



MAXIMIZE BUSINESS VALUE PODCAST - EPISODE 43 Transcript

Announcer (5s):

Welcome to the Maximize business value podcast. This podcast is brought to you by mastery partners, where our mission is to equip business owners, to maximize business value so they can transition their business on their terms. Our mission was born from the lessons we've learned from over 100 business transactions, which fuels our desire to share our experiences and wisdom, so you can succeed. Now, here's your host CEO of mastery partners, Tom Bronson.

Tom Bronson (36s):

Hi this is Tom Bronson and welcome to maximize business value. A podcast for business owners who are passionate about building long-term sustainable value in their businesses. In this episode, this is the third part of a series on sales and growth strategies. And we're going to have more beyond this. We've already had two, the last couple of weeks, we have more coming up, but in this episode, we're going to continue this mini series on growth strategies. And I'd like to welcome our guest. Debbie Mrazek. She's the president of the sales company, Debbie and I are both members of business pros, which is a Dallas based organization of professionals, dedicated to educational opportunities for business owners, just like this.

Tom Bronson (1m 23s):

Debbie recently presented an at an educational program for business pros. And I knew instantly that I wanted to have her on this podcast. Not only does Debbie absolutely love empowering people to sell and achieve more. She's also a faculty member for the Goldman Sachs 10,000 small businesses initiative, a great program for sure. You should look into that. And she was named one of the 2020 and 2021 most powerful business

leaders in Dallas by the CEO magazine. I'm so excited to have her on board today. Welcome to maximize business value.

Tom Bronson (2m 4s):

Debbie

Debbie Mrazek (2m 5s):

Hi Tom, thank you so much for inviting me today to talk about my favorite subject. I look forward to it.

Tom Bronson (2m 12s):

Awesome. Well, our folks need to plug into this cause they're going to get lots of wisdom. So tell us about the sales company.

Debbie Mrazek (2m 20s):

You bet. So we started our career actually selling semiconductors for Texas instruments. So working with a lot of technology, technical people, not, and one of the things that I learned in doing that was a lot of people, brilliant ideas, but they could not sell. So they would lose their businesses. You know, they'd have some genius invention or whatever, but they would lose it. So I started doing I, so I had done sales for my whole career inside, outside sales, even customer service when I began. And so I started doing consulting only for technology companies and fast forward, 20 plus years, we do all industries now.

Debbie Mrazek (3m 3s):

And it has just been just so invigorating and fun and every day is different. And so that is what we do is we help other people be able to sell in a way that they can sell. Yeah,

Tom Bronson (3m 21s):

You said a mouthful. So many entrepreneurs are out there experts at building the widget, right? They know their, their technologists. They know how to build better products faster and that kind of thing. And so, but a lot of times the sales strategy, the sales element escapes them. There's a lot of that in the consulting industry as well,

folks that are really good at their craft, who are not great at selling their products and motivating others. So you've told us a little bit about your background selling semiconductors, but, but why did you start the sales company? What was the impetus for that 20 years ago?

Tom Bronson (4m 2s):

It

Debbie Mrazek (4m 2s):

Was because in seeing these people that, you know, were so passionate about what they did, you know, they had used their money, excuse me, their grandmother's money. You know, the 20, 30 years ago, you know, people there was VC money, but not like we see it today. And so to see them just, it was their dream. It's what they wanted to do. And because of this, one thing that I thought was like, everybody could do, you know, it was, you know, like I can, I can do this. And so I was at the time, right before I got into consulting, I had a manufacturer's rep company and we represented companies all over the world.

Debbie Mrazek (4m 46s):

And that market I was selling, like I said, printed circuit boards, semiconductors was getting so competitive that we were spending months every year, negotiating those darn contracts and getting less and less money. And it's like, you know, you just get to a point. Sometimes they're just like, I think it's time to do something different. And I just really believe that I could do this. And because I, you know, I care about other people and I loved, loved the technology business. And so that's what made me take the leap. And I've been so grateful that I did now. You don't

Tom Bronson (5m 24s):

Only work in technology though. Oh no,

Debbie Mrazek (5m 26s):

No. Today I work in everything. In fact, I tell the story out a good friend of mine who is the kind of friend that you call when you've done something really great. I mean like

really great. And they go, yes, this is great. We'll have champagne, you know, kind of thing. So that kind of friend, but that kind of friend called me one day and said, you know, and an enemy like serious as a heart attack, you know, like, you know what, you help all these other people. I don't know why you don't me. And she was just serious. And I was like getting teary, like, okay, well, I, I will never say anything about that again. And she's like, no, you just need to help me.

Debbie Mrazek (6m 7s):

And I thought, what are you talking about? Because I don't do your industry. And she's like, that is nonsense. Sales is, sales is sales and you need to get over here and help me. And I said, well, okay, I'll come do it as a beta. You know, could we survey your people when we finish, you know, to see if you know, they appreciated or it helped them or whatever now. And like they say, the rest is history.

Tom Bronson (6m 33s):

Wow. That's, that's a good friend.

Debbie Mrazek (6m 36s):

Yeah. I was good. That's what I was going to tell you. And that is the best kind of friend. And in fact, one of the people that was on her team, I still work with from time to time today. No kidding. Oh, he's brilliant. And he was just young and just didn't know.

Tom Bronson (6m 54s):

Wow. You know, in my last company, I took on a group of investors that gave me a, a chief operating officer who said, you know, we just have to build great products cause they'll sell themselves. You know, we'll just, they'll go out there and sell themselves. And, and it always frustrated me that be in a conversation with him because sales is a craft, like, like any other craft, you know, you, you work to hone the skills that you have as a sales professional it's process. It's about all of these things that you have to do, but it is really, in my opinion, it's a, it's a learned skill.

