

Scaling Up Services

Episode 235 - Brandon Fluharty

www.scalingupservices.com/podcast/235-brandon-fluharty

Brandon Fluharty, Founder of Be Focused. Live Great.

Brandon is a former VP and top seller at LivePerson (NASDAQ: LPSN), the top Artificial Intelligence company on the planet, as selected by Fast Company in 2022.

In his role as Vice President of Strategic Account Solutions, Brandon closed over \$50M in SaaS sales with Fortune 100 companies like Delta, Chipotle, and UnitedHealthcare.

In 2019, he entered the coveted 7 figure annual earners club for the first time. These results came about, not so much by focusing on specific sales techniques and tactics, but more through designing and developing a unique way to operate consistently at an elite level. Today, Brandon shares this knowledge to help elite sales professionals learn from his successes and failures.

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/brandonfluharty>

<https://twitter.com/brandonfluharty>

<https://www.instagram.com/brandonfluharty>

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

This is an automated transcript and may contain occasional errors or omissions from the originally recorded conversation. While we review and try to correct any of these issues, we don't catch them all and we can't confirm 100% accuracy. Please use the link above to listen to the episode if you have any questions.

[0:02]

You're listening to Scaling Up Services where we speak with entrepreneurs, authors, business experts and thought leaders to give you the knowledge and insights you need to scale your service based business faster and easier. And now here is your host business coach Bruce Eckfeldt.

[0:22]

Are you a CEO looking to scale your company faster and easier? Check out Thrive roundtable. Thrive combines a moderated peer group mastermind expert one on one coaching access to proven growth tools and a 24/7 support community. Created by Inc award winning CEO and certified scaling up business coach Bruce

Eckfeldt Thrive will help you grow your business more quickly and with less drama. For details on the program, visit eckfeldt.com/thrive that's ECKFELDT.com/thrive

[0:58]

Welcome everyone. This is Scaling Up Services, I'm Bruce Eckfeldt I'm your host, our guest today is Brandon Fluharty, He is Founder at Be Focused, Live Great, we're going to talk to him around performance, particularly around sales about being a high performance seller, really kind of fascinating topic. You know, we talk a lot about the importance of sales and services and kind of scaling. And we're gonna dig a little deeper beyond just kind of tactic, I'm sure we're going to talk a little bit about tactics and kind of what you can do to sell effectively. But more importantly, like who you need to be, and what does that mean? And how do you really advanced your own kind of, I guess I'll call it inner game to show up better, more focused, more aligned, so you can actually be a more effective seller and more effective salesperson. So a fascinating topic. I'm excited about this, I'm sure we're going to talk a little bit about hacking, I always love figuring out how we can improve ourselves in all sorts of ways and credit, really the holistic person. So with that, Brandon, welcome to the program.

[1:53]

Bruce, thanks for having me.

[1:54]

That's a pleasure. Before we kind of dive into what you're doing today, and really helping high performance sellers, let's get a little background. How did you get into this space? What was your experience? Give us the story?

[2:04]

Yeah, sure. So I started my career trying to actually become a professional soccer player in Europe. So high performance was something I needed to focus on to actually get myself in that environment. And after running into some injury issues, and not winning the contract that I had hoped for, I came back to the states and eventually found my way into sales, like many of us who have gotten into sales I happened into it wasn't something I was formally steering towards. But so glad that I did. And I took a lot of those learnings from trying to be a professional player, being in that type of environment where focus, discipline, scheduling, the way I slept, and ate and trains, I took a lot of that into sales. What I discovered though, especially as I was climbing the ranks, is, you know, when you're in that kind of environment in Europe, where soccer is treated very much like a religion. You have your agents helping you to win that contract, you have someone helping with your mindset, you have someone with focusing on your nutrition, a strength and conditioning coach, you name it. And I've always thought it was weird that we in strange that we didn't have those types of performance trainers and coaches helping us in sales, especially when we tout Hey, salespeople are the athletes of the business world. Yeah. And so really, that's kind of been my focus of doing that for myself, and now as, as a founder be focused with great, sort of trying to deliver that to the world in a much needed way.

