

Chapter 1

Introduction By Andy Buying

“All great changes are preceded by chaos.” — Deepak Chopra

It was midafternoon on a warm Wednesday, May 8, 2019. I assembled our core Tulip Media team in the conference room and informed them I had just fired our entire sales department. At the time, the sales team accounted for nearly 35 percent of our staff.

Jaws dropped. The initial reaction was that of shock.

A few hours earlier, just after lunch, I had walked into our offices with a lump in my throat. After quietly assembling my notes in our conference room, I brought our entire sales team in, one by one, to speak with me. I then shared with them the extreme, excruciating and extraordinarily difficult decision we had made to let them all go.

I explained that the company was changing its strategy and taking a different approach to sales growth and business development. I made it clear that they were not at fault, but that it was a strategic decision that I and my two main business partners had made. And the decision was final.

This was an incredibly difficult thing to do. Over the years, we had grown to be a family, and I truly loved each person on our team. However, I knew with all my heart that this was the right decision for the company.

The Inspiration

The inspiration for this bold move came from a good friend of mine just

a couple of months earlier. At a business conclave in Boston, Patrick “Paddy” Condon shared the story of how he transformed his company, Finished Basements, in Denver, Colorado.

Finished Basements is a high-end home renovation company doing work in three cities: Denver, Minneapolis and Chicago. Paddy talked about how six months prior, he was doing annual planning with his team by way of a three-day event. During those three days, he and his partner drastically altered the structure of their business development strategy.

On the first day, they gathered the 12 people on their sales team together to strategize and discuss the future plans for the company. Doom and gloom filled the room. The sales team consistently blamed other departments and the company leaders for missing their sales targets, and Paddy had decided right there and then that he didn’t want to continue that way.

One thing Paddy had always observed in their business was that when customers were speaking with the sales team, their defenses would go up. However, as soon as they were brought into the showroom to speak with a designer, they would begin to enjoy themselves. Instead of focusing on the deal, they would be focusing on the color schemes, the trim and the pot lights that would be used, and they would get very excited about starting the project with the designer. When customers were transferred back to the sales team, the magic disappeared instantly and their defenses would go right back up again.

In his words, the salespeople were often the ones killing sales deals!

On that day after meeting with the sales team, and growing increasingly frustrated, Paddy decided to execute on his new idea right there in the moment. He told his partner, “I’m willing to bet the entire company on this strategy: I want to let the entire sales team go, and I want the designers to sell jobs.” Before the next morning, the two of them had called every single person on the sales team and let them go.

The next morning, they met with the designers and administration and

told them what they had just done. Initially, everyone's instinct was to panic, but Paddy quickly explained his change in approach.

Paddy explained that nearly all of the inbound leads came from their marketing department, which was still fully staffed. He then explained that the designers would now be taking on the role of the salespeople in that they would be following up with customers, inviting them in to talk about their project and getting them excited to move forward.

When one of the designers declared that this sounded like a good plan but they weren't salespeople, Paddy replied, "Yes you are. In fact, you're better at selling than 'salespeople' are. You're the ones who get the people excited about their project through the design process. The only thing you need to do differently is this: when your customer is good with their design and budget, say: 'We're excited to get started! All we need is your signature here, and we'll get it scheduled.'"

Overnight, Paddy's best designers became his best salespeople. Customers were excited about their project, especially not having to deal with a "salesperson." Not only this but the company also cut about \$2 million in costs! The new approach drastically changed the course of the business. In fact, sales went up by 12.5 percent that year.

This story really resonated with me. After being frustrated for five years with no end in sight, this story hit me between the eyes. At that moment, while hearing Paddy's story, I came to the same conclusion. We had to do something similar at Tulip Media.

I remember immediately walking out of that room in Boston and reaching out to my two main partners. I wanted to explore the idea of restructuring Tulip Media without a sales team.