Tom Bronson (7m 36s):

You know, you always hear those folks who say, Oh, a natural born salesperson. I just don't buy that. Right. I mean, people have the gift of gab perhaps, but sales is not about talking. It's about listening and understanding and, and, and helping others. So where do you land on that equation? Is, is sales a natural occurrence or is sales something that you like?

Debbie Mrazek (8m 0s):

So I, I say that it's both an art and a science, you know, there really isn't science to it. There is a process to it, but the art to it is you. And that's why when I said earlier, working with other people to help them be great at sales, the way they can do it and perfect their art. So they can do sales. You know, people call me sometimes and say, okay, Deb, I've got this great person. And you know, I want everyone to be like, George, I will never take that engagement. And I tell them flat out, you don't want everybody to be like, George, all your clients are not like George's client.

Debbie Mrazek (8m 41s):

You need to have, if you're having a team, if you've gone to that level, you need to have different people that can sell to different kinds of people. And I do believe it is an art.

Tom Bronson (8m 53s):

I couldn't agree with you more completely. And, and salespeople are no different from all other people. They all have to be managed differently. They all have to be a they're, they're all motivated differently. Certainly you want salespeople that have some degree of money, motivation if there's a sales compensation factor in there. But, but something that, that would work great for me probably wouldn't work for you and, and vice versa. But that goes out throughout the organization. I hadn't really thought about that. Cause, cause that's a frequent request. I want everybody to sell, like George does well, but, but George's clients are all of the clients that are out there.

Tom Bronson (9m 35s):

Right?

Debbie Mrazek (9m 35s):

Absolutely. And the other thing you said is about people being money motivated. One of the things that I think people miss when they're hiring is to ask you, you know, what are your goals? Not, not, I'm not talking about leading you on, I just ask you what your goals are. And if your goal is say, you want to make \$70,000 a year, you want to be able to take the kiddos to Disney world for spring break and a ski break in the fall. Well, you know, that's fine. You're probably going to be happy then if you make that 70, but if I'm looking for a sales person, that's going to do 200,000 a year, you may be great, but you're not going to get me where I want to go.

Debbie Mrazek (10m 19s):

The same though. You it's like not everybody being George. Maybe you don't need all your salespeople to make \$200,000 a year because there's different levels of profit and stuff. So if you have like, you know, you say George superstar, that's \$200,000 a year, great profit. And then, you know, there is a steadiness to your business though, if you keep going, you know, at this level. So maybe you do, you need to \$70,000, you needed one 50, you needed 200.

Tom Bronson (10m 52s):

I love that. I love that. Everybody's not going to be the same and you're not going to get the same result that I've ever bought.

Debbie Mrazek (10m 59s):

This is why you see a lot of times when people take sales positions, you know, like they give them a, you know, a six months, you know, window. Like they pay him a certain amount of commission for six months and then, then they leave, you know, cause they didn't ask these things upfront. In fact, I have even done things for clients where I upset, you know, all days, you know, you have a stack of resumes and I could flip through those resumes and go, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Look at these three. And they'd say why? I said, because you know, they used up their money for the six months and look, they were gone at nine months. They were gone at eight months. These aren't people you want to do that.

Debbie Mrazek (11m 39s):

Now these three, you know, something else is going on, why they're willing to make a change. And so I would consider them and seldom, have I been wrong in that?

Tom Bronson (11m 48s):

Right. Well, you know, it begs a, a, a different issue and that a lot of times I hear, gosh, it takes, it takes six months or it takes a year for, for a sales rep to be firing on all cylinders in our company. I think that that's a bigger problem. It, it almost, I've never had a business that I couldn't have a sales, a new sales rep, fully functional and operational death star, if you will, in less than three months, but it all boils down to process and how are we doing this? Right? How are we teaching it?

Tom Bronson (12m 28s):

How are we, how are we following through on it? What tools are we giving them? If, if, if it takes six months or nine months or a year for somebody to become productive in sales, I think it's a sales process issue and not necessarily a sales person issue. What do you think about it?

Debbie Mrazek (12m 47s):

I, I definitely agree with that. And that's where so many people, you know, they don't appreciate what sales is. They don't even consciously understand that it's a process. It's like what you said earlier, you know, they're just born with it. Well, they may be confident. They may be at ease having a conversation with all kinds of people, but there's a process to sales. There's things you have to do in sales. You know, I do not object to companies offering a draw, you know, like for six months, you know, maybe the first month the person needs one in the fourth month or something. I have no objection to it, but the people that know they're coming in and getting their salary and they're going to get this draw for six months and then go somewhere else.

Debbie Mrazek (13m 30s):

I think if people really understood what their process was. And also also, you know, not everybody's process is a sale in six months. You know, there are those things that do take a year or longer, but again, it gets back to interviewing when you're interviewing somebody who do they already have relationships with? What kind of sales have they

done your particular industry product or so I don't think they have to, but if they have them, they have something they can bring to the party right away. Then they probably are going to be closer to making that number before, you know, the six months or a year or whatever the sales cycle is. But many people have no idea what their sales cycle is.

Tom Bronson (14m 11s):

Yeah. You know, imagine if you will hiring somebody, having bad processes and you've got an 18 month sales cycle and that's, that's not unusual, right? I mean, there are lots of companies out there that have these really, really long sales cycles and, and working with a sales rep for 18 months to two years only to have them walk out the door because the, we didn't interview and hire them properly. We didn't have processes in place. Now you've wasted a two whole years of your life trying to get this person up to speed when it was, you could have had the right person in the beginning

Debbie Mrazek (14m 48s):

And you know, and they talk about, you know, well, I don't want to use a recruiter and you, and I both know there are brilliant recruiters out there now. And you know, they don't wanna use a recruiter up front because it costs too much money yet. If they had invested in somebody who really knew how to interview really understood what you did and got you the right person firsthand that 18 months, that person would have made you money, not cost you money, but now what you've done, you've hired inappropriately. And so you do, you try, you do whatever for 18 months, everybody goes away mad and you've lost money, not only in sales, but what it cost you, you know, to employ that person taxes and benefits, whatever.

