

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPISODE 350: SCOTT EDINGER

Welcome back to the Disrupt Yourself podcast. I'm your host, Whitney Johnson, CEO of Disruption Advisors, where we help you grow your people, to grow your organization because organizations they don't Disrupt people do. And the building block of that growth, it's you. There was a type of salesperson once that was defined by one phrase, always be closing A, B, C. Here's Alec Baldwin in the play turned movie Glengarry Glen Ross.

Get out there. You got the prospects coming in. You think they came in to get out of the rain? A guy don't walk on the lot lest he wants to buy. You're sitting out there waiting to give you their money. Are you going to take it? Are you man enough to take it?

There's an allure around that kind of confidence and charisma, sure, but take it from the other perspective. Have you ever had such a pushy car salesman that you just took your money elsewhere? But I thought we should always be closing. Our guest today says that's because charisma isn't a sales strategy. There isn't room for building trust in your solution when you're focused on the close. Scott Edinger is a sales consultant to Fortune 50 companies, including AT&T, and now he's out with a new book, *The Growth Leader*. With such a disconnect from their company leaders, Scott says sales teams are often left to fend for themselves in their calls with clients. So, how do you bridge the gap between the sales department and the C-suite? I hope you enjoy.

Whitney Johnson: What is a time that comes to mind when you were really stuck in your personal growth?

Scott Edinger: Stuck in my personal growth. I think when I started my firm, when I started my own firm, my own practice, work as a solo. Right. Which is close to a dozen years ago. Um, I was not sure what direction I would take

with it. I had had a variety of experiences. It had been sales training, leadership development, and then, of course, work in strategy. And I knew I wanted to try to put those three things together, but I felt all over the place and just a little bit of trying to be everything for everybody and was completely stuck there. In fact, that's right about the time you and I met, because we were both writing for Harvard Business Review, and you had written an article called *Always, Always, Always Show Up*. And that article really helped me recognize what I was doing, which is I was trying to be a little bit of everything to everybody. I was not showing up as, as, you know, like one thing ready to put my stake in the ground in terms of what I believed. Of course, that's taken me ten years to get to that with the publishing of this book, but I was stuck for a few years when I was starting going sideways, and I was making a living, but I really wasn't standing for anything.

Whitney Johnson: It's interesting when you say you were stuck because of that. And the thing that comes to mind for me is that you had, like you said, you've been successful in doing sales training, you've been successful in strategy, you had worked for other firms and been able to do a lot of things pretty well. But you were stuck because you hadn't made a decision of, here's, here's what I stand for, here's what I care about, here's what I want to do. And so, my question is, did you know what you were good at? And you were reluctant to do it? Like, where was the stuckness coming from?

Scott Edinger: Everything sounded like a good possibility. Everything sounded like all of those areas. I could do any of them. And yet none of the, any choice there, felt like I was leaving something important behind, so I could not I could not get it together. And as a result, I was doing a little bit of everything. And as I'd mentioned, you know, it was taking a long time to find a way. How do I put it all together and do that as one thing?

Whitney Johnson: Ah. Interesting. Interesting. So, it's, it's the, okay. So, two thoughts are coming to mind is one that messiness that the launch point of an S Curve where you're saying, I've got this and I've got this, and I've got this, and I've got this, and it's not so much a matter of what do I say no to, but more a matter of how do I take all of my different pieces of life experience and expertise and put them together in a way that speaks to me? And is the alchemy of Scott, like, what is your unique, you're a unique value proposition. Is that? That feels more accurate to me. Would you say would you agree with that?

Scott Edinger: I would, I would, and that inevitably meant leaving part of everything behind, too, because I couldn't just pull everything together. That would be just this sort of weird ambrosia of consulting services, but rather I'd say, so what's the the best parts of my experience here? And how can I put that together in a way that was meaningful instead of, again, going to market and, I'd say, going sideways for a good bit of time. You would think when you and I would talk about this, you'd say, you're spinning at the bottom of the S Curve right now. You're trying to figure that out. And with lots of attempts to come up the S Curve and slide back down and keep doing that.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah. Okay. So, and what I think what I really appreciate about what you just said because as you and I know lots of people who are trying to figure out what they want to do next, think they're going to be able to figure it out today or tomorrow or in two months or three months or six months. And what you described, and it's very similar to my own journey, is like when you figure out what that thing is, putting all those various pieces together, it can take years of experimentation.

