution kills focus. Focus is your biggest asset.
   - Expand when you conquer a niche. Until you do, don’t.

15. It’s time to establish a sales organisation
   - If in doubt, fill the sales funnel.
   - “We build shit and we sell shit and everything else is bullshit”
   - Middle management before 10 FTEs might be too early

250k-1M: Join the 0.5% of 7-figure businesses

16. I found product-market fit
   - There’s no “bells and whistles”. But inbound leads tell a lot.
   - Message-market fit leads to product-market fit
   - Build a “cookie-cutter”. B2B sales is ideally 0 intellectual work.

17. It’s all about the money
   - Money is keeping score as a consequence of value creation
   - “Colour of money” is a real thing. New versus existing revenue matters
   - It’s time to fix your Cash Conversion Cycle. Before you die.
18. Domain expertise is a must for sales hires
   Domain expertise can be taught, quickly. Attitude not.
   Focus on “jobs to be done”, not what sales people are selling you.
   Domain expertise can come with a “this is how the world works” mind.

19. Sales structure kills my culture
   Hollywood does not write movie scripts to kill creativity.
   Scaling up requires repeatability, repeatability requires structure.
   Cluster risk kill startups, founder-dependency is a cluster risk.

20. Let’s figure out sales once and we’re done
   1% better every day is 37× better every year.
   You will sell different deals to different buyers in different models. Adapt.
   Becoming successful is hard. Remaining successful is harder.

1-10M: Cross the chasm to 10M annual revenue

21. Hiring more salespeople will fix traction
   Hire out of opportunity, not neediness. If it’s not “hell yeah”, then it is no.
   “Hire slow, fire fast”, people say. But don’t fire fast if you’re the problem.
   If attitude, intelligence and coachability are there, keep talent. If not, not.

22. Sales people will fully ramp within 3 months if not 3 weeks
   Get your s*** together (way) BEFORE people hit the ground.
   If your sales cycle is 6 months, how can one fully ramp in 3 months?
   Great sales reps have questions for you. Bad sales reps excuses.

23. The CEO should stop selling now
   The CEO must always sell. Customers, talent, investors.
   CEO = “Close Every Opportunity”
   Ego Is The Enemy. Your job now is making other people rockstars.

24. Hiring great sales talent is reasonably easy
   The war for B2B sales talent is over. Talent has won.
   Talent acquisition is “just” another funnel. Sell the job well.
   Plan 2-3 months each to attract, onboard and ramp sales talent.

25. Coaching my sales team is not necessary by Alen Cerovina
   You don’t hire a superstar and expect him to train himself.
   ABC² - “Always be coaching” to “always be closing”
   Internal vs External: Same words, different behaviours.

NEW: 25 Tactical B2B Sales Insights

Implement 5 Quick Wins within 48 hours at EUR 0 investment
Sell Innovative Offerings Better
Consider Local Specifics for Outbound Sales in DACH
Avoid losing prospects by being “ghosted”
Negotiate better by framing the conversation

The End…but Still and Always Day 1

Bonus Material

Further free resources
Customer success: An outlook by Dominik Waltburger
Why high-value content matters by Stephanie Sigrist
What is the role of a start-up CEO when professionalizing sales?
High-quality content shows expertise and may serve as an ice-breaker
Your checklist for the production of high-value content
That feeling went away after the first 10 or so conversations and after the first pleasant one. I started decoupling outcomes from the process and investing in the process.

So what did I get from 8 weeks “on the street”? About CHF 8’000 of self-earned money in cash. But also the confidence to chat up every person in the world without anxiety or even fear of their response.

So why am I convinced I would not be together with the girl of my dreams today without sales?

The official story of how Miriam and I met is “at university, studying.” The real story is more me tapping her on her shoulder, asking “Quick question, where are you going?” and taking it from there.

11 years later, we are still together. And “Quick question” is still one of the better subject lines of a cold email. Because it is a natural way of opening a conversation.

But I’m getting ahead of myself here, so turn the page and read on.

It still puzzles me today how entrepreneurs try selling to companies and not people. Every time I tried “hacking” something with a technique, trick or shortcut, it fired back.

For instance, in that first sales job in 2009, I increased my closed deals by an amazing 50-75% in Week 5+6. I thought I “mastered it”. Far from it. Churn rate as in people not even paying their 1st invoice increased by 80-100%, so I performed worse.

So why do I tell you this story?

Your job is to figure out Product-Market-Fit and get traction before running out of money. 90% of startups unfortunately fail at that. The reason for commercial failure is NOT that your product is not great or that you do not work hard to succeed.

It is the inability to grow revenues and gain market traction as promised to investors. This happens if you either fail to not attract, win or keep enough customers fast enough.

But Switzerland does not have the sales culture and mindset you get in North America. B2B Sales is not a skill you learn even at university or in consulting. This makes it very hard to find great sales talent who think but also execute like entrepreneurs.

After 4+ years at a great business university and 3+ years in consulting, I joined a Swiss VC-backed AI startup as their 1st business employee. I knew a few things about sales from selling for an NGO on the street. And from helping to sell the last Tesla Roadsters in Switzerland in the early Tesla days. And from selling high-ticket deals at Accenture.

I figured out that B2B Tech sales in a Startup is very different than with a big brand. Accenture, Tesla and so on had a customer base and rucksack of sales materials. A startup does not, making it much harder than to get the job done than for a large company.

Together with the Founder & CEO, I established the new Onedot brand from scratch in the market in 2017. I also helped to transform Onedot from a project-based service to a product-based subscription model. Increasing revenue by 260% in less than 2 years was a consequence of that. The startup is doing 7-figure revenue today. But I could have done a lot of things a lot smarter, quicker, and with less pain.

I do not promise you a “Magic Potion” with this book to “Learn B2B Sales in 30 days to grow from 0 to 10 Million ARR in 12 months”. What I do promise you are 25 no bullshit, actionable, time-tested recipes to avoid common myths. This will help you to gain market traction faster, at less trial and error.

Introduction: How we got here in the first place

I want to help B2B entrepreneurs build annual revenues from CHF 0 to 10 million annual revenue.

But let’s take a step back. Actually let’s go back in time more than a decade. I was not always exactly radiating with confidence to ask people for their money. I was no “cool kid” in school and had no serious romantic relationship until university. I lacked the confidence to sell even myself. It thus took me 10 years after my first sales job to found my first own company SalesPlaybook in 2019.

Looking back, it is easy to tell the story that I started in sales back in 2009, in door-to-door sales. I am convinced I would not be together with my amazing wife Miriam without this job.

A job everybody frowns upon in Switzerland, even seasoned sales people. Because it is cold calling 200 people. Every day. Face to Face. When I was 20 years old, with 0 previous sales experience.

But I learnt that a “no” from people - or 195-197 “No’s” out of 200x asking do not kill you. After sometime - like a week (>1’000x “pitches”), they did not even bother me anymore that much. But the about 3-5 “deals” per day felt great. I learnt I could earn CHF 4’000 a month while getting an “Applied MBA in public speaking & human psychology”.

Of course, there were setbacks. There were days in the rain where I met 50 people or less - and signed up 0 of them. I was wet, drained and unhappy. Every Monday, I thought: “What am I doing here, asking people I don’t know to spend money on something they don’t know or need?”
A lot of startups think if they sell their vision Elon Musk-style early on, they will succeed. This is wrong. In the beginning (actually never), you should not shove your ideas down your customer’s throat. Balance getting customers to buy your product, entering partnerships and getting market feedback.

Verify that each development step is adding value. Let your first customers decide what the first commercial product generation looks like. But product-market-fit goes beyond that. You are not going to sell if you cannot help your clients to increase revenue, decrease costs or reduce risk. Your job as a Startup Founder is to figure out Product-Market-Fit and gaining market traction before running out of money. Most entrepreneurs unfortunately fail here.

Finding Product-Market-Fit is not the same as sales in an established company. Before you can launch to close your first 10 customers and then more, you need to figure out a solid business model. And then build a track record and high trust in your target market.

### 1. Build it and they will come

I know because I failed here with the initial SalesPlaybook app in 2019. I invested CHF 15k of my own money to provide “a vitamin, not a painkiller.” The app got 100 sign-ups in <14 days, but 0 revenue. The product was nice-to-have, but not a must. And I did this despite teaching a Design Thinking class to 200+ students.

**Product cycle of death: Building more will not lead to selling more**

No startup ever died of too little “advice”. Everybody and their grandmother will have an opinion what you should be. What you should build. How you should sell. And many other things you could not even think about yet.

There is a huge difference in the value of feedback from people paying you and others. People will tell you “your product is amazing and they would immediately buy if you only had that feature”. Words walk, money walks. Ask for their commitment to sign a customer agreement if you commit to provide the feature.

If people put their money where their mouth is and the feature is the missing thing for them to commit, they will. In the other 90%+ of cases, they will not.

Which is great. Because this way, you avoid building things you don’t want for people who don’t get enough value from it. And will not wire money to your bank account for it.

### 2. I’m not yet selling

Every job application is (trying) to sell. I have applied for jobs since I was 14 years old. Actually earlier, selling Pro Juventute post stamps in primary school.

You are always selling. Being an early-stage entrepreneur “the purest form of sales”. Because you do not have marketing, case studies, processes, referrals, technology and product in place. You have yourself and 1-5 other people.

Your success depends if you can convince another person to invest money into you. Because your business is you at this point.

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**Nobody waited for you. Few people will buy on their own**

Jordan Belfort ("The Wolf of Wall Street") got many things wrong in life. But one thing he got right is that every person has an action threshold and a pain threshold. Only if the pain threshold hits a trigger and the action threshold is low enough ("Make it easy to buy!"), a deal will close.

0 people wake up with this thought. “Let me invest my focus, time and energy to work on evaluating an offer <10 customers have purchased before. And then commit on the spot”.

People need 2-5 or more touch points with your offer before committing to it. Closing 6-figure deals often involves 7 active(!) stakeholders.

It is YOUR job to make the buyer journey as easy as possible and do the hard work.

It is YOUR responsibility the customer is able to buy from you.

It is NEVER the customer who is “too stupid, too busy, too unfocused” etc. to buy from you.

**Sell first, build the RIGHT thing, sell more of the same thing**

If you sell an offer you’re confident you can provide but have not built yet, you use the revenue to build it. If you build an offer you’re confident you can sell but have not sold yet, you go bankrupt.

