

## Beyond the Challenger Sale

Recently I interviewed Brent Adamson, coauthor of "The Challenger Sale," one of my favorite books, and the Managing Director of Advisory Services for CEB's Sales and Marketing practice.

During our conversation, he shares some groundbreaking research that has totally changed the conversation about sales. He also reveals what top performers do differently from other sales reps.

This research will change how you approach prospects. Read the transcript below or listen to the audio recording at: <http://konrath.co/brent-adamson>

## Interview with Brent Adamson

**Jill Konrath: I am so glad you're here because I want to talk briefly about "The Challenger Sale" and then I want to talk about what's on beyond "The Challenger Sale." And your book came out when?**

Brent Adamson: It came out in, gosh, that's a good question. November 2011.

**Jill Konrath: In the last few years, you've been a part of groundbreaking research that has totally changed the conversation about sales. Can you give a brief synopsis of what you uncovered in your research and what you recommend today?**

Brent Adamson: Absolutely. "The Challenger Sale" captures a huge amount of research over the course of several years with sales professionals. In a nutshell, Jill, we found two things we weren't actually looking for originally.

First, we found that virtually every sales professional falls into one of five distinct profiles. There's a Hard Worker, a Challenger, a Relationship Builder, a Lone Wolf, and a Problem Solver. And there are all sorts of caveats, they're not mutually exclusive, there's some overlap.

Just the fact there's these five profiles is very interesting but it gets even more interesting when we compare those profiles to performance.

We found that the challenger reps—the ones who challenge customers and teach those customers something new—were much more likely to be star performers.

The story got really interesting and even deeper when we found that the relationship builder—sales reps focused on building personal and professional relationships, being generous with their time and saying, "Whatever you need, I'm here for you,"—those sales reps were least likely to be star performers.

So the research of the book is a journey into understanding what those challengers are doing. And the endpoint is really an interesting because it's not so much just the sales rep in terms of individual skill but the story of sales and marketing and new product development and every other part of the commercial organization.

Over the last five years, "challenger" for us has become much more a story of commercial strategy than it has of methodology or of individual skill.

**Jill Konrath: I have to tell you, when I first read "The Challenger Sale," the implications were so broad because it's not just about who the sales person is and how they behave.**

**Yes, the salesperson has to be somebody who brings ideas, insights, and information to clients on a continual basis in order to be part of the discussion and to be seen as a valuable resource. But also how much marketing actually has to be involved in terms of setting up and bringing the sales reps what they need to be effective in their jobs. And it changes how you manage people as well.**

Brent Adamson: Yeah. I'm right there with you. In fact, a lot of our work now is on the marketing side around what we've come to call challenger marketing. It's interesting because marketers become a challenger largely as a sales support tool. Marketers are talking to their sales departments and saying, "Hey, we found about this challenger thing, we want to help. How can we help our sales colleagues do this?"

What we're telling marketers today is that becoming a challenger is absolutely vital for sales support—but it's also vital for everything else you're doing in marketing as well. Again, it's more a commercial strategy than a sales strategy. So that's where a lot of our focus is right now.

**Jill Konrath: It's good because it is, again, it's changing the whole game, not just the sales game. And it's saying the world has changed and what we have to do as an organization has to fundamentally change as well.**

Brent Adamson: Totally, I'm right there with you, totally agree.

**Jill Konrath: Okay, so what I want to talk about first is the length of the decision process and when people are contacting sales organizations today. I've heard**

**that one of the things that your research shows—and a number of other companies have found as well—is that people, customers, are not contacting a sales organization until they're like 57 percent or even up to 75 percent of the way through their decision process.**

**And often if a sales person receives a call from somebody who is in the buying mode, that person comes in with preconceived notions of what specifically they need. They may be just shopping for price at that point, evaluating, "Okay, we got these three vendors. I've been online, I've checked them all out, I know what's out there."**

**You and I were talking about what the role of the salesperson has to be in that situation. What do you guys recommend?**

Brent Adamson: Well it's interesting because this is actually research that we conducted since the publication of the book. It's captured in a lot of different places since we put out the book. But it's a fascinating because the story of the primary story of selling and marketing today is not a story of how we're selling or marketing differently, it's a story of how our customers are buying differently.

