

Business901 Podcast Transcription

Implementing Lean Marketing Systems



Learning about Lean People
Guest was Adam Zak

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Transcription of Interview

Joe Dager: Welcome everyone! This is Joe Dager the host of the Business901 podcast. With me, today is Adam Zak. He is the founder and CEO of Adam Zak Executive Search. He is an accomplished senior executive with more than 25 years of experience spanning the areas of management, consulting, financial and operations management and talent acquisition. Adam is considered by many to be the most influential leader today in Lean recruiting and Lean executive search. I invited Adam today to discuss a few secrets on learning about people and engaging them in meaningful dialog about themselves. Adam I'd like to welcome you and before we start talking about others update me on your book Simple Excellence.

Adam Zak: Joe, thank you so much. It's a pleasure to be here today. And thanks for asking about the book. It's hard to determine, answer the question has it been all that we expected? The book I think has made an impact, I get emails, I get phone calls and people I interview, I know many of them actually, read the book before the interview, I think, that makes sense as they improve their chances, it doesn't. But I think the book made a couple of points that we are seeing many other people advocating today and really it's not about the job, it not about the candidate as much as this realignment of both the organization, it's leadership team and the leaders, the executives, the ranked file, the people that they

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bring on board. The way to have the most successful organizations is to organize and align both the leadership team and everyone else there with some common goals, objectives, some purposes what are we trying to accomplish here, why we are doing it, where are we going? It's that team effort; it's that collaboration that makes for the successful companies today in more successful companies of the future, so yeah, it's been gratifying. People notice that, they've read it. It's on Amazon; it made its way to Kindle, so we've been very pleased, thank you.

Joe: I'll have to tell you one thing about it, it seems that style of book where you he talked about putting all the silos together and what the silos kind of meant teach others and how to work together with them, it helped move Lean away from all tools; it kind of gave it more that business model type stories.

Adam: I would agree, and I think that it really does boil down to having people, the right people and taking into account, taking into consideration their interests, their motivations, their aspirations and then connecting all those pieces together. Few books have been written about the importance of how we are doing things and the values alignment between the individual and the organization whether that be integrity or transparency or whatever it happens to be, it's just an important part. Business is about people and it's through people you get things accomplished, so I think it makes sense, and I think it has served as a foundation gratifying the others that followed along that track.

Joe: Well, and that's what so impressive by that book is that every organization in it you really identify people in that organization and has that always been a tendency of yours to

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look at organizations that way?

Adam: It is, and it's not that just I look at it that way, it's just that this is what I see when I look at the business climate out there, when I look at what is happening, not just in North America but really in Asia and the Middle East, I Europe. When I attend conferences, when I go to workshops I speak the articles, the books I read. CEOs today I've learned pretty much across the border are thinking about three things: how to innovate and grow; how to build a more profitable, sustainable business and how to attract develop and engage and of course retain the best talent possible, not just in the executive suite but at all level of the organization because you can't get the first two, you can't get that innovation growth and profit without first having an exceptionally strong team, being exceptionally strong at identifying and recruiting talent. So the people side is very important and to look at it in another way which I think helps us move into our topic this afternoon is that I think successful leadership today translates into knowing how to select the right people at the right time for the right jobs, I can't put any more simply.

Joe: One of your strengths is creating meaningful dialog. What do you attribute that to?

Adam: Well, let me answer the question this way, I think, I've just learned how to interview. Again that sounds like a simple answer but I think, unfortunately, too many managers today even if they are executives just have not developed that critical skill. No one ever taught them how to do it, in many companies it wasn't considered to be a critical skill. Many people simply took for granted that it's, you know, just like having a conversation with a colleague over a lunch or even over cocktails occasionally. On the

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surface it may seem a pretty simple thing to do, so people just naturally sort of wing it and they have not developed that competency. Learning and practicing how to conduct an interview is very important. So quite honestly I've really just taken the time to do that.

Joe: It's just not a plan either or a list of questions to go through?

Adam: No, it's not, I think, it's a little bit more than that, so I'll expand a little bit. I think; the best ways to understand the individual and assess their skills, their talents, their interests, motivations are by having a detailed structured focused conversation about those things. We call that interviewing. I believe that it is really fundamental, a foundation of a successful hiring process. In reality, interviewing is pretty complex, it's a process of building relationship, it's an advocacy process, it's assessment and it's judgment, all those things put together. If you do that badly, you are not going to get the information you need to make the correct hiring decision.

