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This is an edited transcript of the May 20, 2015 SmallBusinessTalent.com podcast interview titled – [Move Your Clients to Make Fast, Favorable Decisions: Powerful Sales Tips From Andy Paul](#).

Announcer: Are you a hard-working, self-employed professional striving for small business success? There is help. Welcome to the SmallBusinessTalent.com podcast featuring candid conversations about successful self-employment.

Stephen Lahey: Welcome to the SmallBusinessTalent.com podcast. I'm Stephen Lahey, and I'll be your host.

My special guest on the podcast today is author and entrepreneur, [Andy Paul](#). Andy is passionate about helping solo professionals and sales teams to win more business. Andy is the author of two bestselling sales books, *Zero-Time Selling: 10 Essential Steps to Accelerate Every Company's Sales*, and [Amp Up Your Sales: Powerful Strategies that Move Customers to Make Fast, Favorable Decisions](#). By the way, that's his latest book and the topic of today's interview.

As you know, helping customers to make good purchase decisions faster is the defining sales challenge for any entrepreneur, so the sales advice that Andy delivers on this podcast is particularly important. You'll take away tips that you can use to immediately improve your selling. So get ready to take some notes, and enjoy the podcast.

Thanks for making the time to be here, Andy.

Andy Paul: It's my pleasure, Stephen. Thanks for inviting me.

Stephen Lahey: To kick things off, tell us a little bit about how you got into sales originally, and then what prompted you to start your own sales training business.

Andy Paul: Sure. In terms of getting into sales, that was probably just a happy accident. I graduated college and didn't have a lot of other plans and ended up in a career placement center the summer after I graduated looking at what looked like primarily sales jobs with big computer companies like IBM and Burroughs and ended going to work for Burroughs back in the day before they became Unisys.

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After that I was living in Northern California and got into the tech business, worked for a number of venture-funded startups.

And then in the year 2000, I started my own company because I'd had a lot of success being brought into companies by investors and management teams to help them when they sort of stalled a little bit from the sales perspective. If you're a venture-funded company, that's not a great place to be, and I helped the company's to accelerate their sales, regain the momentum, and get back on the growth path that they needed to be. So having done that for a number of companies as an employee, I thought, geez, maybe I have a recipe here that I could share with a number of other companies, so I started my own business back in the year 2000.

Stephen Lahey: Now, you recently wrote a fascinating book on selling—and I'll give the title, [\*Amp Up Your Sales: Powerful Strategies that Move Customers to Make Fast, Favorable Decisions\*](#)—what motivated you to write it?

Andy Paul: Well, it was a couple things. One is I had some topics I wanted to explore more fully that I hadn't done in the first book, *Zero-Time Selling*, but also part of what I try to focus on a lot in my writing is not just the how but rather the why behind the how, why people are doing certain things, why buyers are acting a certain way, and provide what I like to call sales education, along with sales training, so it gives people a more full understanding of what they need to be doing at any point in time. If you really understand the bigger picture, then you'll be more educated about the steps that you should be taking.

Stephen Lahey: And that makes so much sense because, for me, it's very difficult to do anything without a context for very long. And we can talk about that a little further in the context of the overall sales process and really understanding how everything we do fits together.

Andy Paul: Right.

Stephen Lahey: But I also like the fact that you teach a fresh, modern approach to sales in your book. I mean, we're living in a different era than when you and I started selling, obviously, years ago.

Andy Paul: Sure.

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Stephen Lahey: How has the evolution of technology and social media impacted the process of business-to-business selling today, Andy?

Andy Paul: Well, in multiple ways. I think that probably the most obvious way is it's really changed how you have the possibility to connect with someone that you're interested in selling your product or service to. Social media, even email—email we take for granted, but it's still relatively new in the scheme of things—and it gives you some options. Somebody that's selling a product or a service, if you before would think gosh, I really hate cold calling, well, you now have some alternatives that didn't exist before that maybe don't totally eliminate the need to cold call, but they create an opportunity to have more warm calls.

