

The Neuroscience Behind a Great Demo

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SUMMARY

Logan Bradford discusses the neuroscience behind effective demos in pre-sales, emphasizing the importance of understanding how buyers process information and make decisions. He shares insights from his experience and introduces a demo methodology called "validate," which focuses on emotional engagement and cognitive clarity to enhance the effectiveness of solution presentations.

- The emotional system (System 1) drives quick, subconscious decisions, while the rational system (System 2) rationalizes those decisions.*
- Effective demos should follow a "problem, solution, value" structure to create emotional engagement and clarity.*
- Introducing tension early in the demo raises emotional stakes and engages the buyer's cognitive processes.*
- The "dopamine cycle" in demos helps reinforce memory and keeps the buyer engaged through narrative coherence.*
- The concept of "what you see is all there is" highlights the risk of buyers forming conclusions based on incomplete information presented during demos.*
- Logan's "validate" methodology emphasizes being value-focused, identity-based, distilled, adapted, and tension-driven to effectively address buyer needs and concerns.*
- The goal of a demo should be to validate the buyer's decision to move away from the status quo, ensuring the presentation resonates with their priorities.*

Hi, Logan. How are you? >> Hello. I'm well. How are you? >> I'm good. We're here for another episode of the PreSales Collective Unscripted. These are some of my most favorite episodes because I just get to ask you a ton of questions. >> [laughter] >> Well, I'm excited to answer them. >> Great. So, before we jump in, can you give everyone just a quick high-level overview and bio of you, please? >> Yeah, sure. My name is Logan Bradford. I live about 35 minutes south of Salt Lake City. I am a lead enterprise solutions consultant at Sprinklr.

Um have been doing solution presentations my entire 15-year career, but only got into pre-sales itself uh like 2 and 1/2 years ago. Um and so I had a long journey to where I am, but loving where where I am. I've got four kids. I uh uh I I ascribe to the Utah Holy Trinity of climbing, mountain biking, and snowboarding uh in my free time. So, that's what I'm doing a lot before work, and then I get to the grindstone and uh try and help clients as they as they put together their programs and uh love what I do.

>> Do you want to know a fun fact? >> Yes. >> I was at Sprinklr. >> Were you? When were you here? >> At SE Sprinklr um from 2015 to 2017 before IPO. >> Okay. Yeah, so a while ago. >> Yep. >> I Did you ever work with Kate Stomatukos? >> Yep, she was one of my good friends. Yeah, we still talk to her. >> She is super cool. She was my manager for my first 2 weeks while I was here, and then she pieced out.

>> Yeah. Some great people I'm still like very close. So, where I'm at now at Ontic, a lot of us were at Sprinklr together, and then we all went to Alteryx together. Yeah. >> Okay. >> I know. This pre-sales world >> Sprinklr generations. >> Yeah, this pre-sales world is so small. It really is. Okay, well, let's >> 100%. >> Let's jump in. Okay, today we're going to talk about the neuroscience behind a great demo. So, I want to learn about when you say you study the cognitive science of how people process information, make decisions, and remember what they see.

So, talk to us about this. How did this passion start? Like, do you have like a degree in this? Like, how did What's your path? This is so fascinating. >> Uh no, I don't have a degree in this. Uh it's just an obsession that I have had since the beginning of my sales career, quite frankly. Where I would observe these sellers. And I would see what was resonating and what wasn't resonating. And I would see this these veteran sellers who were so good at their craft. And I'd say, "All right, how can I dissect that? And is there a way that I can dissect and then templatize it so that I can replicate it, right?" Um I I remember a particular example experience that I had. And maybe this this might be an explanation of a demo that you might you once gave early in your pre-sales career. Um but for me, it was when I was a financial advisor at Northwestern Mutual.

And I gave this solution presentation, which is, you know, just presenting the product and stuff like that. And it was super comprehensive, beginning to end. I felt like I just perfectly explained every single nuance of all of the products that we were proposing for them. They gave me a couple of objections. I handled them. I felt like I just owned them, you know? And then at the end, I presented this like bulletproof ROI. And then I sent the email with all my follow-up materials. And then I got the email back from them the next day. And I bet you can guess what they said.

