

In The Trenches_ Interview with Aaron Ross

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SPEAKERS

Steve Divitkos, Aaron Ross

S Steve Divitkos 00:00
Aaron Ross, welcome to the show.

A Aaron Ross 00:01
Hey, Steve. Yeah, happy to be here.

S Steve Divitkos 00:03
Well, it's great to have you. And we have a lot to get to today, and where I'd like to start actually stems from your substack, called Fresh Air. And you were writing a lot, which I really appreciate about the personal side of being a leader. And where I want to start with you is on this concept of vulnerability. I've asked other guests this question, because it's something that I think CEOs and senior managers struggle with quite a bit, which is this question of just how vulnerable should I be with my employees and my stakeholders? On one hand, some CEOs want to shield or protect their employees from their worries and fears and anxieties. And yet, on the other hand, other CEOs want to humanize themselves and kind of let their employees in so to speak. So, in your experience, what have you learned about incorporating the concept of vulnerability as an executive? And how should CEOs and business leaders think about that at a high level?

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Aaron Ross 01:06

Yeah, I think that I'm not sure how many sales or revenue executives or CEOs starting to see, let's just say that this feeling of wow, you know, I feel like I should be working as hard as ever. I feel like I should be getting more results, but I'm actually more tired than ever. Like, there's some kind of this difference between, like the demands of the job, which used to feel generally doable, which now they are starting to feel untenable. Like, it's too much. And a lot of this is really due to the pandemic and the changes in the world, and remote work. And that's not the only thing but so I don't think they've connected the dots yet on quite as much as, say, there's been this pandemic, COVID pandemic, but underneath this has been, there's been running an emotional pandemic, or an energy pandemic. What does that mean? There's this energy tax that everyone's been paying, especially because of the remote work. So, there's a few things first of all, there's a lot of uncertainty and anxiety in the world is because the pandemic, financial, travel, sickness. Then there's all these changes in work to remote and not and, and there's all the screentime now, if you're remote, so there's basically all these add up to this. People just, I think, executive, I'm speaking myself to like, just more tired, you put in the same number of hours. And I don't actually think people can even put in the same number hours, but feel like you're not getting the results and just be more tired. And so one of the what I see as a shift is this old idea that the precious resources were time and money. Which if funding or budget and how many hours you working, is been changing, and it's already happening, it's the pandemic accelerated everything, to the new precious resources of energy in trust. So it's not that one's gone away, and the other has been just a rebalancing. Trust has always been important, but it's like 10 times more important going to be energy, the same thing. And so one of the things that saps an executive energy is carrying on this kind of corporate armor and corporate armor, you know, imagine you in the past, you're fighting, I don't like the fighting metaphors for business, but I'm just gonna go with it. Fighting other people wearing swords, and armor is really helpful. You need a heavy armor in the corporate world, people needed to look good look, professional, act a certain way, got it all together, not talk about personal issues or problems. And that serves a purpose. That's just the way it was. Now that corporate armor is become more a liability. It's like if you're fighting people with crossbows and rifles, and you can't move because it's armor so heavy, it's a problem. And there's a shift this way, which is now this corporate armor. This really it's like this emotional load of looking a certain way. And carrying the load for your team, I need to look or your executive, your boss. I need to make them feel like I've got it together, I've got the answers. You know, maybe I look good for not acknowledging like, challenges in your life that really are affecting you. Like that is changing where people now are paying the price of carrying that load in the exhaustion and certainly overwhelm. And one thing that can help lighten that it's just again, being you know, the word vulnerable just sounds so on. Powerful on useful, I think, used to be seen as still as liability, so we have to reframe it. It's really just being more of yourself and allowing yourself to share some of the things that are going on with your team. And if you're a CEO or VP, if X, Y or Z, the thing is like when you let down your armor a bit, and that gives your team permission to let down their armor a bit. So it kind of everybody wins. And you could just be more of yourself. And rather than wasting all this energy towards creating this appearance, and we all do that in some way, but you can just ratchet it back by a lot. And just be more open and real with your start with your team, or yourself. And that is I think the future is a new big thing that's going to be, I think, the number one challenge for executives and teams in the future, because the world has changed, it's not going to go back to the way it was.

