Podcast: Zach Lawryk, Sales @ Rippling on 20VC w Harry Stebbings

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https://www.thetwentyminutevc.com/zach-lawryk/

In this podcast Harry and Zach cover the field of solutions engineering, incl the role of a solutions engineer, how s/he dovetails with the overall sales teams. Zach leads the solutions consulting team at Rippling. Previously he has worked in similar roles at Slack, Optimizely and Box.

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Harry (02:51): This is a very special 20 sales episode and I wanna start with a little bit of context. So tell me how did you make your way into the world of sales? How did did you make you into the world of solutions engineering and most recently end up at the wonder that is Rippling?

Zach (03:04): So long story short, I started university with the idea that I was gonna complete a computer science degree. It was 1999 right before the bubble burst. (I thought) That was the best way or the best path to making great money. Halfway through it I realized I didn't wanna spend all my time in the lab because that was most of the initial coursework for the computer science degree. I pivoted and said I'm gonna be a lawyer. So I did political science instead but never got away from technology. I always loved the intersection of business and technology and frankly I stumbled into technology sales. I started a company in college. I had no idea what I was doing but was sort of on the business and technology side. I worked for a company that got me to San Francisco. I luckily got a job at Salesforce. I knew nothing about the company, knew nothing about the job, was just happy to get paid a little bit more than what I was paid previously.

And long story short, I'm in a training room. I started my job at Salesforce. I was like a premier support person basically. So, I had a set of accounts, I was the Salesforce expert, help them set up their Salesforce instance and manage it. On one side of the room there were the technical support people like myself on the other side of the room, they're sales engineers. The sales engineer side of the room was having a lot more fun than I was and I looked across the room and I said, I wonder what that job is about. It looks like they're having a lot more fun than we are. We're taking this so seriously. Lo and behold, it's true. It was a much more fun and rewarding career and I never looked back. That was like around 2006 I interviewed for my first SE job. I didn't get it the first time I demoed, they said, you're gonna need to do that again. That was pretty bad. The second time around they said that was okay, come on board. I've never been more excited about getting a job.

Harry (04:34): Can I just define some nomenclature for anyone that doesn't know, how does a sales engineer differ from a sales rep?

Zach (04:39): So the sales engineer or solutions consultant or pre-sales consultant? There are a lot of different words these days. I think solution consultant is the proper term. We are a product expert, an expert in the solutions that tie the business value to help support the sales rep in the execution of their quota.

Harry (04:55): Got you. That was fantastically succinct, but I I wanna ask you, you spend time at obviously Salesforce, you mentioned that, but also Slack where you worked with many incredible people. Maggie being one of them, incredibly tough question, but if you were to take away a single biggest takeaway from each of those experiences that really impacted your mindset, what would be one from each?

Zach (05:15):I would say I also, while I've worked at some really successful companies, there's some companies that didn't live up to expectations and I've learned just as much from those experiences as I did from Slack, Salesforce and Box. And I would say the common denominators have always followed great people. That is a good proxy for understanding whether or not the company is going to be successful and is on the right trajectory is the quality of people you're surrounded with. And that's a common that I've followed throughout my career.

Harry (05:37): Did you know they were super high quality straight away? One of the biggest mistakes I make in hiring, I fall for people who are good at selling themselves and then they're not actually that high quality and they're actually, some people are quieter but really high quality and I miss them often

Zach (05:51): I think about the advice that I give to folks earlier in their career. You go to someplace where you're surrounded by people that are smarter than you, but also people whom with you think you can collaborate effectively because the people that you work with are really what make every single day tolerable. It's all about the people. It doesn't matter how fast the company is growing, how great the technology is, how big the total addressable market. If you don't feel like you're learning from the people that you're surrounded with, then you're in the wrong spot.

Harry (06:14): Now I want to dig deeper on the sales industry itself. Uh, kind of deconstruct different parts, but if we start on the sales industry itself, I spoke to Maggie before and she told me that I should ask this one as a starting point. What is broken about sales today, Zack?