[3:47]

Yeah, yeah, it's interesting, I certainly have found that, you know, a great source or a great kind of background for highly effective salespeople is some kind of physical performance sports, you know, experience. What do you think that is? Is that about something in their nature, like someone who's competitive, you know, does well? Or is it something about actually, the sports kind of culture of performance and training and discipline? And, you know, doing the reps? Like, where do you see, I guess, do you see a connection between people that

are highly effective in sports that transition into sales? Well, is that because of what they learned in sports, or because of just their fundamental nature, and that they're competitive, and they're good at this stuff?

[4:26]

I think a mixture of both, I think all the above really, and I think we do over index on sports. I know there are a lot of great salespeople who want nothing to do with sports did not come from an athletic background. But they may come from another background, whether that was arts or music. And so I really look at we need to elevate the industry of sales to that of other crafts, to high level crafts. So whatever it is, if it's a discipline of learning how to play the piano showing up every day and consistently getting better, 1% better, or showing up at the track and getting 1% faster every day, whatever it is, I think it's important that we carry that over. And those high performers, those top 1% producers, do tend to come from some sort of background, where it takes discipline where it takes focus, where it takes building a system of consistent training, and really falling in love with the process of getting better and developing. And again, that runs the gamut, whether you're picking up an instrument, learning to act, or be a comedian in front of an audience, or stepping on the field and training hard or competing hard. Yeah, give us

[5:47]

a little more insight on your, your kind of sales journey, like are the major kind of milestones for you, as you kind of went from, you know, initially kind of transferring this into a sales kind of environment, you know, what were the kind of big transitions that you had to make, you know, as, as a professional as a salesperson, give us a little bit of the journey that you were on?

[6:05]

Sure. So after I learned I was not going to make it as a pro player. The next best thing for me was giving back to the game that had given to me and allow me to travel the world live abroad. And I started training youth players. And I actually joined a soccer education startup, that was actually the best way to describe this company. Because we were a bunch of young American players who had played collegiately or professionally, and we developed a unique training system for mostly five to 12 year olds all across Long Island. And because it was a startup, and we were trying to build something I was employee number four, I learned the lesson of selling, I was able to cut cut my entrepreneurial teeth, and I didn't know I was selling. And the first lesson I learned was the best way to sell is to stop selling. And I think two things really resonated for me one have expertise to a certain degree of of what I was selling, and then authentically being able to sell that, because I loved it. And so I really learned how to sell from there. And then I followed another passion of mine. So you know, I'm young 20 something years old. I wanted to, you know, go from working and living in Long Island to living in Manhattan. And I followed. Yeah, exactly. I followed another passion, which was music, and actually DJ, I taught myself how to DJ. And again, back to the performance enhancement and kind of putting yourself out there in front of an audience learning how to read a room. Those were all sales lessons. But ironically, what I got out of that was an actual job in sales. And my first real role in sales was an account manager for a music marketing company. It started as a DJ education company. It was co founded by Jam Master Jay have Run DMC, not where you could come and learn how to DJ. And that's where I learned how to DJ. And I started getting booked, actually, by this company scratch and one thing led to another and they brought me on they wanted to expand their music marketing capabilities. And I was an account manager in charge of background music and with brands way out of my league. I landed somehow the Gucci accounts and I was managing their background music, and some other cool accounts like Royal Caribbean cruise lines and beaches, Sandals Resorts, where we leveraged DJ talent to, to mix their music. So that really gave me a foundation of selling. But fast forward a few years after taking on that role. I met some life changes. I met my girlfriend now wife, she

was finishing up nursing school she had lived in New York for a while I had lived in New York for a while very expensive place to live, and we wanted to reset and so we set off for her hometown in Florida. And I really had to start over and I started over at the bottom I was selling \$45 print ads to local bars and restaurants. And I really had to cut my teeth on selling it was just you know turn and burn and you know keep keep grinding. And eventually I made my way into digital marketing after having a stop off at selling television advertising and went from SMB into digital SAS from digital SAS into mid market consulting mid market into enterprise SAS. And then eventually into strategic conversational AI, with some of the world's largest brands.

