

**Lori** - My guest today is Dave Kurlan, very excited to have Dave here. First of all welcome Dave – before I list all of our achievements - thank you for being here.

**Dave Kurlan** - It's great to be here, I appreciate the invitation.

Lori- Yeah I just want to lift the few things for those leading who may have been under a rock somewhere may not be familiar with you. You have led objective Management Group since 1989 where you're the leading developer of sales assessment tools. You also have led Kurlan and Associates since 1985 which is a top sales training company. You have a highly read blog which I enjoy reading every time it comes out it's called Understanding the Sales Force - we'll put a link to it in in our post. You're an accomplished author been featured in dozens of magazines and websites. Welcome to Our Score More Sales audio recording and we're going to have a few questions for you today - with some tough ones that we want to get the bottom line answers to. Are you up for this?

**Dave Kurlan** - Oh please ask the tough questions. None of the easy questions. People will tune out with easy questions - make it challenging.

**Lori** -OK.

**Dave Kurlan**- And thanks for inviting me.

**Lori** - You bet. So I wonder your point of view - you've been researching and measuring how the best sales teams work and of course - how the worst sales teams work. I'm sure that comes up in your research for nearly thirty years or so and I wonder:

**What surprises you the most today after all this time?**

**Dave Kurlan** – That's an awesome question. And you know, if I think about it, the most surprising thing is how little sales, sales capabilities and sales effectiveness has changed over the years. It's almost essentially the same as it was when I started researching it in the 80's and if continue doing the research mining the data, making comparisons right up to the present day. And very little has changed, does that surprise you?

**Lori** - So what does that tell you with the advent of all these sales tools that they are out to make selling easier and better I mean there are thousands and thousands of tools.

**Dave Kurlan** - Well it tells me that Instead of improving their listening & questioning skills - instead of learning what an effective sales process looks like, instead of developing their consultative sales ability & learning to better qualified & sales people who along with tools has crutches and these tools kind of de-salesify sales people so they turn them into technical engineers. It's just people sitting behind the screen pushing buttons. It's kind of the Wizard of Oz. So they're getting worse instead of better because of the tools.

**Lori** -Well and managers when you say engineers i certainly think of that would people just talk and metrics quite often.

**Dave Kurlan** - Yeah and there's nothing wrong with metrics - I love metrics - but regardless of what the metrics are it should be a systematic approach to getting to those metrics and managers should be supporting salespeople & coaching to get to those metrics that we should be having conversations around. What do our conversations sound like in order to get to those metrics - who just numbers It's tools and It's on. What do we have to do more effective it gets lost to these tools in my opinion but I'm sure you have an opinion about this too. You're also a sales expert what do you think?

**Lori** - I do. Well I think very highly of what you talk about because it's clearly a combination of science and art together. However, if you have the wrong people trying to develop the science and the art You still have a disaster and that's what I've been most impressed with and in learning more about your tools. You know, Harvard business school came out with an article recently and it was called the best ways to hire sales people and I noticed you created a blog post about it with another point of view. I'd love for you to share that as we talk a little more about:

### **What really are the best ways to hire sales people?**

**Dave Kurlan**- Well this happens a lot it's not just. Harvard (HBR) their blog comes up with a misguided piece on how to select sales people everybody with an opinion comes up with a misguided piece how to select sales people probably use their opinions are pretty accurate based on their limited self experience. So if you or I was a seasoned sales executive and we worked for a few companies over our careers and during that time we hired you know a hundred or 150 sales people and we ran five hundred interviews, maybe we think we were pretty good especially if we were in the right place and right time and we were part of a group machine and we have these perfect sales people. But that's pretty limited experience when you compare it to a million sales people and being able to see the good and the bad, being able to see how competencies and sales DNA play it out differently in different roles, in different markets with different challenges. So when you say hey I have done this five hundred times. Consider based on my experience i know what I'm doing but that experience is very limited compared to the much bigger picture and so when people express their opinion based on that limited experience it's not inaccurate. It's just doesn't apply to the real world. It's what they experience so it's not Harvard's fault or the authors fault that they get it wrong all the time it's just that they usually have an inflated opinion of what their experience means and they want to share it with the world. So all the power to them for wanting to share what they've done with the world. The problem is nobody getting these things to see if it's if it's accurate when you apply it and share it with the world and most of the time it isn't.

