5 STEPS TO FUEL GROWTH FOR SALES

INSIDE THE MIND OF

BRIAN BURNS

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Introduction

It's a brave new world for sales teams in the B2B space. We're witnessing a sea change in sales methodologies, CRM platform capabilities, consumer buying preferences, and the rules for selling digitally and remotely. But even against that backdrop, today's sales professional can rely on some key best practices to raise their game successfully. We interviewed sales leader Brian Burns, podcast host and CEO of B2B Revenue, to discover what it takes to really thrive in today's dynamic B2B sales environment.

Brian Burns is a sales author and consultant, specializing in assisting companies with their sales strategy, sales practices and in developing an effective sales team. Brian hosts four podcasts in the top 15 in Business on iTunes, including the B2B Revenue Leadership show and The Brutal Truth about Sales and Selling. He has authored four books on B2B sales and marketing where he draws on over 25 years of experience.

Here are his five tips for fueling growth in your sales organization.

1

> "The buyer's real challenge is socializing the transaction within their organization, and the only way to do that is to understand how their management makes buying decisions."
>
> —**BRIAN BURNS,** HOST, BRUTAL TRUTH PODCAST

Become Client-Centric, Not CRM-Centric

We all know that the person incentivized to close a deal is the sales rep. But that sales rep usually sees it as a CRM-centric process with many steps to enter: populating lead notes, converting it into an opportunity and assigning a monetary value, presenting the demo and adding a buying team to an account, proposing with digital paperwork, and then finally closing. But that's not how a client sees their engagement.

They have a problem and they hope that you have a solution. They're usually eager to help move things along quickly, and they may even be overly optimistic and assume they know how to get it done, but oftentimes neither side knows how to get the transaction completed. It can be frustrating. And since about 80 percent of deals that go to commitment don't actually close, it means that something is getting missed along the way.

The buyer's real challenge is socializing the transaction within their organization, and the only way to do that is to understand how their management makes buying decisions. Buyer behavior has changed significantly over the years; buyers are far more sophisticated than they used to be and can get product recommendations, reviews, and even pricing without ever speaking with a sales representative.

So, now with the understanding that prospects are choosing to speak with sales teams after doing their own research, Sales must fundamentally become more client-centric and re-focus on the customer experience. How do we do that?