Except if you have received tons of external funding, which has its own challenges. You might think now that sales does not fix everything. True. But a lot of things.

For fundraising, 5-10 deals (in the same niche) will grease your Seed round, CHF 1'000'000 ARR your Series A.

Top entrepreneurial talent wants to work in a rocket ship with market traction.

Customer testimonials build trust and make it easier to assess your credibility. Happy customers are your best salespeople.

Once you build a solution making 2-10 customers happy, don’t build other things. Focus on finding 20-100 customers with the same use case and profile as your customer base. Go deep on your proven offer to make it so valuable to make it “an offer you can’t refuse”.

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Startup “sales” is ⅓ business model, ⅓ go-to-market and ⅓ sales

I worked with 150+ B2B entrepreneurs. I also had conversations with 3-5x that number who did not become customers. “They will first raise funding, then hire people, then build, and then start selling”. “Our business plan says we will go from 0-1M ARR in less than 12 months, hit 2-4M ARR the year after and 10M ARR in less than x years.”

Unfortunately, I can count on one hand that this worked at least in Switzerland. There are Silicon Valley “role models” that achieved the above metrics. After raising $10-100M+ of funding. If you have less than that, start selling as early as possible.

0 pipeline today might mean 0 sales in the next 3-6 months

Sales forecasting is difficult. But sales people rarely close more deals, faster than expected. And they are never out of nowhere. We are as homo sapiens also terrible at understanding the dependency of time.

Some say on Sunday morning “I will never drink again”. While never is a long time in fact, Friday the world looks often different.

People think how the sale is going to close in 2 months if everything works as planned. The problem is: life gets in the way. People don’t call you back or are on vacation. New stakeholders, competitors, regulatory hurdles, IT, Compliance, Procurement, Finance, Legal enter the picture. And your Champion might leave the company.

Many entrepreneurs feel pressure to commit to “hit CHF 1’000’000 Annual Recurring Revenue by the end of the year”. Even if they are are at 500k and it is July. And their average sales cycle is 6-9 months and their pipeline is not even unweighted 500k.

Being realistic in startup sales sucks. But it is 100% necessary for survival. So either figure out how to cut your sales cycles in halve. Which you can’t.

Or start filling your sales pipeline with SQLs (Sales Qualified Leads). Every working day. Please start today, now. Even if you put this book aside until you booked at least 1 call.

Revenue is the primary driver of value creation.

Customers, employees and investors tell you they care about your vision and you as a person. True if you do great on both. To a certain extent.

But customers want to be sure you will still be around to support them in 5 years. Employees want to get paid. In cash. If in equity, they want to work at a place that’s going to be, successful.

Investors want you to 3-10x your valuation and if VCs 30-100x within 7 to 10 years. Upon 7-digit revenues, your valuation is a multiple of your annual revenue.

Great revenues let you get away with bad storytelling. But great storytelling does not let you get away with lack of revenues over time.
And if you are sure 10-100 other companies need your product as well. Need as in willing to commit you a 5-50% upfront payment if you commit to provide the solution within 3-6 months.

**Words talk. Money walks.**

You don’t know what your product is worth until somebody paid for it. In cash. From their own budget. Everybody will tell you how amazing your technology, your idea, your team, your brand is. Then it should be a no-brainer for them to put their money where their mouth is and invest a CHF 5-50k into your solution. If not, they will at least introduce you to 2-5 decision makers who need your solution. Now.

That rarely happens. Because commitment is different from words. Even try to give somebody CHF 5-50k of value for free. Give them a 100% money-back guarantee. And offer them that you double their investment if they are not happy with your offer.

Now you might ask “But what if my product does not deliver? Isn’t there a huge risk for me?”.

True that. But let me ask you back then: If you don’t believe 100% in your product, why should the customer?

**Product-driven growth is expensive**

Product-driven means you let people use your product without selling them something. Which means you do not get money for it. But as the product should sell itself, the product experience needs to be great. Building amazing, scalable products is expensive.

Make sure you have deep pockets to build an amazing product without relying too much on cashflow. If you have a ton of cash, build it and commit to product-driven growth. But don’t expect all your users to become customers, but only a fraction of them, like in 2-10%.

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**5. Incubators / Accelerators will teach me B2B sales**

I did 30+ B2B working sessions with incubators and accelerators not because they are bad. But because they are great at what they do and get help to fill gaps in their offering.

**Reality says no. Because they are not built for that.**

Most people running incubator and accelerator programs are not entrepreneurs themselves.

People running these programs are putting corporates’ money to good use. They position these corporates close to the participating entrepreneurs. They do this to help them scout great talent, technology and traction early on.

These programs typically take 2-6 months. B2B sales cycles often take 6-24 months from first contact to company-wide roll-out. The goal of these programs are often “PoCs” - Proof of Concepts.

B2B sales is not about proving concepts. It is about solving real-world, operational problems for customers. And getting 10-50% of the invested financial means as revenue for solving the problem.

**Fix sales BEFORE you join to get maximum value**

Incubators and accelerators are a great opportunity for accelerated trust building. The program introducing you to a corporate is much better than your cold outreach. But do you have your discovery questions, case studies and buyer journey ready? 80%+ of entrepreneurs I met feel “It would have been amazing if we would have been ready for these meetings. We then would have closed 2-3 deals instead of still discussing when to start with a Proof of Concept (PoC)”.

**No startup ever died of too little feedback**

Everybody and their grandmother will have an opinion what you should do next. Incubators and Accelerators do their best to attract Experts and Advisors for you. I know because I’ve been on that side as well. But the reality is: You do not need 20 more answers to questions you did not ask. You need to ask smarter questions.

If you have them and get great answers - great! If you have a proven professional asking you very specific questions you did not know you need to ask - great as well! But focus on asking and getting questions, not answers.
Congratulation. You have sold your first deal and “crossed the vanity chasm”. Many entrepreneurs say the first signed deal was the best feeling in their career. But most small businesses go bankrupt because of cash flow issues. 5 months after I started SalesPlaybook, I hit my 1st year bookings target of CHF 75,000. I “reported to my angel investor” aka telling my wife that I hit my annual target. And that I will go on vacation for a few months (only joking of course, I was hungry as f*** to build the business). She congratulated me with a smile. And asked a question nobody discusses in “Startup Porn”: “That’s great. But how many invoices have you sent? How much money did you receive?”

My humbled answer was: 0 and 0. I worked for 5 months and did not pay myself a salary. Part of me thought I hit my target, but I had CHF 0.00 to show for my hard work. Understanding time, conversion and fundamentals on financials early on is of utmost importance.

If you’re laughing out loud now how stupid the man is, please stop. Your professional network is the light in the story. It is bright there and searching is easy. But after laughing on the above, why not look for the keys where you think you lost them? Lead generation needs to be predictable and repeatable. Your network is a somewhat “One and done” exercise for that.

I know because I went through my LinkedIn network of then 3000+ contacts at the start of SalesPlaybook. I selected the 20% for my company mission interesting people. I then reached out to the top 2% to gather feedback. It is a great exercise and low-hanging fruit, so do that. But after 4 weeks, you’re done. Move on and think about how you could get to 100 customers with a repeatable market offering. Customers buying from you because the problem you solve is important and urgent for them. And people who are the right people to take action on it. Not because they like you and want to help you.

“I have a large network” is the lamest pitch of any sales person

Some sales candidates answer the question “How are you going to build up your sales funnel?” with “I have a large network”. Put them on a commission-only contract or call bullshit on that. If coming from your competitor, they will often not be able to poach their former client base to become your customers. Because it would be illegal, immoral and not even possible for them. Ask them what they will do once they worked on “their large network”. And find out if their fundamentals are rock-solid. And if they will be able to prospect, drive and close deals even in a completely different market.

Predictable revenue comes from repeatable outbound sales

Inbound leads are great. I am not going to argue with here for once. Inbounds are further in their buyer journey. Your direct customer acquisition costs were 0 so far. And they might tell you about their problems and willingness to invest without you asking for it. There is only 1 problem with inbound leads: They are very hard to predict and make repeatable. Sometimes they come, sometimes they do not. But you want to bulletproof your sales engine. In a way that you know exactly how much pipeline you are going to generate in the next quarter. Independent of luck, trends and other unpredictable factors.

Which is why I recommend investing into outbound prospecting from Day 1 and keep at it forever. Confirm which channel works best for you. If this is email, LinkedIn, phone calls or TikTok does not matter as long as it’s working. Predictably, repeatably, independent of you as the CEO.
80% of companies die due to cashflow, because money is going out the door faster than the Cash Conversion Cycle accelerates. Speed is of essence.

**Trust drives speed. Case studies, credibility and authority build trust**

PoCs can destroy speed. Business cases can destroy speed. PowerPoint can destroy speed.

Because they force people to increase their action threshold.

What drives speed is trust. Clients need to trust you, the company, the product and the market to take a buying decision. Start with your credibility.

Your credibility builds upon your intent, your integrity, your capabilities and your results.

People feel if your intent is not genuine, if you see them only as “a deal”, they “feel your commission-breath”. People find out about your integrity, if you say one thing and do another. The world is becoming ever smaller. Any bullshit you tell is only a reference call you will never know existed away. This is not to scare you, but to think of your sales career as a life-long endeavour, not a quarterly quota.

Do people trust you that you are capable of solving the problem? Do they trust in your product? Do they trust in the market that you actually solved the problem before?

Customer testimonials with proven bottom-line impact are your best sales arguments. If in doubt, discuss 1-3 customer-specific case studies and have 0 PowerPoint slides. Never PowerPoint without social proof. You might not yet have real, documented, authorised success stories to use. But still tell your story along a use case on what a customer will experience when working with you.

When you get “pushed into the PoC corner”, reply that you’d love setting up a reference call with a customer instead. And then start creating operational value right away. Be confident enough to offer the customer a 100% action-based money back guarantee. Your trust in your offering will translate to the customer - both ways. If you’re not confident to offer reference calls or risk reversals, go back to fix your offering.

**Everything always takes longer than expected**

Your internal sales process takes 2-3 weeks. The buyer journey you mapped takes 2-3 months. But please be well aware that your offering is tying in to a larger initiative at the client. Which might be political, not in a hurry, getting stopped funded, or be downright political. And thus take ages.

Rarely does a customer call you to say “I go an extra CHF 100k budget and would love to start immediately”. Except if the end of their fiscal year is nearing. And they need to get rid of some money to get the same budget next year again. Then strike without mercy, get a deal done even without the exact scope and celebrate.