Scott Edinger: Well, you and I started talking about this in 2014.

Whitney Johnson: There you go.

Scott Edinger: I was looking at some notes beforehand. I was like, oh, wow. So, this coming together for a while here.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah. Oh, I love it. So the way out of it was just to go through it, right? I mean, like what you just said always, always, always show up. The way to way out was through.

Scott Edinger: As awful as that sounds. It is so true. And like it doesn't. It was not all misery, drudgery. You know, I'd get a piece of something together, and then I'd get an article published. And then, you know, something works

great for a client, but then everything falls apart again. So, you just keep working at it, and it is about continuing to show up. Continuing to ask yourself this question, what do I really want to say here?

Whitney Johnson: Yeah.

Scott Edinger: I found myself so many times trying to write to please someone to not draw their ire. I could imagine a client at times saying, no, that's not right, Scott. And then I'd stop.

Whitney Johnson: You'd pull back.

Scott Edinger: Instead of doing instead of saying, no, I've got some research behind this and it matches my experience. This squares. You may not like the idea, but I'm putting it here.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah. And I, you know, the quote that comes to mind is, is Winston Churchill "When you're going through hell, keep going." And I'm also, I also want to just call out before I go on to, to what I want to ask you next, is that even in the midst and the and the mire and the muck of trying to figure out what you wanted to stand for you, you had a highly successful consulting business. So, it's not like you're like, I'm just I don't know what I want to do. Like, you're out there having a business, being successful, but it was more about, okay, I can do all these different things. I'm a great utility player, but what do I want to stand for? Like, I want to be great at this.

Scott Edinger: Now, I think that was an important note that you just hit on that because throughout all of that, like it's not, I said it wasn't all drudgery. Like, I'm getting articles published in Harvard Business Review. I got great clients and the work is coming together, but it wasn't sort of exactly as I wanted it. It's like the house wasn't decorated quite like I wanted it to be, and lots of stuff was upsetting to me, so throughout it all. But it was still a pretty good place to live.

Whitney Johnson: Right, exactly. And, and so and that we're going to talk in just a minute about the culmination of this, this messiness, and moving into the sweet spot of your S Curve. But before we do that, I want to ask you the question, what would you say your job title is? What does it say if you had a business card? Because people don't have business cards anymore, what does it say?

Scott Edinger: It would be simple, consultant, maybe advisor. Because if I consider what I really do on a day-to-day basis, I spend time with senior leaders. We talk about their issues, the thorniest of them, the toughest challenges, and the organizational issues around growth. And don't go do any of it for them. I talk with them about how they could go about it.

Whitney Johnson: Okay, good. So advisor. All right. Speaking of advice, you have a new book coming out as of the date of this conversation. It is in 11 days. It's called *The Growth Leader*. And you are making the argument that, fundamentally, growth is not a sales issue. It is a leadership issue. What is your case? Make your case, Mr. Edinger.

Scott Edinger: Well, during all of this time of trying to figure out where I was going to focus, when I would meet with senior executives, when I would meet with CEOs or their leadership teams, the business issue pressing all the time was, how are we going to grow this business and the absence of conversations about sales. But for, let's change the comp plan or send them to sales training was noteworthy to me because I had this interesting experience of being in the sales training industry for for a number of years. Quick aside there, I always joke that the sales training industry was the most frustrating business of any on the planet because salespeople would attend. Nobody's happy, salespeople attend the sales training, and they're like, hey, this is great, but it's a lot harder than anybody thinks it is to sell consultatively or to sell solutions at the senior level. And I'm not managed that way. And then senior executives are frustrated. I just spent hundreds of thousands, millions of dollars, and you didn't completely change them into different people. And then management consultants are like, it's going to take more than a couple of days of training.

Scott Edinger: You got to do something differently here. So, the absence of the connection between leadership and strategies, which are designed ostensibly to grow their organization, however, you measure growth, profit, net income, revenue, number of products, customer sat measures. However, you measure that if you have salespeople

or you know any kind of people that are responsible for front-line contact to drive that. Well, then they play a critical part of this that is often disconnected from what happens in the boardroom. So I kept seeing this. I thought, huh, well, this is an issue that is about growth, and it's not about sales. This is about what leaders are doing. Because when leaders are disappointed with sales or disappointed with those results, they often look to the scene of the crime, like where who's closest to it. It's always the salespeople, but most of the time, those sales teams are doing what they think they need to do. So you have to ask yourself, well, where's the disconnect here? What's happening? So, that's what I see. That's the central message in *The Growth Leader*.

