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This is an edited transcript of the February 11, 2015 SmallBusinessTalent.com podcast interview titled – [Randy Riemersma on How to Drive Sustainable Sales Growth](#).

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 guest on the podcast today is Randy Riemersma. He and his company called [Span the Chasm](#) have a simple yet powerful mission, helping you to drive sustainable sales growth for your business.

Randy has been a successful entrepreneur for over 10 years now. Before founding his own firm, he spent 28 years in corporate sales management, sales consulting, and sales training roles.

Today, Randy helps his clients to get result by staying focused on the right activities and success metrics. The innovative sales approach he teaches leads to “yes” or “no” quickly while eliminating those frustrating “maybe” responses.

Randy helps his clients improve across a full spectrum of business-to-business selling activities. From market penetration strategy to sales process and execution training – he helps solo professionals and small firms to generate more revenue and create lasting success.

Simply put, if you're ready to take your sales process and sales results to the next level, then you need to know what Randy teaches.

Welcome, Randy!

Randy Riemersma: Steve, thanks so much for having me on the podcast today.

Stephen Lahey: Glad to have you here. To kick things off, give us a quick sketch of your professional story, it's a deep sales background, and then tell us what you're up to today with your own business.

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Randy Riemersma: Sure. The story on the sales side probably goes back to 3rd grade where I was in a little private school and there were all these fundraisers which I seemed to have a passion for winning every year. That continued into a career of sales that I've been in now for a little over 28 years, sales, sales management, and sales leadership.

My degrees are actually electrical engineering and mathematics, and I tried that for a little while out of college and just realized that it was completely outside of my interests. I've been pouring myself into sales ever since, taking very much an analytic approach on understanding sales processes and sales methodology, which has really kind of led me to where I am today at [Span the Chasm](#), which is a sales growth firm where we are 100% focused on helping our clients drive sustainable revenue growth over time and solve the conundrum around that, and we've been pouring ourselves into that since 2005.

Stephen Lahey: I've noticed something that so many solo consultants have in common. So many of them are really hard workers, and I'm sure you are too – and they really know their stuff, they know how to serve their clients. But they just don't have a consistent flow of clients. That, to me, is a sales and marketing issue.

Randy, what are the most common causes behind that problem from your perspective?

Randy Riemersma: There are a couple of things I would comment on here. Number one—and hopefully this doesn't apply to your audience today—is that I've run into many solos and small business folks who have this fabulous idea that there's just not a market for, and you can bark up that tree all day long with little results. But assuming that does not apply, there are four areas, the four Ps, that I coach people around.

One is planning. I may be a solo or a small business owner and I've got this idea, but my planning and my mission statement that really needs to be in place as my navigational beacon just isn't that finely honed. They don't have that navigational beacon, if you will. So the planning element I find is often an area that needs to be beefed up.

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Second is Prioritization. This one is a huge one, and that is really about understanding what you *are* going to go after and what you *are not* going to go after. How do you say no to things? It's very difficult when you are—and I know this from my experience, as I've had a couple of small companies now—when you are going after the marketplace and you want to grow and there's a tendency to say yes to everything. Having the ability to assess what is the realistic reward that I might get from an event or engagement, multiplied by what is the actual probability that I might close that sale, then divided by the level of effort needed – so that I can assess realistically if this is something that I should be going after or not. The inability to say no to projects and not having any assessment process around that, I find that's a barrier to long-term growth.

A third area is process. I'm a firm believer that if I'm going to do it twice, then I build a process. That helps me to get better, drive efficiency, and that's going to help me ultimately build my skill set to serve my client base better, more efficiently, and that's going to help grow my business.

And then the fourth or last area relates to production. A lot of small business owners, or solos, they're paving the runway while the airplane is trying to land, and the inability to have a tight execution plan to guarantee customer success is a barrier, as well. So, the four Ps, Planning, Prioritization, Processes, and Production are the four areas where I see issues arise that prevent long-term growth for folks.