But always plan for the first case. Because 5-digit deals typically take 3-6 months, 6-digit deals 6-18 months and 7-digit deals even longer.

My coach once said “You cannot make a sales cycle shorter - but you can make it longer”. At first I did not understand what he meant. I then realised that in today’s buyer-centric world, our job as a salesperson is not (anymore) to “present our offering” (never, ever present!). But to help the buyer take an informed decision by helping them to navigate THEIR world. And not trying to bring them into your world.

**SMBs first, Corporates second**

The majority of successful businesses I know started out with SMBs - Small & Medium Businesses. They move much faster and have a lower cluster risk. They have also less complex and custom requirements. And in most cases, they are glad to serve as references for case studies, webinars or reference calls. This not to say corporates are not attractive clients. But be realistic that corporate buyers have by their nature a higher risk aversion. This is the way a corporate ladder works as the impact on the whole business is higher if things go wrong.

A strategy I have seen working well countless times is to mix things up. Establish a very active SMB pipeline with the intent to close deals this and next quarter. But keep “updating” corporates about your progress. This way corporates see that your offering is getting better every time they see you. Once you hit a critical number of customers and case studies in their ecosystem, they will work with you.

**A CRM is like sleep. You can go without it for quite a while and skip steps. But you will pay dearly for it. You also do not need a bespoke box spring bed (aka Salesforce Unlimited with add-ons) to make things happen.**

**Your head is great. But you want to build a business, right?**

There’s a thing called “bus risk”. If you get hit by a bus, what happens? Investors, banks and others want you to get insurance for yourself. Because they don’t want the business to be dependent on you. But that’s exactly what it is. If the company is in your head, email, Excel spreadsheets and sketches in your notebook.

Which is why you need to take a conscious decision if you want to be a freelancer or build a 7- or even 8-figure business. Even if you are a freelancer, get a lean CRM and save yourself some time and even more headaches.

If you do not do this, going on longer vacations, delegating processes and handing over relationships is not workable. Or at least a lot harder then if your brain is available to others.
Get a CRM for free, in less than 2 hours, with 0 technical background

A myth in the sense of concern (or excuse) not to take action is that “a CRM is too expensive for us”. Cut it and save me the tears. You can start for free with Hubspot, Pipedrive starts at $12 a month, Salesforce at $25 as of this writing. If you need to think about investing <$500 to set your business up for scale, you’re in the wrong business.

Another myth is that you need to be technical to setup a CRM. I’ve been a certified Salesforce Admin for 4+ years and agree it can be a bit of a beast sometimes. Nothing prevents you from getting a basic CRM, email and calendar sync. And automating meeting scheduling and adding your 5-10 most used templates. This is workable in less than 2 hours. Now go do it, start small, then build from there.

Start with fundamentals, get quick wins, go from there.

“Implementing a CRM seems like a huge project”. Yes - if you make it one. I know because I co-led 2 large Salesforce Quote-to-Cash transformations where the client paid 900k+ and 2M+ in the end. Because they had complex business processes, 50+ users, tons of exceptions and more.

I understand you’re still working here towards hitting CHF 1 million annual revenue and thus do NOT have 50+ people in your organisation. So don’t do what corporates do because they need to. Start with the out-of-the-box setup, keep complexity low, only configure what you need, do not customize if not necessary.

And if you need your CRM to talk to other systems, Zapier and your CRM marketplace gets you a long way before custom integrations.

Find 500 people with the same demographics, challenges and objectives

In the 2010s, you hit up the phone book and asked around. And went to networking events to find people that want your product or service.

It’s 2021 now. LinkedIn Sales Navigator is helping you filter from 700M+ people to a niche profile of 100-500 people with the same demographics. Tools like ocean.io or Owler help you find Lookalike companies within minutes instead of days. Yes, these tools cost you CHF 80-300 per month. But if finding product-market-fit is a thing for you, that’s money well spent. Either way, ask your existing customers for referrals, groups, chats, events where they and their colleagues hang around. And get more of these similar customers instead of pursuing a “spray & pray” approach. And shouting “we need to do more of the same, even if it is not working”!

Be real about your unit economics and conversions

Your unit economics of the past lie to you how your unit economics of the future will look like.

Going from 0 to 10 paying customers is hard. Like much harder than to go from 10 to 50. 5-figure deals from your network might close much quicker than “cold” leads. Because your contact did a lot of the trust building already.

Invest in understanding your sales cycles, deal sizes and customer acquisition costs. Without making things complicated. Let’s take Customer Acquisition Costs (CAC) as an example. Start with a Google Sheet and assign yourself an internal hourly rate of e.g. CHF 100. Make 4 columns for emails, calls, meetings and offers and fill in the hours spent per Closed/Won deal. I know this does not incorporate time on Closed/Lost deals and channel metrics. But it works at least to raise awareness.

9. My network is enough to find product-market-fit

I started SalesPlaybook with a network of 3'000+ LinkedIn connections and as a HSG, Tesla and Accenture Alumni network. 1 out of my first 20 clients came from that. I also am much happier to provide friends with an amazing product now than to show very little in the beginning.

Again. Your network is NOT enough to find product-market-fit

I know, I know, we talked about this before. But let’s go again. Because by now you closed some deals from your network. And think you’re on the right track towards product-market-fit. I know 10+ year old scale-ups that surpassed 5M ARR (been at 7-8M before). That still have no idea which industry, buyer persona and use case works best for them. Which is why they still struggle with lead generation, conversions and profitability.

10. Channel sales will fix market traction

I went through 100+ emails, 25+ hours worked, 10+ calls and 1 physical workshop with SAP Hybris as “the potential was huge - we could get 300 customers in 1 niche if this works!”. I got 0 customers, 0 revenue and even 0 time in front of SAP Hybris customers out of this.

Channel partners have day jobs. If shit hits the fan, you don’t matter

People are egocentric, irrational creatures. Sorry to break it to you, but that’s the way we are. Survive & procreate. Channel partners are consisting of people with a day job. They survive and procreate if they do their day job well and stay focused. Which means not taking away valuable time from their day job (survive). And from their family (procreate).
If you can’t sell your product, nobody else can - or will

“There’s a huge opportunity for channel partners to make tons of money from selling your product”. Sure thing. But how easy is it to sell your product? Nobody else then you ever did? You did not do it 10 times this quarter? Then I am out. Because this looks like tons of hard work without a guaranteed reward or any of your equity upside.

Come back once I can make an email intro for you and in 2 out of 3 cases, a deal closes and I get a 4-digit amount from that email.

Don’t be stingy with referral fees and incentives.
Invest in your partners

Which gets us to one of my favourite founder questions: “How much must we pay partners for selling our solution? More like 3% or 5%?” W.T.F! I mean, if I love your product after benefitting from it myself, I will refer you no matter what. But if talking money, don’t focus too much on cutting the cake. Focus on making a big cake. Like 10-15% for qualified introductions and 15-25% for co-selling with you until the signed deal.

Oh and before I forget: Don’t sign lifetime referral contracts. Investors don’t like them. Your CFO will not like them. Appreciate the work and trust a partner puts in you. Make it a 1, 2, 3 year referral deal. But no lifetime deals. Because life is long.

100-250k: Closing 5 deals in a niche

So when do you know you reached Product-Market-Fit? Nobody will tell you “You reached 98% Product-Market-Fit”. And there will be no bells & whistles ringing. Europe bolsters a strong innovation culture. Switzerland is even the world’s most innovative country by the World International Patent Organization’s (WIPO) ranking. The same is not true for its sales culture. Which is very different and arguably less developed compared to North America. B2B Sales is not a subject you learn about in school, at university, in society and even most companies. This makes it very hard to find great sales talent who think and execute like entrepreneurs.

So this leaves you with a few options as a founder:
You try to do everything yourself. But you are already juggling strategy, product development, admin, hiring and fundraising.
You hire a senior sales guy for CHF 150’000+ per year who knows his stuff. But that person is rarely as hungry and hands-on as you need that early employee to be.
You hire an affordable junior sales guy who is hungry and hands-on. But without support, that person will struggle to ramp-up sales and set your startup up for scale.
I know a handful of entrepreneurs who sold CHF 1’000’000 annual revenue all by themselves. So Option A) is workable, but hard and rare to work out. And the longer you execute the day-to-day sales activities yourself, the longer it will take you to reach scalability.

From my experience, option B) is difficult and risky. In a startup, you are hiring not for sales skills, but also for entrepreneurial skills and attitude. This much needed “fire” and “hunger” to build things with the founders is hard to find in combination with 10+ years of sales expertise. Not to mention the (lack of) financial resources required to attract these colleagues.

So what about Option C)? People can learn, practice and succeed in sales. Unlike neurobiology or quantum physics, people can learn sales within months, not years. You “only” need to make sure you equip young hungry talent with the right support to ramp-up quickly. But are you already at the point where hiring your first full-time sales person makes sense?

Let’s review 5 common B2B sales myths at this revenue stage.

11. I know what the customer wants

Even if you do... everybody hates an upfront “Know-It-All”. The same is true for “Told you”. Let me simplify: Seek to understand before being understood.
Prescription without diagnosis is malpractice. Doctors lose their license for that

Doctors are amazing sales people. The bad ones prescribing you something without your consent and buy-in can get into jail. Because they need to make you aware of the potential consequences of taking a medication or undergo surgery.

There is a reason why you don’t tell your doctor “Let me discuss this internally and get back to you. Then I might do a Proof of Concept. Then I might negotiate with you. Then I might not get back to you.” The reason is that the doctor diagnoses you first and only then follows up with a a prescription.

You got 2 ears and 1 mouth. There’s a good reason for this. Seek to understand before being understood. Listen first. Then ask smart questions. Then ask follow-up questions. Then rephrase if you understood everything. Ask more questions if useful. Then share general options you see that could help the other person or team. Get feedback if they see the world like you see it. Only then even think about pitching and "prescribing" your solution.

Stop selling, let people buy. Think buyer journey, not sales process.

The world is becoming ever more buyer-centric. Buyers are better informed today than even 5 years ago. They have 5-50 data points about your offering and ecosystem before you see them the first time. The good news is that this saves you a lot of required pitching time and demos. The bad news is that most sales people are still very "demo-centric". Even website CTAs (Call To Actions) are saying “Book a demo. Get a demo.” People don’t want demos. If they want presentations, they watch a movie and grab a beer. People want to understand and check if you 1. understand, 2. can and 3. will solve their problems. Without them spending a fortune and jumping through hoops to make it happen. This is why your job is not to “push” an offering down people’s throat no matter what. But to helping them take an informed decision. When entering 5- and especially 6-figure deals, you will have 2-10 stakeholders involved. This is not only a lot of work for you, but also for your buyer!