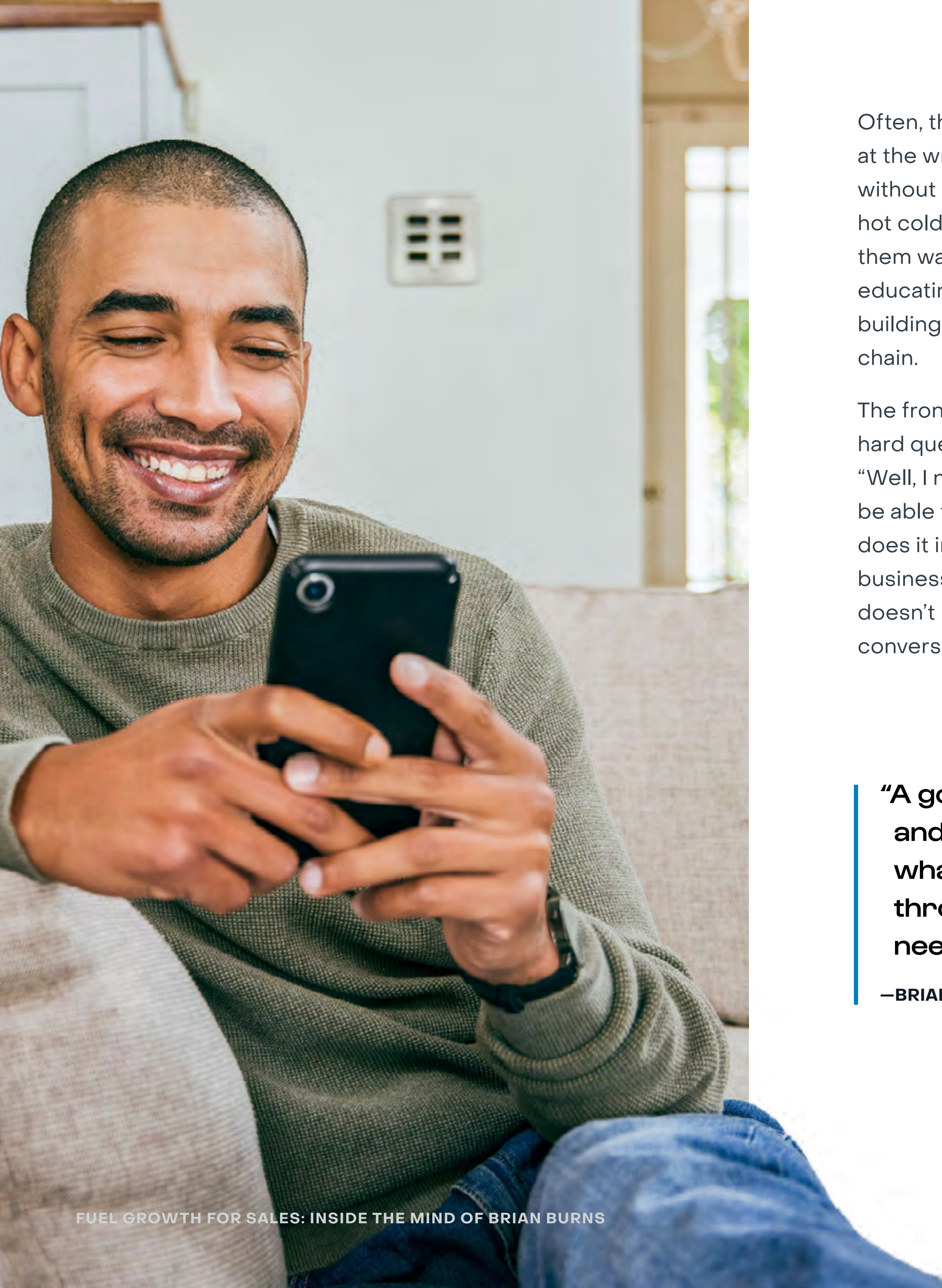
2

Be a Guide Through the Unnatural Act of Buying

Put simply, buying is an unnatural act. No one calls you up and asks "Hey, have you bought anything yet?" Nobody has that job! As a sales rep, you need to have a different mindset for working with a prospect. Instead of being a salesperson or "trusted advisor," you're more of a concierge – or a sherpa – to guide them through the buying journey.

You have to understand how clients make decisions: the administrative side, the political side, the economic side, the emotional side of buying. The change-oriented side – what I call the "gauntlet." You have to help them justify a purchase, move them down the journey, and make it a good, easy customer experience.

You've done this before; you know where things get stuck, and what your champion needs to do on the inside. Give it all to them with the proper cadence and in the right order to guide the client. That's the difference between a good and great sales rep. A good rep is servicing; they're a clerk, reacting and supporting but not guiding. Great reps know what that gauntlet looks like and guide the client through it, arming them with the materials they will need at each step and having next steps on the calendar.



Often, the client will inadvertently pull you in the wrong direction at the wrong time, like requesting a proposal right after the demo without more support and discovery. Their nature is to go hot, cold, hot cold (that's human nature), but you should be focused on getting them warmer and warmer. Help them justify the purchase by guiding, educating, and enabling. Help them through their decision process, building the proper cadence, then enabling them to move up the chain.

The frontline buyer may be excited, but they often fail to ask the hard questions that the CFO might ask, like, "Why are we doing this? "Well, I need it" is not a business quantifiable reason! You need to be able to explain what you get, what happens if you don't do it, how does it impact your top and bottom line, and what does it do for your business? Optimize the discovery process: pretend your prospect doesn't know what they want. Let them discover with you during your conversation. They need to know they have to change and take action.

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>
> —**BRIAN BURNS,** HOST, BRUTAL TRUTH PODCAST

Build Empathy into Your Repertoire

Empathy is what separates the very best sales reps – the ability to put themselves into the client’s situation, to understand why they would want to do this, and what’s in it for them personally. It’s important to read the situation and respond accordingly at every stage.

To be empathetic, you need to be curious. And to be curious you need to not talk. You need to think in terms of questions, not statements. You have to admit you do not know it all, because if you knew it all you wouldn’t be curious. That curiosity spurs interest in the other person, which spurs empathy.