Tom Bronson (15m 33s):

Yeah. And you've got to replace them again and start the clock all over how much they do the same thing again, that's it. And how much what's the opportunity cost. Right. And you know, what, what have we lost in the meantime? So, so why do people struggle so much with sales Debbie?

Debbie Mrazek (15m 52s):

You know, I think as, and some people struggle, not because, you know, they're trying to pull the wool over your eyes. Like I can do it kind of thing, but they really don't understand the process of it. They think it is just about talking to people. You know, I'm just going to talk to you and tell you what I have and because it is the best mouse trap, you automatically want it. And so the other thing is, is in our society. And I think probably in other places in the world too, you know, there's this stereotype about sales being schmucks or, you know, people that are out to get you and stuff.

Debbie Mrazek (16m 33s):

And so people who aren't sad who want to do sales, but they're always worried about, am I a schmuck? You know, are they thinking I am instead of one of the most difficult, but most powerful lessons I ever learned, I was in Houston selling, this was my first gig in outside sales selling into, if you can imagine the seismic industry who never had women salespeople. So this is dresser industries, the big guy in slumber, J kind of people now. And I was going along and there was a woman who, I wouldn't say like a mentor, but you know how there are people that just advocate for you.

Debbie Mrazek (17m 17s):

They, you know, you may not be able to do this yet, but they think you can, and you know, they're cheering you on. And one day she said to me, you know, she said, Deb, the sooner you figure out, if you would just be you, this is going, gonna work a whole lot better than you trying to be those guys. And I sort of understood and think, because, you know, it's like, just like you and I have talked about our families, our cat, you know, those kinds of things. Well, what I was doing, I thought guys only talked about work. You know, like the part numbers, you know, what the engineering department said. And so that's how I did. They would have never known, I had a beautiful son and a husband, two beagles at cat, you know?

Debbie Mrazek (18m 2s):

I mean, I just, I didn't do that. And she said, Debbie, you are not being used. Let me tell you something that year that I finally got that, you know, and I talked to my boss about what she said, and he went, she's absolutely right. And so just little by little, I started and I mean, the flood Gates opened and it was fine. And this is why, again, I'm so passionate

today about teaching people to sell the way that they can sell, you know, for other people,

Tom Bronson (18m 32s):

I am very fortunate in my career to one of my first sales management jobs. I realized that very quickly is that people sell differently. They're going to sell to their strengths and they, but, but you have to let them be themselves. Right. And I hired a, a guy way early in my career. This is, we're talking about probably in the, in the early mid eighties who had been, he was, he was an older gentleman, basically nearing retirement. And it had a very successful sales career. And, and then was kind of in a slump for a very long time.

Tom Bronson (19m 12s):

And we hired him into a territory and, and I started working with him. And when, when he started appreciating the direction that I was giving, and I started letting him be who he was, he was one of our top sales reps who was basically at the end of his career that most people would look at him and say, Oh, he'll never sell anything, but it was letting him be authentic about who he was. I'll, I'll just relay a short story. And this was, we learned from one another, right. And in our whole process. And we were out in a hospital somewhere in deep Eastern, North Carolina, out in the middle of nowhere in the Sandhills.

Tom Bronson (19m 55s):

And, and we went in and we had a plan, what we were going to talk about. And I'll tell you in, in probably 10 minutes of sitting with the head of purchasing for that hospital, I felt like this conversation was going off the rails. And I literally wanted to get up grabbed Dick by the back of the neck, because no longer with us, you know, he passed on several years ago. What I grabbed him by the back of his neck and drag him out in the parking lot and just beat the hell out of him. I said, what are you doing? But he kept going and kept going. And then he made a comment and I wish I could remember what it was, but, but this head of purchasing at this hospital group opened up like a Christmas present.

Tom Bronson (20m 40s):

And suddenly an hour later, they're buying everything we had to offer. And it was because it was him authentic and being who he was. And I learned a great lesson that day. And people have to be authentic in the sales. They, they can't be the, as you call it sales schmuck, I'm going to start using that.

Debbie Mrazek (21m 4s):

And they are out there.

Tom Bronson (21m 7s):

Yes, they are. You know, it's the old adage, you know, used car salesman. But I will tell you that one of the very best salespeople I've ever known in my lifetime, a fellow by the name of Jim Palokas, he works for the Sewell automotive group. He's been a used car salesman for Sewell automotive for 25 years. I will never buy another car from somebody else. Why? Because he is really good at his craft. So, so stop using the term used car salespeople. I'm going to start using sales Schmidt.

Debbie Mrazek (21m 36s):

I love it. And let me tell you some of that. So funny you say that about school. I have bought from a gentleman, Kevin Bush at Sewell, and I have spoken about him on stages of a hundred people. And you hear people and you say, you don't have, when you stand up on the stage and look out and you see them and they're just like, Oh my God, he was like, call Kevin Bush. Let me tell you this, man, I don't want to talk about what's under the hood or whatever. I want a white one. I want to pay this much. I want this kind of sound system. And that's what I want. He delivers it to my house. He takes away the old one. He sends a young man with a piece of paper and it has little stickies to sign here.