It’s 2021, not the “Roaring 80s of ABC - Always Be Closing”

Sales in the last century used to be a lot of large “one-off” transactions. Enterprise sales meant to lock-in 7- or even 8-figure deals and then “be done” for good. Because it was more or less a one-off transaction in value in exchange for money. Which locked the customer in for often years.

That has changed. We live in a subscription economy. Even Enterprise Software like Salesforce can start with a 4- or 5-digit deal. If people want to change providers because their problem is not solved, they will.

Which is why “Always Be Closing” can ruin your reputation as a sales professional. “AUA” sales - “Anhauen - Umhauen - Abhauen” is a bad idea today. Because you will get 0 customer lifetime value beyond the initial deal. 0 referrals and 0 testimonials. But 100% churn as soon as it’s possible for the client.

In 2021, B2B sales is about building trust and lasting relationships so your sales efforts compound over time. If you close an initial 10k deal, that deal can often lead to a 100k deal. And 2 referrals to clients with the same use case and similar revenue potential. Get that 250k in revenue from 1 customer. Focus on adding value and helping people take informed decisions and build from there.

12. It’s time to sell big tickets to corporates

“We have 9 months of runway before running out of cash. We have great conversations with 10 enterprise prospects. And if even only 1 or 2 of them close, we will be fine and even ready to raise our Series A.”

Big tickets take big time - duration and time investment

The problem is: Large corporations rarely invest 100k+ with you within 9 months after the initial conversation. Even if they do, they often have payment terms of 90 to 120, but at least 60 days. Which means adding another 2-4 months to the 9-18 month enterprise sales cycle. Even if you close 5 enterprise deals after the statement above, you will have 0 cash after 9 months. And go out of business if no other sources of income are available.

I am not advocating against selling to enterprises in principle. But for understanding the Cash Conversion Cycle from lead to opportunity (2-3 months) to booking (3-8 months). And then to revenue (2-3 months) to cash (2-4 months), which is crucial for your survival.

Big corporates love letting others trying and failing or succeeding first

“We could do great things together”, the Founder & CEO said to the Buyer Persona at a big corporate. Both people are aware that if they do, it means a huge deal for the Founder & CEO and a side-project for the buyer. If nothing happens, the Founder & CEO has sleepless nights. The buyer continues life as planned.

The thing is: Corporates have existed long before you existed and have been (kind of) fine. They did not wait for you to call them. They might have tried fixing the problem you fixed. But it was either not important, not urgent, or not workable enough for them. Or they failed big time with one of your competitors. And are now “burnt” to trust the solution approach you’re proposing.

Don’t be(come) dependent on 1 or 2 big customers

Power balance matters. Corporates might play “status games” with you to establish they are Alpha and you are Beta. Because they are on a global scale. But to be successful in sales,you need to get “Local Alpha Status” in your domain. And avoid being needy at all costs (more on that in the book “Pitch Anything” by Oren Klaff).
The thing is: If a customer brings in more than let’s say 30% of your revenue, he has leverage on you. Because if they work with somebody else in the market, they are 100% fine. But you are 30% short of income, which would destroy your growth plans and cash in the bank. And impair your freedom to operate your business. And they know it. Which is why 10x 100k deals are much better than 1x 1M deal.

13. It's time to hire a VP Sales

I had the honour of interviewing a VP Sales candidate for a Swiss scale-up. The candidate looked promising with 4+ years industry and 20+ years sales experience. But he spent 40+ out of 60 minutes talking about how he led the sales team and how he sees sales working. While asking 0 questions even after I asked him 3 times if he has any. I then asked him if he had any questions for me and got a no. I then asked him if he sees himself as an Elephant (has big ears to listen to) or a Lion (has a big mouth to speak). “An Elephant of course - let me tell you about it!”...

A VP Sales leads 3-10 sales people. Do you have 3-10 sales people?

If you have that amount of sales people before you hit 250k annual revenue, you are either backed by a VC who tells you “burn my money, growth at all costs”. Or you are very ambitious that they will scale your business to the moon. Or stupid because they cost you more than you can generate in revenue and you will go bankrupt.

I am confident you are not stupid at all and do not have 3-10 sales people yet. Which is why it is NOT time to hire a traditional “Mr. Dashboard” VP sales yet. Hire an Account Executive if you got enough leads for that person to work with. 80% of entrepreneurs at this stage don’t have consistent, predictable leads coming in. In this case hire a Sales Development Representative to fill the pipeline.

There are 48 types of VP Sales. Make sure you get the right type

Jason Lemkin put up an amazing free video on why “Mr. Dashboard” is not a great fit for your stage yet. The misconception here is that a 6-figure annual revenue company needs “normal” sales people that do just that. Sales. The complication is that you don’t yet have product-market-fit. Your market offering and even business model is still changing on a 3- to 6-month basis. And there is much work that traditional sales people either do not want or unable to help with.

VP Sales are a big investment. Can they add 500k+ in annual revenue?

Sales is about leverage. I recently heard of an Enterprise Sales Executive pocketing $4.5M in commission(!) from selling a $50M deal. Which is very desirable for a sales person to do, no questions asked.

If a sales person wants to earn $250k per year, you are likely to want that person to bring in about $1M in annual sales (4x OTE - On Target Earnings). The problem is that the salesperson will most likely be unable to bring in that revenue at your current stage. Because it would mean growing 400-600% per year just from what that person sold. This is very rarely workable due to product, operations, delivery or technology constraints. Which is why you are going to either overspend on a “traditional” VP Sales at that stage. Or to disappoint the sales person as you will not pay $250k if the person can only bring in $250-400k.

14. It's time to expand to new verticals

Facebook started with Harvard. Then Ivy League. Than US colleges. Than other colleges. AirBnB started with the San Francisco Bay Area. Then San Francisco. Than California. “Going global” sounds great, but make sure you do it if it makes 100% sense, and only then.

Focus on a niche. At all times. Then take the next closest niche.

Sales should not be a mind blowing intellectual challenge. But it is if you make it. If every sale you attempt is in a different market, buyer persona, buyer journey and use case. Then you will need to jump hoops mentally. But also product-wise and commercially every time you try to close a deal.

Unfortunately, that is what I see happening all the time with entrepreneurs. They are “big logo hunting”, chase every inbound lead and try to “Always Be Closing”. Because money is always short, ego is there and the prospect might even ask for the deal. But with this sales “strategy”, the phrase “Your tech startup is a glorified consultancy” might apply forever. Because you are selling and delivering custom, project-based services. Instead of product-based subscriptions or an otherwise scalable offering.

Which is why focusing on a niche is as I see it the most important, but most neglected decision to stick with for any successful company.

Expansion is dilution. Dilution kills focus. Focus is your biggest asset.

“This is (not) working! So we need to conquer new markets now!”

If things go great, entrepreneurs strive for expansion. If things go bad, entrepreneurs strive for expansion. I have seen this go as far as every person in a company “leads” a different market offering or even business model.

The thing is: You are and will for the foreseeable future be resource-constrained. Too constrained to dilute your efforts on various offerings, geographies or even business models. Focus is one of your biggest assets. But expansion kills focus because you're
It seems finding a niche and achieving product-market-fit is harder than scaling sales from 500k to 1M annual revenue. Because the second one is doing “more of the same” to a certain extent (the crossing the chasm challenge is real!). Finding product-market fit is hard because there is often no defined process to it. And it might be more individualised for your case than “just” closing 10 more deals in the same niche.

Which is why you should invest a ton of energy into understanding the attractiveness and “readiness” for many niches. You can apply advanced lead generation methods and talking to as many potential buyers as possible in the beginning for this.

Stop selling until you understand the problems in your niche well. Then win 5-10 customers in that niche, create 1-2 case studies. And then approach 20-50 other companies in that niche. If you can execute on this within 6-12 months, it seems like you found an attractive niche. If not, dig deeper to take an informed decision if you are the problem. If the product is not ready. Or if you are ignorant to existing challenges. Or if trust is not there yet. Then decide if the niche is (not) a great fit for your company.

Only once you have validated the a niche, drive expansion to another niche. But not any niche, but the closest one. Change only one variable such as geography, adjacent industry. Think e.g. investment banks -> private equity firms -> family offices -> hedge funds. NOT automotive and not even insurance.

“I have 7 Kalashnikovs (Account Executives), but no ammunition for them.”, a VP Sales of a 5M+ ARR scale-up told me. Because all but one of their SDRs quit recently. If you must establish an organisation, establish a lead generation engine. Predictable lead generation typically leads to predictable revenue. With or without 7 Account Executives.

If in doubt, fill the sales funnel.

There are tons of problems in B2B sales that kill companies. Such as neediness to close a deal or not enough conversations to validate a niche. Or frustrated sales people that leave because they don't get enough deals done.

Filling your sales funnel often helps to make the above go away. Because more leads mean less neediness to get one specific deal done. Sales reps have more conversations and learn faster which niches, sales arguments and offerings work or not. and sales people thrive because they actually close deals and make money.

Sales is also a numbers game to a certain extent. Double the amount of qualified leads and you will typically double your opportunities, new customers, revenue and cash.

“We build shit and we sell shit and everything else is bullshit”

“Learn how to build. Learn how to sell. If you can do both, you will be unstoppable”. This is one my favourite quotes from Naval Ravikant. Because it captures the essence of entrepreneurship in less words than most people take to introduce themselves.

Most people who give advice to early-stage startups have been or are still working for much larger companies. They need a sales organisation, because they have 10+ sales people, but at least 10+ FTEs at all.

But as a startup, you for quite some time do not need people who’s main job is to keep things organised. You need people who build shit and sell shit so you generate enough revenue. This way you build trust with customers and investors if you need them. And cashflow to pay salaries and other expenses. And market traction as this has the biggest potential impact on the mission you set out to achieve.

Middle management before 10 FTEs might be too early

Establishing a sales organisation is not contributing (yet) to the above. Because you do not need one yet. Focus on building and selling, and the rest will take care of itself. OK, let’s be honest, the CEO aka CFO / COO / VP Product / Head of HR / Head of Problems will take care of itself. Hire managers once you can afford them to enable you building and selling more yourself.
Only 0.5% of all founded businesses ever make CHF 1’000’000 in annual revenue. That is 1 out of 200. Of people that actually incorporate a company and not just do some freelance work and talk about “being entrepreneurs” because they “built” a No-Code App on 2 weekends.