S**Steve Divitkos 05:40**

Now, I love the phrase taking off the armor. Tactically, I'm wondering how you do that? And I'll give you an example. So at the beginning of my weekly management meetings, when I was running my company, the first five minutes of every meeting was dedicated to us going around the table and each member of the management team would give us their personal best over the past week. So personally, what was the best thing that happened to you? And professionally, what was the best thing that happened to you? And other times we would, we would do? You know, what am I most looking forward to in the coming seven days? What am I least looking forward to in the coming seven days? all under the guise of kind of taking off our armor and kind of bringing our whole selves to work. So if it's that important, which I agree, it is tactically for CEOs and VPs of sales and other leaders listening to this, what are some ways that they can incorporate that, that thought that platitude into their day to day as they run their companies and their teams?

A**Aaron Ross 06:38**

Yep. Well, one of the things is able to acknowledge and let people know if you've got something at home that's affecting you. Right? It could be everyone's got some well, not everyone but like a CEO today might, he has a parent that is really declining quickly, right. It's creating a ton of stress and uncertainty and everything else and sucking up a big chunk of his energy. You know, it's okay, so here's the thing is, whether it's embarrassment, don't look bad, don't want to like, I don't want people to pity me. I don't think it's relevant. Lots of reasons why people don't mention these things. But I think it's more important than ever to say, yeah, hey, by the way, just so you know, I've just started going through a divorce. I just, you know, a family member got this. I mean, every there's always old age, sickness, death, divorce, addiction, teenagers, anxiety, the mental health issues are out of control, and they will continue to be out of control. Like everyone's got something, or everyone's got a close friend or family member who's got something to dealing with. And the differences, okay, you know, how far you go. There's a difference between letting people know and kind of opening the door, if you want to talk maybe you don't take great and where you go too far is starting to kind of dump on people. And maybe it is a divorce and you start crying, you know that my partner is such a, you know, XY expletive, like, That's going too far. So it's kind of at least giving people information that's going on, if you feel like you want to talk about or not, can open the door for people to ask questions, personal choice, but not to start to dump or overshare for the team. That's one example of a tactic. Again, I think, a lot of meetings and so on. So hey, let's talk about the good stuff. Great. You know what, fantastic. I think it's a mistake not to acknowledge at least if there's some shit going on. There's frequently something. Someone's got something going on that's pretty heavy. That's just life. I mean, let's not be dishonest to pretend it doesn't exist. It doesn't affect you. That's even bigger lie, oh, I got it together. No you don't, no you don't.

S**Steve Divitkos 08:54**

Very few people, very few people do.

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Aaron Ross 08:56

Oh, come on. We're all human.

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Steve Divitkos 08:59

Now I mean, throughout the course of your career, you deal with very high level business, professional CEOs, CROs, you know, VPs of sales, etc. My guess correct me if I'm wrong, is that many of us fall into the kind of type A overachiever category. Whether we do or we don't. As you zoom out 100,000 feet and you look at these types of senior ambitious folks that you've dealt with, I'm curious, like, what similarities or patterns or themes do we tend to present as a group? So for example, you know, if I look at myself and my peers, one of the things that is common amongst us is this need for achievement, in some cases need for approval. And if we don't kind of achieve something explicit on any given day, we feel as if we've wasted that day. In other instances, we focus on outcomes that in some cases are completely out of our control instead of the processes and the inputs in working towards those outcomes. So those are just kind of a few examples of what I mean. I'm curious if any similarities, themes, patterns have emerged over the years for you when dealing with these types of people?