And the reason why that story matters more than anything that we're doing in sales and marketing is because that's the story that gives everything else its urgency. It's what we call at CEB the "Why now?"

When you look at how Challenger selling is really commercial strategy and go-to-market strategies, it's big and it's complex. It's tempting instead to go for quick wins and there's easier ways to start. But over time, it's going to be a pretty big shift. So I think it's completely fair that someone might ask, "Is it even worth it?" Seriously, that's a lot of time and a lot of trouble, a lot of effort.

We argue not only that it's worth it but you may not even have any choice because of the way the world is changing so dramatically. And primarily you see that in the very statistic that you're talking about, Jill.

We've been running surveys across thousands and thousands of people over the last several years. One of the very simple questions we asked is, "If you think about a typical purchase process that occurs from a due diligence beginning all the way to closure and a purchase decision (or a lack of one). At what point during that purchase process do you typically pick up the phone, fire up the email, and reach out to a supplier for their input on whatever it is you're doing?"

And as you noted, that answer came back at 57 percent. So customers are 57 percent of the way through a purchase before they proactively engage Sales in the buying process.

The one thing about that data that's really interesting is it wasn't a very narrow distribution around 57 percent. In other words, it didn't run from 27 to 87 percent. It ran from about 45 to 65 with an average right about 57 percent. The other thing that's interesting about the data is that the more complex the deal, the later your customers call you.

**Jill Konrath: Now that's pretty scary from a sales perspective. First of all, it tells me as a salesperson that I have to get involved earlier and I have to insert myself in the decision process. I have to create the decision process because I'm not going to make my living waiting for people who are coming to me with preconceived notions.**

Brent Adamson: The other thing that's mind-bending moment—from my perspective—is if you think about what this 57 percent number means. First of all, it means that customers are out there on their own doing all the things we were hoping to do with them together. Right?

So they're identifying a need, prioritizing that need, figuring out capabilities to meet that need and even finding the suppliers who can deliver that capability. So by the time they approach us there's very little left to your point to discuss but price.

I often ask Heads of Sales and Marketing to think about the purchase continuum, and to think about the point on the continuum where customers are most likely to contact you being the top of that arrow, the 57 percent point. And then I ask them "Where, across that continuum, if I were to ask your top two competitors where they would place themselves on that continuum relative to their customers, what would they say?"

And the answer is really interesting. They answer "Probably at the exact same 57 percent point." In other words, it's not that customers empowered with information are shutting out your sales reps, customers empowered with information are shutting out all sales reps.

**Jill Konrath: That's right, and rightfully so because when most salespeople try to reach out to customers, they don't do what the customers need them to do. They still are, in many cases, blathering brochures who really have failed to understand how much the customer has changed and what the expectations are and how different they are. I shut salespeople out myself. I'm a salesperson but I keep them at bay because too many of them are just, "Blah, blah, blah..." You can't shut them up.**

Brent Adamson: It's ironic, isn't it? That even salespeople don't want to talk to salespeople.

**Jill Konrath: Exactly, that's pretty scary, isn't? It's a statement about our profession.**

Brent Adamson: But this is where it gets really interesting. Because if I were to ask any Head of Sales, any Head of Marketing, "Who's your top competitor? Or think of the top two or three competitors you have," they'd all list one or two companies they compete against.

But in this world of the 57 percent, here's the mind-bending moment. In many ways—since your customers are not just shutting out your reps but all reps—your Number One competitor today isn't so much the competition and their ability to sell. Your Number One competitor today is your own customer and their ability to learn on their own.

So we've just spent the last 5, 10, 15, 20 years building the "customer-centric organization" where the customer is at the center of everything we do and the customer is always right and the customer comes first. But in this world of 57 percent, we're in big trouble if the customer is always right.

And we've landed on this really interesting world where we have to ask, "What does it even mean to compete against your own customer's learning ability?"

That's why we spend so much time talking about what we call Commercial Insight right now at CEB. What enables you to compete against your competition's ability to sell and your customer's ability to learn on their own simultaneously is in fact information. Not just information but Insight. And that's why we spend so much time talking about it.