More often than not you'll actually make a wrong decision. The impact on your company, your organization, can be very costly, very disruptive and, in fact, occasionally it could turn even into a devastating event in terms of your own career potential. There have been a number of senior executives who've lost their positions after somebody they put into a critical role, simply failed. There have been boards of director members who have resigned after a CEO hire that failed. A number of those that come to mind they were pretty high profile and even at that level people falsify their credentials or their experience of whatever can have terrible consequences.

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Joe: In Lean, we talk about culture. You have to evaluate both sides of the fence. You have to evaluate the company culture that is seeking someone, and then you have to find a fit for that culture. How do you do that?

Adam: There is a way to do that and so let me just take a couple of minutes to explain what I've done. I've been doing executive search for well over 20 years. I've completed just under 600 executive searches, and if those averaged even five or six interviews a piece and I know many of them were, involved more people than that. That's a lot of interviews, so I've developed a strategy and a methodology and actually I've built a fair bit of Lean thinking into that. It just works. There is a lot of structure, but it's also agile or flexible enough, so that I can tailor it to the requirements, the circumstances for every company, every position, and every candidate. The interview approach that I use that I've built, it just helps to understand the candidate's story. It's about the candidate's story: the skills, the experiences, and the accomplishments. I ask questions about what the candidate achieved, why did it matter, questions about the kinds of decisions that he made. How he went about making them, questions about the mistakes that he made, how he recovered, what he learned from them, question about why he was basically even drawn to the company where he worked and the position he held. Then, how he considered changes and went about making those. I really get to understand both for myself as well as on behalf of my client what was going on in the process.

I think it will lead into answering your question more specifically. My process actually consists of three components or phases and interviewing is actually only one of them, the one in the middle. It's about preparation; it's about execution and then it's about

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evaluation and if you'd like to ask questions or if you'd like me to talk about each of those phases, I'm happy to do that.

Joe: I think you led into it perfectly. Talk about the preparation, talk about how you start out.

Adam: Ok. So preparation addresses your question about company culture very, very directly because preparation for me and I've been told by some folks that they've never seen anyone do this the way I do this, but, so what works for me, what works for me is the preparation means having a very deep insight into that client, their company, their culture, their purpose, their business objectives. I also have to have a very clear definition of that position in terms of what they expected that individual will need to accomplish in that role, both short term and long term, and I need to have absolute clarity about what the ideal candidate in their opinion is going to bring to the table for success in that role and I create, I gathered this information because I've created a very detailed, a very intensive information gathering process, and that includes in-depth conversations not just if it's a senior level executive, not just the CEO, but the key people in the organization, the CFO, the top marketing people, the top sales people, the top HR people, the people who will interact with the person in that role who explain to me why they are there, why they want to be there, what they are hoping to accomplish and why this is going to be, this person is going to be a critical addition to that team.

That's how you go about understanding the corporate culture. I have been to the Gemba on every single search. I will not take an assignment unless I've personally met with the

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person to whom the position report recall that the hiring manager and until I've actually been to a site or some part of the company that represents a critical piece of the business that the new executive is going to be managing, so I've been to factories, I've been on sales calls with VPs of sales and marketing to understand who they sell to their customers, how they listen to their customers. I have literally walked through steel mills, through smelters, through Intel's clean rooms where there are people in the bunny suits, really walk around in bunny suits because that gives me a sense of how people interact, how people work with each other about, are they coming to work with a smile on their face, are they doing the kind of things that engage them.

I have spent a lot of time getting an understanding of what that position in that company is all about before I ever talk to the first candidate cause if I don't have those metrics and if I don't know what I'm looking for then I'm not going to find the right person. Again, it's simple but everybody does that, it's like some of the things today in the world today in life. Firstly and professionally, it's about the execution. So what all the things I've been talking about now help me build the metrics against which I'm going to measure and evaluate each perspective candidate - that's the only way to determine the degree to which the person I'm going to be speaking with is going to align with that company and not only the current role, but the anticipated future state of both because nothing is static. That position is going to change the minute that person comes into the job and probably well before he or she is recruited, so those are the kinds of things that you try to build into the process to make an assessment, the evaluation and the final decision a more accurate and hopefully more correct one.