Whitney Johnson: Okay, so, I want to unpack this for a minute because I think this is so interesting. First of all, you raised a point is pretty much everybody on the planet thinks that sales is really easy to do.

Scott Edinger: Yeah. This is we can put a bookmark on that topic because that that is a there's a stigma around sales, that it's personality. And anyone can do it, or you're born to do it.

Whitney Johnson: Or it's. It's easy or it's smarmy, but there's, there's like all sorts of stigma. And yet we all need sales. So yeah. So, I wanted just to ask that question because I think this, this is interesting. So, salespeople would say fascinating I get it. Thank you for training me in this. But this is not how I'm compensated. And this isn't how my manager isn't thinking is thinking about it. This isn't how the CEO's thinking about it. And so none of this is going to happen. Everything you're telling me and teaching me, I will go back and think, oh, back in the halcyon days when I had this training, but it won't happen. So, talk to me about what a conversation looks like with a senior leader. When when you're you know now that you've seen that frustration and you've done the sales training, and you're a great sales person yourself. How do you then advise the CEO? What does the conversation sound like?

Scott Edinger: Well, I think it always starts with a recognition that sales is the execution of your strategy. In the market every day, dozens of times, hundreds, maybe thousands of times a day. Your strategy succeeds or fails at the only place it can with your customers. How close are you to that? How much do you see that? We got research in the book that suggests that 86% of executives, CEOs in particular, are disconnected or not strategically connected to their sales team. Nearly a third of them are completely hands-off. Like, just get out there and sell people. Tell me what the number is. So, it always starts with this recognition that your strategy does not get executed at headquarters. There are no customers there. It happens in the field with customers. Every sales call reflecting the success or failure of your strategy. Right kind of customer, ideal client profile, or whoever would meet with them. Right level of contact or whoever they have a cozy relationship with, even if they can't say yes to anything, they can only say no. Are they having the kind of conversations that you say in the boardroom are important to drive your solutions for outcomes with customers, or is it pitch and close and the capabilities brochure that marketing gave me? And am I pursuing the kind of objectives that are important for our business, or am I selling anything that I can? So, that's those are the elements of strategy. And they don't exist in any other place except the front lines with customers. That's where they come to life.

Whitney Johnson: Okay. So, sales is the execution of your strategy. Which goes to something else that I think you and I have talked about is if sales is the execution of your strategy, then if you wanted to flip this, then you're, at some level, your salespeople are determining your strategy.

Scott Edinger: Yes. This is a conversation you and I had a while ago that actually helped me with the title of an article. *Your Sales Team Is Setting Your Strategy. Are You Okay With That?* Because, if you do, if you put those pieces together, right, you're like sales is the execution of your strategy. That's where it happens, and you're disconnected from that as an executive. You're not driving that, not getting what you want. Well, then, every day your sales reps wake up, they decide what your strategy is going to be. I've sometimes said to executives, don't tell me when I ask you. Don't tell me what your strategy is. Let me go on a half a dozen sales calls with your team, and then I'll come back, and I'll tell you what it is because that's what it really is. Not what you say here.

Speaker4: Oh, that is so good!

Whitney Johnson: That's like. That's your magic, right? I'm going to go on six sales calls with you, and I will come back and tell you what your strategy is, and then you can tell me if you're okay with that.

Scott Edinger: Yeah. And here's what we both know you're not going to be.

Whitney Johnson: Fascinating. All right, so speaking of executing, you did some, some work with the *Los Angeles Times* that really caught my eye. What was it like to help them to transition from print to digital with one of the nation's largest newspapers?

Scott Edinger: Yeah. So this is interesting. You go from, um, from selling classified ads, you know, to this total shift to digital. You know, the amount of change in selling advertising space, whether you're selling an automotive or entertainment or in the employment world. Right, to making a shift to saying, okay, so now I don't just sell this little part of the newspaper, I've got this whole digital suite. How do I become more of a I'll use the term consultant again, although it's overused. How do I become more of a consultant or partner discussing marketing issues with my customers? Discussing how they're going to get broader coverage, how they're going to advertise what's important to them in a broader digital solution set, versus here's the ad space for this week. Here's the here's the price. Totally different kinds of conversations, totally different kinds of conversations. So, that doesn't happen again just because you say, hey, here's two days of sales training, people, go change the way you've been doing everything for the last decade. That's a strategy effort from senior leadership that says we're going to go to market differently. We have a different set of choices, a different set of business outcomes that we need to drive for customers. And the way you engage with them is a key part of that.