You want the prospect to want to talk to you. How is this going to help their career growth and aspirations within their company? They’re not just doing it for their company: that’s the ‘rationalization’ of buying. Why are they doing it for themselves: that’s the ‘realization.’ Focus on honest, open communication instead of ‘vendor talk’ and you’ll build an empathetic bond with the person on the other end of the transaction. Nothing builds trust more than showing the other person’s interest is your top priority

4

Know How to Make CRM Work for You and Your Customer

Smart people know how to use CRM tools to do the things that humans are bad at. Model into your CRM what the client's journey looks like: where you are, what has happened in the past with other accounts at this stage, and what should be the next steps on the journey.

Your CRM makes it easier for your salespeople to guide clients through a process that's not naturally easy. It connects you with the right information to help them make decisions and show value. And you don't have to waste time going back and forth through the journey because it's all mapped out for you.

Oftentimes, sales reps don't really know what happens from the time they give the proposal to the time they get the purchase order: what I call the "mystery middle." Your CRM system can be very powerful in explaining those steps: who you're talking to and where their signing authority is, who else is part of that decision-making process, have they seen the right materials, who else have decision-makers talked to already? A lot of that forecast triage can be done with technology. Give them the data they need to make those decisions as it moves up the chain.

You can't memorize the details of the 15-30 deals each account executive is working on in a quarter. And you shouldn't need to: It should all be there in your CRM. Instead of searching through email, your calendar, all your zoom calls. It's about getting it all in a single, centralized system. And your head is the worst place for it! Even if you could keep all the information in mind, it's not the right place for storing, sharing, or taking action from.

CRM also gives you context. You need more than just an email address and phone number for each deal. You need to know what has happened, what their concerns are and what is the next best step for this type of customer. AI plays a growing role here too, helping guide things like sales opportunity scoring, AI-assisted forecasting and customer chur predictions, and prescribed communications throughout the opportunity.

Once something does close, now it's business! Now you need to service it, you've got to renew it, invoice it, all the formal side of the business becomes super important because you're keeping track of the money, not just the possibility of money.

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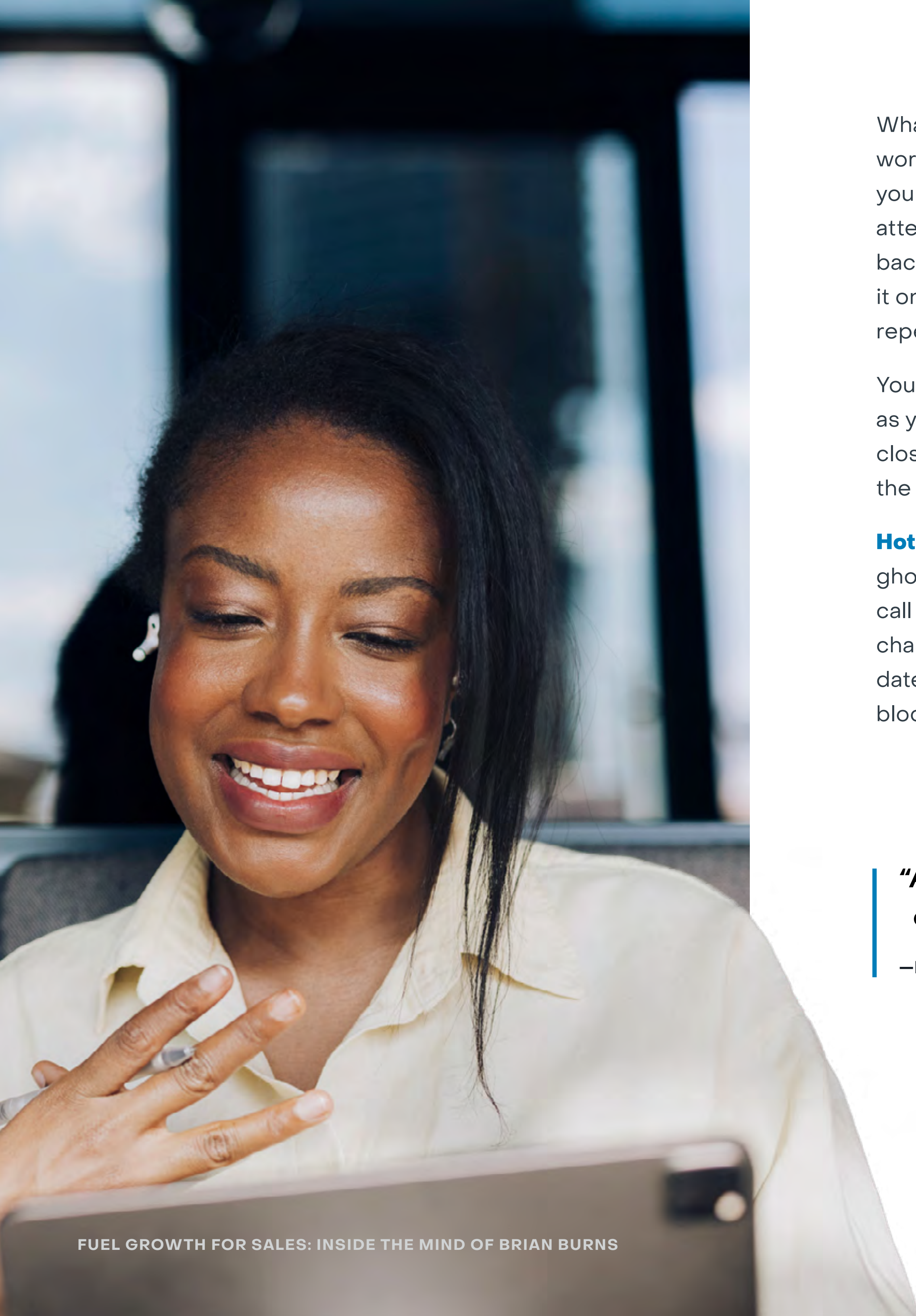
Become a Student of the Sales Game