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Joe: So, you know, we talked about this before a little bit, and I talk about personas and different things but you don't really build a persona with an empty hole, kind of a doughnut where this guy is going to fit in, right?

Adam: Oh, absolutely and that's a great analogy because you are not recruiting a person in a vacuum. There is an existing culture even if the candidate and this is quite often because of the work I do in Lean even if the candidate is actually being hired to change the culture; he's still got to fit in to begin with or the organism will reject, right? So first it has to be able initially to fit into what is already there in order to as Napoleon Hill said, 'Win friends and influence people' or whatever that was because if they don't, they will simply not be given, people will just make them fail. The existing infrastructure, the existing politics, the existing rivalries, the existing all of what's there even if it needs to be changed, you still have to come in and do it as an insider as opposed to an outsider because when you do things as an outsider the change is simply not sustainable. The first has got to come in as part of the team that's already there, fit in with them, be accepted and then go do what they need to do.

That's the other part of preparation is having before I actually interview the candidate and by interview I'm talking here about a face-to-face meeting, one-on-one typically in an office or in a hotel somewhere, so it's a face-to-face sit down usually two to three hours, sometimes running a little bit longer, sometimes a couple of meetings depending on the level of the position and the requirements of the job, but preparation also helps, means having a solid preliminary understanding of that candidate, so I build that with, first of all, a detailed advanced reading of that candidate's resume and in most cases I'm gonna do at

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least one or two, maybe a couple more initial phone calls and I build on what I learn in every phone call and then find tune and tailor the nature of the next phone conversation based on my observations and conclusions, so before that actual face-to-face interview I put together some really tailored questions and I will weave those into the interview conversation.

Now this advanced preparation helps me choose the topics I want to dig into a little bit more deeply, maybe I'm going to place a little more emphasis on certain experiences or accomplishments that I know are going to be critical to the candidate's success and in the client organization or maybe I'm going to take a little bit more time to talk about something that's potentially vague or maybe I've noticed an inconsistency with what appears to be motivation to do one thing, but then the motivation to do something else. I want to explore those things. I want to really identify the candidate's sort of trajectory, understanding for who they are, but I want to do that in a holistic fashion, both who they are professionally and who they are personally. People say sometimes the personal stuff doesn't matter, I'll tell you that unequivocally more searches have failed because the candidate ultimately decided not to take a new job because the spouse or the children would be affected in a negative way, maybe the spouse just simply would not want to uproot from the community or the kids were in a school where they are just not going to make that move, so people sometimes don't look at that piece on the personal side, and yet that can derail what would otherwise be a very successful match and I want to take all that into account and I want to explore in detail in that face-to-face interview, perhaps that's a little bit too detailed but you know, I feel very strongly about really, really understanding what's going on inside that person's head and their heart.

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Joe: Have, we moved into the execution phase now?

Adam: We are about to.

Joe: Ok, so we are still preparing.

Adam: So again in my process, and again I'm looking at, I'm talking about this from the standpoint of interviewing people for an executive role, so that's typically a director or a VP or above. Now I believe they say in principles apply anywhere and the degree to which you are interviewing software engineers with the better understanding of who they are and why they are interested and why would somebody want to go work for Google or for Facebook or you know, why would somebody leave Facebook for yet another startup when for all purposes, right, everything they could have imagined and hoped for they got at Facebook. Well, because people do things for different reasons and have to get that understanding, so for me that's the preparation part is, giving myself to platform of information from which to work when I then actually conduct a face to face interview, and we could talk a little bit about that then.

Joe: Yeah, I would like to touch upon that because as you move now, you've made this plan, this structure, you have some candidates available, that's also in the planning phase, in the preparation phase, excuse me, now when do you move in the execution? What's the bridge? What's the step you take? When do you execute?