Any guesses? >> Um you said super comprehensive. Maybe they wanted to like okay, here are the top ones that I used to get. Um can we see it again? That's another one like can we have another demo? >> That's a good one. >> Maybe I'm trying to guess what are some other objections. Maybe it was too complicated. Gotten that one before. I don't know. Which one what what what happened? >> Thanks so much for the presentation. It was incredibly informative.

We're going to stick with what we've got. >> Oh, yeah, that's the third one >> [laughter] [gasps] >> where your competitor is no change. >> Yep. Yep. >> Got it. So what happened? >> And yeah, so that that same week I was working another case with a with a senior veteran rep and he presented the exact same products and I compared it compared my presentation to his and his was so blessedly simple. And I was like how does this convert? He's not even getting into like the depth of the the products. No technical details.

How is this how is this working? Um and what I what I realized over time is that there is actual methodology to this and that there is a system that we can learn and that we can templatize so that we can replicate it so that we can progress our deals more reliably with our demos. Um it's not to say that this system is like the silver bullet but it won't be hopefully if we follow it it won't be the demo won't be the reason that the deal doesn't progress, right?

>> Okay, so talk about the templatizing and the learning and the methodology. Did you create your own? Did you go through like a an outside vendor or like how did you get to where okay, I got to get it simple? >> Mhm. Well, where I'd like to take the conversation is about these um pre-sales best practices that we hear all the time, right? We hear hey, show the show the best thing or show the last thing first, right?

>> Mhm. >> Um that we should do like persona-based demoing. We should follow a tell-show-tell, follow the rule of three, use the prospects or like industry-specific data. Nobody ever explains why or how all of these things fit together. >> Mhm. >> Um and so what I'd like to do to do in today's conversation is dig into what's happening in the prospect's brain when we follow those best practices >> Okay. >> and why especially when we sequence them appropriately they accelerate deals so much faster than when we don't. So, early in my career I thought I was guiding a rational evaluation.

We are not. The buyer has already made an emotional decision halfway through, sometimes even like 25% of the way, maybe 30% of the way through the demo, and the rest after that is only justification. Most demos don't fail because the product isn't good, they fail because they're built for how sellers think decisions get made, not how buyers actually make them. So, the real question that we need to be asking ourselves is how do I give a better demo? It's what's happening in the buyer's brain while I'm talking, right?

So, to introduce this I I basically want to talk about two systems that we're going to pin the rest of the conversation on. System one is emotional and automatic. System two is rational. By the way, this comes from Daniel Kahneman's book Thinking Fast and Slow. And I'll quickly define those really quickly. The first system, number one, the emotional system, this fires on pattern recognition. And it's totally subconscious. It's automatic. It makes snap judgments without any conscious effort on our part. And it's emotionally driven. We feel things before we think them, and that's not something that we can control, despite so many solutions engineers, sales engineers saying, "I am a logical, rational person." We are not. We are emotional people.

Um Now, system two is the rational system, right? This system is subservient to system one. System one makes decisions quickly, serves it up to system two, system two then rationalizes the decision that system one made, right? And so, it it it kind of defaults to endorsing whatever system one gave it. It's slow, it's deliberate, it's analytically rational. It engages only when it's forced to think through complexity or override intuition.

It's also very high high effort, which means that it's lazy. Uh and it doesn't want to come online. And so, the moment that it has to do real work or maintain like a coherent train of thought, hold multiple variables in working memory, override an impulse, that kind of thing, it burns through finite pool of cognitive resources. And so, that effort is physiologically expensive. The brain's glucose, which is like the the literal fuel that our bodies run on, spikes during those diffi- difficult cognitive tasks.

Um And so, the brain really treats system two activation as a cost to be minimized. So, I've just explained the two systems. System one is emotional, automatic. System two is logical and rational. Let's now anchor that to our demos. Um, so, I want to, you know, maybe go inside a demo really quickly and inside the brain of a prospect as we're giving our demo.

During the first two or three minutes as we're getting into solution presentation, the the prospect's cognitive state is in its default mode network, DMN. Attention is kind of all over the place, right? They're like, "Hey, I don't know. I'm getting on this demo. I might be checking my Teams. I might be checking my email." They've got mild skepticism, low emotional arousal. Their neurochemistry, dopamine, they're like baseline, right? They're pretty unstressed about the demo itself. Cortisol is pretty low. Decision systems, like what they're using to make decisions, totally offline, right?