Zach (06:28): Broadly speaking, most technology sales organizations are selling the same way they were 20 years ago. We've gotta do some deep discovery with you. Controlling access to resources, controlling the sales process. It's a very seller-centric approach, which I think is totally broken. The way things are has shifted and this began before covid but was accelerated with Covid and the fact that we're all staring at 16 different screens on a daily basis is that attention spans have dwindled. And I don't know, have you ever purchased software before?

Harry ([06:56](#)):Many times…

Zach ([06:56](#)): Yeah. It's not an easy experience and it's not very fun. You can imagine when somebody's trying to withhold information from you, it's also it makes that experience far worse. So I think what has changed and what is broken about most sales organizations today is they're still trying to sell. Like they're in control of that process when the truth is they're not, the buyer is in control of the process and it's more about buyer enablement and it's about selling anymore.

Harry ([07:17](#)): Can I, is that really the case still when you see the rise of PLG (product-led growth), when you see they hey have a play, it is the consumer's option to go deeper, it is the consumer's option to buy more and engage with the enterprise team. Is that still the case that it's so seller centric?

Zach ([07:32](#)): I think PLG is a really fancy word these days and there are a lot of people that kind of use that term loosely. But the end of the day it's a great way to get exposure to a product in a self-service fashion. People still want to talk to people but they wanna talk to people on their terms. So Forrester has this concept of sensemaking. It's a term they use as it applies to modern complex selling. And I really like it because it's, what it's really about is your job is not to sell something to somebody. Your job is to help your buyer make sense of a really increasingly complex world. And that's what I think selling is all about. It is seller-centric in the sense that you're addressing the seller's needs and you're considering what they need and what they're trying to accomplish *(Sajith: seems like he meant to say buyer-centric here)*, but they still need your help and guidance to make sure they're making the right decision and making sense of all this information that's out there.

Harry ([08:16](#)): Is outbound dead cuz in terms of sense making, you have to get them through a certain stage of the funnel to get to sense making. Yeah, is traditional outbound dead do you think?

Zach ([08:25](#)): I don't think outbound is dead. I think outbound has just has fundamentally changed in terms of the methods that you need to use to engage prospects and you have to take like a multi-channel approach to that and it's as simple as creating different forms of content to capture people's attention and the way that they consume information today. TikTok style approach to selling, you and I we're gonna get off this podcast or whenever you take a break you're probably a look at your phone and consume about 16 different pieces of content and articles and probably read half of those articles. We don't have time to consume long form content in the way that we did, but we're, we're selling as if people have time to read these elaborate emails, we've gotta capture their attention where they are and the way their brain processes information.

Harry (09:01): What I think straight away that when you say that though, is the blurring lines between sales and marketing. I see marketing now eating up so much more of the sales funnel where bluntly the prospect knows that they wanna buy Rippling very quickly in the process because they've been sold the content, the story, the vision before they've ever engaged with a sales rep. Do you agree with me in terms of this blurring of sales and marketing and how do we see the future of sales as a result of that complete blurring?

Zach (09:26): That's a really good point and that's where I see, especially in my world where the solutions engineering function was predominantly uh, a really guarded function or resource where you couldn't even talk to somebody on my team 10 years ago unless you've gone through an hour discovery call and you've been well qualified, we're starting to encroach earlier in the process and that's okay. We want our team to develop content that will be consumed earlier in the process. So we're creating things like shortform videos and demo vignettes and slides that are easier to consume in new formats in a way that helps the customer educate themselves earlier in that process. So by the time they get to us, we're very well aligned on what they're trying to do, what they're trying to accomplish. It makes our jobs easier, more precise and more valuable and it makes the buying experience much more enjoyable as well. And effective.

Harry (10:12): Is there really a solution to opening up you and your colleagues so earlier in the process because you are a much more valuable resource that is constrained in terms of availability? If I'm your ceo, I couldn't put you front and center or much more available because we don't have the resources or bandwidth.

Zach (10:30): Yeah, and that's where, especially now we have to think about scale. We think about what we do on a weekly basis, how we're engaging with customers and how we might productize some of those engagements in a way that can be scaled earlier in the process. So it's not us physically getting on a call with the customer earlier, it's us creating content and messaging and solution material that can be leveraged earlier in a sales process but we don't have to get involved directly when we do it at scale.

