



Anneke Seley Interviews Sharon Little

“The Golden Thread of Sales Enablement”

Anneke Seley, founder and CEO of Phone Works, is the coauthor of the best-selling book, Sales 2.0: Improve Business Results Using Innovative Sales Practices and Technology. Visit www.sales20book.com for more information, including free chapter downloads, or to read and comment on her blog. The following interview will be part of her new book on Sales 2.0 leaders and how they implement Sales 2.0 practices.

Sales 2.0 is about using technology to improve the buying or selling experience by making it more meaningful (effective) and streamlined (efficient.) But given how many sales reps started their careers a decade or two ago, the first thing sales managers have to do to improve selling is to train and prepare the sales force to sell in this “2.0” way.

That’s why “sales enablement” is one of the hottest areas in Sales 2.0. Sales 2.0 companies are recognizing they need to start with an inward focus in order to transform their customer-facing strategies. The aim: to serve up relevant content, knowledge and customer intelligence in real time to improve their reps’ sales productivity and results.

Sharon Little could easily be described as the most prominent thought leader in the emerging field of sales enablement. She joined the billion-dollar software company VMware in 2007, at a time when the company was experiencing explosive growth and was challenged to hire and train new sales reps fast enough to meet customer demand. Her role as director of field marketing communications is to provide the communications, sales tools and training to ensure the company’s sales force of hundreds of thousands makes its numbers.

Sharon’s background in sales management makes her an unusually credible professional in her field: She knows what it’s like to carry a quota, manage a sales team, and feel the pressures of month, quarter and year ends. In fact, Sharon is also a recognized expert in inside sales, which gives her unique credibility with the phone/Web selling groups at VMware, which contribute 50% of the company’s revenue. Her team also supports the field sales, channel partner, emerging products (new products from acquisitions) and technical sales organizations, which she describes as her “customers.”

In her spare time, Sharon runs a networking, education and idea-sharing group for sales enablement professionals called “Salescraft” (www.salescraft.org). The group’s name belies Sharon’s point of view: Sales enablement is art as well as science. She says, “While I track metrics, I know my programs are effective when the sales team gives me feedback that our tools and events are helping them sell.”

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Anneke: You have a mission statement for your sales enablement group. What is it?

Sharon: To deliver high-value consumable information that builds competency, drives culture and enables performance for the field.

Anneke: Isn't that Marketing's job? What's the difference between what your group does and what Marketing does?

Sharon: We do the translation and packaging of information created by Marketing and other sources. Our job is to make that content prettier and more actionable for the sales team. For any content, we can determine what's missing and fill in the pieces to make information worthy of the sales person's time.

Anneke: What's the difference between Sales Enablement and Sales Operations?

Sharon: In my view, Sales Operations sits between Finance and Sales, while Sales Enablement is the liaison between Marketing and Sales. Sales Operations works on behalf of Finance on things such as budgets, compensation plans, metrics and technology to make sales people more productive. I believe that, over time, Sales Enablement will provide the same service for Marketing.

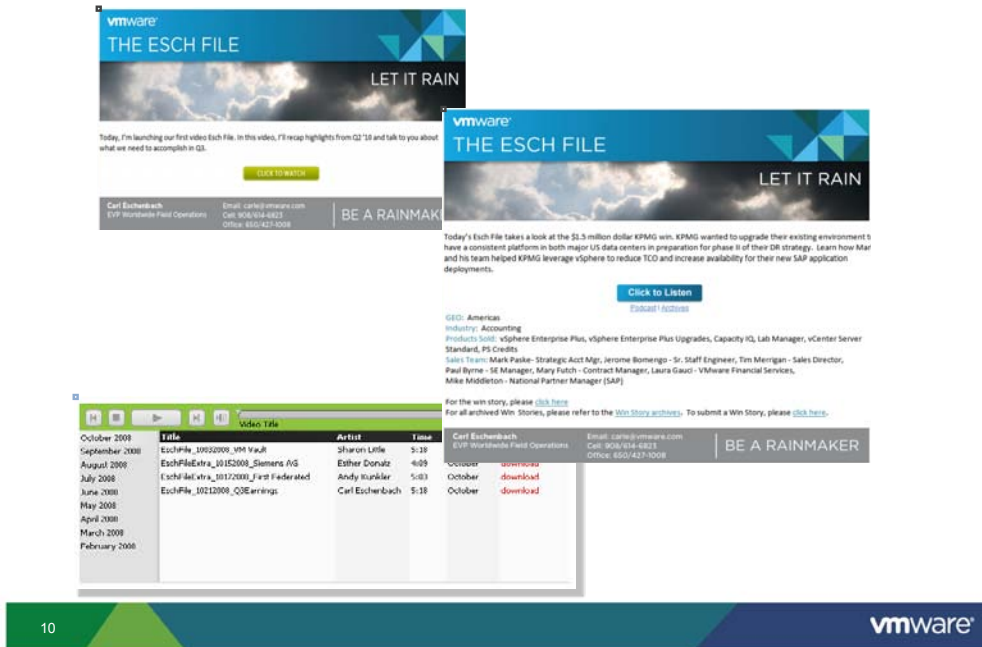
Anneke: What does Sales Enablement include at VMWare? What are your deliverables to the sales organization?