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Aaron Ross 10:19

Yeah, I mean, especially in the corporate and like to tech, the SaaS area, obviously, pretty common. People are working, you can draw a pie chart, but a significant part of why they work just for money, and success, maybe fame and fortune. Title, and there's opportunity. And I think everyone's different. So but it's being aware of, do I really know, why am I working? You know, and personally, I've gone through different phases where, you know, I just turned 50, when as younger, there was like, the big salary was exciting. Or title maybe was exciting, more opportunity was exciting. And now I've got I've had kids got a lot of kids, 10 kids, I work primarily, to make money to support food is really to support the families, the different I need, I work to support the family. And one thing that I've been working on, and I think what other people don't do is say, what's been missing? Whatever your reasons are, you know what, there's no wrong reason, like knock yourself out if it works for you. But I think again, with dependent we there's been a reawakening of people, she's like, What am I doing? Do I want to do this? Or do I want to do this, but in the way I'm doing it, and we've all got this blank sheet of paper and a chance to rewrite as a business, as a team, as a person? How, what do I want to do? And how do I want to do it? And says, creedal, autonomous, you know, whether it's through presentations, or reflection, which we haven't even seen, this is the tip of the iceberg. You know, over the next few years, a lot of people who have been thinking about this, but have not made changes yet. You know, over the next three to 10 years, there's been a lot of people who are like desperate to, and I've been in this I'm in this boat, too. Although I started before the pandemic, like, how can I read, create my work or myself to fit to realize that fits more like me, it feels more like me. And that's different. And that's not. So I think, again, this is another area where, because of the nature of work, and the overload and overwhelming, the screentime, and it's like the this energy thing, you can think about it. When your work or the way you're working is out of alignment with who you are. And I'll come to a tactic, it is draining you know, you can a lot of us can go through brew will willpower or stubbornness for a while, but at some point you hit a wall. And I'll give you one example, for me a simple one. So I think about CEOs as well,

because there's so much stuff they have to do or feel they have to do. And it's whether they like it or not. But the more you can align with like who you are what you like to do. And so for me, like I'm creating content, you mentioned my substack fresh air. I've written some books, pretty well known, they've been on a lot of Silicon Valley Top X books, lists. And when it came down to, you know, for a while could do I want another book, and I just been burned out on writing for a few years. And part of that was from having kind of, effectively twins. One was an adopted baby, now that we had our baby. I was just toast and had been. So for the last few years, it's been a brutal struggle. If I try to write, It's a brutal struggle. It's like stabbing myself in the brain. And it's just become out of alignment for me. But when I left my old company Predictable Revenue about a year ago, again, just out of alignment, who I was just so done, the team just wasn't a fit and the type of work I was trapped in. So went back to the text of content. So I'm a lot happier now. I'm still working through this, but some work with different people, people so much similar more than we're values to his clients and boards. And going back to content. I'm creating a different kind of content that feels more real to me is still for executives. But it's more can how can you make this, it's called Money for Your Business or You but in a way that aligns with who you are. And there's that leading by example. But here's where it gets a little bit even more specific, rather listening than to write which it just doesn't work for me. I'll be out walking or driving or doing something, I'll get ideas and I'll record them either on an audio app, or do maybe like a video or a video, tic tock or whatever Instagram or just my phone. And I have a marketing person who helps kind of like go through and edit stuff and we talk so I'm on the go, I don't sit to write I capture it in some other media and then someone else kind of like does it pass at it. Then sit down on zoom with them. Let me go through it together. Because I get energy from being with someone live. I don't really like asynchronous as much, doing some of the live is much better when I can do it. And then she does kind of the posting. And so for me, it's a lot more in alignment. I'm still tweaking, you know, working through this with who I am, where I am now, which is not writing but in creating content, formats that are simple and doable to capture and getting help with someone in terms of accountability and editing in the tactical publishing part, which I don't want to do. And the more that is even whether you're CEO, or VP sale that whoever you are, you can start to rethink and re re look at who you are, what you want to do, or how you want to do it. And I wear these places in my day that is just like pounding my head against the wall, is it the person I'm working with, is the type of work I'm doing, is it the way I'm doing it, the time I'm doing it? Then start to restructure that, then that is going to be found a fundamental to your your business success, including in how much you enjoy your work. And I don't see it's so rare that people are doing that it's happening, but not enough, especially at the executive level, because they set the example for their teams.

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Steve Divitkos 16:13

Now you've talked about energy quite a bit. Things that drain your energy and things that replenish your energy. And I would say that, you know, substantially everybody listening to this is running a marathon of some sort personally and or professionally and part of a sprint.

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Aaron Ross 16:33

Mix of marathon of 26 Sequential Sprint's

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Steve Divitkos 16:38

That's right, that's right. Now, you know, not that I'm a big runner or anything. So I hope I don't kind of stumble on my words here. But I suspect part of running any marathon not that I would know from firsthand experience, is cultivating your energy, knowing when to sprint and when to replenish. So in the marathon of entrepreneurship of the marathon of leadership and the marathon of one's career, I'm curious for you personally, do you have any tactics or habits or routines that you lean on to replenish your own energy?