Whitney Johnson: Okay, so *Los Angeles Times*, you're talking to a senior leader. They're like, okay, Scott, let's do this. How do you and we would be here all day. But, like, what's one thing that you will have your senior leader or your CEO say or do in order for their salespeople to shift that mindset from here's ad space to let's figure out how we use this entire property to help you move forward your marketing goals?

Scott Edinger: Yeah. A big part of this is to be able to recognize and to say throughout your organization that the sales experience is a point of differentiation for us, the way we engage with customers, with clients, with prospects, this is a point of differentiation. It's not just pitch and close. And, of course, a strategy would suggest is about differentiation. What makes you different in the market? And so many executives think about that as what we provide, what we sell, what we bring to the market, and I would suggest that if you really want to make a difference and create some competitive advantage here, then you could say how we sell in the market is as valuable, and the sales experience is central to that. Now, we have all heard a lot in the last five years about customer experience, CX. Good, a nice acronym in conferences and magazines. But one of the things I share with executives when we're working together is that the sales experience is the first mile of the customer experience highway, and if that is not a good experience, they will get off at exit one, and they will have a customer experience elsewhere.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah. Okay. So, you know what a question that's coming up for me, Scott, is I've been like obsessed recently with Strengthsfinder. So, like I had done it a few years ago, I had thought about it and I've come back to it. And so, as I'm listening to you, I'm thinking, you know, typically you think of strength finders as like a really good salesperson, as a WOO person, a win others over. And I think that that's interesting. But as I'm listening to you talk, I think there are other pieces of this. It's not what but how then win others over. I think is probably most successful salespeople have some portion of that. But what I hear you saying as well is they probably need to have a strategy strength, and they might need to have a relationship strength. Or, like, so it's interesting, as you're thinking about that metamorphosis that you need to have take place, you're probably looking for a different amalgam of strengths than you might have looked for historically.

Scott Edinger: Sure, the way we think about sales, in particular, and what it takes is not just about being articulate or extroverted, right? All those things that we associate with it, but rather, are you strategic? Are you a problem solver? Because if you are an executive and you're thinking about the sales experience as a point of differentiation, which, by the way, in the book we've got some research that says 25% to 53%, depending on which research you look at from McKinsey or Gartner. That quarter to half of the decision criteria of customers is based on the sales experience. So if you are similar or same in the eyes of customers on everything else, which, by the way, a lot of us are. Right? Then that sales experience is what tips the scales in your favor and can make the difference in you winning all of your fair share of business. So that doesn't happen because salespeople, or your sales team, or any of us show up to pitch or to close or to do the capabilities presentation. Like there's very little value in in hearing all of that. In fact, customers don't even want to anymore. They'll go online, they'll read about it. There's very little salespeople have to share that

a customer couldn't find elsewhere. So it's the insight. It's the expertise. It's helping you to think differently, to see an issue that you hadn't considered, or maybe you had considered it, but didn't realize just how serious it was or just what the opportunity was. How do you think differently about a solution, a way to solve a problem where you're like, oh, we didn't think about that. We could do that. That's interesting. So, there's lots of ways you can do this. My old boss, Neil Rackham, who wrote the book *Rethinking the Sales Force*, used to call this the idea of, would a customer pay for your sales call?

Whitney Johnson: Oh, yeah, that is so good. So good. You're dropping all sorts of truth bomb. So, one other question for you on this before we, we we move on. When you're advising a CEO around this. Are there 1 or 2 things that you would suggest as you're looking at the patterns for how can they identify someone who might be a really good salesperson that historically wouldn't have hit the radar of being good at this?

Scott Edinger: Yeah. One of my litmus tests for this is like, I will often talk with people who say I'm terrible at sales.

Whitney Johnson: Uh-huh.