A lot of reps like to just shoot from the hip and wing it and sell by instinct, but that's where they typically get in trouble, because they're following their emotions instead of their brain. Learn about how companies change and how they buy, politically and administratively, and become a student of that game. If you don't understand, you'll struggle to know why deals don't close. A lot of the time, selling change is the real obstacle, not the money.

Ask the right questions: Does this company fit out ideal customer profile or is it a stretch? Is the timing right? Do they have a problem we can solve as a good match instead of them just experimenting and hoping it's a good match. Great reps are able to put the right amount of tension into the right order, not 100% effort on this order until it closes, then find the next one.



What technology can do is keep track of these deals instead of working only on the 'best deal right now.' Before CRM, you'd see your top five deals this month but there are 50 other ones that need attention and nurturing and guidance. You forget about it, put it on the back burner, get to it after this other deal closes. You can try to wing it on a deal that hasn't been touched in a month or two, but unless it's repeat business, it won't' work with a chain-oriented transaction.

You need to get all the stakeholders involved and get as many people as you can saying yes. It also helps you work on deals in the order of close date, not deal size, because it'll get you focused on the deals in the order that they're important. That's served me my whole career.

Hot Tip: get it on the calendar! Unless you do so, the likelihood of ghosting is really high. The excitement level drops an hour after the call and they go back to their lives. If you don't set a cadence, you'll be chasing a deal that may never close. The best time to get a second date is right after the first date. There are too many ways of getting blocked these days: caller ID, voicemail, and email.