Many entrepreneurs are also comfortable running their own 6-figure lifestyle business, taking a nice salary and some dividends and that is that. Which is perfectly fine. But since you are reading a book with a title starting with “From 0 to 10M…”, I understand you are hungry for more.

There’s no “bells and whistles”. But inbound leads tell a lot.

Be honest to yourself if 50%+ of people approaching you have the problem(s) you are solving. If this type of inbound leads (“people coming to you”) is increasing over time, you are on the right track. There is no “magic moment” or even a Key Performance Indicator for Product-Market-Fit. You cannot declare that you now on the 18th of June 2021 (while I am writing these lines) hit product-market fit.

Which is why your best shot to assess your journey towards product-market fit are “proxies”. Shorter sales cycles, less open questions on “how this works” and higher profitability. Also, more referrals, more customers in the same niche and a decreasing need to individualise your market offering.

Message-market fit leads to product-market fit

Like it or not, signaling is real. If you want to solve a particular problem, people need to know that you do or will do. It is great have message-market fit, then solving the discussed problem. Much better for sure than building a product without a validated market first. And then put out messaging on how many great features your product has.

Which is why you should embrace overarching principles like focusing your whole messaging. Focus first on the solved challenges (WHY) and “What’s in for the customer” (WHAT). And only then on what exactly it is what you do with your company (HOW).

Build a "cookie-cutter". B2B sales is ideally 0 intellectual work.

A “cookie-cutter” is referring to the part of a conveyor belt that cuts cookies in a factory. It cuts every cookie the same way, every day., at scale, in great quality.

That is what you want your sales to look like. Running Proof of Concepts with different use cases and a lot of inputs for your product roadmap is stimulating. But not an efficient use of resources at all.

Which is why you need to move on from the consulting model. “Tell me your problem, I will tell you I can do it, get your commitment, and then somehow figure out how to deliver a solution as we go”. A product-based, scalable market offering requires you to not every time change the product. But to find enough “cookies” (think delicious customers) for your “cutter” that result in customer delight.

Money is keeping score as a consequence of value creation

If you are in entrepreneurship to make a lot of money, you might also work as a consultant, a banker, or a consultant for bankers. Or the equal for engineering. Because most startups fail. You will at times be on the brink of bankruptcy and be unable to cash out hard currency for often 5-10 years.

I also aim to become a millionaire in cash (valuations are vanity until cash hits the bank) before I turn 40. But I would do the exact same thing I do today every week day even if it would not pay money at all. Because I am convinced this is how I can have the biggest potential impact on helping entrepreneurs change our world for the better.

I hear so many people declaring that “They are doing this just until they hit Escape Velocity. When they become financially independent, they will quit and chill out.” Escape Velocity refers to the amount of money one needs to not need to work anymore in life if choosing so. Such as a mid 7-digit amount depending on standards of living.

Most billionaires are still working like crazy. Even if they could live for 10’000 years while working 0 more hours. Because they love it. Because what they do is their purpose in life. Because they are still hungry to build, to sell, to achieve. Not for the money, but for the before mentioned reasons.
Many employed people hate their job. They “do it for the money”. The never quit their hated job because they are earning too much to quit due to opportunity costs and FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out). But not enough to become financially independent.

Which is why I would invest in yourself to build a high-value, industry- and geography-independent skillset. One that you enjoy applying every day. With or without money. Because money follows if value is there.

“Colour of money” is a real thing.
New versus existing revenue matters

One of our favourite rapid fire questions to ask guests on our B2B Startup Sales podcast is “If you need to choose between one unit of revenue from a new versus from an existing customer, which one do you prefer, and why?”.

The question is rapid to fire. But I am still surprised how long it makes seasoned entrepreneurs and sales people think. Because they rarely thought the question before. If you are unclear about the above question, your sales strategy will not be crystal clear. Your incentive structure will be ambiguous. And your future team structure not defined (think “Hunter Sales” vs “Customer Success”).

It’s time to fix your Cash Conversion Cycle. Before you die.

“Opportunity is vanity, revenue is sanity, and cash is reality.”
Cash kills startups. Or more precisely the lack of it. But often people confuse market traction, bookings, revenue with cash. I know many successful companies that went out of business not because they ran out of traction, but cash.

The most important variable I see first-time entrepreneurs missing is time. Every intelligent and driven entrepreneur (most of them are!) will figure out product-market fit and build market traction eventually. The key question is if they do so before running out of money.

Let’s run a quick thought experiment. Your startup has 10 employees, of which everyone costs you 5k per month. So 50k go out of the bank every month, no matter what. You have currently 200k cash in the bank. In 4 months, you will hit 0 and your employees will become very nervous. Because they see you will be unable to put money to their bank account if nothing changes.

Now the question is not if you can win a 50k deal to pay 1 month of salaries. But if you can do so within 4 months. Actually not winning (bookings) and then invoicing (revenue) the deal. But getting the customer to pay you in full (cash).

Which means every day you can speed up your market traction with the above cost structure has a monetary value of >1.5k for you. So if you can invest (think ROI, not costs) into anything that will result in a 3-10x ROI in the above model, you should do it. This can be a CRM, a lead generation tool or a Sales Acceleration coach (No sales pitch to work with us. But if you felt it was one: That was it I guess).

18. Domain expertise is a must for sales hires

Domain expertise can be teached, quickly. Attitude not.

Let’s look at the areas you are hiring for:

- **Functional Expertise**: “Classic” sales experience, knowledge and acumen. Such as generating & qualifying leads, following a structured sales process and closing deals.
- **Domain Expertise**: Intelligence, experience and network in your field of business. Such as compliance solutions for large financial service companies.
- **Technical Expertise**: Deep understanding of your technology and its ecosystem. Such as machine learning for unstructured regulatory & compliance documentation.

Candidates can ramp up on the above areas with the right assets and processes in place. If the candidate is able and willing to learn them that is. So assessing candidates against these criteria is useful. But not enough to make a hiring decision.

A Leadership IQ study tracked 20’000 new hires over 3 years and saw 46% of them fail within 18 months. Only 11% were due to the above 3 areas. 89% of them failed due to a lack of coachability, emotional intelligence and motivation and temperament. So in short Attitude. It is much harder to change people’s attitude than to train them in hard skills. No difference if you hire an intern or your Chief Sales Officer.

Which is why hiring for attitude before functional, technical and domain expertise seems to be smart.

Focus on “jobs to be done”, not what sales people are selling you

“We are looking for a sales person - do you know somebody?” is a question I get on a weekly basis from entrepreneurs. My answer to that: “Yes sure, I’d estimate 1’000+ sales people as part of my job and ecosystem. But more much more important than if I know people or not: What exactly do you want this person to achieve?”

This simple question often earns me a puzzled look along the lines of “What do you mean?”. I mean there is a huge difference what you expect from a sales person: Get people from 0 to knowing you (SDR - Sales Development Rep)... ...to having a conversation with you and discussing a collaboration (BDR - Business Development Rep)... ...to committing to a collaboration (AE - Account Executive)... ...to staying with you for a long time (CSM - Customer Success Manager).

Of course you can hire for a “jack of all trades”. That is also great at building things. But think back, if the person can build shit and sell shit, the person might not be unstoppable. But at least consider building a company him/herself and not be for hire.

Which is why you need to be(come) clear upfront what you need to achieve right now and not what talent you get in front of you. You might interview a Senior Account Executive that is great at closing 6-figure deals. But crap at generating leads. But if you have an empty sales pipeline, that person will be expensive and non-value adding to your team today.
25 B2B Sales Myths Debunked

Domain expertise can come with a “this is how the world works” mind

Hiring senior sales people with 10-20 years of industry experience can be a great asset. If the person is still hungry, humble and malleable enough. If not, that person might not thrive in the fast-changing, innovation-driven environment that you are operating in.

Unfortunately, I see that working out in less than 1 out of 10 cases. Because hunger, humble, adaptability, but often a combination of these traits is lacking. We all “grow up” with a specific paradigm on “how the world works”. It is hard for a person to change their Status Quo Thesis on “how to do things”.

Which is why it is often a smart decision to engage such people not as full-time employees. But as KOL - Key Opinion Leaders in a function as advisors. This ways they can provide tremendous value to helping you build trust. And share insights on how the world currently operates from their point of view.

19. Sales structure kills my culture

Hollywood does not write movie scripts to kill creativity

“But a sales script will make me sound like a robot. Let me wing it.”

Winging it in the sense of “going freestyle” is NOT something I recommend any professional. Leonardo di Caprio does not learn a script word-by-word because he is a bad actor. Rammstein practices their shows to perfection not because they are bad musicians. Roger Federer does not enter Wimbledon with a game plan because he is a bad tennis player.

They all practice at home, rehearse with others and then follow a structured approach. Because they are amazing professionals who want to maximise their chances at success.

Which is why you should too. So you can go off-script when things go well and it benefits the buyer journey. And so you can go BACK to the script if things go south. Which they always do at one point.

Scaling up requires repeatability, repeatability requires structure

“But our offering / sales process / product / <other excuse> is too complex to standardise. Well that might be true today. But it’s bad news because you will never scale your business if that truth remains. Because then you need highly intelligent, experienced and thus expensive people to sell.

“Sorry my friend, I did not have time to write a shorter letter” is a quote attributed to Goethe that I love. Because it captures the essence that everybody can create complexity. Only exceptional people are able to simplify the complex. And therewith make it repeatable.

Which is why you need to reduce complexity first. Standardise second, industrialise third and only then think about automating fourth. This process forces you to make your sales structure repeatable. As in people-independent so other people than you can sell without you.

Cluster risk kill startups, founder-dependency is a cluster risk.

Every successful organisation I know has visionaries. But functions also with “normal” professionals. It is unrealistic to only hire world-class people for every role once you grow. Due to budget-constraints, talent availability and the basic “jobs to be done” of the position which not always need visionaries.

The founder(s) of a startup are also its biggest cluster risk. If the founders all share a taxi and die in an accident, the startup also dies in most cases.

Which is why you want to establish a people-independent structure before you need to in order to reduce cluster risk. Or to take a vacation of more than one week without worrying about what might happen.

20. Let’s figure out sales once and we’re done

1% better every day is 37x better every year.