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Aaron Ross 17:13

Well, you mentioned draining and energizing, so I got 10 kids and family is hella hella draining, you know, hella draining. And at the same time, incredibly energizing. I have been tired, physically and emotionally for most of the last 10 years. And yet, able to work almost nonstop. And by work, whether it's like work work, or whether it's, you know, chores with the kids are playing, I mean, just be active, just kind of on the go. And my problem, I think my struggle is the number one thing for me, which helps improve my energy, my emotional bandwidth is just sleep. And it's been challenging for 10 years. So for me, sleep is number one, Exercise number two, and some of us maybe like nutrition or kind of number three, but I noticed is that when I don't get enough sleep, and I'm with my wife, or kids too, my bandwidth for dealing with stuff is a lot smaller, and I'll just, I'll be more likely to snap or I can't go on, I gotta quit early, I just can't. And so that is an obvious one for me. I used to do a lot of meditation I used to, there's other things, which I feel are important. So that's one, the other thing has made it the most dramatic difference in my work and able to work enjoying work, getting results out of work, again, is this realignment with working with people that I like. And that's mostly on my own. I have some contractors help with like finance and things, but that's part of it, but also with the clients. And not working with some, you know, I was my ex partner and I were like energy vampires to each other. So that's made a huge difference and also the type of work rather being in more like tactical outbound implementation stuff. Now it's more sales advisory high level like board, Sam boards. So those are the things like the sleep and that type of work, have made the most dramatic difference and be able to really feel like I'm back in the game and excited to do things and to create things. Versus just dragging but which I was for years, and I still have those days and those times trust me like even today because last couple of nights getting my sleep interrupted a lot last couple nights. And I'm just dragging, but.

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Steve Divitkos 19:37

I hope this show appearance is not an energy vampire for you?

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Aaron Ross 19:40

No, I mean, one of the things I like to do is talk to people, not too many per week, right? It's like, I like to meet people talk to people, I get a lot energy from that versus just sitting at my desk doing like email or writing. Like that's the kind of stuff where I'm just over. I really try to minimize that as so. That's taxing them like yeah, Talking to people. That's the thing I'm working on doing more of.

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Steve Divitkos 20:06

Well, let's take this theme that we've settled on here and bring it closer to home from a sales perspective, because we've talked about roles that you enjoy, versus roles you don't enjoy. Roles that you're uniquely good at, versus roles that you're not uniquely good at, and kind of optimizing your life and your career around things that you enjoy, things that provide you with energy, etc. I'm reminded of my own VP of sales. I mean, one of the biggest energy vampires for him was the fact that he felt as if he spent far too much time working in his team versus working on his team. And in fact, this is a very common concern among sales leaders. And frankly, leaders have many divisions, particularly among small and medium sized businesses. So I'm curious, what advice would you give to sales leaders or leaders of any departments who feel like they can't extricate themselves from the day to day? And could it possibly be as simple as hiring a manager to sit between them and their individual contributors?

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Aaron Ross 21:08

Yeah, and that's a good question. So I think one of the consequences of this change in work and energy pandemic, again, is people with mental health challenges, and the most emotional health are way higher, and remain higher indefinitely, just because of just tech, tidal wave, which rolls on. And so people's attention spans are shorter, people's ability to juggle bunch of stuff shrinks down, and so my, I believe that one of the things that people need to do is even go further with things like sales specialization, which is, or what are it's the old idea of like, what can you focus on that you do best? Or that you really want to do like, either you really enjoy it, you're really good at it, or you have to do it. And other things, can you get someone else to do it, who's better at it? So like you said, if there's a VP of sales, or an executive who's really struggling with how much to work in the business versus on the business, you have to, like something that really works is find someone else to help you. Someone else who's better, ideally, better at the thing you need to do. So if it's, like a VP, sales cannot be the best. Let's just come on, like, they can't be the best at hiring and coaching, and proposal coaching, and demo coaching, and quota setting, and territory management and, and, and, and. They can't be the best all that that's impossible. So for any VP sales, some will be great at some of those things, and be horrible some of those things, just get support for the things that you're not good at and or don't want to do, or that where you just feel like you're banging their head against the wall. Unfortunately, a lot of them might enjoy modeling and forecasting and like Silikal so great selling. A lot might learn when I rip their eyeballs out. Why make them, find someone who can kind of co pilot with them, if need be, can run, sales ops is a relatively new ish role, but that role, whether it's full time or even part time, get a consultant is such an incredibly important job. Yeah, as the world gets busier, the more tech and like any sales executive is, if there's any way to get any, like sales ops, we may call it Rev Ops, we're gonna call support. If that's the kind of thing you don't like to do, like, yes. Do it, just find a way to get some budget to invest it because you get paid back, it will pay itself back. Don't try to do it all yourself. You can't and do it well, it's impossible.