Stephen Lahey: Do you know what I find, Randy? It really does come down to mastering the fundamentals – and what you've just described are, I would say, the crucial fundamentals for anyone who wants consistent sales results in their business life. Without mastery of the fundamentals, you're simply not going to have a consistent flow of clients. Of course, you can wing it and you may have success here and there. I think a lot of people are addicted to adrenaline. You know, the highs and the lows.

Randy Riemersma: Right.

Stephen Lahey: That's not a healthy lifestyle and eventually it will catch up with you. So, having a well-defined plan and sales process is key. And at the same time you still have to flex and respond to changes.

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Unfortunately, there are people who will just focus on a plan as if the data coming in doesn't matter. But, being flexible and responsive is really important. We all need to learn from what's happening and say wait a minute, let's do a course correction. Would you rate responsiveness as an important quality to keep in mind?

Randy Riemersma: Oh, it's critical. The rate of evolution that is required today versus 10 years ago, versus 20 years ago, versus 30 years ago, it's staggering how quickly we have to be able to adapt. So yes, Stephen, that's a great point. You have got to listen to what the market is saying to you and be able to weight that. And, no, we're certainly not saying that for the solo, for the small business owner that it's some sort of big data project. But, we need to be constantly aware—what is the marketplace telling me—and I do this in my own business. I have a service offering, and I constantly go back and ask – is this the best way for me to approach this, is there a way to do this better? I'm constantly tuning the approach and the process and staying flexible. If you're not adapting quickly to what the market is telling you, well, then adapt or die is very much going to happen.

Stephen Lahey: My audience is primarily solo professional service providers, so they could be accountants, web designers, consultants of various types, and they're in the business-to-business space. I know you bump into people like that and you also coach people like that.

Randy Riemersma: Yes.

Stephen Lahey: What are the biggest mistakes that you see solos making when it comes to their sales and marketing efforts?

Randy Riemersma: Not thinking that they need to have a great sales effort. Taking a “Just build it and they will come” approach. That's a flaw that I've seen many times.

Then there's the other side which is I just need to all-pervasive and be everywhere. They're barking up some of the wrong trees and going into the wrong marketplaces. My advice is, okay, the fish that you're trying to catch, well, where do they swim? Find out and go to those places. Take some time to think where that needs to be and make sure that you're placing message in those places.

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Also, apply leverage. Look at the vehicles that are out there, look at the email automation, marketing automation and nurturing that's available at very low rates for solos and small business folks. Look at platforms like LinkedIn. I spend a lot of time nurturing people that I meet on LinkedIn. It's a great place for me to start nurturing folks to create warm leads. I focus on warm leads. I hate cold leads. But I see a lot of folks not using these tools wisely.

In Malcolm Gladwell's book, I think it was *Blink*, he talks about the concept of the loose connection. It's often not the people that you know super well that have the best contacts and connections for you. It might be people that you just sort of know. You got introduced to somebody and then that's a leverage play for you that can create broader access to other contacts and prospective clients.

Stephen Lahey:

Now, about LinkedIn. For most of my clients, LinkedIn is an absolutely phenomenal networking and prospecting tool. And personally when I think about what my life was like before LinkedIn, it's amazing what I had to go through to get the same results that I can get so quickly on LinkedIn now.

As you nurture relationships on LinkedIn, what are some of the most important things that you do, Randy? And these might just be basic things, basic to good networking in general. But guide people, if you would. I think LinkedIn for some people is a bit of a black box and they're just not sure how to approach it.

Randy Riemersma:

Great question. I mean, Stephen, you and I would not be having this conversation right now if it wasn't for LinkedIn. We met through an association, common connections, and you watched what I was writing, and I watched what you were writing. We decided that, hey, it makes sense for us to get connected and here we are. We're now having a conversation and reaching out to serve the solos in the small business community. So, this started as a loose connection that grew through LinkedIn that we're now leveraging to expand our reach and our ability to help other people. LinkedIn is a great, great tool.

