

Ian Altman: 00:00 Hey, it's Ian Altman. I'm joined today by Lee Salz. Lee is the author of the new book sales differentiation. He's also a fellow keynote speaker, works with a number of organizations on how to grow their business and stand out in the way of differentiation. We're going to talk about the biggest mistake that professionals make when it comes to differentiation, the difference between what you sell and how you sell, and then how we make sure that we're not falling into this trap of what we perceive as the educated buyer. You're gonna learn a ton from Lee Salz. Lee, welcome to the show. Thank you. Can you start by sharing something surprising about you that our audience may not know

Lee Salz: 00:46 surprising about that. In College I competed in a national comedy competition. Standup comedy. Really? Yeah, and my wife doesn't believe it because she says I'm not funny.

Ian Altman: 00:58 You know what? I get that too. My wife will say, look, when he's fully clothed, these not that funny, and so I don't know where she came up with that, but. And why that matters, but you know, something that she brings up. And, and obviously though those standup comedy may be a resource people come to you for, um, except for our respective spouses. Um, what, uh, what I really want to talk about is this whole sales differentiation. And for starters, what's the biggest mistake that you think salespeople make when they're trying to differentiate themselves?

Lee Salz: 01:32 Well, probably the biggest one that I've found is that when a buyer balks at your price, they blame the buyer. It's their fault for not seeing the value, that meaningful differences in what we're offering. Now you can probably tell from my accent and I live in Minneapolis, but I'm not from here originally. I grew up in east coast, New York City, New Jersey and I moved to Minnesota about, gosh, almost 15 years ago. And as you might imagine, the weather here's kind of tough, you know, we get wind chills sub 20, but I should say so minus 20 and on and a lot of snow and my neighbors, when it snows, you'd, think someone just said let's have a party there out, snow blowing. And they're just having a grand old time. I told you I'm from New Jersey, so I have New Jersey skin. And when you move to Minnesota they don't issue Minnesota skin.

Lee Salz: 02:31 That's a shame, right? So where I'm from, we deal with differently. You know how we do that in, how do you do it? We get a guy, he had a guy, we don't do snow, we get a guy. And so I went on this website to get a guy. No, we're not that kind of website to get a guy to handle the snow and with through this process. And, and one provider actually contacted me. He lived in the same city that I do in and we had a nice email exchange and I was planning to use them. And then I got his price. And so there were five snow removal services. When you use this online website you get is price and his price was exponentially higher than all of them. Yep. So I

sent them a nice note, very simple. I just said, I wish your price was lower. That's all I said. And I got this long email with him being annoyed, blaming me for not seeing the value of what he offered. It was my fault according to him anyway. And this is very common with salespeople, is that when people balk at the price, they get defensive and they say it's the buyer's fault, he just doesn't get it. And what we should do is take a step back and take it as constructive criticism say clearly I'm not articulating meaningful value commensurate with the price of what I'm selling.

Ian Altman: 03:56 Exactly. In fact, in fact, what I haven't asked audiences, as I say, look, so if your client doesn't know the difference between what the other people selling, what you sell, who's fault is that? Is that there's, or is it yours? And the reality is, if it's the seller's fault, meaning our fault, that we can actually do something about it. If it was, if it was truly just the customer's fault, well, you can't fix stupidity. There's nothing you can really do about it. But when it's our fault, we can set a differentiation to help us stand out so that the customer says, like, for example, if this person before they should their price with you said, so let me just tell you the three things that our clients tell us we do differently. Amen. That are important to them, but what I need to know, Lee, is, are those things important to you? Right. And now all of a sudden we're having a conversation and you go, oh yeah, those things are really important. One order to do those three things that we do that no one else does. Here's the investment that it requires.

Lee Salz: 04:54 Exactly. And part of what's driving this is there's some bad advice that salespeople are getting. They get it every day from their management teams. They get it from the articles they're reading from speakers, trainers, books, and what they're being told is that you're, you're now selling to an educated buyer because there's this new fad. You may have heard of it called the Internet,

Ian Altman: 05:18 you know, I have heard of that.

Lee Salz: 05:21 Okay, good.

Ian Altman: 05:22 The whole www thing. Yeah.