**Lori** -Yeah your response was that there are **three parts** to getting things right you must properly identify the selling environment and that it's the selling challenges not half that need to be identified and then the skill that are required to succeed and then once you've identified the required skills you can measure the sales person's capabilities and you have three categories for that was the basis of your research.

**Dave Kurlan**- Yes! So let's use a couple of examples. Suppose that we had something of a technical nature that was really expensive that was higher price than our competition. That could only be sold at the sea level & had really long sales cycle and it wasn't just something you could demo but it was pretty conceptual and complex. So for a sales person to succeed, we need someone who already have the capability and had already done this successfully of call it on the C-level and selling something really

expensive and selling something conceptual and selling something that was priced higher than the competition in very challenging situation but more than having the experience. I mean the experience is, this is where we need to cast them that people who had done that. But then just because they've done doesn't mean they were good at it. We have to look at their DNA - their sales-specific DNA and we've to look whether their sales specific DNA supports selling at higher amount of money selling something that's more expensive than the competition calling them the sea level selling something conceptual if a company is practicing the challenger sale being able to push back challenge conventional thinking.

So whatever it is that we decide is the challenge in this particular world in this particular business selling to this geography or vertical that we need to identify what they have to be able to do we have to look for people who've already done it now we've got to see whether their Sales DNA supports it. And we have to look at their competencies make sure to have the skills to go along with it and make sure that they have a proper level. So when we look at things like that HBR article which looked at tasks they need to be able to do, well those tasks were probably there those tasks probably didn't need to be done but almost anybody can do the tasks. It's the conversations that are so difficult the right conversations at the right time for the right reasons with the right people and in those conversations the right questions need to be asked and the right kind of conversation needs to occur. So almost any person who gets into sales has the personality traits that the people who align personalities look for enough can do the tasks that the people who focus on tasks look for but it's all the wrong stuff because tasks and personality traits aren't differentiators between good and bad sales people. They're common of all sales people and when we only look at the good ones we see these personality traits we see the ability to do these tasks and we mistakenly believe. Oh that's how you identify good sales people.

**Lori** – Right and are you still think managers being hired who were successful sales people and managers who are also selling still,(player/ coach) because I see that a lot.

**Dave Kurlan** – Yeah what you're seeing. I think that scale is unfortunately again it's another thing that in thirty years hasn't changed. Are you a good sales person so somebody wants to promote you, you're good salesperson somebody wants to recruit you and doesn't necessarily it's like saying Wow this person is a great soccer goalie. Let's make him our first baseman.

**Lori** – Yeah. If that doesn't make it that amazes me that it hasn't changed much in all these years. Because I've been involved in sales, B2B selling that long as well and it just amazes me.

**Dave Kurlan** – Yes. So for all of the companies and the executives in those companies that seems to get it. There's probably 99 more that don't seem to get it.

**Lori** – Yes!

**Dave Kurlan** - The companies that really grasp capabilities that are suitable for the role are in the definite minority here. It's just dwarfed by all the executives in the companies that don't get it because they were in the right place at the right time when they work for a big company they work for the market leader their experiences kind of doesn't matter who throw into these roles because they're going to succeed. You don't really think they're succeeding. Because of the company they work for.

**Lori** – You know I was thinking in my days of sales management. I thought I was pretty good interviewing and of course we hired by gut - that's great I was never better than 50% accurate in terms of identifying

the right sales reps to bring on board and to me after doing those hundreds of hires as you were talking about you think that You'd be really good at something like that fifty percent is nothing to be proud of I don't think in terms of the success ratio. What do you think?