Advice that I would also give to people on using LinkedIn – be active but not overbearing. If you sit back on LinkedIn and just have a profile and, again, think “If I build it they will come”, well, that's not going to happen. Find articles that matter and share them. Write articles that matter. Be generous. Join the communities and

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be active. I think generosity and being available on LinkedIn is absolutely critical. A caveat – if it's just all broadcasting your services and broadcasting what I can do for you, I think that you'll trigger a sense of fatigue with that.

For me, LinkedIn is a great platform to build credibility, to nurture, to be exposed and share competencies; and personally, I don't use it as much of a sales pitch vehicle or a place for advertising services. I've observed that when other people do that it creates a sense of fatigue for me. So my fundamental advice would be, be active, be generous, and be open to who you are going to meet.

Stephen Lahey: I agree. And I think a lot of it comes down to having empathy and following your sales instincts as to when it's the right time to send someone an InMail, for example, on LinkedIn and say – I just read your article and agreed with your perspective on BLANK. Perhaps we could get to know each other, see if we can help each other. I think that using LinkedIn as a networking tool we sometimes forget that it's a lot like networking in real life. It's not primarily about sharing content and building credibility. That's part of it, but of course you've also got to reach out. You've got to get human and actually connect with someone. Maybe get on the phone, maybe in person, but connect.

A lot of what happens for me happens through reaching out to people directly. Has that been your experience, as well?

Randy Riemersma: Yes, absolutely. We're talking now because of that very reason. And B2B is still H2H. It's human-to-human. And it's about reaching out, and I will go back to something I said earlier, be generous, right? Ask how I can help you versus immediately reaching out to see how you can help me. Generosity, I think, ultimately has great ROI, and especially if you're focused on human-to-human connection, nurturing these folks, taking advantage of the platform. You've got to be active, generous and participative.

Stephen Lahey: Yes.

Randy Riemersma: Everybody has got to make the call on what specific approach makes sense for them, but that would be my encouragement to the folks that are listening to your podcast.

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Stephen Lahey: So when you think in terms of how you and your business partner approach new business development, obviously, your strategy may include using LinkedIn, as we've been discussing. But walk us through it – how do you approach new business development and finding new clients?

Randy Riemersma: I'll reference two examples. I owned a small systems integrator years ago and it was an IT automation organization. That's what we were focused on. We automated a bunch of processes inside of IT. We were very much a generalist IT organization and we were doing just fine, but I got some coaching from one of the companies that I worked with, from a great sales leader. To this day, I'm so grateful to him, and we're still friends. He focused us, pushed us towards specialization and finding three or four use cases inside the IT space that we could become really expert at and go from a generalist approach to a focused specialist approach. And when we did that, it took a while but the business really grew under that methodology. Being really good at one thing.

Here at [Span the Chasm](#) as a consulting organization we serve a specific audience – companies that need help navigating and growing and they don't have the rich set of processes in place yet or the experience and discipline to accomplish that. Interesting that we had an opportunity to work with a very large company in the Northwest that everybody would recognize. It could have been a great gig. We certainly could have talked ourselves into taking it on. A lot of money. But it would end up being at a lower margin, it would take a tremendous amount of effort, and it would take us away from what our true mission was. So, we do what we teach. We are very good at saying no to things that we shouldn't say yes to so that we're then available and can say yes to the things that are great for us and for our client base.

We constantly look at our story and our goals. Are we still on the same path? Is our path the right path? Do we need to adapt? Evolution is a daily process. And we try to have really candid conversations, look in the mirror and say this is what worked yesterday, but what do I need to change from yesterday to today? Because yesterday is not good enough for today. What am I going to have to change so that I'm ready for tomorrow? So, just taking a constant evolutionary approach helps us serve our customers in a unique way.

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Stephen Lahey: Well, I can see why you've been successful. Concentrating your energies in a way that makes sense is a theme here. And then, of course, asking yourself would it serve our mission better, would it serve us as individuals running a business better if we were to steer away from what might seem in the short term to be a big payday? Let's be strategic about it. I think that's a really wise perspective.