[10:06]

Fascinating. Yeah. And so let's just talk about what is selling? Because I think that, you know, we there's lots of different ways in which we can kind of frame it. I mean, there's there's very kind of specific around, you know, selling in a business context, you know, particular kinds of products and services, and then they're kind of more just general, you know, selling in life, I guess, how do you frame or where do you focus? Or what do you kind of define as being kind of the art of selling or the professionalism of selling?

[10:33]

Yeah, I think what I discovered later in my career that the elite performance of selling is really not selling, and it kind of was full circle. For me, the best way to sell is to stop selling and what I felt I was doing. And what I saw from other elite performers around me was we were designing really good buying experiences. And so what we were focused on is really thinking large on behalf of these fortune 50 level brands. And we had to dream big, we had to help them think about, hey, if we were to suspend reality, and go after some of those moon shots that you want, as a company, some of those moon shots that you want to go after as a high level executive, how can we do that? How can we design that, so we would start with the end in mind first, and then work backwards with a very logical plan. So none of that was selling, none of that was pitching, I was really designing a good environment where we could align their stakeholders with our smart people. And we would co create something together. And I found that that's really more consulting. It's not selling, it's more designing, not selling. And so when you can come together and do that together, that's really when you know, the big deals happen. The transformations happen.

[12:10]

Yeah. Where does this show up? I mean, if you kind of look at the business world, like where, where do you find these types of, you know, sales processes or types of sales that need to be made? Like, how do you like in the world of business? Like, where do you end up focusing? Or where does this kind of approach to selling end up really kind of presenting itself?

[12:29]

Yeah, I was really fortunate that my, you know, over the last four years, where I accumulated the majority of my wealth, it was with a enterprise artificial intelligence company. And we were again, focusing on fortune 50 level brands, some of the most iconic brands out there, all the companies that we use every single day, in our personal lives. And I think the big thing for me that I think was extremely helpful as these were business to consumer types of brands, and we were a business to business, to those business to consumer brands. And so the standard I tried to uphold myself to was knowing the brand's consumers experience better than most folks I spoke with at that that company. And because I could be on their planes, I could eat at their restaurants, I could shop in their stores, I knew what it was like to experience, the highs and the lows of that company, whether it was waiting on hold for customer service, whether it was finding something on their websites, that wasn't ideal, whether it was communicating with them on social media, whether it was you know, at the register

at the gates at the airport. So mapping all of that out and understanding. Here's the consumer experience, The Good, the Bad and the Ugly, we could, again work backwards to creating ideal scenarios across the board.

[14:10]

So what goes into being a high performance seller, like if you you kind of break it down for us? Or they're, you know, if you're evaluating somebody or helping coach somebody, what are the kind of categories or areas that you're looking at in terms of their capabilities?

[14:24]

Yeah, I so I actually just published an ebook. And it's really more than an ebook. It's really a system. And I call it seven steps to seven figures. And I start it again, designing what's the ideal experience to get to that unicorn status of earning seven figures a year in sales, and I think SAS sales in particular is one of the the best areas to accumulate wealth in a relatively short period of time. Why SAS? Well, it's just running the world today. And margins are really high. And it's really competitive space where in favor of, you know, elite performers, it's a great environment to put yourself in, because you can, you know, do really well. And it just accelerates transformation for these really large companies. So if I were to deconstruct those seven steps, no particular order, but this was the order that worked for me, just getting in the right environment, to be able to close huge deals, you know, to be able to talk with a fortune 10 level company, we've got to be in the right environment where a company has a proven track record to do that. And also, for me, I found that I wanted a Goldilocks, so to speak, type of company where it wasn't too big, but not too small, I can have the resources around me to move quickly, like a startup can, but not be so big and bogged down with internal processes and structure where I couldn't have freedom and flexibility. And I was fortunate to do that. And I would coach or encourage any of the the clients that I work with to do the same find that Goldilocks type of environment. And there are plenty of amazing companies out there to do that. Step two is just being really thoughtful and intentional about your account list. One of the best things that I did that helped me cross the chasm from going from a perennial six figure earner to a seven figure earner for the first time was slowing down in order to speed up. And I worked with my manager at the time, when I was saying yes to everything in 2018. And we were very deliberate about saying no to more things, because he recognized me when I was able to give quality, focus and attention to my accounts, good things happened. So I deliberately pruned my account list. And I'm talking about removing some really large accounts like Walmart, and Apple from my countless that most people would think I was crazy for

[17:10]

and how like, what were you what were the criteria that that allowed you to make those seemingly pretty tough decisions? I think most people went deep those those companies.