Debbie Mrazek (22m 17s):

That's how I buy a car. And Kevin understands that that's it,

Tom Bronson (22m 23s):

That's it. So, so we have to let our sales people be authentic. So, so I bet you and I can swap stories all day about things like that. Sewell is a great company, that's it? You

know, unfortunately many of our listeners are not in the, in the DFW area and they, they've never experienced Sewell automotive. I would encourage you to, to on your next car, make a trip to Dallas.

Debbie Mrazek (22m 46s):

Exactly. You just say it's worth it to come to Dallas to buy a car at Sewell.

Tom Bronson (22m 52s):

So, so let's get back to a kind of sales methods and tracking and that kind of thing. So is there a good method for forecasting and tracking sales?

Debbie Mrazek (23m 1s):

Well, first of all, the number one thing is to do it, that this is I kid you, not how many people, you know, this is one of the things I start with. Do you have a sales forecast? No. So how do you know, how do you know? And so I find, and this is, you know, individual people, large groups, whatever. It's so many people don't even have a sales forecast. So I shared with you earlier, I started my career at Texas instruments. You know, what do engineering people love numbers, numbers, numbers, your graphs, pictures, number, ode spreadsheets, those kinds of things.

Debbie Mrazek (23m 42s):

Now. Well at Texas instruments, they, I use what they called a rolling forecast. So today is January. So yeah, most people do their forecast January through December. But if we were talking in may, the forecast would begin in may if you didn't have one, but it goes through the next 12 months. And the belief system was that if you, so you know what happens to January, then that becomes a report that you have, you can look back on, but the forecast is always 12 months going forward. And there, the way they worked was there was no way you could not do it. You know, you had a, you know, inside sales, outside sales, you know, you had to do this well.

Debbie Mrazek (24m 28s):

So that's how I grew up. Well, the division of TI workforce sold to another company and the TA management went with them. So we continued to do that. Well, later on I

changed, I went to a different company. And so this was something that we did every Monday morning. You know, every, every salesperson you would just were polite and respectful while Tom gave his report, Debbie gave hers, you know, but you knew you had to have it updated. You couldn't just copy and paste from last week. So anyway, so I go to this other thing company and they don't do anything, nothing. And here I am one because I quit because I was mad at the manager at the other company.

Debbie Mrazek (25m 10s):

But there I was, you know, a week later hiding over at my desk, making my own sales forecast. And what I tell people about that is, you know, today there's a lot of question about forecasting and using software and different things. And there are great ones out there, but this is an exercise that can be done with pencil and paper and a ruler. And it still can today. There is no excuse not to do a forecast. So what I did, and this is the basis for what I do is when I start working with somebody and they do not have a forecast, I tell them if we are going to work together, the first thing we're going to do is we're going to create a forecast and, you know, they get all nervous and, Oh, we don't have, I was like, I don't care.

Debbie Mrazek (25m 56s):

If you only have two pieces of business, we are going to set up the format, you know, in a generic format, of course would be suspect prospect leads, proposals, customers, you know, very traditional 12 months out, you know, the next 12 months and let's get to it and you start filling it in. Well, what happens with that is so thinking about the individual that I might be working with, who's never had one, I send them away week one with this template, if you will. And we've been through exactly what to do and you know how to do it, but I don't go back to the office with them and do their homework with them. So they show up the next week for the meeting and they have this.

Debbie Mrazek (26m 38s):

Now I oftentimes to ask people, you know, so what are your, you know, what would you like your sales be this year? And, you know, somebody says, well, I would like them to be a million dollars. I don't care what the number is. That's great, but they go away and they do this forecast and they document everything. They really know including suspects.

And they come back and in the bottom grand total right-hand column, it says 3 million. So I say to them, do you want to do three or one? I'm good either way. And they're just like Debbie, I had no clue. And so then we can be able to create a plan on how we can get that.

Debbie Mrazek (27m 18s):

Or maybe we sort out our suspects and realize they're not exactly the ones we want. We want some other ones, but now we know if we only had 10 more of these other ones that do like this, you know, then we wouldn't need these other 40, that aren't as profitable or aren't exactly the right criteria. And so I believe that a rolling forecast is the key to success. And I will tell you one thing that just happened last year. So I have taught this to everyone that I worked with. I even wrote a book because of this, because I just feel like this is the key. And one of the gentleman, he told me he had a forecast and we kind of went through this and any, and basically what he was doing was going.

Debbie Mrazek (27m 60s):

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, you know, you're an adult, you know, so great. You've got it. You've got it. So come back next week, he sends it to me. It is the Texas instruments deal. It is exactly what I had learned. And I looked at it, you know, he was, we were on a zoom and it was like he said, are you okay? I said, I, I haven't been doing this over 20 years. I have never had anybody that had the forecast. Like, I'll put it, you know, like I said, where did you learn? I did not realize he too had worked at Texas instruments early in his career. Yeah. So his issue wasn't as forecasting, but it was, you know, in helping with other things about sales.

Debbie Mrazek (28m 45s):

But yeah, so most people just simply don't have it. So they don't know where they are. So they don't know what their target is. They don't know what they want. You know, they don't know what they have, you know, they don't really understand what they have and the profitability. So, you know, they, they're just floundering out there and just doing this one thing alone, to look at what, you know, not what, not something you're going to have in six months, but what do you know today? And they realize they know a lot more than

they thought they did. And so then they can have targeted activities to begin to make these things happen or let them go.

Tom Bronson (29m 21s):

I love that. You know, you can't manage it if you don't measure it. Right. I mean, that's in our old adage and just a quick side story on how I was able to use that I'm in the same camp, you know, we've worked, has sales always. And I've, even though I've spent most of my career sitting behind the CEO of the companies that I've, that I've owned and run, I started in sales, right. I started in, and so I developed really great habits back in those early years. And because I was always tracking sales and measuring it and monitoring it and forecasting on that, my forecasts were always good.

