

SALES STAR



Diane Albano: Bridging Experience and Innovation to Create Sales Success

[By Akbar Ali]

With 20 years of expert sales experience under her belt, Diane Albano stands as one of the industry's most recognized and celebrated leaders who is also an effective and inspired sales professional, pushing the limits of her success through innovation and strategy modernization. As vice president of Americas operations for Progress Software, a provider of application-infrastructure software for business applications, she continues to lead high-performance sales teams, attracting clients from all over the world and surpassing sales quotas through a core set of values based on her diverse experience and innate talent for "closing the deal."

Albano discovered very early in life that she had both an interest in selling and the ability to sell. At the age of 11, she and her brother started their own makeshift car washing and waxing business in their neighborhood.

"I've been hooked ever since," she says.

Her early entrepreneurial skills fully rooted, she also realized (as all natural leader types do) that she enjoyed motivating and managing others who, in turn, supported her vision and helped her build a customer base.

Albano was able to put herself through college at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, by wisely saving and managing the money she earned from various jobs she had throughout her youth.

She recounts, "My passion for sales drove me to success through the odd jobs I completed during high school, and my interest in continuing sales at a higher level motivated me to save money for college."

After graduation, Albano found work as a line umpire in the U.S. Professional Tennis Circuit (Longwood, Newport, RI, and the Volvo Classic). She has been an avid sports aficionado and athlete for many years, belonging to the intramural tennis and swim

teams while at college. Though her job as a

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. Anything involving my family equates fun. We ski, play golf and tennis, and scuba dive together. We always enjoy attending sports events, football and baseball games, and great shows. My family and I have taken many trips together, including a safari to South Africa, Alaska, Hawaii, and a recent trip to Italy. When I'm by myself, I really enjoy running, working out, and reading. I am very active and enjoy all kinds of sports as well as travel.

Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?

A. Dave Matthews Band. But I like all kinds of music.

Q. What is the last magazine you read?

A. *Newsweek*.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. I don't really watch much TV. I like the History Channel, and I really enjoy movies.

Q. Who are your role models?

A. My mother, father, and husband. My husband, Dennis, is my best friend and business confidant.

Q. What makes you laugh?

A. My children and my husband. All we do together is laugh and have fun.

line umpire was undoubtedly exciting, she longed to turn her passion for selling into a full-fledged career. She elected to return to school to further her credentials, attending the Harvard Business School Program for Management Development.

While at Harvard, she earned a sales position at the Burroughs Corporation, a move she said "reignited [her] interest in sales." From there, she went on to work with large corporations like Honeywell and Xerox, later joining the Digital Equipment Corporation, where she was able to build her expertise into a newly acquired marketing position. This new job helped reinforce to her that sales was her professional ambition.

"It was then that I confirmed my passion for sales," she says. "Though I enjoyed gaining the marketing experience, sales is and always has been my passion, so I naturally progressed to sales at DEC."

Her primary duties at DEC included global account management and sales management. Given her impressive academic and professional credentials, she was selected for the most high-profile and important company projects, including running and managing the aerospace business unit on a worldwide basis. As

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the successful head of that project, she confirmed her expertise and has never looked back.

“Since then, my sales career has flourished,” she says.

Four years into her time at DEC, Albano graduated to a position in its global account management division, a distinguished organization that provides global reach and management to the company’s largest and most strategic clients. There, she was responsible for uniting hardware, services, and partner capabilities, which, she soon discovered, was no small task:

“I took over an account that held potential but needed serious strategic help! Before I joined the team, they were unable to get a particular opportunity to move forward with this strategic endeavor. The company claimed we were too difficult to deal with and had decided to pass on our services. It was not just a ‘sale’ but the creation of an entire new business for this company: militarizing our computers for government use.”

In order to resolve the client’s issues, Albano took the initiative and visited the client’s headquarters, met with several top-level executives, and spent time acquainting herself with the frustrations and difficulties they were experiencing, having dealt with DEC multiple times with no results.

“I wanted to uncover the source of this problem and, thus, regain the customer; ironically, during an elevator ride, I sparked conversation with someone who turned out to be the president of the company, which provided me with the opportunity to discuss the problems. I introduced myself and empathized with his frustrations dealing with DEC, detailing solutions and promising changes to our relationship with his company. Through this interaction, I showed him that we would not let him down again and that we are serious and passionate about working together on this very strategic

project. We were able to win this sale, cementing a long-term partnership that has lasted for over 20 years. And the rest is history.”

Albano counts this experience as one of the most memorable of her career. Her success in reaching a positive resolution, which testified to the depth of her expertise and business acumen, provided her with a definite sense of accomplishment and excitement.

She says she also learned a valuable lesson that day about approaching clients:

“Prepare yourself, know your customers, and be passionate about what you are doing. Running a worldwide sales force selling for a complex software infrastructure company has its challenges. However, I believe that even today, with all the technology we have at our disposal, it is still important to meet people face to face because nothing can replace a hands-on approach and knowing your customer intimately.”

Her many successes and experiences have taught Albano that there are three great motivators for sales professionals:

1. Customer Oriented: Salespeople want to control their own destinies with their accounts and respective achievements.
2. Financial Benefits: What is the goal, and how can you surpass it? Her motto is “Make salespeople wealthy.”
3. Recognition: Salespeople are motivated by recognition.

Throughout the early stages of her career, Albano found that although she was full of ambition and the desire to succeed, there were few other women around her in the business world who could guide her and share their experiences.

She notes, “When I started working in sales during the mid-70s, few women worked in sales, and even fewer worked in computer sales. In general, there were few women in business, and specifically in a management capacity. Starting at my first sales job at Burroughs, I was the only woman out of 160 sales reps. At the beginning of my career, I had very few women mentors to look up to as an example, so I had to look to myself for motivation.”

There have been some influential colleagues in her career, though—notably Jack Shields, DEC’s head of sales and services, whom she credits with having inspired her to become self-motivated. Initially, they began as colleagues who worked together on sales calls, quickly earning each other’s friendship and respect. But their relationship strengthened when they got to know each other outside of work after running into each other while vacationing with their families more than two decades ago.

“[Jack’s] guidance has played a very important role in my career, especially during my role at DEC as the global account manager,” Albano says. “Jack certainly helped steer me in the direction of accepting that role and encouraged me to always remain customer-centric while balancing what is right for the company. Basically, as a mentor, Jack offered me many lessons, and he is still someone I can call on today.”

Albano also acknowledges that just as she has had a mentor over the years, she must serve as a mentor to others.

“I help when and where I can, working to balance management and mentoring both in business and with community members,” she says.

In the past, she spent 15 years working as a religious education teacher for her children and their classmates, serving as a positive role model; she maintains relationships with her children’s former classmates to this day.



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To the up-and-coming group of sales pros, Albano offers the following advice:

“Be proactive and passionate. Specifically, do your research, line up internships, work hard at these internships, network, and build yourself a great reputation with exceptional experience. Moreover, work in a non-paid

internship and absorb what it takes to be in sales. Accept your losses in stride and, even better, congratulate yourself on success.

Understand and remember that sales is binary, and therefore you will not close the deal until you understand the science behind it. Lining up a pipeline to make quota is an art that you will not master until you are

eager to work hard for your customers and can enjoy helping them in order to succeed.”

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