**Jill Konrath: What does this Commercial Insight look like? How would I know it when I saw it if I was a customer?**

Brent Adamson: That's a great question. We spend a lot of time talking about this right now, particularly with marketers. We find, especially on the marketing side and all the big movement towards content marketing, is that we get a lot of false positives.

For example, we'll get, "Oh, Brent, I totally hear you on that content thing, we're all over it. In fact, we're working very hard to become a thought leader in our industry." So we spend a lot of time trying very hard to differentiate between thought leadership and what we've come to call Insight.

So thought leadership is all the content and the data and the white papers and the information, the research and all that stuff that we all publish to essentially build our brand and to demonstrate to the world that we're experts. We publish it to build trust so that the customers see us as a place to come for information. And eventually all of that work is designed to get our customers to think differently about us: that we're smarter, we're better, we're more trustworthy.

Insight, on the other hand, isn't really designed about getting our customers to think differently about us. It's designed to get customers to think differently about themselves. To somehow demonstrate to them that—on their independent journey towards the 57 percent—they've missed something materially important to their business. Suddenly they're exposed to more risk or more cost than they realize and as a result they need to change what they're doing.

So for us, Insight is about two things. It's not just about what you could be doing but it's about what you are currently doing. And demonstrating to your customers that their current behavior is significantly opening them up to cost or risk in ways they haven't fully realized.

What you're ultimately trying to do is get your customer to change their behavior, to buy more from you, to buy it at the higher margin from you, to do something different than they're doing now. But unless they see a reason to change, no matter how good a solution may be, if what they're doing now is good enough, that's where they're going to stay.

And so Insight is all about breaking down that current behavior before building up the alternate behavior.

**Jill Konrath: Let me just ask another Marketing question, "Could this Insight be included in the thought leadership, content? Or do you see it being delivered in other ways too?"**

Brent Adamson: The way that we think about Insight versus thought leadership is that in many ways Insight is a specific form of thought leadership. As a result, the two are not diametrically opposed. In fact we draw this graphically as a Venn diagram where Insight is nested inside of thought leadership.

So to put it one way, all Insight is probably thought leadership but not all thought leadership is Insight.

In other words, if you take what you do in the name of thought leadership and tweak it in certain, very specific ways, we argue it becomes Insight when it's not just about what you could be doing, but you're currently doing.

Ultimately what we nested inside of Insight is something we call Commercial Insight. That is the Insight that you share with your customers that changes the way they think about their business and naturally leads back to something you can help them with better than anyone else

People ask us all the time, "What happens if I go out and teach my customers something new, they take that great idea, put it out, then my competitor wins the business?"

We call that free consulting and that's just a bad place to be. So we have to make sure that the Insight that we deliver to our customers leads back to something we specifically can do better than anyone else. That's what we call Commercial Insight.

Jill Konrath: That's cool. Now we're going to get back to that question that I asked you a few minutes ago.

**As a salesperson, you have a customer who's been doing their research on the phone, or online and has stumbled across your website, read some stuff on your website, read some stuff about you perhaps and how you are even perhaps evaluated, some evaluations on forums, etc.**

**This person reaches out and they say, "Hey, Brent, this is Jill and I've been doing some research on sales training and we'd like to talk with you about doing objection handling training for our reps."**

Brent; Yeah.

**Jill Konrath: That's just an example but it could be anything, "We'd like to talk with you about this. What is your price point, how much do you charge on that? Can you tell us about your program?"**

Brent Adamson: Yeah.

**Jill Konrath: How should salespeople handle that? When they have an educated customer who's done their homework.**

Brent Adamson: I think it's a great question. So I think the knee jerk reaction would be, first of all, you start celebrating, "Woo-hoo."

**Jill Konrath: Yes, yes, "Oh, I'm so excited, I got a hot one here."**

Brent Adamson: "Cancun, here I come. Going to get to the Presidents Club this year," right?

I think the first thing that any good sales rep does is ask some questions. As opposed to saying, "Well I'm glad you asked, let me tell you a little bit more about our objection handling training,"

I think the best sales reps would simply say, "It's interesting that you guys are interested in objection handling training. Love to talk to you a little bit more about it. Could you give me a sense for what is it about object handling training that you're looking to accomplish, what's the bigger goal you're trying to achieve?"