Sharon: Our team delivers communications, tools and training, as well as culture, leadership and motivational programs. This is all under the umbrella of sales enablement. The goal is to continually transform the sales team to stay ahead of the competition and ahead of what's happening in the marketplace. Even more importantly, our sales teams must be prepared to deliver customer value.

Anneke: Tell me more about your communications programs.

Sharon: One great example of both leadership and communications is The Esch File, named for our EVP of worldwide field operations, Carl Eschenbach. Carl used to write an e-mail himself to everyone in his organization every Sunday. Our group has taken that communication to the next level and created an audio podcast. We've branded this for "Esch," so the sales team has a greater sense of their leadership. Branding is a key element in communications and enablement overall. Every year, we have a theme. In 2010, it was: "Let it Rain. Be a Rainmaker." All our field-facing materials reflect the theme and are integrated throughout the year. We also leverage audio and video when appropriate.

The Esch File



Date	Title	Artist	Time
October 2008	EschFile_10022008_VM Vault	Sharon Little	5:38
September 2008	EschFileExtra_01052008_Siemens AVG	Ethier Donatz	4:09
August 2008	EschFileExtra_01172008_First Federated	Andy Iunkler	5:03
July 2008	EschFile_10122008_Q3Earnings	Carl Eschenbach	5:38
June 2008			
May 2008			
April 2008			
March 2008			
February 2008			

VMWare's "The Esch File": Direct communication from the CSO

For internal groups wanting to communicate to the sales organization, we developed VM Express and VM Partner Express. We consolidate information so we don't have hundreds of staff spamming the sales force with individual messages of varying quality. When sales reps receive communications from our enablement group, they recognize it as well-written content, packaged for them, with links to more detailed content, organized by more than 250 authors/subject-matter experts.

Anneke: That sounds like a lot of content. How do you organize it all and make it searchable and usable for Sales?

Sharon: We have a portal called VM Vault 2.0, which is built on a technology platform from SAVO. We've expanded the system every quarter since we launched it about two years ago. We have very well-established governance policies that ensure the right content is "discoverable" by the field. We also remove anything that isn't being used on a regular basis.

Anneke: Sometimes sales forces are reluctant to embrace new systems. What kind of adoption do you have?



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Sharon: We have about a 90% adoption rate, which means 90% of the field uses the system at least once a week. It took us about 90 days to achieve that level. Before launching this portal, we had close to 800 SharePoints, so moving to a centralized system was transformational for the organization. It's integrated with Outlook and mobile applications, and it's customized for different roles within the sales organization. VM Vault is the carrot, not the stick. It helps reps do their job, which goes a long way with adoption.

Anneke: Everyone I talk to is excited about the potential of video content. How are you incorporating video into your portal?

Sharon: We've noticed video has really taken off in the past year. Within VM Vault, we've created VM Video Vault, which is based on technology from Altus. All content is searchable by spoken word and can be downloaded to a phone or other mobile device. This creates a great training tool. It's very beneficial when learning a pitch to see someone else give the presentation. Our non-English-speaking reps appreciate the ability to read the words and view materials at the same time.

One of our sales VPs for a newly acquired technology recently recorded a video that was viewed by 750 people. This was a very effective way to transfer her knowledge to them and build traction with a new technology.