Tom Bronson (30m 3s):

Right. I always knew. And, and at the point where I'd grown a company and we were taking on investors and I needed to report on what we were going to be able to accomplish in the next three and six, nine, 12 months. I knew I could do that because we, we relentlessly track that information. I knew to a salesperson how accurate they could forecast their business. And so I could apply those metrics. You know, just a, in our key accounts group. In my last company, we had three different sales organizations. One was, you would, you might call them inside sales. They're the folks that are, we called them, our customer relationship folks.

Tom Bronson (30m 45s):

They're the ones who were mining existing customers for more business. Right. We had our new account guys, which were out there finding new, you know, individual are up to, up to 25 locations that they were bringing. And then we had our key account folks. And, and I could tell you in each one of those different groupings, how accurate their forecasting was based on, you know, where we were, you coming into the quarter. And I get a forecast from the key account groups. I knew how to apply a factor. And I was going to be within a hundred dollars of where they were going to end. Why, because I've measured it and tracked it and paid very close attention to those details.

Tom Bronson (31m 28s):

And, and it was okay for me, for them to forecast the way they were, even though it was often I was applying a different number to it, but I know I could count on it. I can almost take that money to the bank because I knew how they forecasted and did that. But the only way I could do that was measuring it. So that is great advice. You've got to measure it. We're up on a break. We're talking with Debbie Mrazek. Let's take a quick break. We'll be back in 30 seconds.

Announcer (31m 58s):

Like it or not, eventually you'll have to come to a point when it's time for your business to transition,. Will you be ready to get the maximum value for your business? Brought to you by mastery partners, masterYclass is a 12 month program designed specifically for business owners. We meet once a month as a group to work through our transition readiness assessment, expand your business. Toolbox through leadership presentations have live interaction with other business owners. This program determines vulnerabilities and your business will affect business value and your ability to transition in the future. Whether that transition is in two or years, what you do now has long term effects on the future value of your business.

Announcer (32m 45s):

We have the know how you to get the results you want in your business to maximize the business value. To learn more And secure your spot in the program. Visit mbvmasteryclass.com. That's MBV masteryclass, mastery with a Y, mbvmasteryclass.com.

Tom Bronson (33m 7s):

Debbie Mrazek president of the sales company. So Debbie, I was on your LinkedIn company site, the sales company company site. And you've got a quote on there that I'm fascinated with that I think will tie to what we were talking about before the break. You don't have to be great to get started, but you do have to get started to be great. It speaks volumes. Is that yours? Did you lift that from somebody else? Yeah.

Debbie Mrazek (33m 34s):

Yeah. That's from, I don't even remember. It's been like, you know, 30 years ago and also there's been various variations of it, you know, even wonderful Zig Ziglar had something like that, but you know, this really came about because you know, when you work with people and they're beating themselves up, you know, like they've hired you to be better and yet they're beating themselves up over what they haven't done. And it's like, you know what? We can't do anything about that, but we do have to get started if we are going to be great. So let's get started today. You know, it's like meeting you where you're at versus, you know, while I'm not working with you until you do this, this, and this, meet them where they're at, get them started and get going because the momentum builds for them once they see just like we were talking about before the break at the forecast, you know, and they see those numbers in black and white and Debbie didn't make them up there.

Debbie Mrazek (34m 29s):

There's and it's just like, so how do I do this? How soon can I do this? You know? And we're off to the races.

Tom Bronson (34m 37s):

Absolutely. So, so it's okay if you've been running a business for 20 years and you haven't been tracking that stuff, but if you want to be great, you have to get started, I think is what I'm hearing. So, yeah. So these are interesting times that we're in. I hear all kinds of things about COVID and, and, and challenges in business. Do you think genuinely that it is possible to grow in 2020?

Debbie Mrazek (35m 5s):

I absolutely do. And I think if you look back at American history anyway, our business history, good times or bad times, and I'm talking about even, you know, bad times, like world war, one, world war II, you know, where yes, there were horrible things that were going on, but there were still people who were making money and had businesses look at the companies that are a hundred years old, how many bad times had they had to go through and, you know, and do this. And one of the things that I say to people is, you know, so how many things have you been through in your career? You know, like I had

nine 11 happened in my career, you know, 85% of my business went away and it's like, Oh my gosh, it's over.

Debbie Mrazek (35m 50s):

But guess what? It wasn't over. We kept at it. We kept working at it, you know, and we continue to grow. And here we are 20 plus years later with other crisis going on now and we're still doing it. So I believe in good times are bad times. You can do business. You may have to adjust. You may have to have a different offering. You know, you may have to change expectations, maybe accept a different profit margin for a year. But I do believe that you can grow during any difficult time. And, you know, in this day in time in 2021 more than probably ever with the advent of all the technology that we have today, the things that people are making, be businesses that before nobody would have ever thought that could be a business.

Debbie Mrazek (36m 46s):

So people are being creative. They're they have an equal footing with a big company in that they've got a technology platform they can work from to get it out to the world. Yes, I'm definitely and believe. And, and you know, and one of the key things with that is not giving up. And I do, I do understand about giving up and tough times I do, but you know, if you don't, you know, reach out, you know, other people, how, you know, how can you work together? Yeah. I am 100% onboard that you can grow in 2021.

Tom Bronson (37m 21s):

Well, I'm like you, my business, I had, I had just bought the, the, my last company, the technology company, and may of 2001, and it had been largely unprofitable. It was a very small business, less than a million dollars in revenue. The, we had a terrible reputation in the marketplace and our employees were like the Island of misfit toys. And then, and then in three months by August, we had actually turned our first profit that the company had seen and, and three years.

