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## Sales Coaching Par Excellence

Interviewed by Denise Barr

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### Interview with Philippe Lavie, Interim CSO

#### You were born and raised in Paris. What brought you to the US?

I came to the US 30 years ago to do sales and marketing for the Portland Trailblazers. I did that for three years.

#### Working for the NBA must have been a trip. You then became an entrepreneur?

I created a company called Tickets Northwest out of Portland. I co-founded it with two other individuals. We created an \$8 million business in eight months. After that I worked in sales and business development for several companies, and then joined several start-up companies. I currently own KeyRoad Enterprises and am also a managing partner with Melcion Chassagne and Company.

*If you bring automation like CRM (customer relationship management) into an environment that does not have a well-defined process, the only thing you get is a dysfunctional process on steroids, and it doesn't really help. It's like automating chaos.*

#### What is KeyRoad Enterprises?

KeyRoad, which I started in 2002, helps companies and their senior executives accelerate sales performance to drive revenue, greater accuracy in pipeline management, and consistency in prospecting and client engagement best practices. We help transform sales organizations to strive for excellence in sales effectiveness, sales efficiency, and sales enablement.

#### When would a company seek out an organization like KeyRoad?

We work with CEOs, COOs, VPs of sales, and their sales organizations. There are two reasons why they would want to work with us: 1) they have a sales performance challenge; or 2) they want to take their sales organization to the next level.

#### What types of performance issues does KeyRoad



**Philippe Lavie** is founder of KeyRoad Enterprises LLC, which helps companies effectively manage their growth through improved sales performance, and Midwest managing director of Melcion Chassagne and Cie, a global company that advises and supports both serial and first-time entrepreneurs

#### Ah, the art of conversation. Can that be taught?

Very few people know how to have effective conversations with upper level management. They've never been trained into it and some of these people may not be of the highest caliber. Top sales people systematically and intuitively know how to have those conversations. So most non-intuitive or traditional sales people, as we call them, have to be helped. And the way we help them is by developing conversation guides we call solution development prompters.

#### Solution development prompters?

These are prompters or conversation guides, if you will, that help sales people navigate a more effective conversation at a higher level with their prospect. These prompters are one of many tools that we use to enable sales people to be more effective.

#### Is sales performance always the issue?

So while a company may not have a performance issue, they may be selling at a level at which they don't want to be any more. They want to increase their deal size or have more control over which markets their tool or widget

#### So the key is a well-defined process.

One of the big challenges of CRM or any automation tool is that it doesn't get adopted. It is designed to manage salespeople instead of selling activities, which are aligned with the buying process of your prospects.

#### What's the hardest thing you've ever had to do with a company?

Fire someone because he or she is not aligned with where the company needs to go. It is gut-wrenchingly difficult, but not doing it can cause the company to fail. So, with all of the compassion that you can muster, and all of the carefulness that comes with having to send people out in the cold, you do it.

#### Let's talk about Melcion Chassagne (pardon my French).

I joined a group of seven other individuals—five in Europe, two in the US (San Francisco, Boston, and now Chicago, with me)—where we act as senior business advisors and mentors to entrepreneurs, helping them create value within their respective companies. I am managing director for our Midwest US operations.

#### Is Melcion a traditional consulting firm?

No it is not. It's a very different model.

#### How so?

We bet on the individual, not necessarily the company. If we believe in the individual entrepreneur, we will work with them to help them build value within the company over a long period of time.

*If you are an entrepreneur and you want to sustain your business because it's your passion, you have no choice but to find the right balance, which can be completely out of balance for anybody else. But you have to find a balance, otherwise you will perish. It is an incredible conundrum that entrepreneurs find themselves in because their own personality may drive them to be consistently off*

**typically address?**

Sales performance is like the 80/20 rule. Eighty percent of my revenue comes from 20 percent of my reps, so why do I have the other 80 percent? Or, maybe a sales organization is having trouble forecasting accurately, controlling price, or having meaningful conversations with higher-level executives within their prospect base.