Harry (10:55): You mentioned the word scale there a couple of times. You've worked with and mentor many early stage tech companies and startups in terms of sales and product market fit. You said before to me that in sales and product market fit, it isn't as hard as many technical founders make it naturally. I was incredibly inquisitive but also going tell me more. So tell me more Zach, why isn't it as hard as many technical founders make it?

Zach (11:19): Yeah, it always boggles my mind and I was thinking about this morning as well. I think it's because the process of starting a company, developing a product is a very personal journey. You're really wrapped up in yourself and you sometimes don't take the time to empathize with the actual customers that you're selling the solution to. So when I try to mentor folks or earlier stage companies that have no sales expertise or background, think about who you're actually gonna sell this product to map out their pains and gains.

Was it Marty Kegan? Is that the guy that you just had on the pod? Yeah, so he said something and I was listening to this yesterday in the car he, he kinda alluded to the concept of these business value canvases. It's a really empathetic exercise that anybody can walk through where they identify who their customer is as an individual and a business person, the pains that customer has, the gains your product potentially could provide. And you essentially you connect your potential customer with your product and solution and essentially just try to map what your solution does to the outcomes that your customer is trying to achieve. That's a vast oversimplification there, but it is a really powerful exercise to walk through and you imagine the power if you actually have that sort of visual in your head as you're developing your product and talking to customers and talking to investors makes things a lot easier.

Harry (12:25): How do you think about the challenge of multiple buyers? And what I mean by that is especially today we're seeing CFOs become a lot more involved in buying decisions across every different software product that their teams are buying. How do you think about the challenge of incorporating suddenly multiple different buyers including the CFO?

Zach (12:43): Yeah, I think it's is a healthy forcing function. We're all scared about the current macroeconomic climate, particularly in sales now we're forced to really think about how we're gonna sell this if a CFO is scrutinizing every detail, having the CFO involved is always tough, but it forces you to think about true ROI, which is not always easy, especially for early stage founders. That should be an exercise that they should go through. If you had a CFO come into this conversation and had to justify the spend on this amongst all the other software that they're purchasing or investing in, how would you do it? So that same exercise where you would identify a primary buyer, you could do the same thing for every potential buyer or influencer as a part of the process. And if that's the case, it's something that's required necessary.

Harry (13:20): I'd like to think of these shows as like metaphorical discussions where you are an angel and an advisor to me as an early stage founder cuz we have so many founders that listen when we think about solutions engineering and structuring our team today, why do we need solutions consultants, solutions engineers, fundamentally what is their need first?

Zach (13:39): Well there's two things. One, if it's a highly technical product that requires deep expertise, oftentimes you can't have the same person be the account executive who also is going to go to that level of depth with a customer. There are some solutions where very early on you just have to have a technical expert on every call because it's that detailed and that technical a product or solution. On the other hand, if you're competing in a market where your competing sales teams have a solutions engineer or consultant as part of the sales team's composition, that's when you have to think earlier about adding a solutions consultant to your team as well. Because part of what we do is provide that deep expertise, solution expertise, presentation, differentiation through process and approach. But also it's a competitive differentiator in how you approach a sales cycle and how you appear to a customer. And if you show up and you're, there's only an AE who's trying to handle this end to end and you're competing for a large ACV or dollar amount, it's really difficult to compete without the right resources in place.

Harry (14:29): Now what size dollar ACV, does it make sense to really have your solutions engineer solutions consultant as part of the process?

Zach (14:36): It depends on the volume. I mean I just talked to a CEO yesterday, we were talking about the ideal AE to SE ratio and his average ACV was about like 35K. But it's all about how many opportunities you think your AEs can manage and how many, many opportunities you need your SEs to help manage. And then you think about the win rate and if it converts and it's worth the investment that you're making that additional resource.

Harry (14:59): Where do SEs sit in the stack also with then customer success cuz you've got and then SEs that then move to customer success. Is there a handholding process between SEs and customer success to ensure the smooth integration and do the AEs leave at some point? How does that work considering customer success as well?

Zach (15:17): In an ideal world, yes there's a perfect handoff. There's also a modern movement for SEs to take on more of that responsibility.