**Dave Kurlan** - i think it's better than the ones who get it right twenty percent of the time. You know. Everything's relative you know so by comparing it to a worse number it looks pretty freaking good and if we're comparing it to a better number. Yeah it's not as good.

I was talking with a guy last week and he's going to scale the sales organizations he is at ten and they want to go to fifty right away and we're talking about whether or not OMG's sales candidate assessment would make sense for him and he was clearly a guy who's pretty impressed with himself and has hired sales people before scaled sales organizations before and there was pressure on him to use OMG the private equity firm that owned stuff wanted them to comply with the rest of the companies in the portfolio are doing and you know he's pretty much agreed that what worked when he was hiring sales people one at a time using his own instincts might not work when it's scaled out a month and sales managers you know. That a tool this predictive and accurate might be useful to help sales managers accomplish what he personally has accomplished and he wanted to try it on. Two candidates that he was looking at to run EMEA, these would be sales who had hired sales managers and sales people and I said and how would you react when these first two assessments come back and they suggest that your candidates might not be recommend? He said well I wouldn't be very happy about that he's about to pick that one out. It's him or what if it does He said I'd need to go in a different direction. So of course he ran the two assessments and he's too close for eight V.P. candidates and neither of them know where that one lacked commitment which is a huge red flag and. Warning. It shouldn't go anywhere near that campaign and the other one was weak a weaker candidate just didn't have the competencies and of course he reacted badly. How could that be - you know I interviewed these people myself their background and that's one of the beautiful things about the science behind sales selection that you can only learn so much about candidate when you interview them. You can't get inside them. You can only get what they're willing to give you and they may have had a nice track record that may have had some nice experiences but that doesn't mean they can do this job today the way that. Someone needs it done.

So that's kind of the power of the science behind sales selection in that the science doesn't lie and science doesn't exaggerate and Science doesn't misinterpret. You know once you have a million rows of data the science is pretty solid & predictive and it says when these combinations of factors exist a sales person, a sales manager, or a sales leader will succeed in this role and when this other combination of factors exist and these people won't succeed in the role and we don't want to waste any time interviewing offering a job and on boarding someone who we already know based on science isn't going to succeed.

**Lori** – Right and the science helps us from falling crazy for the person that we interview because they're saying all the things we want to hear. I love how you can assess them first and then know who to spend more time with I think that makes so much sense and yet it seemed counterintuitive to some people who haven't done it – it's a great idea.

**Dave Kurlan** – Yeah that's the biggest mistake the sales managers and sales people makes is they go through this entire interviewing process where even if you get a resume in talks somebody on the phone

brought them in for a couple of interviews and everybody loves them and then they say OK let's assess. It's not going to matter at that point what the assessment says they are so invested in the candidate. And they love them so much that they won't heed any warnings. And they won't follow any recommendations unless the recommendations validate the decision they've already come to so when you assess early in the process and just use it to disqualify the candidates that won't succeed in the world.

You already know this person doesn't have the capabilities or doesn't have the Sales DNA. isn't properly motivated to succeed in this role with its challenges. Let's not waste any time reviewing the interview. Let's not waste any time trying to get him on the phone. Let's not waste any time flying out to the candidate. Let's move on with the candidates that will succeed in the world and it's pretty simple. It's pretty logical but it's different from what a lot of sales leaders have done. Sales leaders tend to be. What's the word? Uncomfortable with change.

**Lori-** There you go. So the smart thing is to assess early. Assess early and save time save energy save what do you think everyone's time. Yeah it's absolutely. So another topic I was interested in your opinion on how people said they don't teach sales in school and yet now there are universities that have some kind of a degree or certificate there's are even schools now that have a major in sales and I wonder from your standpoint I'm sure you probably think in some ways that maybe great. I don't know because we never talk about this but in another way if they're not using science as the foundation.

**I am curious to know what you think they are teaching about sales in colleges and universities?** Do you have any involvement in any of the university programs?