The reason why the very best challenger reps ask that question is not just to build rapport or to share information but they're looking for a point of disagreement.

They come to these conversations with a contrarian mindset, looking for, "Where's that opportunity for me to teach that customer something they haven't fully realized?"

So as the customer says, "Well we're interested in objection handling because we're facing these two objections."

The best sales reps say, "Well it's interesting you're facing these two challenges. Have you considered this as a potential root cause?" They'll go through that process of root-causing that problem with their customer and trying to figure out if in fact objection handling even the right thing to be talking about in the first place. They'll be looking for an opportunity to tell that customer or to show that customer, "There might be a different way to think about this all together."

Now if that sale rep is only selling objection handling training and nothing else, that might be exactly where you want the customer to be. But even so, you want to make sure that your objection handling training has some specific aspects to it that allows you to demand a premium price for it relative to the three other competitors. So I'd want to steer that customer to a point that allows me to guide them towards realizing my unique objection handling training is worth a premium price.

**Jill Konrath: But you also said to look for the root cause because often when people come to the table and they say, "We want to do this," they're basing their decision on research that they're conducting now. They may not have done a lot of work in this area before so they're skimming the surface of the information. Even though they're doing some deep dives in certain areas, they don't necessarily have enough experience to know if they have come to the right conclusion.**

Brent Adamson: That's right. In fact we hear this all the time from Heads of Sales. "It's deeply frustrating because customers are out there learning on their own and when they get to the 57 percent, they package it all up in a RFP. They call up the sales organization, lay it all out, and say, "Here's what we want."

And the sales team will look at it and say, "That's not what you should want, that's actually going to hurt your business." So question number one is, "Are your customers learning on their own?" Question number two is, "Are they getting it right?" And those two are not the same thing at all, we find.

**Jill Konrath: Right, they're not necessarily getting it right because in many cases they don't buy these products or services very often. Or maybe the company does buy it often, but there's so much transition within an organization that the person who is responsible or the people who are responsible weren't involved the**



**last time. And so their depth of knowledge is only skin deep sometimes even though it appears deeper based on the research that they've done.**

Brent Adamson: It's really interesting, you see this in the data when you look at core performing versus star performing sales professionals and how they're trying to engage customers. One of the things we found actually quite clearly in some research we did about two years ago with several thousand sales professionals is if you look at the key engagement strategy of core performing sales reps and what they're trying to accomplish from a customer's part of that conversation is things like, "I'm trying to figure out the customer's purchase process," or, "I'm trying to get them to teach me how this purchase is going to be made, I'm trying to figure out how different people relate to one another so I'm trying to get them to essentially teach me their org chart. I'm trying to get them to help me understand what they're doing in their business and why they need this in the first place."

So it's essentially the core reps who are asking the customer to coach them through the sale. And what's interesting about that list is that's what we've been training on for years. It sounds like Sales 101 and to see that associated with core performance, not star performance, is a weird thing. But then when we looked at what star performers were doing, it actually was a 180-degree difference.

Star performers are saying, "I'm trying to teach the customer things about the purchase process that they themselves might not have fully realized. I'm trying to help them understand that there are probably questions on the table they haven't considered but should. I'm trying to show them the different people that they need to bring into this purchase decision that they might not fully appreciated."

What we're finding is the star performers, rather than asking the customer to coach them through the sale, they're proactively coaching the customer through the purchase. The idea being exactly what you just said, that while customers may be buying the solution for the first time, that supplier has been selling it every single day and they often will understand better how to buy the thing than the customer will themselves.

And so there's this really interesting opportunity that most reps don't actually take advantage of to coach the customer through the purchase process, proactively telling them who should be involved and what they should consider and the questions they need to answer. It's a really different posture.