Harry (15:24): Surely customer success isn't technical enough in a lot of ways to suddenly manage the process from an SE who's done incredible work, got them to that stage, they've been impressed by the depth of knowledge and then he hand over to CS who I'm sure is fantastic but they won't have the depth that you have and it's almost like a letdown.

Zach (15:41): Yeah, that's the modern movement. I think Frank Slootman had the idea that he doesn't wanna have Customer Success at any of his, but I think what he's really saying is that he wants the sales team to take more responsibility for the success of a customer. It's not that they don't have CSMs in the traditional sense, but that they have more responsibility to sell good deals so the customer doesn't churn when you extend the solutions consultant deeper in the sales process or even post sales and ensures customer success and early on. I would say a company of less than 50 people, that your SE is gonna take on more of that responsibility and that's good, it's healthy.

Harry (16:12): AEs are often associated with being coin operated, being very financially driven and incentivized, whether we agree or not, a lot of their comp is based around closing customers and closing dollars. When you have an SE in the room, it makes our life a lot easier and it takes a lot of weight off them. How does that impact comp for sales reps and does that mean the comp is then in the hands of the SE? How does comp change when incorporating an SE into the process?

Zach (16:39): If you're gonna invest in SE resources, you gotta have larger quotas for the AEs for sure because the idea is you have to believe that by adding additional resources to the equation that they'll be able to execute on a much larger quota at the same rate with additional SE resources. And the SEs from an SE comp perspective should always have a variable component. You want them to have some skin in the game but there's less risk involved. Typically you've got the AE was 50 50, you know 50 base, 50 variable and the SE in an ideal world is 70 30 and you want the SE in my opinion to have as much skin in the game as possible and be connected to the same number as the sales executive because they need to have a shared destiny and they need to be considered salespeople as well in my opinion.

Harry (17:17): When should we hire our first, how often we hear about hiring the first sales rep and doing a two by two? When do we hire the first SE?

Zach (17:25): On average across a wide variety of products? When you get to about five to seven reps because you're starting your first sales team, you probably need to hire more capable multi-faceted AEs for the first five. But then you get to a point where they can't be handling all the demos and handling all of the follow up and handling all the technical details and solutioning, you're gonna achieve scale by adding another sort of central resource that'll be at five to one ratio, moving at scale beyond and handle some of the back office stuff as well. And a great example, I joined a company called Get Satisfaction long ago I was the first SE and I think we had about five or seven reps or so.

Harry (17:57): So if we use that as a start point, we now know where SEs sit in the process, we know when to hire them, I need to hire them now I got five to seven and you're gonna help me hire my first. Thank you so much. How do I structure the hiring process for an SE?

Zach (18:12): It's pretty simple. There's something that we did at Slack which we haven't yet implemented at Rippling. I'm not sure if we will, which is sort of a chronological interview and it seems like it's a lot of time to spend. But we would spend an hour and a half going through a person's background job by a job to understand their motivations, why they joined a company, why they left the company. Especially if you're in a lot of interviews, it's really difficult to get to know somebody and really get to know their motivations and the work they've done and whether or not their resume is actually reflective of the impact that they've had over time. That's not just unique to SEs but that's something we did and I thought was really effective and helped us get to know and hire really great people from basically zero to 200. And then you also wanna have an opportunity for them to demonstrate the craft because there's very much part art and science in this role. Deep expertise is important but what's also important and what makes SEs the most successful is if they also are great presenters and can articulate value. So you need to give 'em an opportunity to do that.

Harry (19:03): Can I ask, in terms of demonstrating the craft, the thing I find really hard is if they demonstrate a product that you don't know so well, you'll just be easier to impress. But if you get them to demonstrate your product, you know it so well, you'll automatically think less of them. How do you get them to demonstrate their product in a neutral environment where they have a fair chance?

Zach (19:22): That's an age old question, Harry. Ultimately where I stand today is you get them to demonstrate your product and understand the value prop better than anybody like you understand the target customer. You just have to do so with the understanding that it's not going to be the best demo of your product that you've ever seen, but you have to understand how to measure for competency or evaluate for competency as it relates to that. So what we do and what I've done in the past is you give them a stripped down scenario, something that would be easy for any technologist to grok but helps them demonstrate whether or not they can connect value to what your product does. And I think it can be structured in a way that's fair to anybody and fair to the right candidate.