Lee Salz: 05:24 So there's a question that I've asked salespeople, business owners, executives, and I've asked this all across the country, I've gone up north to Canada and I've been asked this question for years and the question is this, who knows more about the world of potential solutions in your industry, you or the people you sell to an Ian? Not One person has ever said, oh, the people I sell to know much more than I do about the world of potential solutions in my industry. It's never happened once. So we're telling

salespeople that we have educated buyers and it's not true.

Ian Altman: 06:03 Yeah. And the reality is that clients can get. The way i often try to think of it is, look, our clients can get great information about someone's products or services, but they don't necessarily know how it will apply to their situation.

Lee Salz: 06:17 I'm going to put you on the spot. The insurance. Ready? Yeah. What's the difference between an organic apple and a regular apple?

Ian Altman: 06:26 Well, see there's, there's, there's a lot to it. So the difference between the organic apple and the regular apple is that the organic apple is grown with organic materials, it's non gmo, all those sorts of things.

Lee Salz: 06:38 You're one of the few people that can answer that question. I asked that question all the time. My audiences in two, maybe three people raised their hands when I say, tell me what the difference is. This is a product that we buy weekly and we don't know how to make an informed decision on that. You think they know how to buy what you're selling.

Ian Altman: 06:57 Exactly. Keep in mind there are also things like you'll see him, you'll see in the store, um, something that isn't organic and they'll say things like, it's all natural chicken, which I guess is different than buying vinyl chicken.

Lee Salz: 07:11 My wife's Vegan. So she might prefer.

Ian Altman: 07:14 There you go. He go, yeah. I mean it's, but it's. But that's, that's the whole point is that very often people don't know the difference. So, and I know that in the book you talk about 19 different sales differentiation concept. And before we get into those, I want you to share with our audience what you mean when you say differentiation, because they may be thinking a little bit more narrowly than you are.

Lee Salz: 07:39 Yeah. So what I'm referring to, I don't just say differentiation. It's sales differentiation. Correct. And this is a philosophy I've developed over, oh my gosh, I'm going to be 50 next month, about 30 years. Uh, and uh, I'll, I'll tell you a politically correct example of this. I become, I was very passionate about this even as a teenager and so I got pregnant with the idea as a teenager, but I wasn't ready to share with the world this whole sales differentiation philosophy and until now, uh, but it's, it's for companies. Doesn't matter what industry you're in, what size company you are, if what you're selling and who you're selling to, there's

always a conversation about price prospects trying to justify the price that you put in front of them relative to what they're getting. So that's when the game begins. Did the salesperson demonstrated enough value to support the price that's put in front of them?

Lee Salz: 08:37 Well, the core tenant or purpose of sales differentiation is to help salespeople win more deals at the prices they want and there's two components to it. There's sales differentiation around what you sell and sales differentiation around how you sell. What are the challenges on the what you sell side that I. I see a lot of you and I'm sure you do as well. You'll see executive teams and sales people so passionate about their differentiators. They're like, boy, we should never even have to negotiate based on what we have to offer, but they're ineffective at positioning those differentiators with the person across their desk such that that person is as passionate as they are about those differentiators. I'll give you an example. I shared with you. I live in Minneapolis. One of the oddities of Minnesota is that every homeowner and every business contracts for their own trash removal. I didn't know any. Yeah. You don't want any place in the country that has like.

Ian Altman: 09:43 I know that in our development, not only don't we directly contract for it, I have no idea where these people come from. They show up, they take the trash, it goes away. It's just a magical thing to me.

Lee Salz: 09:55 So. So if you ever get a chance to come out this way, Wednesday mornings there was a parade of garbage trucks coming down my street representing every hauler you could imagine each one doing the same thing, pulls up to the home and arm extends out from the truck, grabs that, cam, lifts it up, dumped the contents in the truck. It puts the can back down, drives away. You get an invoice. The end of the month, CEO from one of these companies reached out to me and said, Lee, I believe we have meaningful differentiators. We have meaningful value so that we shouldn't have to fight over price. Now, I was intrigued because week after week. I watched the same thing. I'm like, boy, there are differences. I'm not seeing it. Well, he was right. They didn't meaningful differentiators and one of them is they have this truck called the can be clean truck. Twice a year this truck follows the garbage truck and cleans your garbage cans.