**Jill Konrath: One of my recent clients just showed me an outline where they really went in-depth in terms of their customers' buying process. They said they used some of my stuff from SNAP Selling to do this. What they ended up doing is outlining the stages on a map of the decision process: who needs to be involved, when, and what has to happen on at each stage.**

**When they're contacted by customers, they're literally leveraging this checklist and saying, "Look, you don't make these decisions very often. We work with customers who do this all the time. Here's the process that we found really makes a difference. We'll walk you through it step-by-step so you know what to do and who to involve at each of the stages."**

**And what they've found is by simply doing that, they have significantly shortened their sales cycle time.**

Brent Adamson: That's fantastic. I'm right there with you. In fact our research is totally aligned on this. We call this approach Commercial Coaching—it's coaching your customer with the commercial endpoint in mind. I have a similar story about a Head of Sales at a company we all know. He went on a ride-along recently with one of his star performers and he told me this story.

"Brent, it was really weird because I did this ride-along with one of my best reps to a customer who's relatively early in the purchase process. We walked in to have a conversation with the senior decision makers and the Procurement officer was there. And it was really awkward.

In the car on the way back to the airport, I looked at my sales rep and said, 'How in the world did Procurement get invited to the meeting?'

And the sales rep said, 'Well I invited him.'

The Head of Sales said, 'Why in the world did you invite procurement to the meeting when it's so early?'

He said, "Because I've learned ten times out of ten if you don't get procurement involved early, you're going to tank late. So now I encourage my customer to get Procurement involved early, rather than trying to do an end around."

It's the same idea, it's really powerful.

**Jill Konrath: Yeah, that's very cool.**

**Jill Konrath: Brent, I know you've been doing some significant research around collaboration and getting buy-in earlier in the sales process—versus waiting until a customer is late in the sales process to get everybody in the group together. You actually have some research around what salespeople can do to get buy-in. I think that's a pretty important topic because the number of decision makers has expanded significantly in the last few years and the length of the decision cycle has expanded at the same time. So what have you uncovered recently?**

Brent Adamson: The biggest story in selling today is not that we're selling differently, but how customers are buying differently. Up until now, much of our work in the customer buying process has been around informed customers delaying the interaction with sales longer than ever before. But there's a whole other parallel track to that customer buying story which is the consensus story—the fact that there are more stakeholders involved in a purchase, arguably, than ever before.

The consensus first showed up on our radar screen as early as 2006, so that in itself is not necessarily a new story. But what fascinates us is in the last two or three years is that it's morphed significantly to be less a story about number and more a story about diversity. Not only are more people involved in a purchase than ever before, but there's more *different* people.

It's funny, when we talk to any B2B company in the world, they all have the same story, "We used to sell to X and now we sell to X, Y, Z, A, B, and C." They also tell us, "We used to sell to the Head of Marketing, but now we have an IT component so we have to sell to the CIO too. And now the C suite is involved and now the head of Germany involved," or whatever.

We've done a lot of customer surveys and we've actually nailed that, on average, customers involve 5.4 different people in a typical purchase decision.

And it's not just 5.4 people that are involved, but 5.4 different perspectives that are involved. And so much of our work is now essentially like herding cats. What we're finding is that this has massive implications on deal quality, on margins, things like that. Because if these 5.4 people can't agree, then they ultimately just settle for what we've come to call the lowest common denominator. What's the one thing we can all agree on? "Well let's try to save the company a buck," right?

**Jill Konrath: "So now we're just going to look at" . . .**

Brent Adamson: Because the 5.4 decision makers couldn't agree, you wind up with low margin small deals that are good enough for status quo. And so that's where a lot of our work is right now.

**Jill Konrath: So you have 5.4 people involved and they are all sitting at the table. Maybe they're not sitting at the table because they're spread out globally or certainly in multiple offices. And they have to come together to figure out if changing the current way of doing things is worth investing in and then with whom.**

Brent Adamson: Right.

**Jill Konrath: So that's a bit of a challenge, especially if you get some people involved in a decision who will be hurt possible by the decision.**

Brent Adamson: That's right.

**Jill Konrath: It's going to put pressure on their organization, they may have to go backwards, they may not realize any benefit from it at all.**

Brent Adamson: Yeah.

**Jill Konrath: And you've got others who can't wait to get going and you've got to hold them back because they're terrifying everybody as they're trying to ram something through the organization.**

Brent Adamson: That's right.