And so, in that situation, we are not even yet competing. We're just kind of like background noise to them, right? And so, here's where we're going to get into how we're positioning the demo and how we're positioning the solution. The first thing that we do when we So, first like best practice that we're going to touch on here is a tell, show, tell. I actually prefer to relabel this problem, solution, value because I think it's a little bit more compelling and helps us understand what how we ought to frame this, right? Um, where in that situation, we are intentionally introducing tension and expectation. So, this is where we're like naming the persona of, you know, chapter one or vignette one of our demo.

Then we're going to articulate that current state problem, even quantify why that is like unacceptable for the the prospect, and acknowledge what they've already tried and why it failed, right? So, what this does is it creates like immediate cognitive clarity for the prospect, and they say, "Yeah, that's that's me." Um and it raises emotional tension. Remember how we said before their emotional state pretty low, pretty sub state, right? Here we're actually giving them a micro hit of cortisol, which is the stress chemical in our brain.

We're giving them a tiny bit of adrenaline, heightened stakes, right? And then nor norepinephrine, which is the chemical that kind of uh controls focus and seriousness, brings the prefrontal cortex, which is system one, online for problem-solving. And so, then what we've done here is we've we've we've framed the problem. And now they're kind of saying, "Oh gosh, I'm in a little bit of trouble here. It's a fine needle to thread, right?"

Where we can't just, you know, raise threat levels to 110 billion such that they like shut down, but enough that it brings the prefrontal cortex online. And so, um as we do that, as we're leading with their priorities, not necessarily like product slides, um when we're solving their biggest, most pressing problem first, when we're bringing up the negative consequences of status quo, um then we're intentionally introducing that tension. And um and so that then they they kind of say like, "Okay, how do I solve this, right?" Um Now, real quick, pause here to emphasize what we ought not to do, right? Start with configuration, build, set up, that kind of thing, right?

Um because they're we're staying as background noise. Um okay, that's stage one. Um now you're you're a curious cat, so let me pause there and see what kind of what what kind of questions you have based on on that or if you just want to keep on going. >> Um no, I was I actually wrote down when you said we do tell show tell with my SCs cuz you did it sprinkler, Salesforce, and now Ontic. I like how you said problem, solution, value.

And I was just wondering when you were talking about the different levels of cortisol, the different adrenaline, things that are kind of ratcheting up, which like where you introduce those in your system for your first like

vignette. That's what I was just thinking through. >> Yeah. So I So tell show tell I I um I have problem, which is the problem is the the quantified articulated uh current state that is painful and unacceptable. The solution is the demo workflow that we're showing. And then the value is the rearticulation of that current state and how it's changed since then. So the brain loves contrast. And so that's what that framework does rather than tell show tell like I'm going to tell you what I'm going to show you, then I'm going to show you, then I'm going to tell you what I what I showed you, right? That's a little bit reductive and isn't quite I think representative of what we want to do.

And so what we're doing is let's say that we have have like three vignettes or personas in our demo. We are setting up what we call the dopamine cycle in essence, where we're raising a problem, we're introducing tension, and then we're providing the resolution. And then lastly in the dopamine cycle, we provide reinforcement. And so that loop, like I said before, uh introduces cortisol, norepinephrine, a little bit of adrenaline.

It uh uh peaks anticipation and then the resolution releases the dopamine, which is the pleasure chemical. And it builds, it creates memory anchors that build kind of like narrative coherence so that afterward our demo doesn't just fade into noise. This is especially important when we're up against when we're like in a in an RFP situation or we're up against you five other or something like that. It's really easy for our demo to just become noise and become you know, kind of forgettable. But if we have legitimate storytelling, it gives the buyer's brain something to anchor to.

And they say, "Oh, I remember that uh tension and then the resolution of that." Um Okay, let's get into the demo itself now. We're now showing the workflow. Uh this is you know, the buyer's brain by the way is heightened, triggered state a little bit. And they're asking, "Hey, can this actually solve my problem?" And so the first question is like, "Is this familiar territory? Do I know what's happening here?" What is most important here is the cognitive load of the prospect, what's happening in their brain and how much they have to try uh to understand what's happening. And so when we uh start with something familiar but also their biggest problem, then we immediately get into quick wins.

