

SALES JOB STAR



## Eliot Burdett: Reorienting the Focus of Sales

[By Akbar Ali]

*Eliot Burdett, a business owner who fell into the sales industry, realized that he wanted to base his career in sales when he was in his early 20s. Burdett is the owner of two companies and serves as the vice president of sales for one of them. He also is the founder and co-managing partner of Peak Sales Recruiting. Burdett recommends that sales professionals make sure to infuse customer service into their sales jobs, and he advises sales professionals to do everything to the fullest in their sales careers because it takes just as much energy to be mediocre as it does to be brilliant.*

As founder and co-managing partner at Peak Sales Recruiting, an Ontario-based recruiting firm which places sales professionals with technology companies across North America, Eliot Burdett is revolutionizing both the sales and technology industries by matching top performers with the most promising opportunities. In the past he has founded two companies and served as vice president of sales at another, bringing to each position the singular rule which has proven to be the dividing line between an average career and a superior career in sales: a focus on customer success.

“Most importantly, show up every day. Life is what you make it and the more you put in, the more you will get out.”

Burdett admits that he entered the sales industry by “falling into it,” never consciously setting out to become a sales professional or a sales recruiter. His career was born out of necessity to help one of his own companies.

“One of the companies I helped to start, a web services company, needed a salesperson, and no one else was willing or able to do it,” he says. “I was in my late 20s. That was when I realized I love sales. I had been a consultant, and so consultative sales was a natural fit for me.”

He also credits his father for having demonstrated the value of business and sales, two things which he came to understand as overarching the product or service being offered.

“I grew up with the understanding that nothing comes for free. My father was an entrepreneur and businessperson. In addition to teaching me to expect to work

hard to achieve the things I want in life, he taught me that selling technology is not about technology at all. It is about selling the solution to a business problem. And perhaps most important, after I started selling, I quickly realized that sales is a great sport where score is tracked in dollars.”

Burdett’s formal training proved to be a different kind of challenge as the academic environment he was in was not set up to engage his practical working experiences, demanding instead that he operate solely out of textbooks. Needless to say, this sent Burdett searching for better learning opportunities.

“I went to university, a four-year Bachelor of Commerce program. Unfortunately, I found the entire experience disappointing. It was far too focused on textbook learning with little connection to the real world. By this point, I was already working part-time at a large technology provider and was learning more than school could ever possibly teach me.

“I was later asked to be part of the university’s curriculum advisory committee, but when they insisted that real-world work experience had no place in the university environment, I quit. Schools should teach real-life skills as early as possible, and every school on the planet should have

**Q. What do you do for fun?**

**A.** I love my work. Outside of that, I enjoy hockey, and I love playing with my kids and hanging out with my family.

**Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?**

**A.** Soundgarden.

**Q. What is the last magazine you read?**

**A.** *Business 2.0.*

**Q. What is your favorite TV show?**

**A.** *Kitchen Nightmares.*

**Q. Who is your role model?**

**A.** Probably too many to name. I seek out role models. Maybe Richard Branson, for having an absolute “can-do” attitude and living life to the fullest.

**Q. What makes you laugh?**

**A.** I find humor in almost everything. My kids are at the top of that list.

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co-op programs that start right after kindergarten.”

Because he was already working while in school, Burdett was able to transition easily from the world of academia to the professional arena, making important contacts and forging relationships which would prove pivotal to his future success.

“I had started working part-time while studying. I started in the mailroom of a large technology company and worked my way up to programming and internal tech support. I met lots of people in the mailroom, and eventually a few of us decided to start up a company building web solutions. That’s the company I was at when I fell into the sales role.

“We sold that company, and I was subsequently part of two startups (one as a co-founder, the other in the sales role). Because I have spent so much of my professional life building sales teams for technology companies, co-founding Peak Sales Recruiting was a natural next step for me. The company is all about helping technology companies build high-performing sales teams.”

Burdett has enjoyed many successes over the years, launching his own companies, and has navigated some setbacks as well, learning that failure often opens the door to success by spotlighting businesses approaches which don’t work.

“I am proud of having started my first company when I was in my 20s and going out and securing big contracts with important companies to do some really innovative work. Selling that company was the icing on the cake. After that I started another company and raised some seed financing not long before the Internet bubble burst in 2001. I made some huge mistakes, and not being focused enough on sales was the biggest.

“That said, I learned a huge amount from the failure, and the lessons continue to shape how I do business today. Later I joined a startup in the sales leadership role. I was very proud of winning large deals with important reference accounts for that company in Europe and North America, deals that helped the company establish itself.”

The most important professional and personal model for Burdett throughout his career has been his father, though others have also played integral parts in helping

shape his career and providing invaluable guidance.

“My father, Avery Burdett, was a great mentor. He was a businessperson in the tech sector, very entrepreneurial, and self-reliant. He taught me that you can decide what kind of life you want and then choose a profession that is fun and supports your life plan. Peter Reid, a business consultant engaged by my first company, helped me mature as a business leader and manager. Finally, Dan Kuzell was a mentor in selling. I knew how to go out and hustle for business, but he taught me the science of selling.”

Burdett’s advice to sales professionals in search of the next tier of success is simple: make your career what you want it to be, and be sure to do it with ample gusto and humility.

“Most importantly, show up every day. Life is what you make it, and the more you put in, the more you will get out. Being mediocre is usually just as time-consuming as being great, so aim to be great at everything you do. If you think you can do something, you probably can. Approach your career with no ego, and take any job where you can watch and learn from someone who is successful.”

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