Anneke: Any words of advice for implementing video programs — or challenges you've encountered?

Sharon: Historically, one of the challenges with video is bringing in a \$10,000 video crew every time you want to shoot something. That's not scalable, even for a company with a generous budget. We learned that reps are OK with a lower-quality video for training purposes. We have experimented with low-cost Flip cameras and portable tripods. These videos can be turned around in a couple of days without having to call in the professionals ... and the price is right.

Anneke: Let's talk about something else that has a lot of buzz: plays and playbooks. You recently asked us at Phone Works to create these for your inside sales organization. What are they all about?

Sharon: Playbooks provide content customized to specific buying scenarios or campaigns. They are particularly useful when you want the sales force to customize to the buyer, the product, the stage of the sales cycle. They guide reps step-by-step through their daily workflow: from pre-call research, to call/online strategy and objective, to systems use, to competitive selling (which we call "Fight Plans"). Playbooks provide actionable, consumable information and make the sales process consistent, measurable and scalable. And they are



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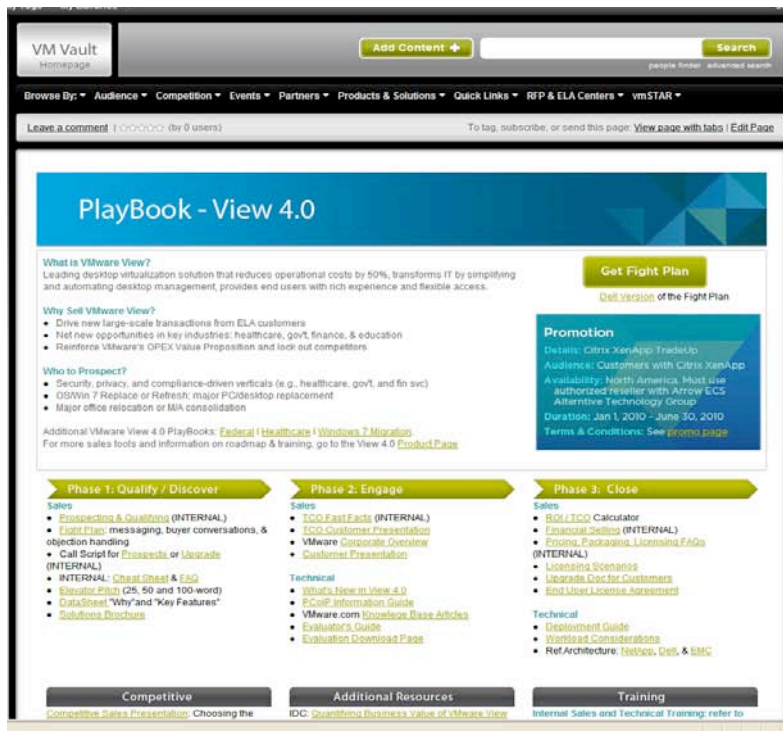
integrated with salesforce.com, our CRM system, so a rep can access them directly from a lead or opportunity.

Anneke: Any adoption issues with playbooks?

Sharon: We validate new playbooks with selected field and inside reps before we roll them out to make sure they include what Sales needs to close a sale for a particular product or solution. Adoption is streamlined because field needs are already incorporated into the deliverable. Plus everyone who provided input also acts as a sponsor when a new playbook is rolled out.

Anneke: Do you have any metrics showing that playbooks — or other enablement-content programs — increase sales?

Sharon: It's very difficult to tie bookings to a single tool or training effort, and it can be a trap to attempt to show ROI on every enablement deliverable. At the same time, success metrics — both objective and subjective — should be created for all enablement efforts, with the understanding that it is not always possible to show a direct cause-and-effect relationship.



A VMWare PlayBook

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Anneke: VMware also revamped new-hire and ongoing training — what you call “event-based enablement” — for your global sales force. What programs have you implemented, and what are the important lessons you’ve learned?

Sharon: Just last year, we rolled out Rainmaker Academy. This program launched in 16 cities during a four-week period. Lesson No. 1 is don’t schedule training in August. Europeans, in particular, don’t like that! I’d also recommend more than six weeks to plan the content. What did work is leveraging a high-engagement/guided-learning approach, which includes grouping participants at small tables and facilitating discussions of case studies, problem-solving and the like. Also critical to our approach was completing a beta of the class with field representatives prior to rollout. We were able to make adjustments and ensure the class was tailored to the field audience.