And then we do that, you know, so we do that, you know, once for the first persona and they say, "Okay, that's that's good. We've started the dopamine cycle." We do that for the second persona, maybe somebody a little bit higher in the organization organization and they say, "Oh, this is great." And then we do it at the executive level. And what we've done is we've done three dopamine cycles. and We're running a mini addiction cycle basically in the form of a demo.

And what it does is it helps them to understand, "Oh, this is not just a product. This is actually a solution to take me out of that current painful, unacceptable state that we're in right now." You look like you have something to say. Go ahead. >> I'm now just thinking how it's almost like the brain is like, "Ooh, I like this much more than just a typical value or like a feature function demo." Cuz you're taking kind of on a ride.

>> Yes. Yes. What you're talking about there is narrative. Uh and so when we talk about storytelling, that is specifically why. It's because stories in our brain uh give us something to attach to. And so we see ourselves in

the demo. We see ourselves as it's happening. One last thing, I know we're like at 1 minute until we need to wrap here, is a um is a really, really important concept that I didn't understand about until about like four or five months ago.

It's a concept that's called what you see is all there is. Have you ever been in a demo, Allison, where um you've shown one thing, but it wasn't quite exactly what they were doing? You're like, "And here's where you would fill in the blank." And like they just couldn't wrap their heads around it. And you're like, "Just apply a little tiny bit of intellectual flexibility, and I'm sure you can get this." >> Yeah. Or imagination. Imagine.

>> Yes. Yes. So this is again a concept from Daniel Kahneman where that that uh your brain's fast thinking system, system one, it builds like coherent stories from whatever information is just immediately available. And it largely ignores the fact that like important information might be missing. And so the mistake or the I would rather like the the risk there is not believing false information, it's treating incomplete information as if it were complete. And that's what happens in the prospect's brain in that situation where they can only see what is in front of them. And so they're limited by that.

This also applies to like show the best thing first, right? Um uh when they first have that like quick win, then they they pretty much assume that kind of everything thereafter, remember what system two does? Uh system one serves up a conclusion automatically, impulsively, and then system two only stays online to justify that. And it's really hard to break out of that. And so if we uh lead with a weaker case or something like that with system one, then system two just goes back to justify and rationalize that.

Um okay, man, I could talk about this for the next hour, obviously. >> I love it. >> But we are we are at time. >> Um okay, so I think you should do some LinkedIn content about this. Like if you haven't already cuz we just connected, but I think this is like I can tell you're passionate and it's very it's almost like complicated, but you're making it very simple. So I think you should like dive deeper and share this with people. This is fascinating.

>> Thank you. I too find it fascinating. I um you brought up it earlier in the in the call. Yeah, I just stumbled upon this or like how did you how did this come to be? And uh last fall we needed to revamp all of our like golden demo templates. Um and so I said, all right, like what's our demo methodology going to be? Um and we done and like there isn't like a lot of demo methodology of like this this this and this of like med pick or command of the message, that kind of thing. We can borrow concepts from that and we have all these like best practices in pre-sales. And so I actually came up with a demo methodology. I call it validate.

Um and the phrase that I use is the demo needs to validate the buyer's decision to move away from status quo. And so, the way that I remember this is V A L, val, stands for value-focused or obsessed, value-obsessed, where we're starting with what is most important to the prospect. I stands for identity-based, so like persona-based demo, right? Um D stands for distilled. This is a concept that we didn't get to, but we should show as little as possible, quite frankly. And we need to minimize and categorize for the prospect. A stands for adapted, where ideally this is adapted to the persona and branded accordingly.

T is tension. We're intentionally introducing tension so that we can get that get into that heightened emotional state and provide the resolution, which is the end state, E. Um and so, that end state, we start with the problem at the very beginning and then we have microcycles of dopamine throughout and then we end with that end state, where the initial like board-level priority or executive-level priority is resolved and we have like three micro-narratives all throughout, including the overarching.

So, that's >> Okay. Logan, I'm going to be on the lookout for your LinkedIn posts on this to keep going. >> [laughter] >> Um thank you so much. We are at time. Thank you, Courtney. Thank you, Logan. I can't wait to learn more. >> Thanks a bunch. Great to meet you. >> Bye. >> See you.