As we wrap up, what kinds of resources do you offer solo professionals in the business-to-business space, Randy? I know you do some coaching, and so on. Why don't you tell us a little bit about that?

Randy Riemersma: At the end of the day, with everything that we do, we run it through the filter, is this going to help this client drive sustainable revenue growth? So, that's our mantra. And just for what it's worth, we back everything with a financial guarantee. If we don't do what we said, the way we said we were going to do it, in the timeline that we said we were going to, then we feel that our clients deserve to get their money back and we do that with no questions asked. So that's our approach, our commitment to the client base.

For your audience of solo entrepreneurs, I think there are probably two things we do that would potentially drive a lot of value. One is our executive sales coaching, which is focused on working with leaders in a go-to-market perspective, F.O.W.M., focus on what matters. What are the key things, 3, 4, or 5 things that must be executed at a very high level that will drive the growth that they want to see? Don't major in minor things, major in the majors. Take that kind of approach. So that's what our executive coaching service does. It's an annual program. We meet once a month for a couple of hours on the executive coaching side. We're constantly nurturing and taking care of the most important things that a client needs to be looking at.

And then the other offering that may be a fit for your audience is more of a tactical thing, which is an assessment. Coming in and just looking at your sales process, looking at the methodology, and just taking our experience, myself and my partner, we've been selling for almost 60 years total in a lot of different environments. We've owned small companies, we've been through small startups. So, we're just taking our maniacal approach to sales process and methodology and taking fresh eyes and looking at what you're

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doing and assessing that, running a report, and making some recommendations.

I think those would be the two key services. Our sales executive coaching and our sales assessment process would be the things that would be of interest to your audience.

Stephen Lahey: Sounds very interesting. And I think people also need to visit your website – how can people connect with you and your company online, Randy?

Randy Riemersma: I think the easiest thing to do would be to go to the website, which is SpantheChasm.com, go to the blog section, there are a couple of docs there you can download and there's an opportunity there for you to give us a little information and decide what you want to be kept up to date on.

I'm also available on LinkedIn at Randall Riemersma. Pretty easy to find. There are only two of us with that name on LinkedIn. You can always also follow us at @SpanTheChasm on Twitter for daily pearls of wisdom.

I would probably point everybody to [the website](#) first. It's the easiest place. You'll get a feel for what we're like and if it would make sense for us to have an engaging conversation, we'd obviously be honored. And there might just be some interesting stories, anecdotes, experience from other customers that might be of use to you, as well. Read the blog. See if there's something you like.

Stephen Lahey: I would highly recommend that people do that. By the way, if you visit SpantheChasm.com and you scroll down to the bottom, or footer, there are links to your various social media accounts like LinkedIn and Twitter, right?

Randy Riemersma: Right.

Stephen Lahey: Well, Randy, thank you so much for joining me on the podcast. I really appreciate it.

Randy Riemersma: Steve, thank you so much for having me join you today. And to everyone that's listening, I know it's tough. It takes a lot of courage to be a solo or a small business owner. I would just leave you with

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this. I read a great book by Ruben Gonzalez. It's called the *Courage to Succeed*. It takes tremendous courage to start something, but with the pragmatic realities and the difficulties of life, it often takes even more courage to continue. The word of encouragement that I would leave everybody with is please do have the courage to continue. Don't stop before the miracle happens.

Stephen Lahey: I totally agree with you on that, and the miracle comes through hard work but also through learning and improvement as you've pointed out throughout this interview. Thanks again, Randy.

Randy Riemersma: You bet, Stephen. Thank you.

Stephen Lahey: And to our listeners, thank you so much for spending some time with us today. If you like what you heard, visit SmallBusinessTalent.com and subscribe to the 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 the new LinkedIn guide to attracting ideal clients, and much more. Thanks again for listening today and best wishes for your success.

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