Sales is like any other profession not about “figuring it out”. The click funnel ads on Instagram on “how to make $20k passive income a month without working 12 hour days within weeks” might sound very tempting. The same way the “Get to 10% body fat in 60 days” sound. Or the way hard drugs work. They might even “fix” your problem. But they don’t give you the consistent results you need to build a company. Because they only help you to “hack” a way to “success”. Without helping you to make consistent, repeatable progress.

Which is why it seems much better to write down one “Learning of the Day” every day. Revisit these once a month if not once a week, implement, adapt and get a bit better every day. Because sales is changing all the time as you learn, get different customers, use cases, people, market niches, products etc.

You will sell different deals to different buyers in different models. Adapt.

“One size fits all” does not apply in B2B sales. An advanced sales method like MEDDIC might be an overkill to sell 5-10k deals. But you also will not sell 25-250k deals with a click funnel in 1 discovery & closing call.

Which is why you need to understand well what you are actually selling to. And even more how they buy offerings like yours. You might think SaaS subscription (Opex). They might think in 3-year investments (Capex) adding a proprietary solution. You might think in quarters, they might think years. But also in months of their project timeline if the problem is urgent.

The challenge is that you will often sell to very different stakeholders with different interests within the SAME deal. think CEO, CFO, CIO, Head of Project Management, Head of R&D and Operations Manager. They might even have opposing interests. Like the Head of R&D advocating for the most visionary, expensive solution out there to be cutting-edge. But the CFO opting for the most conservative, cash-efficient one.
Becoming successful is hard. Remaining successful is harder.

Sales is a lot about consistency. Sales is not about “Heureka” moments. It is about showing up every day, following up after every call, digging deeper every time. And getting up and going again after losing a deal.

Which is why sales works a lot like playing in a professional rock band today. This might seem counter-intuitive as you might think rock bands are still “Sex, Drugs & Rock’n’Roll”. The thing is, every fan only sees you once as let’s say Axl Rose of Guns’n’Roses.

Which is why “But I played well yesterday - today is a bad day” does not work, at all. Because your fan, your buyer, only meets you today. And cares 0 about your performance yesterday.

Let’s take a look at rock stars and sales people. There are many “shooting stars” that came, shined, but vanished again. There are only very few that are successful over years if not decades. Staying consistent and successful is hard, but crucial. Get yourself an accountability group if it is helpful. But stay consistent at all times.

Congratulations on hitting CHF 1’000’000 (1M) annual revenue or in terms of a “1M run rate” CHF 83’500 MRR (Monthly Recurring Revenue). Enjoy this moment...

...and prepare to “Cross the Chasm”.

There is a saying “What got you here will not get you there”, and I think it is so true. I have seen multiple entrepreneurs getting to CHF 1 Mio. annual revenue without hiring any sales people by selling 2-10 6-figure deals themselves. This is a tremendous achievement and something you can be proud of if you did it yourself.

There are however a few warning signs on the wall on what could happen next because you could not validate these important mechanisms on your journey so far:

- **Founder Bonus:** How much harder is it to sell your offering for somebody else? What is the impact on sales cycle times, conversion rates, sales rep ramp-up times? Can somebody other than you, the Founder & CEO, even (yet) sell your offering?
- **Scalable Process:** Where does the process break? If you fix one mechanism, will this truly fix the problem?
- **Viable Market:** Are there really 50 viable customers in a niche you sold 5 deals in?

21. Hiring more salespeople will fix traction

Hire out of opportunity, not neediness. If it’s not “hell yeah”, then it is no.

People do stupid things if they need something “at all costs”. They offer unnecessary discounts to “bully clients”. And they lose status before even starting the collaboration. But hiring a person is way more important than winning a customer. Chance is pressure from investors and also colleagues if overloaded will be to “get it done, now”.

Hiring should happen out of a position of strength, of offering opportunities and solving problems for other people. Doing business with a client who does not fit your ICP (Ideal Customer Profile) will at best be profitable with no negative consequences. And at worst be painful and unprofitable to work with.

But hiring a colleague who is not a great fit for your business and especially culture can do much more harm than good. Like scaring away customers, existing employees, but even future top talent.

Which is why following the principles of Topgrading makes a ton of sense. Every hire
should heighten the quality standards rather than lower them. Even if this slows down the hiring process. Because hiring, ramping, coaching and then after 3 months parting ways with the person is much more problematic. Because then you go back to Square 1. But you lost at least 3-12 months, CHF 30'000-300'000 in cash and opportunity costs and harm your culture.

“Hire slow, fire fast”, people say. But don’t fire fast if you’re the problem.

I worked with a scale up that went from 0 to CHF 5 Mio. annual revenues in 4 years, with 0 external investors. The company is successful and has built sales founder-led and with a great VP sales. They also hired 7 sales reps within about 2 years - and parted ways from 6 of them again. They acknowledge they were part of this “hiring & firing chapter”. They now hired 2 new sales people, who are together with the VP sales committed to learn, share and improve every day. They now invest more into creating the right environment, expectations, coaching and processes. To make people successful even if they are not sales stars from Day 1.

Always hire 2 sales reps for the same role at the same time. So you can differentiate where people and where the company is the problem. If this sounds expensive to you, these 2 people will work as a “tag team” that’s friendly competitive. Which increases the odds to succeed for both. If one of them does not ramp well and one does not in the same environment, the decision is yours if to focus on the top performer. If both do not perform, you need to go back to your drawing board and fix the company, not the sales talent. Or your hiring and coaching process.

If attitude, intelligence and coachability are there, keep talent. If not, not.

I do my monthly deep-dive 1:1 sessions with employees based on our 6 company values. Not operational sales performance. Because performance can vary and is generally “fixable”. As long as attitude, intelligence and coachability are there.

If not, you can try to “fix people” - which works about as well as it does in every human relationship. It does not work and not end well. Because people struggle to change their fundamental character without significant trigger events. Such as a severe accident, a broken relationship or a fundamental economic need. You hiring or letting go of people is not operational sales performance. Because performance can vary and is generally "fixable". As long as attitude, intelligence and coachability are there.

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Which is why I would always stay loyal to people who give it their all. Who take feedback and adapt. Who have the intelligence and drive to “make things happen” with scarce resources. Results may vary short-term due to bad luck or market situations. Think e.g. less sales in July/August than September/October due to summer vacations. But results will always be bad mid- to long-term if attitude is bad. If coachability and intelligence are not there, let people move on.

If you’re the problem.

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22. Sales people will fully ramp within 3 months if not 3 weeks

Get your s*** together (way) BEFORE people hit the ground.

“We hire a senior sales person. And then build sales assets. That sales person will figure out product-market-fit for us. Oh, and bring in CHF 500-1’000k revenue in their first year. I mean that person asked for a 150-300k salary, right?”

Nobody gets a world-class musician on stage before the stage is there. Because it would be a complete waste of time, resources and talent. And also result in an angry and disappointed, unproductive musician. Also, nobody expects the musician to build the stage. Because playing a concert and building a stage are different “jobs to be done”.

The challenge is now that you might not have “built the stage” yet. Because you are too busy “playing music” until your sales rockstar hits the ground.

But again, most salespeople will not appreciate your demand to “build the stage” for you. They identify with generating leads, pipeline, revenue and commissions for them. And they will get frustrated if they see they will not be successful with you. But more likely quit if they see they can easier, faster, and more at another place.

Which is why you want to create an environment where sales people can thrive. So they are worth their high salaries and stay with you for a long time.

If your sales cycle is 6 months, how can one fully ramp in 3 months?

I am convinced that time is the most underrated factor in B2B sales besides listening.

You need insights on how your customer demographics, ticket sizes, sales cycle times and ramping times interact. So a few “ballpark figures”:

- **SMB Sales**: 5-50 FTEs, 1-20k deals, 2-12 weeks sales cycles, 1-3 stakeholders
- **B2B Sales**: 500-10k FTEs, 20-100k deals, 3-9 month sales cycles, 3-7 stakeholders
- **Enterprise Sales**: 10k+ FTEs, 100-’1’000k deals, 6-24 month sales cycles, 5-20 stakeholders

These are rough guiding posts, but my point is this. You cannot expect to hire a sales rep to hit the ground and close a 6-figure deal from 0 to net revenue in <3 months.

Which is why you do well to develop more granular OKRs (Objectives & Key Results) to measure progress. Such as generated SQLs (Sales Qualified Leads). Or discovery calls converted to opportunities. Or closed deals out of an existing sales pipeline.

Great sales reps have questions for you. Bad sales reps excuses.

Elite athletes will not always be humble in victory. But they are very humble in defeat. Even a loud-voiced Conor McGregor goes back to the drawing board minutes after losing a fight. He will watch the fight again. 5, 10, more times. And asks his coach questions on how to do better next time. And then come back stronger.
"Sometimes you win, sometimes you learn". A good conversion rate from opportunity to Closed/Won is anywhere between 20-40%. This depends on how rigid you qualify and the quality of your sales process and people. So sales people learn in 60-80% of their cases.

That is, if they do. The bad ones will always have standard "smokescreen" excuses. Such as "The prospect did not have budget / authority / need / timing." For these cases, you can also send a BANT-based discovery quiz. But that is not what sales people are for. Sales people are there to help people get clarity, build trust, and overcome concerns. And then take action, because they will not do so by themselves.

Which is why great sales reps will "push your FAQ" early and often. Because they want to do better next time. They want to understand what they could have done and will do better next time. They will start the conversation with "How could I have behaved / answered / acted differently?" rather than "The prospect could / would / should have behaved differently".

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**23. The CEO should stop selling now**

The CEO must always sell. Customers, talent, investors.

"Sales = Making money from customers." This is a perception many people have about sales. But sales is at the core helping other people to take an informed decision about taking action. About making it easy to learn, understand and buy an offering. This can be a product, a service, a technology or even a business model.

But it can also be as much about recruiting top talent. Or helping an investor giving you money to scale faster. The CEO is very often the decision maker if to hire a talented person or if to pursue venture capital. The CEO is almost always still involved in closing "lighthouse" customer relationships.

Which is why the CEO should never, ever stop selling and improving her sales skills. Because it is one of the highest-leverage skills not just to win customers. But also key employees, investors, partners and suppliers.

**CEO = “Close Every Opportunity”**

The CEO is a closing asset. 0 ego involved, the CEO still has the highest authority in an organisation to make or kill a deal. To "go the extra mile" on investing into a key client with value (or a discount "off the standard playbook"). This does not mean the CEO needs to lead or even take part throughout the sales process for the majority of it. But be available to the sales team to help close the deal where tactically useful.