Ian Altman: 10:51 That cool. See, I thought I thought it was more like twice a year they'd clean the truck was thinking, hopefully it's more often than that, but got it. Okay.

Ian Altman: 11:01 Yeah. Twice, twice a year. They clean your garbage cans and they're the only ones in the state of Minnesota offering that service and their salespeople didn't know how

to have a conversation about that. So we develop what I refer to as a positioning question. It's an open ended question that aligns with one of your differentiators and helps buyers think differently about the solutions they have or could have. So what we did was for their residential sales people, after they introduced themselves to a homeowner, the next thing out of their mouth is, when's the last time you had your garbage cans cleaned? Because we know they never have unless they did it themselves. And even if you've ever cleaned your garbage cans, you know what a miserable experience that is.

Ian Altman: 11:50 You know what? I've done it. I've. I've done it here. We have a power and basically you put on a hazmat suit. He shut down the neighborhood. You've got to put yellow tape at the entrance of the cul de sac and with suits on, you put the dog inside and hope that no kids are watching.

Lee Salz: 12:06 And your neighbors love it because it just trickles down the street. So it gets to the drain.

Ian Altman: 12:11 Yeah, I make sure I make sure we do that. Yeah. I usually do it next to their swimming pool.

Lee Salz: 12:17 Oh, that's lovely. Just don't get invited over to the next barbecue. So. So that question, when's the last time you had your garbage cans cleaned? Is designed to help someone think differently about a solution. This case, their trash will have very basic elementary service. Yeah. Why isn't someone cleaning my garbage cans? Because beyond that, the only conversation some will be interested in is can you lower my price? Because they watch Wednesday mornings the trucks coming through. They're all doing the same thing. So unless you're saying you're going to save me a nickel, there's no conversation to be had. And so this brings out one of the flaws that we have in discovery. So we tell salespeople, when you go on a sales call, you need to ask questions to probe for pain or challenges that someone might have. Well, we're only asking questions then of what someone perceives could be better or different than what they have today. But if you agree with me that we know more about the world of potential solutions in our industry than the people we sell to, we can't just ask questions around what they perceive. We have to ask these positioning questions around areas that they didn't know even existed. If I said to that homeowner, what are three things you'd like to have that you don't have today with your trash service? No one would say, boy, I'd love it if someone cleaned my garbage cans because they don't know what exists.

Ian Altman: 13:53 Yeah. Or, or the or my or my favorite bad question. People are taught, which is what keeps you up at night and they might say, oh, it keeps you up at night. Really not up at night. It just wakes me up in the morning. Is the damn people coming to collect the trash.

Lee Salz: 14:07 My wife would say, my husband's snoring.

Ian Altman: 14:09 Exactly. Exactly. So the the challenge when you ask that type of a question is you don't actually have a high likelihood of someone picking something that you're good at and that stands out. So this idea of the positioning question I love because now it's something where it's genius has something. Importantly, there's a. there's a concept that I teach called the client vision pyramid that frame it for you and you can give me your thoughts on it, which is this client vision pyramid will say to somebody, if somebody says, hey, you know, I'm calling you guys about trash removal. Well Gee, there's. When people are looking for trash removal looking at one of three levels, the most basic effective level is just like people come by once or twice a week. They up your trash and recycling they thing your bill. That's effective level. They come when you want them to.

Ian Altman: 14:56 At the enhanced level. These are people that may be have air fresheners, was part of it. They make sure if anything falls out, they pick it up and really just meticulous at the engaged level. These are people that say, look, what are the things that go wrong? Well, people's trash cans get smelly and they get nasty, so twice a year they want them cleaned out and they want to make sure that everything's meticulous, involve a sudden they have a special need because they had a big party or something like that I'll have to do is go onto the website and click and men stuff gets removed, so, so which level you are looking for and by. By creating those three different, those three different levels. An interesting thing happens. One is the client says, wow, I didn't even know there was such a thing as an engaged level, but now I want it. The other thing that we see as a byproduct is people will say, well, yeah, you know, we went with you, but the other vendors they had, they were all at the enhanced level at best. No one else was engaged and they automatically put other people into these categories that we just made up.