Harry (19:58): Who do you have in that demonstration? What parts of the org? Is it just you? Who else is in there?

Zach (20:03): I usually have a panel so it's myself depending on how many people we have involved, you wanna have the hiring manager, potentially from someone from the sales side if they have the time and scale cuz it's always great when you hire a new SE to have endorsement from sales counterpart to say this person's great and another SE or SE manager.

Harry (20:18): Do you ever have problems with like traditional sales reps in terms of people thinking, SEs stepping on their toes, feeding a little bit of encroachment in terms of their role and how SES play into it?

Zach (20:28): Yes, especially when you hire the first one or especially at a company that has grown up from very quickly, you've had a lot of capable reps who have done all of what SES are doing and perhaps more because they had to, they didn't have those resources in the past and it's something that just takes some time to work out of. You have to help those folks understand the value of having an additional resource and also understand the value of team selling. One thing that I think is important to understand about SEs and team selling in general, but even if both people could do exactly the same thing, there's a lot of value in having just two people on a call because a prospect or customer is going to answer questions differently coming from an SE than they would from an account executive because they have this perception that the account executive just wants get them to close the deal and the SE truly cares about the business, which is true, but it's just this dynamic that continues to play out.

Harry (21:12): When you are evaluating SE talent in the interview process, when you review your own process, are there common questions that you ask? Are there common ways that you try to identify talent or characteristics?

Zach (21:24): Uh, over time developed like a competency based hiring model. We like to have them really talk through experiences where they have demonstrated value, the way they can articulate how they approach learning about something, taking that information and putting it into sort of presentation form and articulating the value of something that can be really telling about whether or not they are capable and have the competencies to be really successful in the role. Another component that's critical especially in this role is that it doesn't matter how smart or good of a presenter or how technical an SE is, if they can't work with their AE counterparts, they're never going to be successful. So we really wanna make sure that they have a history of collaborating with people of all different types and that's really important. How

Harry (22:04): Do you know if you're interviewing me? Yeah, I got on great with my team, we were great friends,

Zach (22:08): You gotta continue to ask questions, show me an example, show me an example of how you dealt with conflict on the team. And that can be really telling once you start to break through. Everybody's got a set of prepared interview questions or retorts, but you've got to ask that second, third and fourth question to continue to break through and say like, so what happened when you had a conflict? Tell me something about your job that you hate. Tell me what you really don't like about the job. Tell me what you really didn't like about the team that you worked with. Those sort of questions can be really revealing.

Harry (22:34): I know there's no right or wrong answers but there are bad answers. What's a bad answer to how you managed and handled conflict? Because no one's gonna go, well I shot them. <laugh>

Zach (22:49): <laugh>. I think what's hard to hide is an SE who is generally like a very high IQ smart person, right? Sometimes they have a low tolerance for working with folks of varying levels of aptitude or experience and that's really critical in the SE role, especially as your onboarding in new account executives. You have to sort of be tolerant of where they are in their stage of growth. It can be really revealing to ask them questions about what happened when you dealt with somebody that didn't know what they were talking about or what happens when you deal with an AE who's early in their ramp, like how did you help them describe some examples. It's very easy to cut through the BS there, determine whether or not they're, somebody is tolerant and can help mentor and evolve the reps that they work with or somebody who thinks the world themselves and is not going to be a collaborative individual.

Harry (23:32): Okay, so we have that, but when I think about that, I think about the Mr Sociable and then the bloody Mr Nerd, sorry for boxing people. But then when we think about, and this was Maggie's question so I have to give her credit. She said, should we then lean towards more technical focused people or should we tend to lean towards more sales and charisma focused acumen? How do you think about that technical versus charisma, sales focused?