You can send somebody an email, explain what you do, and say hey, I'm going to call you at 9 o'clock on Tuesday to follow up with this. You've created an entrée. Or if you've connected with them on LinkedIn, or you've exchanged comments on a LinkedIn discussion group, or something of that nature, then reaching out to them becomes a different proposition. And so technology certainly has helped people that have call reluctance, if you will, to give them alternatives for succeeding in this business.

The second thing that I think has happened is that the way that you need to approach the customer when you sell them has changed dramatically because now the customer has the opportunity to go online, research you, your products, your service, before they ever engage with you for the first time. So when you start to sell to them, they're really at a different point in their buying process than they have been in the past. And that requires that somebody be a little bit more oriented towards the customer. It's less about the product and service.

When you finally have a customer or a prospect, we'll say, that reaches out and touches you either through a sales lead or you've met them at a networking event and they've heard of your company, you now, since they know more about you, you can now lead off with good discovery questions. It's less about pitching your product or service. It's more like getting into a customer's requirements.

Stephen Lahey: And we'll know more about them upfront, too. You mentioned LinkedIn. Almost everybody who I'd want to sell to has some kind

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of LinkedIn presence, and you can really dig-in and do your homework. You can learn a lot about people upfront, just as they can learn about you.

Now, although people say, oh, X percentage of people have already done tons of research online before they call you—I think it depends on the industry. I mean, in headhunting, recruiting, for example, they're getting peppered with calls from recruiters every day of their lives.

Andy Paul: Right.

Stephen Lahey: And they're not thinking, hmm, I wonder who the recruiters are out there. Absolutely not.

Andy Paul: Yes, and I think what it does, as you talked about, with social media the seller has the ability to go out and research people and see what they're up to, so it gives you more opportunities to sort of intersect with them. Because you can track what people are doing on social media and you can see if somebody is in a LinkedIn discussion group and you can respond to that. Or someone's Tweeting about their business and you're an expert in that business, then you can reply to that Tweet and start that engagement in a way that you couldn't before.

Stephen Lahey: No doubt about it. Now, as we get further into your book, in Chapter 2, you discuss something near and dear to my heart, the importance of understanding how the tools we use and, really, everything we do, fits into our sales process and strategy. We've begun to kind of touch on this, but from your perspective, why is that so critical to our success as business owners who sell?

Andy Paul: Well, we have to be mindful of what we're doing, what the impacts of it are. The biggest fault, if you will, that I see, or the biggest problem I see with salespeople and with solopreneurs that are trying to sell their products and service, is that they've got sort of this rigid process they want to follow and they're somewhat operating on autopilot. And for me, selling is really a creative process and it really demands, you know, it's a thought-based process, so it requires that you be mindful at each step of your process, and of the buyer's process, what it is that you're going to do next and what's the value you're going to provide to the customer in terms of the value for the time that they're providing

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you to sell to them. What are they going to walk away with that's going to help them move one step closer to making a decision?

So it's always being, as I said, incredibly mindful at every point in the process why you're doing something, what the value is that you're delivering to the prospect, and what they're going to do with that value to move them closer to making a decision.

Stephen Lahey: Yes. Again, context, and being in step with where they are in the buying process. Understanding where you're going and why. That kind of thinking really does make people, even those who maybe have less experience in sales, it makes them much more able to be effective.

Andy Paul: To follow up with that just briefly, is that I tell people, when you have a list of prospects and you're working it, and you could be a salesperson or a business owner, as in your audience, a solopreneur that's executing and selling at the same time, there is a simple way to understand what steps should be taken – basically, just go down your prospect list and ask yourself this question – what value can I deliver to this prospect today that will move them one step closer to making a decision?