**Jill Konrath: So you have this diversity and then there's the financial guy who only cares about the numbers and the HR people who are asking, "How are people going to feel about this and how will it impact-." Okay, so we've got all these people, what is working to bring them together and create consensus earlier on?**

Brent Adamson: To get to what's working, let me first tell you what's not working. It's really interesting. So the traditional approach that I think most of us would adopt is what I call a "track them down and win them over" strategy. Right?

The first thing to do is figure out who the 5.4 are in the first place. Sometimes it's not clear, sometimes your customers don't even know. But let's assume for a second I can figure that out who is involved in the purchase decision. The idea is to approach them one by one and make a pitch to them as compellingly as possible that speaks to their unique needs and to their unique priorities so that I win them over. And once I win over number one, then I move onto number two. I do the same thing with the second person and tailor my offering to make sure that they're on board. Once I win them over, I move onto number three. And so we collect a series of Yeses and we think that, "If I can connect each one of those individuals more closely to my offering to me, that the one plus one plus one will equal agreement."

But as one of our members in sales and marketing at CEB told us, "The world I live in has this problem of one plus one plus one equals zero." In other words, even if I win over each of the individuals, the deal's not yet in the bag. Even if each one of them has looked at me and said yes. When they all get together around a table (figuratively or literally) and have a discussion, the deal can still fall apart.

We found out that in many ways this problem of consensus and diversity for the 5.4 is not just a selling problem, it's just as much a buying problem. The issue isn't so much that those individuals don't appreciate our offering, it's just they can't agree with each other. And so the bumper sticker phrase we often use for this work right now is that "the challenge of overcoming consensus today is not so much doing a better job of

connecting individual stakeholders to us, it's doing a better job of connecting those individual stakeholders to each other."

And this becomes really interesting because that's actually a very different dynamic. Think about what those individual stakeholders are disagreeing about or where they're failing to reach consensus, what they're struggling to agree on. From our data it turns out the thing they're struggling to agree on is not whether or not you're a great supplier, but whether or not a problem is even worth solving in the first place and what the right solution to that problem is irrespective of supplier.

**Jill Konrath: Right.**

Brent Adamson: Right? And so that's where we need to plug in to help the 5.4. It's not about helping them to decide whether or not we're the best answer, but whether that solution is even worth pursuing irrespective of our answer. It's a very different dynamic.

**Jill Konrath: It's a hugely different dynamic. I see this happen in my world all the time too. What do you do when they don't all come to the table thinking that it's going to change? What have you found that's working and helping to get consensus that the problem is worth doing something about at an earlier stage?**

Brent Adamson: One of the things we found last year in our marketing work that's really interesting to us is, first of all, when you look at the most likely point of disagreement across the 5.4. Again, it's not the supplier but it's the problem identification and the solution selection irrespective of supplier. And it peaks at solution selection, just getting agreement on what we should even do in the first place.

When we ask customers, "At what point in the purchase process do you typically reach that disagreement point, that sort of node where consensus is likely to either for or fall apart around the solution?" that point turns out to be 37 percent of the way through the purchase process.

So now take these two numbers I've put out here so far and put them together, it's really interesting.

**Jill Konrath: There's a huge drop-off point.**

Brent Adamson: That's exactly right. Think about what this means. Customers left to their own devices are unlikely to contact the supplier until 57 percent of the way through the purchase, but consensus is most likely to fail at 37 percent of the way through the purchase. I often ask marketers, "How many deals have we lost over the years that we never even knew were on the table because customers never could reach consensus around moving forward?" And the answer is "Who knows?" It's an unknowable thing.

As a result, we're finding that a reactive strategy for consensus is not going to work. We have to essentially go out and build consensus—instead of just waiting for consensus to fall apart and then try to stitch it back together. That means there's a huge role for marketing to play around the consensus issue. If Sales is only called in later and has to reactively stitch together consensus, then we need marketing to play a bigger role.

And so we've come at this from both a marketing angle and a sales angle. On the marketing side, it's a lot about the language and the collateral. The messages and the content that we create need to be constructed in a way where multiple stakeholders can see agreement as opposed to divergence.

A lot of the work in marketing around personas, personalization and tailoring of content, while important, could actually create more distance across stakeholders as opposed to greater connections across stakeholders if done too far or done in the wrong way. And so all of our answers, whether they're sales or marketing right now, are really focused on, "How do we do a better job of making an individual, personal, tailored connection that also sets someone up simultaneously for connecting with others at the same time?"