Lee Salz: 15:53 Yeah, no, I mean you're. You're basically saying a different packaging of exactly what we just talked about, which is helping buyers think differently about the solutions they have or could have and not just relying on what they perceive their options to be.

Ian Altman: 16:09 Yep. Oh yeah.

Lee Salz: 16:11 So we talked about the, what you sell side. Then we also have the sales differentiation around how you sell. I've identified opportunities in every interaction between seller and buyer where we can be different. We can provide meaningful

value that our competitors are not from that very first phone call through how we handle that discovery meeting through documenting a solution all the way into their, uh, clients and how you perform account management. Even a request for references. There is opportunities to provide meaningful value that differentiates you, help you stand out that your competitors are not doing. So let's start at the very beginning. Sure. I said there's opportunities to be different, right? In that first interaction or there's a question, and I've asked salespeople and I've never had anyone get it right. And the question is this, who's your biggest competitor? And they'll say, oh, it's this company, that company, the other company will say, well, those are pretty good competitors, I'm sure, but there's one even bigger. And they'll say, oh, you mean that old sales trainer one, the status quo, the choice to do nothing, also a formidable competitor, but there's one even bigger and you want to guess who that is.

Ian Altman: 17:37 Well, it could be the sales person themselves, but, but I'm going to let you tell me

Lee Salz: 17:41 as one, even bigger than that. It's every salesperson calling the same person. You are trying to get a meeting. You see we're egocentric. We think of competition relative to us, but you're calling an executive vice president of whatever responsibility in the organization. They have this broad purview of responsibility. They're getting calls and emails from salespeople representing that entire purview and beyond. Uh, you asked before about something people don't know about me. I'll give you another one. I was a history major in college. I went to Binghamton University in upstate New York and there was a fact that I

Ian Altman: 18:22 had you went to Binghamton and you're complaining about the snow in Minneapolis or this is worse, this is worse.

Lee Salz: 18:30 That training did not get me ready for Minneapolis. So, um, so there's a fact that I learned while I was studying history there, and that's this in a history of business, there has never been an executive that has had the responsibility to meet with salespeople every hour on the hour. Ian, it's never happened. So no one has that responsibility and we have this plethora of salespeople that are calling this individual trying to get a meeting so we have to be different in that initial interaction or we're never going to get the meeting if there's no meeting. There's never a proposal. If there's no proposal, there's no sale, which means no commission check and no hitting quota. So, so very logical progression. And so there's a strategy that I teach in the book and how to differentiate your approach with prospecting those initial calls. And that strategy is this. Imagine it's two in the morning and there's a pounding on your front door. It's the police. They want to talk with you about a crime that's reasonably been committed. Would

you do in?

Ian Altman: 19:44 Well, naturally it nationally. I was guilty, but I don't know. I'm sorry. My wife said I was guilty. There you go.

Lee Salz: 19:51 Yeah, and they. They don't randomly pick your house and you. For this conversation, they've studied the evidence and that evidence has led them to create a crime theory and that crime theory has led them to you for a conversation right now. Yup. Can you see where we're going a sales crime theory, a sales crime theory is based on the answer to this question. Why should they want to have a conversation with us right now? It's not the egocentric side of why should we talk with them. It's why should they want to have a conversation with us right now. So let's say for example, we sell a technology equipment for conference rooms. So what types of evidence would tell us that someone would want to have a conversation with us right now while we might look into business journal and see that a is relocating its corporate office?

Lee Salz: 20:50 Well part of that relocation is probably going to be looking at the conference room and a technology need. So knowing that that type of evidence is something that would lead someone to be interested in a conversation with us right now. We then searched for it. We look for businesses that are relocating and then when we make a phone call into one of those executives, it's not theoretical and saying, Hey, I understand you're the cio and responsible for technology. I'm guessing you also handle conference rooms well guess what that's what we do as well. We're calling saying, Hey, I just saw the great news about you relocating to Rockville, Maryland with your headquarters. I'm sure part of that move is looking at technology in particular, your conference room and looking at the wonderful ways that you can incorporate technology into meetings. Well that's what our firm provides to ceos, etc. Etc. So the point is we're not randomly calling, we're not traditional cold calling, trying to show up on their doorstep. We're looking for evidence that give purpose for the interaction right now.