Which is why the CEO should join the sales team to help (not brag) as a closing asset. The CEO is here at the disposal of the sales team to serve as trusted authority. Or as "the bad guy". Think "I will not allow my sales rep to give you a discount no other customer gets." Or as "the good guy". Think "I love what you’re doing, winning your business is a top priority for me and I will personally oversee the implementation."

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**24. Hiring great sales talent is reasonably easy**

The war for B2B sales talent is over. Talent has won.

Sounds funny. It is if you are a sales talent. It is not if you are hiring as an entrepreneur. Because you are not Salesforce, Microsoft or UiPath that is able to pay CHF 150-300k+ for an Account Executive. Because you are unable to provide the environment for a sales rep to sell CHF 1-1.5M annual (recurring) revenue per year. But large tech companies are thriving and hungry for talent as hell.

Which is why you need to change your mindset (if not done yet. Stop thinking “Top talent has the amazing opportunity to join us”. Start thinking “Winning top talent is like winning a great customer.” Hard work to sharpen your value proposition and build a pipeline. And having a rigorous process and a confident, but servant attitude to move towards the close."

Top B2B sales talent will NOT work for you if you do not offer them a relevant upside opportunity. And believe me, “You will be able to earn CHF 100’000 if you are a rockstar and in 2 years even 0.5% of equity” is not that. That is a base salary at an enterprise software firm and top talent can go work there anytime right now. And make 2-3x that if they’re great.

Talent acquisition is “just” another funnel. Sell the job well.

“What we expect from you...what you bring to the table” are the first 2 paragraphs with 6-9 bullet points in most job ads I see. You would never frame a sales presentation to a customer like that (I hope?). But top sales talent wants to know first what you offer them. And only then even consider looking at what you expect from them.

Start with the “What we offer you” part. Sell the position with an appealing messaging that gets people excited about the job. Only once you achieve excitement or at least intrigue, what you expect will even matter.

I could now go on for 3 pages about if using your CRM for talent sourcing and recruiting is a good choice (it is not...). Use an ATS - an Applicant Tracking System to structure
your sales talent sourcing, prospecting, selling and closing process. But that is a topic for another book I guess. Or read “Hire for Attitude”, “Topgrading” and “Hire right for higher profits”.

**Plan 2-3 months each to attract, onboard and ramp sales talent**

“We plan to have a new sales rep selling for us in September.” When I hear this phrase, it is typically somewhere between May and July of that year. If the sales talent signs an employment agreement and can start on 1st of August, this might even work. But more often than not, the CEO / VP Sales “will start in the next 1-2 weeks” with the hiring process. And find out that – like in B2B sales - things move slower than expected.

Which is why I recommend you to plan 6-9 months from the decision to hire until you can expect a ramped sales person hitting quota. Let me give you an example:

- **01/2021**: Decision to hire an Account Executive
- **02+03/2021**: Job ad publishing, talent sourcing, first interviews
- **04/2021**: Several job interviews, remote tasks, onsite interviews for 2-4 candidates. Employment agreement signed
- **05+06/2021**: Person is still employed by current employer and 100% absorbed
- **07/2021**: Person starts in your company, onboarding, training, first “field days”

In this case, it took you 6-7 months from decision to hire. But more often than desirable, a sales talent will sign with you. But not show up to the job because of another opportunity. Or not work out as a hire. Or the talent sourcing takes longer.

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### 25. Coaching my sales team is not necessary

by Alen Cerovina

**You don’t hire a superstar and expect him to train himself**

You grew your revenue successfully. Now it’s time to grow big. You have a product-market fit. You designed a repeatable sales process. You have all the tech tools and have the data. Now you start to hire. You want experts – sales talents with experience. They will reduce your effort and increase revenue at the same time. They know how to sell, right? And there the problems start.

This myth is very common in growing organizations. And that’s in a lot of cases the reason why the growth is slowing down or even stopping. It’s like hiring an expensive player for your football team and expecting him to train himself.

**ABC² - “Always be coaching” to “always be closing”**

Which is why it is worth the investment to move to “ABC² -> “Always be coaching” if you want to “always be closing”.

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Instead of reducing your effort, you must spend more time with training. Easy rule of thumb: the bigger the team, the more time you must plan for trainings. Or even better, set up an environment where continuous training is part of the weekly routine. Important note: theory and practical training are two different things. It’s important to understand the theory, but it is even more important to be able to use the theory. This is another common mistake in fast growing organisations. I have a playbook. Read it. Done. To give you an easy example: I know I must run fast, dribble and jump to do a dunk. Easy. That’s the theory. But the reality is far from being easy. I have to try it, make mistakes, repeat it, get better, make mistakes again, and at one point, I’ll be able to do it.

One-to-one and group trainings, pitching sessions, shadowing, role plays and discussing feedback. Use data to spot weaknesses on team but especially personal areas of improvement. Act as a personal coach. Or put a “good closer” with an “untrained closer” in one team. Make sure the team is exchanging on problems and best practices. That will reduce your effort. At least for a while.

Define fix times, put it in the calendar. Of course not during the best sales times. Make sure the team is participating, it is mandatory. Don’t accept excuses. From no one. Not from your best sales talent, not from your newbie. Show up yourself prepared. That will show the importance of the trainings.

**Internal vs External: Same words, different behaviours**

From time to time get external input. Someone who can give you an external perspective and motivation. It’s funny that the same words from a manager and an external coach are leading to different behaviours.

The goal of this is to define a minimum quality standard. From this point on you can improve the standard, raise the bar, and define a new – higher - standard. When you finish, start all over again. This will lead to a higher efficiency, faster onboarding, higher revenue, and less churn. And that’s an outcome every manager can ask for.
NEW: 25 Tactical B2B Sales Insights

Implement 5 Quick Wins within 48 hours at EUR 0 investment

1. **Implement a Discovery & Qualification Quiz:** Do you and your prospects the favour of preparing seriously when you invest time. If a prospect is not willing to invest 2 minutes of preparation into a 30-60min conversation, how likely are they to invest a 4- to 6-digit amount of money with you?

2. **Automate meeting scheduling properly:** The initial appointment setting is part of the customer experience. Stop wasting your time with meeting scheduling! Use your CRM or Calendly. Set a clear agenda and reminders automatically.

3. **Leverage LinkedIn more:** Connect with 20 people every day. Automate it where useful. Post 3-5 times per week. Consistency is hard but the key to success. Create an accountability system. WhatsApp / Slack groups work. Outbound Sales in DACH

4. **Leverage video more:** Everybody gets (too many) emails every day. Very few people get personalised videos. Use LinkedIn native video via your Mobile App once connected to people. Use VSLs (Video Sales Letters) to follow-up after sales calls and for offer walkthroughs. And yes it is uncomfortable. But you put success before comfort...right?

5. **Get a word-by-word sales script:** Proven, word-by-word sales scripts can be one of your most powerful sales assets. It is also something really hard to do, especially if you have never done it before. Which is why I’m glad to share these Communication Templates with you here for you.

Sell Innovative Offerings Better

6. **Sell use cases instead of technology:** People buy transformations, so invest in deeply understanding their challenges, target outcomes, why they have not (yet) fixed the challenges and what they believe in.

7. **Use “Novelty Chunking”:** New technology is intriguing and often getting people to have interact with you. But new technology also means change, change is risk, and people hate risk. Make it “plain vanilla” as in “everything remains as is” and chunk all your novelty into a single Unique Selling Proposition (USP) describing why your offering is fixing a problem that people could not fix so far without you.

8. **Speak like your niche:** Invest into deeply understanding the wording, culture and beliefs your (target) customers use. Build a customer advisory board to validate how especially new offerings are perceived by the market.

9. **Focus on the buyer journey:** Buyers don’t need to "get" your innovative approach. But they need to understand their buyer journey and how they can execute on it with the least amount of friction, time investment and risk.

10. **Validate your status quo thesis:** People will only buy from you if you can help them to establish a shared belief of how the world works. You need to make sure people believe in cloud solutions vs on-premise, subscriptions vs one-off, AI vs rule-based approaches first. Only if people trust the mechanism should you even start to explain why your solution is the best one to execute on this mechanism.

**Consider Local Specifics for Outbound Sales in DACH**

11. **Use Social Proof:** Use relevant case studies, quotes, customer testimonials instead of anglicisms, acronyms, technical terms and “Us / We / I / Our” sales pitches

12. **Localise small things:** “DACH” is not a “territory”. Even Zurich and Bern are different. Use e.g. “Moin” for Hamburg, “Servus” for Vienna, “Grüezi” for Zürich

13. **Get the salutation right:** Take the time for “Guten Morgen Frau...”. The easiest way to do handle this is setting up 1 campaign (e.g. “CH CIOs Financial Services 10'000+ FTEs M”), duplicating the campaign and transferring all contacts of the other gender and marking it up with M / F for Male / Female (→ CH ... F).

14. **Be polite, but specific:** “Mit wen könnte ich dazu sprechen?” instead of “Hit reply” “Per Du” does not work for KMUs + Corporates in DACH, especially if the target company has a “Per Sie” culture internally

15. **Spray & Pray:** DSGVO / GDPR is real, so invest in small, carefully curated campaigns of 20-40 people with (nearly) identical profiles and avoid campaigns to 100+ people (without previously validating the mechanism and achieving 70%+ Opening and 20%+ Reply Rates)

**Avoid losing prospects by being “ghosted”**

16. **Be consistent on Date In-Date Out:** ALWAYS schedule the next synchronous activity (call or meeting) on the call / meeting itself. This saves you a lot of mental load, CRM reminders and risk of getting “ghosted”.

17. **Use Pattern Interrupts:** If people don’t answer your third call attempt, don’t call 3 more times. Instead send them a LinkedIn (video) message, write them an email with a high-value “nugget” such as a for their space relevant article or even send them a WhatsApp.

18. **Use a Soft Break-Up:** Write an email along the lines of this, switching gears to not chase the prospect and not appear needy while leaving the door open to reconnect later: “Since I still did not get any feedback from you, I just assume that the topic has no priority for you right now. That is completely fine and I will just get back in touch with you in 2-3 months again.”

19. **Establish a Status Delta:** Be clear from the beginning that you do not desperately need this specific customer, but instead offer a prospect the opportunity to get a 3-10x ROI. If they feel they are not a fit, even encourage them if you see the world the same way. At the same time showcase how other similar companies or even competitors are experiencing success from investing in your offering.