Tom Bronson (38m 2s):

And then of course, 11 days later, later, the twin towers fell nine 11. And I literally, it didn't sink into me that day. But within a couple of days, I realized our business went to

zero overnight. And, and it would have been very easy to throw in the towel at that point and go, all right, well, this didn't work. I need to go do something else. I'm happy to report that. 17 years later, I sold that company, a solid middle market company. We had done 17 additional acquisitions in those years, but it's all about getting the mindset in the right place and being able to go out and do that. So give us, give us a magic bullet here. How can you increase sales by 10 to 20% this year

Debbie Mrazek (38m 45s):

By asking people for referrals? This is huge. This is huge. People have wonderful clients who love them have experienced a great service, a great product, but we do not ask them for referrals. And you know, why, why don't we, you know, we delivered what we said. We were delivering. They say, they're happy. They received it. You know, some, some companies even do like a survey or a satisfaction kind of thing afterwards. And they say, Oh, we love you. It was wonderful, but we don't ask them for referrals.

Debbie Mrazek (39m 28s):

And I'm not talking about it has to be somebody just that you did business with last month, who have you done business with over the years, in this day in time with the advent of LinkedIn, even if you have somebody that you have not done business with in a couple of years, you can most likely find them. And I'm talking the individual, you know, the person that gave you the purchase order, the person that did the business with you and to say to them, so who do you know that might appreciate what we do and how we do it based on your experience with us before. And they go, Oh, well my friend, Mary Smith, you know, it's like, great. Would you make an introduction? Well, again, you know, LinkedIn makes that very easy, but you know, you can, you can do that.

Debbie Mrazek (40m 11s):

This is the number one thing. When I go in and work with people, if they need something really quickly, you know, they need a number quickly. It's like, have you asked people for referrals? You know, no, we never do that. And just doing that, picking up one or two, and this is the other thing, you know, when you've had success at doing something, then you're more likely to, you know, to do it again. And so I do, I think that's one of the, to have double digit growth is work with, and again, this is something you already have.

This is work you've already done. It's like your own intellectual property and you're not using it to further your company. You're just letting it go.

Debbie Mrazek (40m 51s):

Why?

Tom Bronson (40m 53s):

Well, you know, I think that part of that might be just things that we get ingrained in our mind, right? That prevent us from doing things. I recall way, way early in my career, I got soured on, on asking people for referrals because I had had a guy trying to sell me something and, and he was not successful. And we wound up buying from somebody else and he immediately asked me for referrals. And I thought, why in the hell would I refer you to somebody if I didn't buy your product in the first place? And it, and, and that instantly triggered in my mind, don't ask for referrals because asking for referrals is bad, but that's not true.

Tom Bronson (41m 34s):

Right? It's, you're talking about going out to the folks who know you already, like you do business with you and, and asking them in a genuine and polite way, because people want to help the people that, that they work with.

Debbie Mrazek (41m 50s):

Right? Absolutely. And they do want to help you. They don't want to feed you. They want to help you, but we don't ask.

Tom Bronson (41m 59s):

Yeah. That's a, that's a shame. That's a, or there's your magic bullet folks. You know, you want to increase your sales 10 to 20% this year, and you heard it here first from Debbie Mrazek, but you heard it on the maximize business value podcast. So we hear that, that also talks a lot about networking, right? And people talk about networking. Are there good places to network, to grow sales? I know you're, you're a great networker like I am, but are, are there places that, that people should go network to grow their sales?

Debbie Mrazek (42m 30s):

Absolutely. So you started the podcast by sharing with them, how we knew each other through business pros. So business pros is an organization of professionals where we all do different things. And we work together to learn new things, to help one another, to do referrals. This is a great form of networking. And I think everyone should have a group like this, but what industry do you serve? You should be going to their events. That's where your customers are. They are the ones that are going to buy from you. And yet what I find is most people do not go network there.

Debbie Mrazek (43m 12s):

And I use the example of myself. This is years ago, Abbott laboratories here in Irving, Texas was my client. And one of our buyers was on the board for the national. It was called the national association of purchasing managers at that time. And I did a lot of business in California and he said, you know, we're having our conference out there. You know, why, why don't you come be with us? And I did. I bought my own ticket. And I went, and what I was really looking for is, cause I lived in Texas. I lived in Dallas, but I did business all over the place. And I thought, you know, I probably really do need to learn better. What purchasing managers in other areas, what are they looking at? What's important to them?

Debbie Mrazek (43m 53s):

You know, those kinds of things. Well, while I was there, he ran into me in the hall and he said, Hey girl, he said, I just thought about, we're doing a panel this afternoon. You know, like how purchasing managers can work with vendors and stuff. Would you be on that panel? And I said, absolutely well, for years I went to that conference and let me assure you, I was the only salesperson at that conference. And I met buyers from all over. And that's where I got the idea about going then. So now you will see me like at cybersecurity conferences or, you know, I had a client that was doing retail, you know, like retail conferences, those kinds of things, and looking at what are they saying?

Debbie Mrazek (44m 39s):

And I am intentional when I'm there about talking to other people. Like you're not my customer. So tell me, how do you buy, you know, what, what annoys you about

salespeople in your, you know, your business? What do you wish they did differently? I also like every year I speak at a conference called project management international, and these are project managers, but they work at these corporations and the way the world works today, many departments have to work with salespeople, you know? So what are you seeing? What do they do? What makes you crazy? What do you love? Or like even, you know, kind of thing. So I think we should network outside of what is our normal circle.

Debbie Mrazek (45m 22s):

I think we should definitely network there, but we should go where our customers are.