If you're ever sort of at a loss for, okay, what's the next step with this prospect? Just ask that question about the prospect—what's the value I can deliver today to them to move them one step closer to making a decision? And once you have the answer to that question, then you know what you need to do next. Until you can answer that question, you probably shouldn't be spending their time. You don't want to waste the customer's time. But if you ask and answer that question, then you'll know exactly what your next step should be.

Stephen Lahey: This does require us to interface with a customer to know this, of course. I mean, it's not something we can necessarily decide in the abstract. If, for example, we're unaware that there's just been a big change at their company—I'll give a recruiter example again—if we're unaware that their Vice President of Marketing has just given his or her notice, we may not be aware of exactly where they're at in the sales process.

Andy Paul: Well, that might be.

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- Stephen Lahey: There are trigger events.
- Andy Paul: Well, that question assumes that you're in the process with them. That's the question you ask once you're in the process and you're saying, okay, I've had two meetings with this guy, what's the next meeting? And ideally, you would have already agreed with the customer in advance what the content of that next meeting was going to be; but if you hadn't, then this is the question you would ask.
- Stephen Lahey: Does the "process" start, by your definition, while you're still connecting and interfacing with people on social media? Because for me, it does. For example, if I consider someone who took their time to comment a LinkedIn post I've written – I would probably reach out to them via InMail saying, hey, I really appreciate that you commented on my post, I love to connect with like-minded people and learn about their business, let's talk.
- Now, to me, that is part of the sales process, but until I get on the phone and talk to them a bit, I may not really know what's going on for them. So I'm assuming that you would look at the "process" as extending into sort of those presales call interactions on social media and so on, or am I misinterpreting what you're saying?
- Andy Paul: Well, I think from your customer's perspective, yes. Right. I mean, they're beginning a process that, in most cases, we're not aware of the fact that they started it because we haven't had the chance to engage in a meaningful way. And so, yes, it's part of the investment of time they're making to begin to educate themselves about the possibilities, the things that are out there and available in the marketplace.
- The example you gave is a great way to sort of reach out and begin that first level of conversation with somebody that's interacted with one of your updates on social media, on LinkedIn. A great way to start it.
- Stephen Lahey: Absolutely. Now, to switch gears a little bit, in part seven of your book, you present a really interesting section called "Mastering Stories that Sell". I think stories can be very powerful. From your perspective, why are stories so important to effective selling, and how can we approach storytelling to make our sales efforts more effective, and get better results?

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Andy Paul: Well, think of the role that stories play in our lives in general. I mean, just look at the way that we consume entertainment in our lives—movies and TV shows and books and so on. The thing that keeps us coming back is the story.

As I talk about in the book, this is something that Plato was talking about 2500 years ago when he was laying out sort of the formal story structure. In fact, Plato sort of wanted to have storytelling banned back in the day because it excited people's emotions. So the power of a story is that it pulls somebody into it and they sort of identify with the characters or the protagonists, if you will, in a story.

So in a sales situation, if you're able to tell story, a very concise story that talks about how one of your existing customers went through the process of finding you, deciding to do business with you, and getting value from the solution that you sold to them, well, the customer immediately puts themselves into that picture. They see themselves as that customer, and they take what I like to call the mental test drive of your product or service while you're telling that story. That's a huge step for people in their own decision-making process to take that "mental test drive".

And if they feel comfortable with that, it's going to open up the door to you to be able to continue to sell to them that you wouldn't be able to if they hadn't taken that or if they didn't feel comfortable in that story. So, stories capture the attention, they pull people in, they listen, and the key is to be able to tell them in a way that's very concise and very short and sort of hits some specific touchstones that are going to be important to the customer.

Stephen Lahey: Yes, and again we're talking about context, helping them to put what you do in a context that they can relate to, not just intellectually, but emotionally, as you pointed out.

Andy Paul: Yes.