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Steve Divitkos 23:42

So I mean, I don't mean this to sound reductive. But what you're proposing sounds intuitive, logical, understandable, straightforward. If that's the case, why don't more executives follow that advice? I mean, it seems pretty simple, seems to pass the common sense test. And yet 1000s of executives are currently bashing their heads against the wall. doing the things that they're either not uniquely good at are the things that they don't enjoy doing. So if everything that you just said is true, which I believe it to be, why don't more executives heed that advice?

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Aaron Ross 24:22

I think it's just inertia. That's like rewinding back. Why did companies for selling make their salespeople try to do everything and like prospect and close and manage accounts? That's just because the way it was always done. That's just like, sales culture, mine is corporate culture, you're an executive you kind of have to do it all or be expected to get it all done and you're supposed to ask for help. And now, so I think it's just mostly just habit and inertia. And at changing that, is challenging, takes extra energy like for me, I've tried to get VA help and it's such a pain in the ass. Like, what can I even have someone offload to someone, and if they're sometimes during the same time zone or different, are they too Senior or too Junior? Like, it's been so hard to actually get useful VA, a virtual assistant executive assistant help finding a person you can trust. And it's like, okay, it's just easier to go back to doing them doing, I'll just get it done. Right. So I don't think that's what I think I mean, you What do you think?

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Steve Divitkos 25:30

I think that has a lot to do with it. My guess is a lot of folks kind of find excuses and blame for lack of a better word, their circumstances on things outside of their control. So for example, what I'm thinking of is VP of department X, Y, Z, who says, If only I had the budget for a middle manager, then I'd be able to work on the business instead of in the business, or then I'd be able to offload all the stuff that I don't enjoy doing. And yet, in my experience, even when that person is hired, in many cases, more work is created to fill the capacity and the benefits that they were originally seeking and making that hire don't actually transpire. So let's stay on this concept of roles, right? Because it's a really important one and specific to sales, which I know is kind of your backyard. I get this question a lot from CEOs, specifically, the title page is how involved should a CEO be in the sales process, particularly in the context of small and medium sized businesses? And to paint the picture, many CEOs have been lionized and mythologized for being deeply involved in their company sales processes. And they kind of justify that by saying, well, hey, the CEO should be the company's best salesperson. I'm sure that's not the first time you've heard that. Whether that's right or wrong. And so some people are of that opinion. Others say, hey, this is an effective delegation, you should trust your sales team. And by the way, that's not your highest and best use of time as a CEO, I seem to hear both lines of thinking with equal amounts of frequency. So like, where do you stand on this? How involved should a CEO be in a company sales process?

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Aaron Ross 27:27

I mean, you know, of course, like everything these days, especially as the answer is, it depends. So with how involved should CEO be? Yeah, it's up to them. Like, when is valuable use of their time? Is it always a valuable use of their time when the company is small, getting the first 10 or 20 Customers? Yes, always a valuable use of their time. As it gets bigger, you know, is it useful for the CEO to talk to customers and have their hand and kind of what's going on in sales? Yeah, it's usually valuable, but depends to like, how effective are your leaders? To what extent is sales, that part of the business, like a big part of the business, or small versus maybe automated sales, or online or upsells or? So yeah, this, it's useful to keep their ear to the ground, but to accept they're in it or not, that just depends on where's our use of time important. And if the companies transitioning from on the board of a company with a chance to transition from small business kind of sales to enterprise, and a CEO was deeply involved in that, and they had to be, because it was the company's going through a fundamental shift in like messaging and targeting. But once it gets through that will need to be hopefully not as much except for a few key places. So it just depends on the CEO. I think it's not so much avoiding sales, because like, sales, I don't do that. And not so much. I have to be in there because I need to be like, well, just listen to yourself like how useful or not would it be for you to be there? And just try to be honest with your team and to not do it because someone else thinks you should or shouldn't.