Zach (23:55): Don't think that is mutually exclusive. I don't think that actually like charisma necessarily corresponds to sales actually. I think that there are a lot of folks that may not have like the traditionally categorized charisma that have a strong sales aptitude because they think about the benefit to the customer. Like it's all about, again, going back to value. Like can somebody really take the time to empathize with the folks that we're selling to to understand how the technology is actually going to apply to business outcomes And you can get a sense for sales aptitude pretty quickly and you wanna make sure that they have a blend of both.

Harry (24:26): Well you've seen and reviewed many different hiring processes for many different sales teams and sales people when you review them now, what are some of the biggest lessons learned from hiring hundreds of sales pros across your career now?

Zach (24:39): I think the biggest lessons learned is I think as you think about building your own sales process at every stage you should feel like you are receiving data and information on that candidate that's gonna help you make a decision one way or the other. And especially as you get to the end of that process, however you design, the presentation should be done in a way that is going to help you make an objective decision on the candidate. I say that because where I've seen it fail or fall down as we go through this process that we've designed for probably our own benefit and for the benefit of the candidate feeling like they're going through a professional process as a company. But at the end of the process we're basically just justifying our own bias. We're just like, oh yeah, you know, I kind of like that person and they come from Salesforce, let's hire them. And it didn't matter how they performed or what they did and that happens all the time. I think it's really critical for you to like be very objective at the end of the process and be able to surface any objections or conflict at the end to make a decision effectively.

Harry (25:29): I totally agree with you in terms of getting more and more data from every interview and instance, I do wanna move to post hiring process now we've got this incredible se we're very excited to have them in our startup. I've never onboarded before though. What's the ideal onboarding process for SES and how do I structure it?

Zach (25:47): I think pretty simple. You obviously will have some sort of product training depending on what state of growth you're at. When we're at Slack, we sort of built it from scratch. They had some well documented product documentation, etcetera. We use something called Work Ramp to walk a candidate through a six week process where basically they have some self-service training they go through, they get exposure to a lot of customer calls and they get a lot of exposure to the ideal customer profile as well. And the blend of both I think is critical. It can be done at a lot of different ways. I don't think it takes a number of months to get somebody ramped depending on the technical depth of a product and it's very easy to just to put together a product training and enablement and onboarding customer training, enablement and onboarding and you want them coming out understanding and feeling confident in how to present and demonstrate the product and confident in understanding the ideal customer profile and who the buyer is.

Harry (26:30): That's interesting. So a lot of people say we should put them with customer support at some point too. They clearly understand and identify the problems. Do you see a point in putting them with customer support

Zach (26:38): If you have the time to do that, that could be a helpful way to accelerate product expertise. I just think logistically that's difficult depending on the size. If you're a smaller company and you're hiring your first SE, I think that's a great way for them to get exposure to the kind of questions that are coming through for sure.

Harry (26:52): Would you rather an SE have experience in your market or they have experienced selling that level of ACV? Which would you lean on if you could only have one?

Zach (27:02): Earlier stage in the market? I think it's hard to make that sacrifice, especially when every hire has to ramp more quickly. When you get bigger, you have the luxury of spending more time developing talent and giving them more time to get familiar with the industry of people, sort of.

Harry (27:14): You were saying, you were saying the domain expertise on the market matters more to you than their experience selling a certain level of acv?

Zach (27:20): Yes, early stage because SEs job is all about credibility and you can get them comfortable selling a deal of a larger size or talking to a customer of a different stature, but if they don't have any credibility talking to that customer, it's all for nothing.

So having somebody to come in with industry credibility and expertise, I can train them more easily on the sales side than I can on the industry stuff.

Harry (27:38): How does the AEs role and the SEs role and when it comes to actually closing the deal, so they bring the credibility, the product now the technical ability, do they then hand back to the AE to close? Do they close? How does that closing process work with SES involved?

Zach (27:55): I believe that it is the AE’s responsibility to close. So we have the concept of a solution win that we work towards as SEs. Our job is to ensure that the technology aligns to what the customer is trying to accomplish from a business perspective. And depending on the product or service you offer, there are certain check boxes that you just need to check as evaluation. Sometimes that's a security questionnaire that everybody has to fill out or they have to have received the security presentation and we would have to ensure that they have all the right requirements and technical requirements that they are a fit for the solution or product or service that we provide. And then it is the AE’s responsibility to close.