[17:19]

Exactly. So what I did was, I discovered something I read at the time around the Japanese concept of IKI guy, which basically stands for reason for being. And it's basically like a Venn diagram that brings four criteria together, what you love, what you're good at what the world needs, and so forth. And I wanted to adopt a similar thing that I could transpose my account list on top of so I created five criteria, things like moving fast, where I had industry expertise, what kind of companies are changing the world, what has the opportunity to land large right out of the gates. So I applied that as a filter across my account list. And in the middle, was a diamond where all five of these criteria on the Venn diagram met. And I said, You know what, I'm going to focus on my diamond accounts, because I know, this is what's going to get me where I want. It's also going to be what motivates me every single day to get up and be excited I, I have

skin in this game with with these accounts, I know their brand, and I'm excited to want to fix their problems. And, and I did just that and that's when really things accelerated. And so

[18:44]

so that was step two. So what's number three?

[18:46]

So step three is breaking through perceived personal limitations. So I was hit in the face with imposter syndrome. As I was breaking into these really large marquee accounts, talking with C level executives. Here I was, you know, somebody without a college degree, left college early to go pursue a professional soccer career in Europe. I was thinking to myself, Wow, I don't belong here. So I really needed to work. I actually worked with a coach who focused on impostor syndrome. But what I really found and here's it, here's an example. I'm an extremely introverted person. And for so long, that was nagging at me that to be successful in sales, you need to be an extrovert. It's about being that Don Draper and winning deals at over dinner and drinks. And really, once I got into strategic selling, that myth was busted because I started to learn about myself that being introverted actually was a strategic asset. And it allowed me to be a good listener. Be be really thoughtful take the time to do the quality research on these large accounts. And so that was a big breakthrough moment and helped me to kind of break through those, those personal limitations.

[20:12]

Yeah, yeah. And that's, I think I find with most executives, and particularly for these kinds of growing companies where, you know, they very quickly get into new terrain. And yeah, it can be kind of crushing and paralyzing to be faced with the situation of Oh, my gosh, I'm perceiving that I'm over my head, right, like, like I am, I am over my skis on this one. And it's hard, because on one hand, you do want to recognize that you may be outside your comfort zone on this, but it doesn't mean that you can't perform and it doesn't mean you can't leverage the experiences that you've had and the capabilities you have into this new space. So I find it's a little bit of this balance between Yeah, we kind of have to fake it until we make it kind of thing but also, we need to be aware of when we are kind of outside, you know, our high competency area. And we need to be aware of that and figure out what are we going to do to shore that up? Yeah, definitely getting

[21:01]

comfortable with being uncomfortable with something and I had to quickly embrace. And I also learned that impostor syndrome, it's a healthy sign. It's just, it's showing that you're progressing. And I think a lot of high achievers experience it throughout their career in multiple steps along the way. And so sometimes you just need to embrace it and say, Hey, this is good. This is a good sign that I am growing, that the company is growing, that I'm breaking through new ceilings and barriers. And you know, the best thing for me to do is instead of it stifling me, I need to embrace it, and really understand on a deeper level, what are these thoughts that are driving my feelings and those feelings driving my actions? How can I improve them?

[21:49]

So number four, yet

[21:51]

creating a standard that no one else delivers. So as I was going through and working on these diamond accounts, well, I needed to match that with an experience that helped me to cut through the clutter, to really put the buying experience that I was trying to design and differentiate that from the competition. And that's where,

again, I came up with the diamond standard of knowing the customer experience better than the customer themselves. And so that took deep work that took, you know, really being thoughtful about how I manage my time. And not just my time, but my energy and my attention, again, being deliberate about saying no more than yes, once I was at this, this level in this stage, because every hour, every minute, every ounce of the energy, it mattered. And I wanted it to be focused in channeled on the right things, high quality. So that was really something that I wanted to free myself up go deeper on a smaller subset of accounts, so that we can unlock more potential. And that just required being really disciplined about what was on my calendar, where it should be, again, investing that that time, energy and attention.