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Steve Divitkos 29:15

Yeah, I find that where I kind of shake out on this is I think there is truth to the concept of, hey, the CEO should be the company's best salesperson. But I think that's taken out of context. I think a CEO is constantly selling, they're selling to new employees who may want to join the company, they're selling to prospective partners, where there may be some sort of business relationship, they're selling to prospective investors. In that way, of course, the CEO needs to be the company's best salesperson I mean, you're selling to employees for purposes of keeping them motivated, right and retaining them, your selling your vision, etc. I think this statement the CEO should be the company's best salesperson in true is true in all of those regards, but I don't think it's true in my experience with respect to hey, are you logging conversations on Salesforce? And are you carrying a quota? I mean, unless you're a startup, and there's a team of one to five people in that work simply needs to get done. Sure. But with a business that is cheap, any level of scale that just strikes me as a really ineffective use of the CEOs time.

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Aaron Ross 30:27

Yeah. So it's like anything else? How involved should the CEO be in development? I mean, well, product design, yep. Development, you know, it's like this, it's really about being in tune with the business, in what where to apply the time in as much as possible of winning arbitrary demands on what they should do. And this is true anybody, this is like an eternal challenge of being human, how much you doing, because it feels it's valuable. And you should do it or want to do it versus what is expected of you. Like, whether it's like going to school or going for a job, or I mean, who knows what, it's a societal condition, human condition for our society.

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Steve Divitkos 31:09

So sticking on this theme of roles, to get a bit more granular within the sales department. Going back to your early books, you were potentially still are a proponent of specializing between hunters, which are often called account executives, and farmers, which are often called account managers. But I can tell you that many CEOs listening to this a very small sales teams, they could be a smallest two or three people. So at what level of team size, do you recommend CEOs differentiate between these two roles?

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Aaron Ross 31:46

Well, even when you're one person, you can differentiate by differentiating your time, blocking things on your calendar, like if prospecting something or business development, something I get into talking to customers, block it out on the calendar. Ideally, have a buddy with you, and that's an hour a week or three hours, whatever that is. So that's where you start. As soon as you have two salespeople to people, you again usually want to differentiate them. There's so many exceptions, like, if you had the great problem of having so many leads just coming or referrals, you can barely spend the time closing them, all you need is people, two people are closing. Maybe the one person is closing one person's upselling, account managing. So again, depending on what the load is, you there's not like an answer as to what they should do. But you start specializing with two people, when it makes sense. Pretty commonly one person a junior is doing appointment setting of some sort or like appointment management or front end stuff. And there's a closer on the back end, but to people where you start, again, lots and lots of exceptions and situations, but that's where you really start thinking about it. Or another example might be too close to say there's two salespeople, that one has an extra like a secondary specialization in like outbound. And the other has a secondary specialization in like account management upselling. So you're trying to take these jobs that both need to do? And if they both need to build lists, or upsell or say okay, well, it doesn't make sense for both people to do everything twice. Let's say one person take the lead on refining the call scripts, and the person takes the lead on the database management. So you're trying to have people doing fewer things better. That's the the principles focus.

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Steve Divitkos 33:38

Right. So it's not necessarily if you have a sales team of two people, you have one account executive who's only doing hunting and one account manager who's only doing farming. Instead of those kind of rules, you're suggesting, start implementing best practices to maybe have one person do a little bit more of A, the other person do a little bit more of B, such that to use your words, they're each doing fewer things better?

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Aaron Ross 34:04

Yeah, depending on what the load is like, what are the jobs to be done, like what needs to get done that's not getting done? You know, if you got no pipeline, if I need two people both doing prospecting, and then doing some of their own closing. If you got tons of pipeline. So this is kind of like, then that's if you're small, you might need to adapt every once in a while and just keep a pulse on what needs to be done. And like who should be doing what and what is working well versus what's dropping through the cracks and who's good at something. So it's kind of like a constant checking in and atuning, even when you're small. It's even more important in your small.