Scott Edinger: And that, to me, is like a neon light that's saying this person might be really, might, probably, is really good at sales because the way we think about selling. This sort of anachronistic view of it that is about pitching, closing, slickness, right? Stuff that people don't really respond well to. Like when an executive says to me, I want closers, I need closers in my sales team. I'm like, when was the last time you sat across from someone who is pressing you for a close? Like, was that useful to you? Was that value? Did you like that? And yet, here's what you're pressing your teams to do. So, the key here is to recognize, well, those people who are saying, I'm not good at sales. Well, they might be some of your best because what they are likely good at is problem-solving. They don't see themselves as extroverted. They don't see themselves as pushy. Right. All the things that we negatively associate with sales, which for some reason, that stigma is strong. I mean, look, for some reason, it's earned. Lots of salespeople have helped to earn that over the years. But that doesn't work today. And we are just slow to learn that.

Whitney Johnson: It's so interesting. And to your point, when someone says they're not good at sales, oftentimes there's a subtext of but I am really good at relationships.

Scott Edinger: Yeah. So, I'll share a funny story about my like when I got turned down for one of the first sales jobs I interviewed for. So, I go through this, I'm sitting across from the executive vice president of sales, and I'm expecting to get an offer for this sales job. And he says to me, you know, you, Scott, you did great in the interview process. Everybody thought you would be a terrific member of our team. But in the sales assessment, you know, I took the sales assessment, you know, pencil and paper thing back then. And he says, but the sales assessment tells me that I cannot hire you. It says that you have high closing reluctance. Like, it sounded like a disease when he said, it's like, Scott, you have high closing reluctance. I'm sorry. And he says, the data tells me here that you will, that you will be too concerned with the relationship to press for the close. And I need closers. And years later, by the way, I was devastated. I was like so upset. I did not get this job. I really wanted it. And years later I realized, well, that data was absolutely right. But, the conclusion from the data was wrong because they were operating under a false or wrong mindset. Really. And it is the relationship, not in the form of friendships or golf or dinner, the way we used to think about sales. But the relationship, based on, I can help you with your business.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah.

Scott Edinger: I can help you see things you haven't. I can help you solve problems. I can be a valuable resource to you and the growth of your business, and that kind of relationship customers will pay for.

Whitney Johnson: So good. What was the hardest part of writing this book?

Scott Edinger: Well, it took a really long time. If I connect back to that first part of our conversation about all these disparate parts, I was like, how do I pull all of this together? Because as soon as you put sales in a leadership book, it becomes a book about sales and it hits the sales category. So, like, but this isn't like, there's a lot to say about sales in the book. You've read it. But it is about leadership. So, it was very difficult. Three full-on rewrites to try to articulate

that idea in a way that was cogent, clear, and wasn't full of gobbledygook, corporate speak. Which it took me a long time to sift through that. And that was that was the most difficult part for me.

Whitney Johnson: Right. To articulate your big idea, because you were fundamentally saying there needs to be a paradigm shift. And how do you talk about that in a way that made sense because no one else had articulated it. So, you couldn't just say yes, what they said? No, what I said.

Scott Edinger: Yeah. And I and I do think for the regular listeners of your podcast, of which I'm one. You know, those folks spinning like that is the spinning at the bottom part of the curve, trying to get up at sliding back down, trying to does this work? No, that didn't work. And there's this appeal to people. And no, that didn't. And finally getting it to the point where it's like, oh, I understand what you're saying here, Scott. That took a long time.

Whitney Johnson: So you've kind of answered this, but I want to ask it anyway. Coaching and leadership development is an industry that's really built on trust. And why do you believe your clients trust you? What do you do that makes you trustworthy for them?

Scott Edinger: Well, I think trust comes in a couple of different flavors. There's the like, you don't trust someone who's not competent. So, when I'm with a client, I, I with a proper dose of humility, I would say I express a pretty fair amount of competence. I understand the issues. I have expertise in delivering results for clients. So I think that's a big part of it. Um, I have not broken down trust on this second part of it much further than I look out for their best interest. It is the antithesis of pressing for a close. It is not typical sales behavior, and part of that has to come from a recognition like, I'm going to be okay whether I earn this business or not. There's a lot of sellers who go into every deal thinking they gotta eat. You know, it's like they got to win, or they're going to starve. But going into it with the lens of what's in their best interest, they're if, as a consultant, we all have frameworks and processes and programs, right? And some clients will tell me it's like I hired McKinsey, and I got all 16 parts of the process, even if I needed it or not. So, I try to think, what's in their best interest, how do they implement? What is what is going to work for this client and what's in their best interest? And can I help them?