Stephen Lahey: I'm not sure what that says about Plato, that he wanted to ban stories. Come on. [laughs]

Andy Paul: Well, I think it was a control issue. I mean, they were worried that it was going to cause civic disorder if people got too excited by these stories being told. But I think that this is really a powerful

tool. As you said, it's the way of providing context to someone and to be able to relate somebody else's situation to their own. And one of the powerful things about stories, again, is people take comfort from the fact that other people have stories similar to theirs. So when you're trying to sell somebody something, the fact that they know that other companies or a company have gone through a similar process with similar needs and requirements, that, to them, is comforting, and you want a customer that's sort of basically comfortable with what it is you're selling.

Stephen Lahey: Yes, and I think with stories, one of the things that I have found is it's intriguing for them to hear about what their competitors are doing and so on, if that's something you can do, but it's always about understanding them and their world and telling a story tailored to their situation so it mirrors their situation without saying, hey, it's about you, Mr. Prospect. So you're sort of allowing them to draw their own conclusions with the story—

Andy Paul: Exactly.

Stephen Lahey: —and they're in control, which I think is a big issue for a lot of prospects initially when they're meeting with us. They're afraid that we're going to, you know, when anybody is selling anything, it's kind of like, well, you're not going to sell me. Well, they're selling themselves, which is, I think, basically the point of the story at that stage of the sales process. They're selling themselves that, huh, you know what, I suspect you might be able to provide the value I need. Right.

Andy Paul: Absolutely. As you said, people identify themselves in the stories. And there's nothing wrong with the fact that the story may not relate precisely to what they're doing because at that point it's like a question. You tell this story—and as I talk about in the book, you want to tell these short 30 to 45 second stories that are very concise and have a fairly strong impact to the customer. If they come back to you and say, well, that's interesting, but our requirements are slightly different, then hey, you basically just ask the question, or they opened a door to you to ask that follow-on question about, okay, well, let's dig into your requirements and let's see how they might be different. You don't have to be precisely on target with the story to have that have a lot of value for the customer.

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Stephen Lahey: That's a really good point. And one of the things I remember reading at one point, which really changed the way that I shared content online, was don't make your blog post, for example, don't make your blog post such a complete thought that it doesn't leave any room for anyone to comment because their basic reaction might be, well, you've obviously thought this through a lot further than I have, that's a lot of details. A lot of times those really detailed blog posts, from one perspective, they're very educational, but they don't get very many comments because you don't really leave room for input.

In the same way, with storytelling, we really want them to feel free to jump in. Very interesting stuff.

Andy Paul: Right. And I think that also the format of story that I talk about in my book, [\*Amp Up Your Sales\*](#), is really effective for solopreneurs, like, when they go to networking meetings, like Chamber of Commerce, or rotary, or somewhere where they might be meeting people new for the first time, and the prospect says what do you do? Well, instead of trying to say, well, I'm a consultant and I deal in this type of work, you could instead say, well, that's a great question, let me illustrate what I do by talking about one of my clients. Tell that short story, then people get it in a way they just wouldn't otherwise.

Stephen Lahey: So true. Now, I know we're kind of running short on time, but I do want to ask about this. On pages, I think it was 180 and 181 of your book—pretty far into the book—you list three key things that help convert a perspective client into a client. Just briefly, can you kind of give my listeners a taste of those three points?

Andy Paul: Okay. Well, I mean, essentially, those points were really dealing with a point you had started talking about, which was information and context, because people get a lot of information, but they don't necessarily have a context for it. So what I talk about in that section of the book is how to help yourself through the sales processes – you need to map out the information that the customer is going to need in order to make a decision.

Now, in general, unless you're brand new to the business you're selling and the industry you're selling in, you're going to sort of know what this is through experience, but you want to make sure that you're not recreating this every time you're going out to sell.

You want to have a little library that you set up of information that you know is relevant to a customer's buying process. And in addition to your information that talks about you, you also want to make sure you have third-party information.