**How would you solve those problems?**

We bring an ability to create what doesn't exist; adjust what needs adjusting; and implement an engagement roadmap, which is a disciplined and repeatable selling process. Most importantly we lead our clients to think through how their buyers buy, so it's outward-looking to their client base. We then compare that to how they have engaged with those prospects or clients in the past to come up with a more aligned model between the buying and selling processes.

**I bet that's an interesting process.**

About 80 or 90 percent of the time they realize that the way they sell is not at all aligned with the way their buyers buy. We then realign, by defining stages and milestones and a repeatable process, where now their selling activities are in line with how their buyers buy. That's one piece.

**What's the other piece?**

We help them create selling tools—not software, not CRM, none of this automation stuff. These selling tools facilitate a salesperson's activities at each of the stages of the engagement roadmap. For example, say a rep or sales exec wants to have a more effective conversation with a C-level executive prospect; we teach them how to do that.

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*A lot of people think that balance means slowing down. Balance only means that each person has to find a way to ensure that they have the energy necessary to do what they want to do best.*

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or software or product is being sold into. We address both of those.

**Cite a KeyRoad success.**

As a larger engagement example, I was working with a public company in California that had around \$500 million in revenue. One of their challenges was that they had maximized their revenue per rep. They had around 100 reps, so at \$5 million per rep they were pretty much tapping as much as they could based on their business model. The only option they had was to almost double their sales force, which they were in the process of doing when we started working with them.

**Did doubling their sales force do the trick?**

Doubling the force in and of itself never does the trick.

**What does it take?**

In order to successfully add salespeople, you need to train, coach, and manage them effectively. We helped all along the way. This company decided to train its sales force in the European market. So we had a training session in Prague, which lasted four days, where we trained 60 of their sales reps, in two classes of 30. We brought 20 coaches, two instructors and two workshop managers. We put on an event for a team of 100, including the participants.

**What were the results?**

Teaching behaviors doesn't happen by reading books. It only happens if you hear, see, and more importantly, do and practice new behaviors. Therefore, when we do sales training, we bring one certified coach for every three participants. It's very hands-on. Everybody has the skill practice. Everybody has to be totally engaged and it's rather intense. But the results were pretty significant. Based directly on this training, the company created \$25 million in incremental revenue over a six-month period and increased its inside sales performance by over 200 percent.

**Besides sales performance training, what other types of services do you provide?**

We provide "adoption services," which are advisory services on the back end, so that once a client creates a process, develops the tools and trains its people, we help them make sure that these new ideas get adopted properly and sustain themselves over time. We will extend our engagement for a period of time until our clients become self sufficient, and we remain an ongoing resource if and when needed.

**Why wouldn't something like Salesforce.com be sufficient?**

Salesforce.com is a CRM (customer relationship management) tool that automates a process. If you bring automation into an environment that does not have a well-defined process, the only thing you get is a dysfunctional process on steroids, and it doesn't really help much. It's like automating chaos.

*balance. And by doing so, they can impede their own success. Not a good thing.*

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**Bob Jordan, interimCEOinterimCFO's founder, is currently writing a book featuring highly successful entrepreneurs from the Midwest US. One of the issues cited in the book is whether or not an entrepreneur can have a balanced life. What do you think, can you have balance?**

Interestingly enough, if you are an entrepreneur and you want to sustain your business because it's your passion, you have no choice but to find the right balance, which can be completely out of balance for anybody else. But you have to find a balance, otherwise you will perish. It is an incredible conundrum that entrepreneurs find themselves in because their own personality may drive them to be consistently off balance. And by doing so, they can impede their own success. Not a good thing.

**Does balance have to mean slowing down?**

A lot of people think that balance means slowing down. Balance only means that each person has to find a way to ensure that they have the energy necessary to do what they want to do best.

**Any parting words of wisdom?**

There's one statement that I use with my clients all the time and it's something that I really drive for them to truly understand what it means and it's not simple. It's something that I call "bias to action." To be biased towards action. Do whatever will get you in action, because when you're dead you can rest.

**Stay in action Philippe.****[View Philippe's Platinum Profile](#)**