Ian Altman: 22:01 That'S great. And I mean it's, it's something. It's so lacking so often in people in sales. I had a, I had a guy called me up some months ago and the kid calls up, he says, Mr. Altman. So for starters, I see the phone ring, I don't recognize it on caller id. I made the mistake of answering the call anyhow. And this young man's said Mr. Altman. This is justin and, and so I work with speakers and authors just like you because I know that all speakers and authors are uncomfortable talking about sales and about money. And I said, I said, wow, that's great. Justin, what was it about my website that gave you a sense of, this is something I was uncomfortable about. You hear him talking about a year, I'm typing on his keyboard and then, and then he was like a little bit of silence

and he goes, crap. He says, you know, hey, you know, I'm sorry. I've read some side selling and I said, you know, justin, you may want to read it again, but the thing is that this isn't somebody who was, he wasn't born saying, oh, you know what, I'm going to do no research and call people. Somebody taught him to do this.

Lee Salz: 23:15 You could've said, you know what you said, you read it to me a favor. I'll pay shipping send it back.

Ian Altman: 23:21 Well, that would've been, that would've been. That would've been a funnier thing. I just wasn't that smart at the time. But um, but the thing is, you know, I look at it as it's adjustments fault. It's that it's that someone taught him that it's okay to do that. And this whole idea of these sales crime scenes thinking, what's the evidence or symptoms that I should be looking for so that when I'm calling up, I'm relevant to them. I often say that in salespeople can either show up as somebody who's there to sell or someone who's there to solve. And if you're showing up as someone who's there to sell, there are a lot of people who want to have that meeting. But if you're actually showing up as someone who's there to solve something important for the recipient, then you might have something worth discussing and you're just trying to get to the truth as quickly as possible.

Lee Salz: 24:04 Absolutely. Absolutely.

Ian Altman: 24:06 So, and, and I, I love these ideas that you've got these broken down into 19 different strategies for sales differentiation because it gives people a roadmap, a formula to follow that can help them really stand out and compete on value versus price

Lee Salz: 24:23 and none of them conflict with whatever sales methodology company has in place. It's an overlay. It's a strategy overlay.

Ian Altman: 24:33 Yeah, I mean it's just great stuff and I think it's packed With a lot of good information. So lee, what's the best way for people to connect with you and learn more about what it is that you're doing and sales differentiation.

Lee Salz: 24:44 Sure. So as far as the book goes on, the book is available in brick and motor stores across the country and your favorite online website, when you do grab a copy, go to salesdifferentiation.com and register. I'm offering my video series to anybody who buys the book. Normally. Those are only available to workshop clients, but when you buy the book, go to the sales differentiation.com. Click on the bonus, fill out the form and you'll get 20 weeks of videos. It may even be more because I'm having so much fun producing these, um, that will help you put in place the

strategies that you read about in the book and you can also connect with me right from salesdifferentiation.com.

Ian Altman: 25:27 That's great. That's great. Well, thanks so much for sharing your wisdom. Um, I encourage people to run out and get the book you won't be disappointed. It will give you clear ways to stand out, not only in terms of your products and services, but as a sales professional and for people on your team. So lee, thanks for joining me

Lee Salz: 25:47 and it was fun. thank you.

Ian Altman: 25:49 Least share some great insight. Let me give you a quick thirty second recap of the key information I think you can use and apply to your business right away. First, remember that the educated buyer may not be as educated about what it takes to purchase and implement your solution compared to you. Ask Those great positioning questions so that your client understands positionally why what you're doing may be different than what other people are offering, and then I love that sales crime theory. Thinking about, well, what are those traits that someone might have that would make them a good fit for you? Remember, this show gets his direction from you, the listener. If there's A topic you think I should cover or a guest I should have in the program, just drop me a note to ian at ianaltman.com. Have an amazing week. Add value and grow revenue in a way everybody can embrace, especially your customer.