Harry (28:28): It says the AE’s responsibility to close often is how you measure success, especially for AEs. How do I measure the success of my new SE? This is my first, how do I measure if they're successful or not?

Zach (28:39): This is also a very challenging question over time <laugh> because there are a lot of non-correlated factors to why SE is on a deal, right? And you could look at close rate, that's the easiest way to say it. For deals where there is an SE we should have a higher close rate, but at the same time an SE could be a great way to qualify deals out early stage and save us time so we're working on the right deals at the right time. On the flip of that as well, and this is not gonna be a direct answer to your question cuz it's a tough one, but on the flip side of that, you're typically working on deals that have a higher chance of closing because they're better qualified and warrant a more technical resource. One of the things I heard, this is actually I, I heard this on a recent podcast and I think this is the VP of SE at SolarWinds and I really like the way he talked about this is that he measures how the deals where they close rate of deals, where they've achieved the solution win and all the things that they did to achieve solution win is their measures for success of whether or not SEs are effective. And so we wanna have more SEs on deals working towards the solution win to determine whether or not we were successful as a function.

Harry (29:36): What are the biggest red flags I should look out for in the first three to six months of the SE starting? What are the signs where you're like, ugh, they're not working

Zach (29:44): If they can't work with their AEs, that's red flag number one. Sometimes you get folks with a deep technical background who don't have a tolerance for salespeople and are running into personal conflict or professional conflict. That's red flag number one. If that's not working, it's never going to work. It doesn't matter how smart the person is. In fact number two is that especially in early stage companies, the person that you hire has to be an absolute self-starter and somebody who's both a builder and willing to work on deals. And I remember my first job as the lone SE at Get Satisfaction was I was building the demo environment, so I was building all of the decks, I was working on deals, I was working with business development. You just have to be really upfront in describing that's what the job's about and people have to be excited about if they're willing to participate in all those activities and they're not gonna work out.

Harry (30:25): Zach, we're gonna do a quick fire. I'm gonna say a short statement. You are gonna hit me with your immediate thoughts. Does that sound okay?

Zach (30:31): Sure, let's do it.

Harry (30:32): So what sales tactics have not changed over the last five years?

Zach (30:35): It's all about the customer.

Harry (30:36): What sales tactics have died of death?

Zach (30:38): Multi-hour discovery calls.

Harry (30:40): How do you define the sales playbook?

Zach (30:43): I think the sports analogy still rings true. It is a tactic or strategy you apply at the appropriate time for a desired outcome.

Harry (30:50): Who's the single best sales rep you've worked

Zach (30:52): Travis Brian (?). Why? Because I think that he is an SE at heart and was always very empathetic and a delight to work with as an se.

Harry (31:00): What one piece of advice would you give to a sales leader starting a new role today?

Zach (31:04): Take the time to truly understand the business outcomes you're enabling for the buyer and optimize accordingly.

Harry (31:09): What's your favorite sales tool and why?

Zach (31:11): I'm gonna say more of like a medium. I think video is my favorite sales tool today. Asynchronous video is super effective tactic for building pipeline and engaging customers earlier in the sales process.

Harry (31:21): A final one for you. What one company sales strategy have you been most impressed by recently and why?

Zach (31:27): There's a company called Divin that I think does an exceptional job. They create technology for solution consulting organizations and solution consulting leaders. And I think they've done an exceptional job of engaging and building a customer-centric community around their products and services and it feels very intentional. And as much as I like, frankly, as much as I have resisted investing in like technology, they've done a great job of pulling me into that community and getting me exposed to their products and services.

Harry (31:51): Zach, I feel like I've learned a whole new kind depth of the world of sales. Thank you for putting up with my, my questions. I hope they weren't too basic, but you've been incredibly patient so I so appreciate the time my friend.

Zach (32:01): No, again, honored to be here, big fan of yours and I hope we can keep in touch.

Harry (32:07): I absolutely loved that discussion. I think Zach was brilliant there at breaking down the core of why SEs are so crucial to any modern sales team. But I also think we just need to shine more of a light on SEs and how they can be leveraged to make the best performing sales teams