Some of that is through different designs of messaging and collateral. Some of that is just design and ways of creating collective learning across a customer group. And some really interesting things we're just looking at and just learning to understand right now.

**Jill Konrath: So what would you say to salespeople who've initiated a conversation with Eric, got a call with Eric. And they've met with Eric and Eric has expressed interest and said, "We're thinking about if we should change or not."**

**What should a salesperson be doing if Eric is sort of interested and thinks that it's going to be hard to reach his goals unless they do something different?**

Brent Adamson: Okay, got it, so I'm selling to Eric. Now traditionally if I am a good sales professional, I'm prepping well and doing my research, then what I'm trying to do is understand Eric as deeply as I can. Right? What is Eric's role in the organization, what is Eric's function, what traditionally do people in Eric's function look for, what are his needs? And I'll do some of that on my own, some I'll do in the interaction trying to figure that out in the moment. That's all still really important, none of that goes away. But traditionally what we do is we'd figure that out and then tailor our offering as closely as we can to whatever we find out. Right?

**Jill Konrath: Right.**

Brent Adamson: But the other thing we find is that the best reps are asking a different set of questions all together. So beyond Eric, who else is involved in this purchase

decision? "Is it Janet, or is it Susan, or is it...?" or they think of roles, "Is it the CFO or the procurement officer?" And by the way, if Eric doesn't know that, to what degree do I need to show Eric or teach Eric who else is needed to make a decision. This goes back to your point earlier about coaching the customer. Who else should be involved?

First of all, can I help Eric understand who else is going to have to be involved in this purchase? Second of all, are there ways I can help Eric understand what those people care about around my solution or around the area that my solution speaks to? And third, how can I equip Eric to better speak to them in terms they care about when Eric goes to make a business case or a new course of action? Is Eric better equipped to have that conversation with 4.4 other people, who act very differently, talk very differently, and care about very different things? Am I essentially equipping Eric to be a good advocate for that course of action?

We actually profiled a case from Marketo right now about this. So Marketo is selling marketing automation to Heads of Marketing, but the problem is if the Head of Marketing says, "I want marketing automation, it's a great tool." Then the Head of Marketing has to go the CIO to get sign-off because it's an IT tool, but the IT person will say, "We already have a CRM system."

Then they have to argue, "No, it's not a CRM system, it's totally different," right? But the CIO doesn't understand. So is that Head of Marketing equipped to understand what CIO's care about, what language they use, what their objections will likely be? All the things that we prepare our sales reps to do: objection handling, better talking points, better use of language, better stories. Can we equip our mobilizers, the Eric's of the world, to be better equipped to have those conversations on our behalf as well?

**Jill Konrath: That's cool. I've seen a lot of star performers do this too, they're saying, "Eric, we got to get these people in a room soon because the longer we wait to get the people in the room, the more problems you're going to have if this is something that you really want to do."**

Brent Adamson: Yeah, absolutely. The trick is though it's not to get them in a room but what you do with them once you get them in the room.

**Jill Konrath: Yeah, I suppose.**

Brent Adamson: Because if you get them in a room and do a product demo—and our data actually is pretty clear—it's not going to help you very much. Because if you do a product demo, then you're solving for the wrong problem. A product demo is to win them over for you as the supplier as opposed to someone else. But again, the point of disagreement is not who's the right supplier.

**Jill Konrath: Right.**

Brent Adamson: Instead, you need to get the decision makers in a room and have a conversation about what they're trying to accomplish, irrespective of supplier.

**Jill Konrath: Cool. Well, our time is up and I truly appreciate the time you've given us today.**

**For anybody who's listening, I highly recommend getting "The Challenger Sale." It's absolutely a mind-changing book that will open up a lot of thinking for you. But I can't wait until your next one comes out too. So thanks so much for everything today, Brent, truly appreciate it.**

Brent Adamson: You're welcome, Jill. And congratulations on the new book. We're super excited for you. It's great stuff.

**Jill Konrath: Thank you. Thank you so much. Bye-bye.**