Whitney Johnson: Yeah.

Scott Edinger: So with that lens coupled with competence, I think that is what creates the trust for me.

Whitney Johnson: So, we've just been talking about what you're doing and where you are and this wonderful success that you've had, but you started in a place that was pretty challenging, and you were kind enough to let me share some of this in. I think it was in *Disrupt Yourself*, but maybe, *Build an A Team*; I don't remember which one. And I would love for you just to share a little bit about where you started, because I think sometimes we think about this growth mindset and we don't really believe it. And I think you are a living, breathing embodiment of that. So would you just share some of your personal early years?

Scott Edinger: Yeah. You, um, you mentioned where you start. I started after years and years and ridiculous sums of money spent on therapy. I can talk to you about it.

Whitney Johnson: Three cheers for therapy.

Scott Edinger: Amen. But I started in a very hopeless place. Um. I never knew my dad. And my mom and I were broke and living in a trailer park. And when I was eight years old, she left. And it was a very confusing and chaotic set of circumstances. I ended up in an intrafamily adoption in a really horrible situation filled with all forms of abuse and trauma, and it looked like I'd be going nowhere. Um, and in high school, I'm getting D's and and F's with the occasional C on my report card. But I had this speech teacher, a guy named John Davis, who, um, who sort of recognized what we would probably call a little bit of talent, a glimmer of it in a speech class. And he said, hey, Scott, I want you to come to the county speech competition. Because the winners of the contest are going to win a, a one-semester scholarship, books, and tuition at the local community college, Brevard Community College. Now. I had no designs on college. I'm making D's and F's. Like, it's not a it's not a thing. I'm going to be working, you know, locally and live in a trailer park. So, in typical Scott Edinger fashion, circa 1987, I say, yep. Okay, I'll be there. And I'm a no-show. And Mr. Davis is like really pissed off at me about this. But he did not give up, which I think is an

important lesson for all of us as leaders. Right? He doesn't give up on me. He says there are a couple of kids who won in their categories, the scholarships, but they're going elsewhere and they've already got other scholarships.

Scott Edinger: So, there's a couple left over, at least one left over, and I've arranged for you to go to the local community college speech and debate team coach, the forensics team coach, and have a private tryout. And if you go there and you do what you do here in class, I think you got a chance. So, this time, I do show up. And she says, okay. Edinger one semester, books, and tuition. So, but I don't know what this college thing is about. I don't know the speech team. And we go to my first competition, and, um, and I show up this time, again. You know, it's like that whole thing is like, it's amazing how important it is to getting something like a scholarship or winning something; it is showing up. But I think we've all had that experience where we show up. It's what you write about in your article, but not fully. Not really. I didn't prepare like I needed to. I wasn't really into it. So I was there, and I got embarrassed, and I finished last in every category. And afterward, my coach, her name is Barbara Williamson. Also really impactful in my life. She says, I don't get it, Scott. You have some talent. You've got this opportunity here. What's going to happen? And I was really I was humiliated by that, you know. So, but I buckled down, like for the first time in my life; this is a turning point for me.

Scott Edinger: I'm like, okay. She says, I've got some talent. This teacher says I've got some talent. I went to this thing, and I was impressed by the students at this competition. So I was like, I'm going to do this. And for the first time in my life, I buckled down. I start writing speeches. I'm practicing every day for hours. It drove her crazy. She's like, get out of my office already. And then I started to place at the tournaments that we would go to, the intercollegiate tournaments we'd go to. I started to place, and then she said, okay, you're placing at the tournaments. I will extend your scholarship from one semester to two years. I'll let you finish your associate's degree. And then, I started winning. I'd win at these tournaments we'd go to. At the end of my freshman year in college, almost a year to the date of the speech tournament in high school that I'm a no-show for, I'm at the national championships, competing with students from all around the country, and I take bronze medals in two categories. Now things started to fall into place then. I would say for us, I might say I. That's when I started to learn how to go up an S Curve. And that's where it started. Things did start to fall into place by then. There's a lot that happens after that.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah, but that's a start.