Tom Bronson (45m 29s):

Brilliant. Brilliant. I love that. I do a lot of work in the technology space as well. I was a known quantity. I, I owned a company in the space, got very involved in the, in the trade association. I actually write articles for their magazine. I, I post information on their website, but that is a great place to network. And by the way, when people are looking for the services that we provide, and they're a part of that organization, who do you think gets their business?

Debbie Mrazek (46m 2s):

Absolutely. Absolutely. And you know, and I've had people like, just like I mentioned, the one, you know, where they asked me that panel. But since then, I haven't been intentional when I go to like their trade association thing. I'm talking about months and months before the conference actually happens, but call the person who's in charge of programming for that conference and saying, you know, what do you do? Breakout sessions this year? You know, is there any place, you know, I could like the project management international, the very first time I spoke to them, they asked me to speak on negotiating. I said, are you kidding? They said, well, can't you do it? I went, yes, I can do it. But, and so they talked to me about what these project managers were having to negotiate and they thought a salesperson would be great to teach them.

Debbie Mrazek (46m 50s):

My session was four o'clock on Friday afternoon, Pat. Wow. Yeah. I mean, it is like, so there I was in front of all these different companies, you know, with people that affect who they're going to buy from in the procurement department.

Tom Bronson (47m 7s):

That's amazing. And I, and I'll be willing to bet when you did that over the years, you, you probably could measure the amount of business that you got.

Debbie Mrazek (47m 16s):

Absolutely can and I am grateful every time.

Tom Bronson (47m 23s):

Brilliant. So, so before we kind of get into our wrap up questions Ooh. In, in, in the company who in the company should be doing sales.

Debbie Mrazek (47m 36s):

Oh, that is such a great question. So when it's a small company and it's maybe the owner, you know, the owner thinks, you know, that they're not the salesperson, but the truth is there's nobody that cares about the product, the service, the initiative, no one more than the owner. Nobody can, they, they eat, sleep and drink it. So they are whether they like it or not, they are the best people to sell it. One of the things in small companies, what I see is people hiring, you know, their brother-in-law, their cousin, somebody that says they do sales. And not that that person may be couldn't sell something, but they don't have the same interest.

Debbie Mrazek (48m 21s):

You know, you're just trying to push it off. You said, you could do sales, you do it. And then they lose it, you know, kind of thing. So they are, and in other companies, one of the things that I say is we are all in sales. So, you know, for example, you know, if you have just thinking of a technology company, you have an engineering department, you know, your engineers, you know, they, they could, this is one of the things I say. They collect a paycheck on the first and the 15th. Everybody does, you know, if you're working in a

bigger company and so how do you get that money into your company? Well, if you don't sell anything, you don't have any money coming in.

Debbie Mrazek (49m 3s):

So everybody is in sales. So what can the engineers do to help their own salespeople be able to be better? And I use the example of Siemens corporation. This happened many years ago, the CEO was crazed over, you know, their place in the market on a particular division. And the engineering department, not the sales department, the engineering department director hired me to come work with the engineers to teach them how they could work better with the salespeople, because they had the technology, the salespeople had the sales skills and, you know, a rising tide lifts all boats.

Debbie Mrazek (49m 45s):

So I went, worked with the engineering department and I mean, this was even some things that are so simple. Like you need to have a clean tie, you know, you need to have socks that match. You know, I mean the, the, the guy who was ahead of it, he said, Debbie, you know, engineers and, and, you know, really we have to do those basic things. And he said, I just don't feel like I can stand in front of them and talk about socks. And he said, I think you can. I said, I can. So, but what happened was we did not tell the sales department that, that the head of the sales department knew, but none of the salespeople, so the engineering departments worked with us and then we send them out. Well, the first time one of them is at the airport, dressed, ready to go meeting them in Chicago, where they're supposed to be.

Debbie Mrazek (50m 32s):

And the salesman gets off the plane. Cause he's already been complaining about the guy and gets off the plane in season. And the guy's like, great. Here's what I have, you know, based on what you told me, we were going to talk about, we're going to have this. He looks like a million bucks in the salesperson's going well, okay. We've got a rent, current Hertz. And they go, well, this went on for like two weeks because these people had to travel. They, their engineering group was in one city, but they traveled. And so the sales head invited, the vice president had to come sit in on the meeting. And evidently

he did that from time to time. And so while he was there, the sales guy started, you know, running the meeting as normal.

Debbie Mrazek (51m 13s):

You know, how was your week? What happened in the end? This guy goes, you know what? I was in Chicago and Ralph was waiting for me at the airport and his clothes looked nice. And he had the dossier aisle, you know, already typed in and had a copy for me. And, you know, it was just like, I don't know what, you know, Ralph had an awakening. Well then somebody else at the table goes, well, you know, Mildred met me, you know, and it was just all of this. And so then the, the sales guy started messing with him and God, anybody else, anybody else, anybody else? And then you just stood back and looked at him and said, you all had been, had said the engineering department went out and hired a sales coach to figure out how to work with you.

Debbie Mrazek (51m 59s):

The only way we're going to make this number, the CEO wants us to make this year is if we work together. So I believe everybody is in sales, whether customers are, I was doing some work recently with a group that they, for the state of Texas, they have long-term assistance facilities. These are management kind of people. And of course, you know, there's sales involved with that. You have to have people in your beds, you know, kind of thing. And I was sharing with them, even the people who are, you know, the nurses, you know, the staff, you know, they know people in their community that are going to need long-term care.

Debbie Mrazek (52m 39s):

They need to be talking about it. Everyone can be part of this.

Tom Bronson (52m 45s):

I love that. I, I, I that's one of my mantra is that everybody is in sales. As, as I frequently say, nothing, nothing happens in any of my businesses in any business until somebody sells something. That's when the work begins. And, and I used to have a saying for folks that would throw up roadblocks to, to growth and, and selling, I would call them the

director of sales prevention. And they knew exactly what I was talking about. Let's knock down all the barriers everybody is in sales.