20. **Ask Simple Questions:** Write them something along the lines of:

   *What is the financial, operational and for you personal impact if you do not fix the discussed challenges within the next 6 months?*
Negotiate better by framing the conversation

21. **Control the Frame**: Stronger frames always absorb weaker frames. Be aware which frames are and should be used: Power, Intrigue, Time, Analyst, Prizing, Moral Authority

22. **Always be Alpha**: Differentiate between global & local status and situational Alpha & Beta position. Avoid "Beta Traps" such as a corporate framing their power by comparing their vast financial resources, global brand and decade-spanning experience. Be confident about why you exist and challenge incumbents on why they then have not fixed a problem if they are so great (but do so politely indeed...)

23. **Ask for No**: "No" as an answer is great. Because a "No" provides you with a great opportunity to increase the flow of information. People rarely justify why they say "Yes", but they do so almost automatically if the say "No".

24. **Avoid time pressure**: Decision-making under significant time constraints typically reduces decision quality. Put prospects at ease that they can take all the time in the world to make up their mind. But also challenge them on the raised concern of "We just need to think about it" on what exactly they need to think about and how you can help them resolve any open points. A micro-script you can use here is along the lines of: “Let’s be honest with each other for a minute: We have both invested time, rigor and focus to evaluate if and how we can add value to each other’s businesses. This means we find ourselves now in one of these 3 scenarios:

   - **A)** The discussed challenge is not worth solving: Let’s all get back to work then and tackle more important & urgent challenges.
   - **B)** You have specific concerns that we did not yet resolve together or even talk about. Let’s in this case have an open conversation on what these are and work together to timely resolve them.
   - **C)** There are 0 open points. Then we should actually start to create operational value for you and your business right away?

25. **Avoid Neediness**: Neediness is (besides Ego) the enemy. Neediness destroys trust because people feel your intent is inwards-oriented to solve your own problems instead of being 100% focused on the prospect’s problem. Neediness also destroys your Status Delta immediately as you are acting out of need instead of opportunity.

“Sales pays salaries.”
“Startups that sell are startups that scale.”
“We build shit and we sell shit, and everything else is bullshit.”

These are all sappy quotes. And I am convinced that they are a true. And need to be more embraced and remembered at all times by many tech entrepreneurs.

But I love B2B sales so much not because it pays well. Or because I can talk a lot on the job. Or because it will be a job that will always be there, even when most other jobs are redundant.

I love B2B sales so much because it is at the core about learning, caring and making things happen. To help other people solve their problems and have an amazing life. If you don’t care about helping people, you should not be in sales.

Your job in sales is to learn as much as you can about your customer, her situation, her objectives, her challenges. What she tried in the past, what she values from a collaboration and so many other things. Only then will you have the empathy required to build long-term, honest trusted relationships.

I also truly believe that a Still Day 1 mindset is essential not only in B2B sales, but in life.

I hope you learnt something reading these pages and excited about what’s still to come.

Please keep me posted on your journey and happy humble hustling,

Manuel
I wrote this book in less than 30 days while working full-time on building SalesPlaybook. The covered 25 B2B Sales Myths deserve much more attention than they got here.

Further free resources

Which is why I am glad to share these further free resources on B2B sales here with you:

- **B2B Startup Sales Podcast**: Patrick Trümpi and I are interviewing 50+ sales leaders to share best practices, stories and more: [https://anchor.fm/thesalesplaybook](https://anchor.fm/thesalesplaybook)

- **Startup Sales Summit 2021**: had the “amazing” idea to source and host 14 30min keynotes on B2B sales on 1 single day. It worked surprisingly well. You can get all slide decks here for free: [https://thesalesplaybook.io/salessummit21/](https://thesalesplaybook.io/salessummit21/)

- **Sales Starter Kit**: We originally put together 10 Sales House Rules, 7 chapters to tell a great sales story, 3 communication templates to convert leads to customers and 1 guide to build your own SalesPlaybook in 20 easy steps. Upon August 2021, we “upgraded” this and offer a 7-Day Free Trial to 100% of our self-learning content: [https://thesalesplaybook.io/start](https://thesalesplaybook.io/start)

- **Sales Books Reading List**: I curated a list of 35+ sales books I can recommend you to read in full (out of 50+ I read recently): [http://thesalesplaybook.io/salesbooks](http://thesalesplaybook.io/salesbooks)

- **My Personal LinkedIn profile**: I post once every week day. Apart from penguins + home gyms, you might find it useful: [https://www.linkedin.com/in/hartmannmanuel](https://www.linkedin.com/in/hartmannmanuel)

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**Customer success**: 
An outlook by Dominik Waltburger

Finding new clients and closing deals is hard. But if you avoided all pitfalls in sales - congratulations! The impact on your company will be instant and very rewarding with every closed deal. Share that feeling with your colleagues, celebrate and enjoy the moment!

Where is the catch you think? There is none. Make sure to celebrate and do so as a company. Some salespeople may consider it inappropriate if they celebrate new deals. After all, it is your job a sales rep to close deals. And when the day comes and the client puts the signature on paper, it can at times feel more like a long awaited release. Rather than an exciting moment. But keep in mind that not everybody in your company was part of the sales process. And celebrating is only egocentric if you make the deal about yourself. Remind the team that it is the product the client purchased. It is a team effort and as sales rep, you are the ambassador of the product. Make sure to inform everyone in the company about sales achievements and celebrate them together.

The deal is closed, the party is over - so, what’s next?

It is Still Day 1 remember, but not for your new client! Where the sales journey ends another begins: the customer success journey.

Stay tuned for more insights on some B2B Customer Success Myths Debunked!
Why high-value content matters by Stephanie Sigrist

In the early days of a start-up, its most dedicated salespeople are often the start-up founders and the CEO. When crossing the chasm, a start-up CEO needs to delegate responsibilities and focus on leadership. But the CEO and founder(s) are still a valuable brand ambassador. And can be a secret weapon when closing deals due to their authority, longstanding experience, and vast network. Strong storytelling and messaging also help companies creating closeness to the target audience.

Not convinced of the product, unable to answer in-depth questions, and struggling to convey the unique values of their company, potential customers can tell if an underpaid trainee or a true brand ambassador makes the cold call. A good salesperson is an expert in what their company is selling. Demonstrating knowledge and expertise makes a sales rep more reputable in the eyes of customers. In early-stage B2B start-ups, it is often the CEO who define a sales strategy. And contacts prospects and manages customer relationships. With business growth usually comes a need for professionalisation.

It is the job of a CEO to establish a company culture that can deliver sustained growth. Company culture plays is key in recruiting sought-after talents, employee motivation, and performance. It impacts the values and norms of an organisation and influences financial growth. Even the level of risk-taking, the reaction to change, and the realisation of new ideas. Team members who fit in with the company culture tend to be happier and more productive. And their retention rate is higher. A sales expert who truly believes in your company and your products is invaluable.

What is the role of a start-up CEO when professionalizing sales?

Effective salespeople should put in the work, even when it gets tough. Having the motivation to get the job done shows that you are passionate. A trainee who is doing a 6 month internship at your company may lack knowledge about your products. But also lack the assertiveness of seasoned salespeople and the experience in closing deals. And most importantly: the passion for sales. A start-up CEO should invest enough resources into setting up a dedicated sales team. Instead of compelling junior employees to do cold calls and follow up with prospects.

Even in scale-ups, the CEO might still be a secret weapon in sales. They can establish connections on eye level with other top managers. And thereby build mutually beneficial relationships. This will serve as an ice-breaker for the sales team and see a future collaboration. As a start-up CEO, you should always respect the terms and conditions your team defined. I would not change company’s pricing or policies for a specific deal without consulting with your sales team first. Special deals are better coming from the sales rep managing the account. Because that person should develop a lasting relationship with the client.

Prospecting and targeting are ongoing processes. Find out what your target audience needs. And then adjust your selling style and communication accordingly. Before reaching out, conduct research on potential customers and partners to find out what will create value for them. What are the responsibilities of the people you are planning on contacting? What challenges are they currently confronted with? How can you make their lives easier? Check social media platforms, company newsletters, and other sources to learn more about prospects. A tailored messaging and communication can ease customer acquisition. It demonstrates your target audience that you understand the challenges and struggles they are facing. Studies have shown that most people feel more connected to their conversation partners if they are good listeners. A good salesperson understands that each customer has different needs. Show interest in your contacts, ask relevant questions, listen actively and signal that you understand what the other person is saying. You do not have to remember every single fact but memorise the central idea. This will help you reconnect on the next occasion you meet and makes following up easier.

High-quality content shows expertise and may serve as an ice-breaker

Another way to create closeness to your target audience is good storytelling and messaging. According to data analyses summarised by Forbes, 7 out of 10 buyers take a decision before any touchpoint with a sales rep. Creating value before interacting with customers will help distinguish your company from competitors. Valuable content on your website, blog, or social media will also increase your SEO ranking which creates organic traffic. Invest in crafting high-quality content such as blog posts, white papers on current topics, podcasts, and webinars. This helps prospects already before the formal sales process starts to get value from you. Always center the approach around your customers and potential customers. Structure information in a way that makes it easy for readers, viewers, or listeners to spot the main ideas. To make the content sticky, deliver the core message early in the text, video, or podcast and repeat it. Use concise language and be specific. After investing time and energy into content creation, make sure to do a spell-check. Run your text through an online program such as Hemingway or ProWritingAid. Or ask another writer for feedback. Because grammar, syntax, and orthography mistakes can ruin your credibility.
Your checklist for the production of high-value content

- **High-Value**: How does the content create value for your target audience?
- **Purpose**: What are you trying to achieve with your content?
  
  E.g. Raising awareness, increasing visibility or generating revenue impacts your form and writing style. Define the purpose before starting to create content.
- **Structure**: How is the content organised? Is the main idea easy to spot? Does your storytelling include surprising twists?
- **Conciseness**: Is the content easy to read? Are the used terms specific and concise?
- **Authenticity**: How credible is your content? Does the content reflect your values?
  
  Incorporate best practices for your writing. But do not copy another writer’s style.
- **Tailoring**: Is your message tailored to the target audience?
- **Language Check**: Have you run your content through a spell check program? Or asked an experienced writer for feedback on grammar, syntax, and orthography?
  
  Mistakes tend to make your content less credible.