As Tulip Media Group had grown, our outbound sales team had expanded to seven highly paid individuals including a sales manager. However, even though our team was growing and evolving its capabilities, it seemed that we were always falling short of quarterly sales targets and expectations. No matter what strategy, program, training or talent we brought into the organization, we could never seem to get ahead. In fact, through a

return-on-investment lens, we were actually going backwards.

I knew there had to be a better way.

At the time, I had been toying with a new growth strategy that I described as building an “automated sales process.” I knew the way we were growing our sales department was not working and that we needed to leverage online digital and automated sales strategies to create a truly profitable company. However, I also knew that to drastically change our business development strategy like this would mean that our entire company had to operate differently and that our salespeople would never go along for the ride.

That is why Paddy’s story resonated so much for me.

I spoke with Paddy later that day to pick his brain. He challenged me to have the courage to destroy what’s good in the pursuit of something great. It was a quote I had heard many times before.

That was all the encouragement I needed. That challenge from Paddy was the first step towards changing our business life forever.

The Great Pivot of 2019

On May 8, 2019, we flipped our business development model upside down. Up until that point, we’d had a good company that was growing at a consistent rate. We had grown the company using traditional marketing, attending conferences and trade shows, making thousands of cold calls, working referrals and more. We had a sales team seven-people strong, consisting of a sales manager and six salespeople. However, month after month, quarter after quarter, we would set sales targets and fall short. The more we grew, the lower our success rate for meeting these targets would get.

Our success rate fell so substantially that our cost of acquisition skyrocketed. It didn’t happen overnight, but it did happen. In fact, the cost of acquisition at our worst point was over \$40,000 for a new Client-Partner! In other words, our company was heading for bankruptcy if we didn’t change something and change it drastically.

After that fateful day and hearing Paddy's story, I had a lot of deliberation and long conversations with my two main partners, which culminated in that business-altering Wednesday afternoon.

As soon as it was over and the entire sales team had been let go, I gathered the rest of the company and explained what I had done and why I had done it. I let them all in on the planning and the thought process that went into the decision.

We'd had an ineffective business growth model, and I took accountability for that. I then dove into the topic of what exactly I wanted to roll out and what my vision was for rolling it out. What I had always called an "automated sales process," Jessica Embree, my coauthor on this book, dubbed as SMarketing. After some discussion, everyone embraced this new vision.

A couple of days later, we went into our quarterly planning session. During the session, I let everyone know we were going to keep the same quarterly sales target going forward that we'd had for the past three quarters and consistently missed. I recall my right-hand person telling me I was crazy, pleading with me not to set us up for failure. However, I insisted that we keep the target going forward, that it would work. We had to make this work.

We moved forward and immediately started to implement our new SMarketing strategy. I replaced the sales team with a single junior marketing manager who believed anything was possible for our company. He was a recent university graduate that came to us during a co-op work program and stayed for the duration of the summer. It was just the high-energy start we needed. At the same time, Jessica, who handled a lot of marketing initiatives, was coming off her yearlong maternity leave and rejoining the company.

We were ready.

Tulip Media Group went from being an outbound sales organization—logging hundreds of phone calls and emails a week, following metrics on the number of calls, and expecting salespeople to make at least 30

outbound cold calls a day—to an organization that no longer made outbound cold calls at all. Can you believe that? Every single sales call we make now is because someone has reached out to us online and has scheduled their call in our calendars.

We went from chasing over 80 “qualified opportunities” a week to chasing twelve. We went from spending thousands and thousands of dollars every week on sales-related activities to dropping well under 10 percent of that.

To everyone’s surprise, we hit our quarterly sales target for the first time in over a year. It was an incredible feeling. After that, we really knew we could do this.

We were succeeding by only speaking with people who raised their hand first. We were succeeding by only spending time, energy and resources on people who were truly interested in what we were doing.

This was a game changer for Tulip Media Group.

What we didn’t realize was that it would also become a game changer for our Client-Partners in the months and years that followed. The incredible changes we’ve witnessed in our company and theirs since then are the reason Jessica and I wrote this book.