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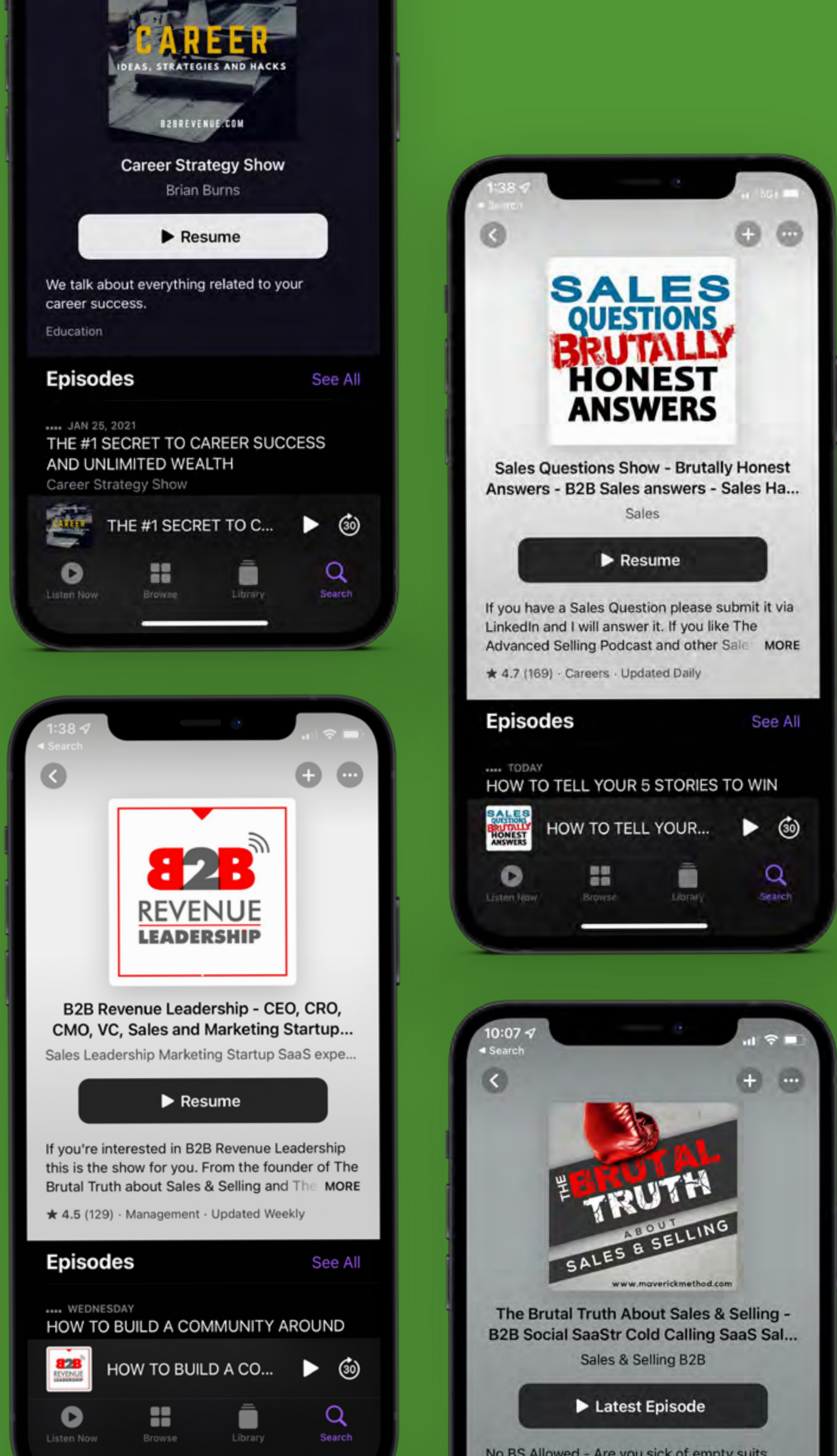

Conclusion

It's not easy to run the B2B sales gauntlet perfect every time, but if you focus on placing greater emphasis on your client at every step, you'll be off to a great start. Being client-centric means becoming a better guide for prospects who may not know how to get from point A to point B in the buying journey and incorporating personal empathy into your efforts. Never forget to be an everyday student of the sales profession, taking the initiative to learn how and why your clients really buy. And in the end, with vital tools like a CRM platform at your disposal, you'll more ably navigate the process and create a client experience that really means something.

About Brian Burns

Brian Burns is a sales author and consultant. He has spent his twenty-five-year career creating, capturing and dominating early stage innovative markets. During this time, has played key leadership, management and sales roles for eleven venture capital-backed companies, resulting in three IPOs and seven acquisitions.

Through this experience, he has developed a unique and powerful sales method for bringing innovative products to market while marginalizing competitors. In his private practice, Burns has founded TMO, a consulting firm specializing in assisting companies with their sales strategy, sales practices and in developing an effective sales team. Brian is also the host of four podcasts including, **B2B Revenue Leadership**, **The Brutal Truth About Sales and Selling**, **The Sales Questions Show**, and the **Career Strategy Show**.

About SugarCRM

Sugar Sell takes the blind spots, busy work, and roadblocks out of customer relationship management, making it easier for sales organizations to focus on engaging with their customers and growing their business. With Sugar Sell, you can empower your sales teams to drive revenue, increase efficiency, shorten sales cycles, and deliver meaningful customer buying experiences.

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Sugar Sell was designed to help you accelerate your sales cycle and increase your win rate by:

- Focusing on the right leads with sales opportunity scoring
- Managing your pipeline and forecast with AI-powered predictions about your customers
- Painting a clear picture of your customers and engaging them anytime, anywhere
- Quoting and closing the deal faster than ever before