And this is directly to your point about context that we brought up several times, is use the tools that exist that are free, like Google Alert let's say is one that I love to use. As you get a new prospect is set up a series of Google Alerts for them using keywords relevant to that prospect's business, their company, maybe the people in the company, the critical key people in the company, and every day Google will supply you with an email or two with links to articles and white papers and research reports that are relevant to this decision the customer is trying to make and the decision you're trying to help them make as well.

And so, instead of wondering, again, how am I going to engage with my customer at this point in time, you can send your customer an email saying, hey, Mr. Prospect, I was thinking of you this morning as I was reading this article about how companies in your industry are going to use technology like the one I'm selling to you—that's a broad example—there's two points in this article I think we should discuss, are you free Tuesday at 9:00 am for a follow-up phone call? Well, suddenly you've taken some information that has value to the prospect, it speaks to the challenge, the decision they're trying to make from a third-party perspective, not information that you've provide just purely about you or your company, and it sets a different tenor in that conversation, and it gives you some credibility. They look at you as somebody that's a value provider, so they're going to be more open to providing more time to you to continue to sell to them. So it's a very important tool in that regard, in terms of using third-party information.

And then be smart about some of the available tools that exist in order to help you deliver that information in an appropriate way. There's an increasing number of sales engagement tools that are very inexpensive and enable you to—an example of one I like is this company in the UK making a tool called BuyerDeck. That's basically a way to create a collaborative portal between you and your prospect to share information. So rather than bombarding them with emails, you share information uploaded to the common collaborative portal. It's very inexpensive. I forget what their

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particular pricing is, but it's probably 15-20 bucks a month, and it just gives you a more professional way to share and collaborate. And then you get the analytics that tell you, okay, how often did the customer look at this piece information that I put up there? Did they dwell on Page 3, which was the pricing page? Well, hey, they came back to the pricing twice in two days, then, hey, maybe I need to pick up the phone and call them and say are you guys ready to make a decision?

Stephen Lahey: I never heard of that tool, sounds interesting. And I think it's exactly as you said, you've made this point throughout, it's about context – where are they in their buying process. Also, as you reach out, instead of saying, hey, I want to “touch base” with you, whatever that means, you're actually showing them that you're doing homework and wanting to bring something relevant because you want to add value. So you're now someone who is not just following up, not just “touching base”, but actually helping.

Andy Paul: Right. Well, and every time you have the opportunity to engage with a prospect, you have to be conscious of the fact you have to deliver something of value for them. Otherwise, why would they continue to invest their time in you? So this is a perfect example, as you said, instead of making that check-in call, just calling to check in to see how things are going, you've actually got information, it's delivered to you through your Google Alerts, you send them a relevant article, etc.

What you're doing is you're training the customer that your communications should be prioritized higher than the communications from other vendors or other sources because they now know they're going to get something of value from it.

Stephen Lahey: I love it. I think that's a fantastic way to frame it. As we wrap up, I am sure that a lot of listeners would like to connect with you online and buy your book. How can they do that, Andy?

Andy Paul: Sure. Well, my books are available for sale on Amazon. The first one, you said, [Amp Up Your Sales](#), we talked about it today, and the first book I wrote, *Zero-Time Selling: 10 Essential Steps to Accelerate Every Company's Sales*. And to connect with me online, visit my website at [AndyPaul.com](#), and you can send me an email at [Andy@AndyPaul.com](mailto:Andy@AndyPaul.com). My Twitter handle—and I'm very active on Twitter with a lot of good content there—is

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[@ZeroTimeSelling](#), all one word. So that's how folks can reach me.

Stephen Lahey: Thanks again for joining me, Andy. I really appreciate it.

Andy Paul: I appreciate you having me on, Stephen.

Stephen Lahey: And to our listeners, thank you for spending some time with us today. If you like what you heard, visit [SmallBusinessTalent.com](#) now and subscribe to this podcast by email. When you do, you'll be alerted whenever I post fresh podcast content, of course, but you'll also receive special resources for email subscribers only, including my LinkedIn Guide, and much more. Thanks again for listening today and best wishes for your success.

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