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Steve Divitkos 34:44

Now, you talked about lead generation, and that's actually something that I'd like to double click on. Before I ask you about it though, for folks who may be unaware, can you just quickly differentiate between outbound and inbound Lead Generation?

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Aaron Ross 35:00

So inbound lead generation generally would be marketing, like marketing demand generation programs that are, could be, you know, SEO, or it could be webinars or it could be all kinds of things, but that drive people to your website, or landing page, right. So they're coming to you, they probably have seen something about you, they've might have done some research, maybe they saw anything, an article webinar. And so they're coming in, they're registering with you, and they're at least familiar with your name, and maybe something else. So it's inbound. Outbound, generally going out to people who aren't calling you, they probably haven't heard of you, don't know who you are, and they might be calling, emailing using LinkedIn knocking on doors to get conversation started. So there can be lots of blends too. But that is generally inbound outbound.

S**Steve Divitkos 35:55**

So specific to inbound, I want to double click on a very particular component of it, which is a strategy that's gained a lot of traction over the past 10 years or so, which is the idea of producing educational content that is not sales oriented. But the general premise is produce a lot of educational content to educate prospective buyers. And by the time that those buyers are ready to buy, they already view your company or an individual within your company as a subject matter expert, and kind of like a trusted adviser. And when companies like the first company that comes to mind is HubSpot, you know, when they introduced this concept a long time ago. At the time, it felt quite new, quite novel. But it's been around for a long time. And most companies that I'm aware of are using this strategy in some way, shape, or form. So I'm wondering, given how ubiquitous it has become, do you think that component of inbound marketing has lost its effectiveness? Like when prospects are reading an educational piece of content or they're watching an educational webinar? I mean, at this point, are they not aware that they're being blatantly marketed to by whoever produced that piece of content?

A**Aaron Ross 37:12**

Yeah, I mean, everyone knows this question, is it useful or not, though? No. So it's not like people, people aren't dumb. I do find that consumer side, I feel like there's a lot more paid content, like landing pages, things that look like real reviews, they look like real sites that really aren't. I'm sure happens in B2B, but I think that's the challenges in companies are trying to do is create useful content that stands out, that engages buyers, and easier said than done. Do buyers know that? Yeah, of course, they know. But like, if it's useful content, so useful content. It still works, it's going to work. You know, it's not like anything in the past is going to stop working. It's more like there's just more things. The more types of things at work, so there's just more complexity, more options to navigate, like, you know, 20 years ago, if you're gonna be marketing, it a pretty limited number of options. There might have been like billboards, and trade shows and flyers, and a couple, some early online ads, and whatever, and then a few more things, but today, you have probably 10 times as many types of things or more things you could do, because there are different social ads. I mean, the profusion of ways that you can market is only going to continue to expand in the future. And so it's like this, I mentioned before it's ever this ongoing tidal wave of technology continues to create more of everything, more options, more tech and more opportunity, and overwhelming anxiety. So it's like now we're in the anxiety economy. That's why the anxiety is not going to go away. It's just gonna increase because there's more more stuff and there is going to be more stuff in the future. And that's not going to change.

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Steve Divitkos 39:01

Now, I've seen business models that are 100% outbound. You know, what's an example that comes to mind gutter cleaning? I've seen business models that are 100%, inbound, some software tools, some software companies don't really have sales teams, they have order takers or marketing teams. And then of course, there's the middle where there's some relative mix of both outbound and inbound. So for leaders who are kind of contemplating what percentage of my efforts should be outbound versus what percentage should be inbound, are there any questions that they should be asking of themselves, rules of thumb? Best practices to lean on when wrestling between those two options?