[23:17]

Yeah, it's interesting. I would say in scaling businesses, the faster you want to scale, the more you need to focus, right, you need to really dial in, okay, well, what are we really selling? Who are result really selling into, because that's the only way we're going to make this really focus, we can differentiate, we can create highly repeatable, scalable processes. And so it sounds like sort of the same things like the more that you can really clarify and niche down into what, what you're really focused on what you're really good at, what can you be effective at, like that's going to accelerate, the process is, is going to create more value, right? It's kind of, you know, if I can sell anything to anyone, right? Like, I'm like, it's tough to really develop a skill set. If I'm selling very specific things to various specific companies, I can really become an expert in that, you know, and differentiate myself. That's great. So point five, then, yeah,

[24:02]

building a transformation mindset. So I really wanted to go past selling and helping folks just stop with the transaction. And then we part ways, it was really thinking much bigger, and it was building a mindset of abundance and saying, no, why, why do we have to stop here? Why do we have to confine ourselves in a box because, you know, really well, large corporations have their processes in place, especially at the director, mid levels to protect themselves, you know, rightfully so you got to protect your time you got to protect the company, you've got to prevent risk. But I found that it was almost easier talking with C level executives than it was mid level directors. Why? Because they thought big. I was a big thinker, they think big. And so we could align and you You throw away the jargon. It's very, you throw away the pitch. And it just becomes a conversation. Obviously, once there's a connection made, but it's a conversation about, let's get those moonshots done, you talk about it on earnings calls, you aspire to it as a North Star? Well, let's do it. Let's work backwards. And let's design it. So building that transformation mindset, that's where it really unlocked huge deals and opportunities, obviously, then you don't have to start with everything at the first go around in the implementation, you've got to be strategic about plotting that out in a phased approach. But it first starts with thinking big thinking about the transformation, and then working backwards.

[25:52]

I always kind of use this concept or this concept from martial arts of the Shu ha ri, where like, you know, in the beginning, you just need to learn the moves, you know, wax on, wax off, and then kind of put them together in a series. And then at some point, it all gets internalized, and it's fluid, you don't even think about it, you know, unconsciously competent at some point, like, how much do you find that, like, you have to put in the reps on some of this stuff, like you have to learn, you have to learn how to do, you know, handling objections, and how to, you know, sell in certain ways, and kind of almost like, learn the basic moves, and then at some point, it all gets internalized. And then you can have this these really kind of big picture, you know, strategic conversations with senior, you know, senior folks in the company are like, do you need to do the reps? Or I guess what's your

I'm just kind of curious what, like, if you were developing a training program for somebody, like, how much do you have them focus on these, like, early skills before they can get to this transformational level?

[26:47]

Sure, I caveat in the system in the eBook, that you do need a foundational level of experience, I've don't believe that you can step right in to a seven figure earning role selling, you know, enterprise level transformations to a fortune 10 brand, without those reps without those fundamental foundational elements in place, just like anything. And so yeah, you know, if you want to be a master pianist, you want to be a master in the P on the court. Yeah, it takes the reps, and that's years and years of work and effort. And then it does come together, I can look back on my soccer career, I can look back on DJing in a room and keeping the crowd dancing, I can look back on those moments of meeting with a bar owner. And, you know, feeling rejected more than acceptance, to, you know, the consulting experience, all that came to fruition once I was in that right environment, and then I could start applying these things that I knew I was capable of. So absolutely, you've got to build your foundation first.

[28:05]

Yeah. Yeah. And let's make sure we cover six and seven. Walk us through those.