Tom Bronson (53m 26s):

So what sets the sales company apart from other sales consultants? Why, what our audience want to engage with you? Debbie?

Debbie Mrazek (53m 35s):

A couple of reasons, one, I think is the actually experience that I had actually doing sales. Not that you know, I'm still selling today. I have to sell consulting services. Selling yourself was the hardest thing I ever had to learn, but you know, that I actually have that experience. And like I said earlier, you know, both from customer service inside sales, outside sales. But today, like I said, 20 plus years later, working with all these companies, working in all different industries. And you mentioned, you know, I work with the Goldman Sachs program. I have worked with over 500 companies in the last six years. Now these are, you know, small, less than 20 million, you know, 25 million size company, but still 500 different companies that are all from different things.

Debbie Mrazek (54m 23s):

So I think the expertise and the experience that I bring to it because of what I've done personally, doing sales, but then also continuing on with all these people all these years that, you know, I have learned volumes that I'm able to, you know, even though something I might suggest to you was something I learned in a completely different industry, but you would have never thought about it, you know, and you try it and it works. You know? So it's like, you know, we have lots of arrows in our quiver.

Tom Bronson (54m 51s):

I love that. I love that. So, and by the way you brought up again, the, the Goldman Sachs 10,000 small businesses, it is a spectacular program. I have been a guest speaker frequently for them, and it is worth small businesses investigating and getting the kind of help there that you can get. That's wonderful that you're a part of that. So one last business question, this podcast is all about maximizing business value. What's the one

most important thing you recommend business owners do to build value in their business.

Debbie Mrazek (55m 28s):

So, you know, in sales, specifically, many people have heard the ABC. So sales is to always be closing. You know, that's, the ABC is ABC is a sales. What I really believe the ABCs of sales is to always be caring. So if you own a business and you genuinely, I'm talking about genuinely care about what you do, what you're producing, it's quality, it's the best you care about your people and you care about your customers. I think that is the greatest value you can bring that will pay you dividends year in, year out for however long you want to do it.

Tom Bronson (56m 10s):

Awesome. I, that is solid advice. And I will add to that, that, that if you do that, and you are able to successfully leverage that and grow your business, a growing business is always more valuable than a business that is flat or declining hands down. That's one of the biggest things that buyers look for in a business, and it will improve the value. And that starts with caring. And I love that. Always be caring. We're going to have a sales competition. The second place is steak knives. Right? I can hear Alec Baldwin right now.

Debbie Mrazek (56m 48s):

Oh my gosh.

Tom Bronson (56m 50s):

What a great movie, Glen, Gary, Glen Ross.

Debbie Mrazek (56m 52s):

It's been my example for years. Cause it just, it, it is. It, it, it, it, yes,

Tom Bronson (56m 58s):

That, it's one of my favorite movies of all time. So, so now, however, I can't let you off the hook. Everybody who listens to our podcast regularly knows that I always ask a bonus question and they, and they stay tuned all the way to this point because they

want to know the answer to this Debbie. And so what personality trait has gotten you into the most trouble over the years?

Debbie Mrazek (57m 24s):

Oh, this is a fun one. Trust when I started, I, I did not really understand that you couldn't trust people. You know, I was naive. I didn't know. I hadn't been around people that didn't tell the truth or so I thought, and so I was so trusting and yet once I figured that out, how, you know, people can be, it's actually both, it's the thing that's caused me the most heartache, but it's also the thing that trusting has probably made me the most money. So it's been a double edge sword understanding how it works.

Tom Bronson (58m 8s):

Yes. I believe me. I know I am like you a very trusting person. I trust everybody until they give me a reason not to. And then earning that trust back is you might as well try to boil the ocean.

Debbie Mrazek (58m 24s):

Absolutely. When I was early on in my career, I don't know if you remember the company compact computer. And these guys had started at Texas instruments and they started this company. And so I was working, I was providing them with like samples of semiconductors and things. And I tell you, I stood up every week in my sales meeting and told my boss, I know they are going to do this. I trust them. Yeah. This is who worked there. This is what they do at all. And he was just like, you know, if you don't, I'm going to fire you, you know, kind of thing, you know? And let me tell you, it, it took, you know, several months before it all came together, but it was, it was probably my most powerful lesson.

Debbie Mrazek (59m 7s):

Like, you know, I knew these people, I trusted them. They were giving me information that I did trust, even though it didn't make sense to my boss, but it was like, I stuck to my guns and he's gone now, but always told the story better than me in the end. Yeah.

Tom Bronson (59m 25s):

That's fun. That's great. So how can our viewers and listeners get in touch with you, Debbie,

Debbie Mrazek (59m 29s):

The best way, just as go to LinkedIn, Debbie M R A Z E K, or go to my website, the-sales-company.com.

Tom Bronson (59m 41s):

Thank ou. Thank you for being you

Debbie Mrazek (59m 43s):

And your listeners. I'm delighted to have been with you.

Tom Bronson (59m 47s):

It's fun times. So you can find debbie at the-sales-company.com or on LinkedIn. And of course you could always reach out to me and I will be happy to make a warm introduction to my good friend, Debbie Mrazek. This is the maximize business value podcast, where we give practical advice to business owners on how to build long-term sustainable value in your business. Be sure to tune in each week and follow us wherever you found this podcast and be sure to comment. We love comments and I promise we respond to all of them. So until next time, I'm Tom Bronson reminding you to develop a great growth strategy while you maximize business value.

Announcer (1h 0m 35s):

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Announcer (1h 1m 5s):

<inaudible> that was perfect. I wouldn't make any changes on that.