**Dave Kurlan** – I do. I'm getting paid by universities a lot and have a few thoughts on this I think it's great when any program includes a sales component even if it's not a sales course or a major in sales. But that's college. I mean my thirteen-year-old son when they have a career day at school - when they have conversations about what you could be when you grow up "Sales Professional" isn't even on the list. Same thing in high school. Sales is not an acknowledged profession. It's crazy. So when they do offer it in college I think it's awesome but they tend to teach it out of those academic textbooks that are written by psychologists who are teaching sales in universities who have little to no experience in the real world. When the marketing courses include sales when somebody actually offers a sales entrepreneurship course I don't think it's that anything remotely connected to what's actually happening. So I think there's a bunch of all the outdated misguided theory they guys taught about psychology buying and selling and it isn't grounded in what really happens up there so whether they teach it from the science or bring practitioners in. Speak. Each week a new practitioner or a different practitioner comes in and offers a real world experience and they demonstrate it and role play anything's got to be better than what they're doing in college because kids are coming out of school even when they've been in these courses not having a clue.

We had an intern here this summer - he was taking a sales and marketing course at his college. And for his internship he got to sit in on every one of our meetings. The very first day that he sat in on the first meeting, he learned more in that one meeting then he learned in three years of his college major in marketing. They're just not getting it done in school.

**Lori** – Yeah. That’s unfortunate I know it would also help to get more women into sales roles if there is a good academic program you know - a good universal program. Because that's something that I see also lacking in most of the industries that we work in. So you're right no one says hey I want to be a professional sales person when I grow up.

**Dave Kurlan** – Yeah even after all these years it's still not considered an honorable profession. Because when the sales they think of car sales people insurance salespeople and retail sales people and in home “scam you for much money they can get” you know one call closers. They have no concept of all the B2B selling that's going on. Most people never experienced that in their entire life and that's the most professional sales. So if sales isn't even considered honourable, people go to do school without even the thought they could end up in sales. Most people end up in sales by accident not on purpose.

**Lori** – Right. So Dave final question: **What do you think the future holds?** You think people will rebel against all the tools and focus on outcomes you think they'll get more into the science of what really works or What do you see you see anything changing.

**Dave Kurlan** – It's a great question. You know if history is a predictor of the future then nothing's going to change. Nothing's change for thirty years even though selling as a profession has changed dramatically just in the last eight years selling as a population of skilled workers those skilled workers haven't improved in the last thirty years so history would suggest once again nothing's going to change and you know that's an exaggeration too because in the companies that hire you. Companies that hire me. Things change dramatically. So I think what's not going to change is they'll continue to be a huge percentage of companies that they don't get outside help and don't figure it out and those sales people continue to sell to the dark ages where isn't the companies that reach out to an expert get your help or get my help or get somebody’s help they’ll make drastic changes because they'll see it they'll get it. They're paying for it and they'll benefit from it.

**Lori** – That’s great well I would love it. You know I sure hope though but like you I see some of the same thing that I saw thirty years ago and I see over and over the same mistakes happening in different companies whether they're traditional companies or they're more technologically savvy. I see a lot of the same mistakes and I hope that there is a way that we can you know better get the word out and you know better work with more companies. So I guess you need to scale somehow Dave you need to be bigger and. Get your tools out to more companies to provide I think it’s one of the thing that I firmly believe in and I’ve seen the result of that and so I'm just hoping that people will look outside of their organizations for more answers and not just keep doing the same old thing and looking for new results of because that is insanity.

**Dave Kurlan**- it is so much and I sure hope.

**Lori** – So how can people get a hold of you? Can you give us how to reach your blog and how to reach you?

**Dave Kurlan** – Sure. The blog is [OMG hub](#). OMG as in OH MY GOD. So OMG is for Objective Management Group.

**Lori**- Fantastic! Well thanks for all you've done for the professional B2B selling it’s quite an honor to get your feedback and get your thoughts. I hope we have the opportunity to this again.

**Dave Kurlan** – Oh I hope so too. This is great fun. Thanks for inviting me Lori.