Scott Edinger: But is I'm to say, from a hopeless position in a trailer park in, in poverty really. To failing at a high school to that, and then and then you could see it's like, okay, so there's a path after that. There wasn't beforehand. And that's the moment where the path gets created.

Whitney Johnson: Oh. Thank you for sharing that. It's just, and the power of those people who believed they just they grabbed onto you, you know, by the, by the sort of shirt and said, I see you, I believe in you. You could be something. That's beautiful.

Scott Edinger: So, to me, this is the essence of leadership, right? It's like, who on your teams, if you're like, it's like who on our teams, do you see something in where you can cultivate the best in them? You can bring it out. They may not deserve it. Lord knows I didn't. You know? I did nothing to deserve that. But they saw something, and they like, and by the way, it wasn't endless. That's like I got my second chance. There was not a third chance in these situations. Like, if I don't capitalize on the second chance, I'm still in the trailer park. Um, but who do you need to give that second chance to? Who do you need to spot it in?

Whitney Johnson: Yeah. Hmm. All right, so I'm having a wondering that I'd like to play with, which is. So, you had those early, those formative experiences, your life's work has now become, you know, this idea of sales is the execution of your strategy. Like this, this idea of growth. And. How do you, if you have to pull a thread through, how did you how did those formative experiences inform and cause this, this work that you're doing now to become your life's work?

Scott Edinger: I think there's two of them, actually. Two threads. The first one is from from very early age. I think even when things are going wrong all around me, you know, it's like I'm recognizing this isn't right. Leadership matters. Leadership is an important thing. You know, it's like it's what it's what pulls people along, shows them what the future can look like. And if you don't have that, then things are bleak. They're hopeless. So I think I couldn't

have articulated it like that, but I, I think that I in looking back, you know, everything's so much more clearly. It's, that's how you see that. So it's like the importance of leadership brings me there. And then, on the career side of it, I spent a lot of years in sales, in sales leadership positions, with a constant frustration that the CEOs that I reported to could not see what was making a difference for our business and what wasn't. And their constant internal focus. So, you know, not that internal things aren't important, but I should probably better say their lack of concentration and attention to that. And then, of course, I see that throughout my career with executives not either valuing or paying enough attention to the thing that could make the greatest difference in their business and whether they win or lose in the market. So, those two things sort of come together for me and say, okay, so this is about leadership sales all pulled together in one strategy.

Whitney Johnson: Which I think is interesting, too, because it goes back to an earlier book that you wrote called *The Hidden Leader* about your ability to see things and wanting to make visible what seems to be. It's so visible and so obvious to you, but not visible and obvious to other people. So.

Scott Edinger: Yeah. There's someone who we both know, Sarah McArthur.

Whitney Johnson: Yeah.

Scott Edinger: Who said to me 15 years ago when I was writing an article with my last firm, she was helping me with it, and she said to me, this is at the end of the book, too. She said, Scott, you know, because I was trying to write something. It was coming along. She said, when you look out the window. What do you see that nobody else sees? If you write about that, I think it'll be great.

Whitney Johnson: Oh, so good. Go, Sarah. All right, so I want to go to a little bit of advice. And if people are listening to this and saying, okay, I heard what he said, lots of truth moments. Sales is the execution of your strategy. What's one thing that you would encourage a leader or a CEO to go do today? Right now, after listening to this conversation, super action-oriented that they can take on.

Scott Edinger: Number one, I would say get on some sales calls and don't go where it's a carefully orchestrated environment catered to you. Executives would be stunned if they knew how much work went on, so that when they show up to a customer environment or on a sales call that everything is perfect, it's that whole fresh paint syndrome, right? It's like it smells like fresh paint everywhere I go because everybody's taking care of everything where you go. Right? So go on some sales calls with salespeople only with the intent to listen. And when you're there, just observe what those interactions are like and see if they're the kinds of things that you would value when you get called on by other organizations trying to sell you things. And then think about how do you make that experience valuable for your customers in the form of insight? If you just go on some of them and say, I want to learn what's really happening in the field, and also don't go with like the best customers, go with the people who aren't hiring you, who are choosing somebody else. Right. So, learn about that. That would be the first thing. And then second, I think you got to connect with your sales organization that their job is more than to pitch and close and make the quarterly number. That their job is to create value for your customers and to and to design and deliver a sales experience that is based on insight and expertise, and how you think about things, and how we can help you to solve problems and capitalize on opportunities. And if you can connect on that, I'm not saying that the quarterly numbers aren't important and that you've got to make them, but there's always going to be the next quarter's numbers. So. Focus on something bigger than that, and I think you'll get your results more than your fair share of results in the quarter.