[28:09]

Yeah, so number six is needing to rally others in your organization to close deals with you. I've seen successful lone Wolf's but they're capped out to a certain degree when you try to do it alone. And it goes beyond just obviously, working with your solutions consultants and and you know, relying on those folks to make you look good, because you really do. But it's, it's more than it's, and I'll take a step back to say, I don't consider myself a particularly strong presenter, I don't particularly think of myself as a great negotiator, or this killer closer. I am a generalist with my skill set. But I'm a specialist with my outcomes and the outcomes I'm focused on our landing extremely large strategic transformational deals, big initiatives that make the stock pop and, and deliver what we want as a moonshot to to the world. So that takes bringing in the CEO at the make them look good and help them close the deal. It means being a quarterback or an orchestrator and knowing when to run the ball, when to throw the ball, the right people to throw the ball to and handoff to and so forth. So that's really when these major deals come to fruition is when you can get not only get the customer excited, but you gotta also get your internal stakeholders excited.

[29:46]

Yeah, yeah, I certainly see the whole team the need to have a team around this. I mean, it's you can only you can only get so much done yourself. And ultimately, you know, if you really want to excel at the things you're really really good at, you have to find people to do the things you're not Yeah, exactly. Exactly. Like if you tried to do everything it's really going to create not only a bottleneck, but it's not going to be fun, right? I was like, You're gonna, yeah, yeah. Brandon, there's a there's been a fun I was loved. Like I said I was loved this kind of area of how to be, you know, high performance, particularly in the sales or I'll just find that in scaling service companies. You know, this is critical, right? It's just like, how do you how do you sell and how to really evolve your selling process and your selling practices is going to be key to being able to scam? People want to find out more about you more about the book, what's the best way to get that information?

[30:30]

Yeah, and we'll, we'll leave step seven as a cliffhanger. If you want to learn more, go to sevenstepstosevenfigures.io. You can learn all about what's in the system and the ebook, learn a little bit more

about me. And I'm very active on LinkedIn. So a great place to follow me and get more content where I actually deconstruct a lot of what we talked about is LinkedIn.

[30:54]

Yeah, that'd be great. I've seen a lot of your posts. It's good stuff. I highly encourage everyone to check out the URL, check out your LinkedIn. I'll link to that both are in the show notes. So people can get that, Brian. It's been a pleasure. Thank you for taking the time today.

[31:06]

Yeah. Thanks for having me, Bruce.

[31:08]

Thank you for tuning into today's episode. Be sure to subscribe using your favorite podcast app so you don't miss our future episodes. So you next time.

[31:17]

You've been listening to scaling up services with business coach Bruce Ed belts. To find a full list of podcast episodes, download the tools and worksheets and access other great content, visit the website at [scaling up services.com](https://www.scalingupservices.com) And don't forget to sign up for the free newsletter at [scaling up services.com/newsletter](https://www.scalingupservices.com/newsletter).

About Scaling Up Services

Scaling Up Services is a podcast devoted to helping founders, partners, CEOs, key executives, and managers of service-based businesses scale their companies faster and with less drama.

For more information and a list of recent episodes, please visit <https://www.scalingupservices.com>

About Eckfeldt & Associates

Eckfeldt & Associates is a strategic coaching and advisory firm based in New York City and servicing growth companies around the world. Founded and led by Inc. 500 CEO Bruce Eckfeldt, E&A helps founders, CEOs, and leadership teams develop highly differentiated business strategies and create high-performance leadership teams who can execute with focus and rigor. Leveraging the Scaling Up, 3HAG, and Predictive Index toolsets, the firm has worked with a wide range of dynamic industries including technology, professional services, real estate, healthcare, pharmaceutical, and cannabis/hemp.

For more information, please visit <http://www.eckfeldt.com/> or email us at info@eckfeldt.com.

Copyright © 2020 Eckfeldt & Associates

Individual Use: A limited amount of content may be printed for your own personal, non-commercial use. In the event of such use, all copyright and other notices and clear attribution to *Scaling Up Services* and *Eckfeldt & Associates* must be maintained. The content may not be modified, distributed, retransmitted, or used, in whole or in part, in derivative works. All other uses, including reprinting, republishing, broadcast and any further distribution, require written permission from *Eckfeldt & Associates*. For any questions or to request permission, please contact podcast@eckfeldt.com.