Anneke: What are your ongoing training programs?

Sharon: Aside from local training, virtual kickoffs and tech summits, we do annual kickoffs, where we build on Rainmaker Academy. Since a live event for 3,000 people is a significant investment, we must ensure we deliver value, so the content is incredibly important. We include intensive product, solution and skills-based sessions. There is never enough time on the schedule to do everything we’d like, so hard decisions have to be made about what is included and what is delivered post-event.

Anneke: What is your onboarding training process?

Sharon: We combine CBT (computer-based training) and classroom experience with an emphasis on experiential learning, culture and new learning techniques. Our philosophy is that any instructor-led training should be highly interactive. We are developing a two-year curriculum that will include certifications and, over time, we hope to integrate our onboarding and overall field curriculum into our enablement platform.

Anneke: How are you measuring the impact of training on sales productivity? Are you reducing ramp-up time?

Sharon: We are working on the metrics and putting the discipline in place to measure this over time. We want to know if we are shortening the time to full quota performance. My objective is to provide a modular, scalable global onboarding framework that reduces the sales reps’ time ramp to productivity. Other key metrics include retention rates and rate of certification among employees during their first two years of employment.

Anneke: You got some great results from an innovative program called Vision Camp. Will you describe it?

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Sharon: This is an event I created based on a hallway conversation between our CEO and EVP of field operations. We took 35 of our top global performers from the field and worked with them for two days to create a consistent sales presentation, or “vision,” for the CIO buyer. This was a high-profile event, with participation by our CEO, CMO, CSO and business-unit leaders — truly the brightest minds in the company. We effectively reverse-engineered and deconstructed the expert content and held a team “pitch” competition, which we videotaped.

We also set specific, measurable goals for attendees: to make 100 CIO/CTO-level presentations that quarter (while making their numbers) and to “pay it forward” by involving colleagues or other members of their sales team. Our aim was to promote early results and package a succinct “vision pitch” for use by the entire sales organization. This program has gone a long way to create excitement in the sales force. The attendees have performed beyond our expectations and have become true evangelists. The re-engineered pitch is getting great response from C-level buyers.

Anneke: What else is in the works?

Sharon: There is agreement that first-line sales managers have an enormous effect on sales results, so we need to develop programs to facilitate their management of the front-line sales teams. This is a hot button for our senior executives, so we’re looking into ways to support our first-line sales managers while still allowing them to set goals for their teams in the way they feel is most appropriate for the business at any given time. This may come in the form of a bimonthly tear sheet that provides managers with content in various forms, including video they can leverage at weekly staff meetings.

Anneke: You’re responsible for a huge number of programs. It may surprise people to know you accomplish all this with a team of four. How do you do it?

Sharon: We work with a virtual team of killer consultants and technology vendors that expand our resources, as well a large number of internal “virtual” team members we call on from time to time. The technology platforms we use are incredibly important. In particular, our sales-enablement platform based on SAVO technology is foundational to all our efforts, and SNP Communications is key to our communications and leadership programs. I will also say I have an exceptionally talented team.

Anneke: What are the most important words of advice you’d give sales executives looking to implement a sales-enablement program?

Sharon: I would start by asking them to open up their perspective on how they view sales enablement. This is about transformation — not just training, communications and kickoff. Every sales leader must be thinking about how to prepare their teams for the next hurdle — a



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well-articulated sales-enablement operation is strategic on many levels. At a minimum, sales leaders must insist that programs and tools be consumable, actionable and easily absorbed by the sales team, and in a format that can be put to use with a customer immediately without hours of modification. Equally important, they should be integrated and aligned with the rest of the tools the sales organization uses on a regular basis. They should tie together, support each other and just make sense. I call this, “The golden thread of sales enablement.”

I truly believe that, five years from now, every sales executive will insist on having an experienced sales-enablement team at his or her disposal. Sales enablement is the key to solving sales and marketing alignment issues, and it is the lever sales leaders need to drive performance. Sales operations measures what you are doing and predicts future performance. Sales enablement makes it actionable.