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Aaron Ross 39:46

Yeah, no, the thing is, it all depends on the people. Every business can get a different kind of ROI out of different types of lead generation. So say look at outbound right outbound depends on that business you're in. Well, some businesses shouldn't do up on a scale of one to 10, the ROI can be, you know, zero or one out of 10. And that can be a affect. So I wrote about this, to some extent in the newest book I did called From Impossible to Inevitable. And some of the factors that affect the effectiveness, so that three times fast, your ROI and outbound are, you know, how commoditized is the market? Your deal size? Do you do services versus products? Anyway, so if you're on a scale of outbound, and you're just not getting much ROI. All right, obviously, your share of total leads will be zero to small. Some companies get really high ROI. So there's going to be high and that tends to be bigger deal sizes, more product based differentiated and so on. An inbound, the same thing. So really, this depends on if you're doing your best at whatever the forms of lead generation, you're doing inbound, outbound, partners, customer success, and you're measuring them accurately, which is a bit of a different challenge, then that's how you can kind of gauge where should we be investing. It's not an arbitrary pie. And I think pretty typically a lot of bigger SaaS companies end up with like 40% inbound, 40% Outbound, 20% partners or word of mouth, you know, but that can do all over the map. So it's much more important, measuring what types of programs you're doing. How effective are they not just on the eyeball vanity metrics? But how are they driving pipeline or revenue? And that's what you use to gauge where you're investing. So we have to let go of this is so tempting, we want this copy, paste way to success, like just tell me the answer. But that's not where real success comes from. You can get examples from people Yeah, like, Okay. Elon Musk is a vegan, I'm making this up, okay, so I'm going to be a vegan? No man, like, or woman will try it, does it work or not, are some parts of it, then you get to kind of create your own cookbook. The way to success is creating your own cookbook by looking at examples, and trying stuff, but also not being afraid to come up with your own, and putting your own creative spin on it. And lead generation is no different than that. And there's so many ways you can generate leads, it's so confusing out there. But part of what you got to do is like, okay, there's 1000 things I can do. I got to pick something rather than saying, following the leader, I kind of have to also look at like, what feels right to me. Okay, there's just too many options. And so that's something else that people have to rely more on is because copy paste, type of success will not work as well, with just the overwhelming noise in the world. Kind of intuition and creativity in the X factor that people can bring, where they make it up, they just create something out of thin air, or at least one piece of what they're doing is going to or their voice is going to be again, and kind of this ever increasing component of success and standing out from the crowd. And standing out from AI. If that's something you think about.

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Steve Divitkos 43:17

Yeah, as we look to wrap up here, Aaron, I'll note that, you know, when I was first introduced to you, I read your book, predictable revenue, this would have been in, I don't know, 2000 2010. Maybe somewhere thereabouts.

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Aaron Ross 43:33

Yeah, that was right when it came out. And actually, there's a draft in 2010, the official version came out 2011.

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Steve Divitkos 43:39

So maybe that's when I read it. It was a little it's a little foggy when it was but it somewhere kind of in that general ballpark. And I would say, you know, in now reading your substack, it seems like you've transitioned from in those early days, kind of managing your business or managing your department, to now managing yourself. And I think that's such an interesting transition. And I think in light of that transition, it's one that I'm deeply interested in, as our listeners will know. And as we look to wrap up, do you have any statements for or requests of our audience or any challenges or questions for them in light of, you know, the transition that you've made, the lessons that you've learned, anything that you'd like to leave our audience with?

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Aaron Ross 44:27

Ever since kind of of what I'm going through and recreating myself, it's really around. There's so much faulty anxiety in the role. People just want to feel safe. Right? So that's why they want a plan because they feel safe for the future. And it's all an illusion, but still, and I think that a lot of ways the best way to recreate yourself in a way that you end up going through a lot of uncertainty but on the other end is more probably money and fulfillment, enjoyment. less time, which is what I'm saying. But I still feel like I'm so early. It's a challenge we're getting, especially for us and like, 40s, 50s, I don't know about 30s You know, how can I listen to myself? Like what feels right? Kind of get out of my thinking analyzing brain a lot more often, can go with the flow. Does this feel good? Do I like this? And using that as just as important or more important to gauge that as to what should I be doing? Right, great. And content, oh, I should be posting a link that I just like, No, I just can't, I just can't. And so there's nothing you have to do, you can forge your own way to get done, and forge my own way and so can token anybody. But that's it's scary because like, you don't really know what's gonna be, just got to embrace that part and keep taking the steps. And it just takes a lot longer than you want it to. But what you want is sometimes irrelevant.

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Steve Divitkos 46:07

I think that's a great place, I should say to end on. That's a wrap. Aaron, thanks for your time. We really enjoyed your perspective. And I really appreciate the time that you gave us today.



Aaron Ross 46:22

Yeah, Steve, my pleasure. Thanks for the chat.