Whitney Johnson: So good. All right. So, Scott, you know you know what question is coming. What's been useful for you in this conversation?

Scott Edinger: I think the opportunity to continue to clarify and refine how I talk about these topics. It is still not easy, despite having taken five years and three full-on rewrites of a book. You'd think I'd have it all. But even talking with you about it and you're familiar with my work because we've talked about it, right? So, having the chance to continue to refine the thinking there, that has been very useful. And on a personal note, I'd say it was especially useful for you to point out the distance someone has traveled. It is really easy to get caught up in the world of LinkedIn and social media and say, where am I ending up with everything else? And in a professional sense, I don't ever talk about this. So, that was really wonderful for us to be able to talk about that in a professional sense. Like my

conversations about this are all private. Um, I was willing to do that here and like you did in a really lovely way, and I appreciate that.

Whitney Johnson: Hmm. It's so beautiful the distance you've traveled. All right. So, any final thoughts to wrap it up?

Scott Edinger: There's there's one element in the book that I write about and, and the importance of inspiring and motivating others and making an emotional connection. Right. Like you're not going to get results treating people like task-focused robots, automatons. And I'm very careful when I use the phrase "emotional connection" because I'm not talking about wild displays of emotion, excessive emotionality, group therapy. I'm talking about connecting with your teams as people you know, like novel idea, fellow members of the human race, right? But people are emotional creatures. So, how do you connect with them on an emotional level? Is there enthusiasm or excitement? Is there concern? Even anger or frustration can be really valuable when expressed right. You know, leaders tend to over-index on the anger side of it and not get behind what's driving it. But is there a concern? Is there is there a care for people in their development and an investment in them? If you connect with people, you will get the discretionary effort. They will go the extra mile for you in some cases. I've seen teams willing to chew through a brick wall for their leader, right? So, that is something that is really easy to forget about when you're talking about strategy and execution and sales and all of these things that are really sort of like, I'll say, tactical business leadership, and I did not want to leave that out. It is a later chapter. I hope everybody still gets to it. But on the importance of inspiring and connecting with people. Because none of this can happen just because you declare it. Like, you won't get there by declaration. You'll get there because you connect with people on these topics.

Whitney Johnson: They understand how to do it, and then they want to do it.

Scott Edinger: Yeah.

Whitney Johnson: Okay. So good. Scott, thank you. This has been super fun.

Scott Edinger: Whitney, I was delighted to be here. Thanks so much. Always great to talk to you.

Sales is the execution of your strategy. That's the top line here, and it is beautifully obvious. It has to be providing solutions for problems customers have. If your strategy is, for example, an S Curve Insight Tool that helps leaders understand each employee's current growth capacity, then sales has to be more than marketing the tool. It's learning about what your client needs, and they're trusting then that what you're selling will solve whatever it is that they're trying to solve for. In short, their work, their life will be better because of what they bought.

And I love, love, love that question. Would you pay for this sales call? In that light. Always be closing is really a failure of leadership. When you're not getting any other directive but to sell, sell, sell. You don't care what you're selling as long as the numbers go up. But if sales is the execution of your strategy and sales doesn't know or care what your strategy is, then what I'm taking away from Scott is that the blame is yours as a leader. It's it's mine as a leader. It's not on the sales department. We're letting an entire department play their own game. Even though they're the face of the company, it's easy to turn sales into a number you check quarterly. It's understandable even to want to shunt the hard work of selling a product to another department. After all the time that was spent developing it in the first place. But that's quitting the race before the finish line, Scott says. As a leader, you see it through.

For more on creating those memorable sales experiences, there's my talk with Jeremy Andrus, CEO of Traeger Grills, that's [episode 148](#). And on building a sales team that you can entrust your vision and strategy to, there's

[episode 287](#) with Stephen M.R. Covey and McKinlee Covey. Thank you again to Scott Edinger for being our guest, and thank you for listening. If you enjoyed today's show, hit subscribe so you don't miss a single episode. Thank you to our producer, Alexander Tuerk, and production coordinator Nicole Pellegrino.

I'm Whitney Johnson.

And this has been Disrupt Yourself.