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Adam: What turns out to be the final phone interview I basically tell the candidate that I'm very interested in pursuing them for this opportunity and in my case it is usually is just that – they are probably not actively looking, so I'm telling them 'Look, I'm really interested in you' and I spend some time talking about why and what I think would be important for them to understand about that role. But by the time we've got to this stage the individual with whom I'm speaking is probably pretty excited, they are probably pretty interested too, so the next step is 'Hey let's get together; it will be a couple hours, maybe three hours whatever, we arrange for that to happen and then finally work together.' So we are sitting in a room and at the end of the day let me hit some highlights of what interviewing the execution part is all about. First of all, it should never feel like an interrogation, I think, that's one of the most important. So many people just don't get that.

I know where that comes from. For a long time now but that's changing dramatically, there was a surplus of individuals, right, and maybe not as many jobs, I mean, we face some pretty tough times with plant closures and restructuring, so there were a lot of people, sometimes very, very good people who... really not their fault that, on the wrong street, they were looking. And you know, not happy to say this, but I think too many companies really took advantage of that situation and began to treat people like commodities and didn't respond to emails or resumes, didn't return phone calls and you know, they were not respecting of people, and they were not treating their fellow human beings the way they would have wanted to be treated. Enough said about that, interviews, the bad ones, the ones that turn into interrogations, they are born of that kind of attitude that, there are 50 people out there for this job, my job is to pick the one or two that are best, so I'm just going to drill these people, anyway, enough about that. I conduct a very highly structured

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discussion about every aspect of that candidate's career. I ask most of the questions, do a series of probing. But the interview is still three basics a conversation, it's an exchange of ideas between two people, it's a process for advancing my relationship with that candidate professionally, to some degree personally, and also in a sense advocating on my client's behalf. I think that it's really, really important that the candidate is comfortable and at ease during this discussion, he or she is going to be more likely to be the person that he really is, more genuine, more authentic, more open, more transparent in his responses, more willing to ask great questions, so anyway, going back to respect for people there is a place in the world of today for what we used to call the stress interview, I think, that idea probably should have died about the same time that the (leisure suit?) did, unfortunately, some people have resurrected. So that's kind of my sort of philosophical overview on how to actually engage in the interview.

Joe: Well, a big part of what you have to find out from someone is their attitude and what makes that person tick? How do you go about doing that?

Adam: There are two components to that. I guess, the very basic it's me asking questions and then me listening very carefully to what the candidates are telling me. I can dig a little more deeply, I can connect things, I can draw analogies, I can... I ask the candidate to tell stories. I ask the candidate to tell me about certain kinds of things that they may have done, may have accomplished which would give me examples, for instance, I've got a client and right from their corporate website they specifically lay out what's important to them as an organization, so they bring up five things: they talk about how innovation is important because it gives them better products, better services and then better customer

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experience; they talk about integrity something and that means they always striving to do the right thing; excellence, because that means, what that means is the pursuing quality, they drive quality and in everything they do; corporate citizenship, they believe in harmony and making a positive difference in the environment and in the communities where they have their factories and then partnerships and I mean, working fairly honestly with relationships, with customers, suppliers, employees, everyone with whom they do business. I have designed questions, again, in my preparation because I know that these are the values that are important and I ask the candidate simply to talk to me about the kinds of things that they've done, that they've been involved in the environment where they have worked, where they had a chance to experience and demonstrate these specific things in the 'what' and the 'how' of what they've been doing. Does that make sense?

Joe: Yes, it does. So you really looking for them to explain in detail and you'd rather go more in depth in a story than look over all the different accomplishments, let's say you are looking to dig deep.

Adam: Yes, and so that's maybe a little bit, maybe sounds a little bit like a paradox or a conflict, so the structure is the question I ask but then the agility or the flexibility comes in play when the candidate now begins to tell the story and I'm writing, I'm taking notes furiously when they are doing that because I'm listening for those things, for those clues, for those identifiers that are helping me zeroing 'aha, yes', this person when they were engaged in that role in this company, they were aligned and here's how they aligned with that company's purpose and values and that is exactly the purpose and the value that my company believes in and wants to hire for, so that's how the process works out, that's why

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these interviews take two to three hours and sometimes even longer because on occasion I will actually schedule another meeting if it's a local candidate or I'll do a follow-up using technology: Skype or a phone call, to ask additional questions, to follow that same vein of question, the same line of thought just to be more complete, be more comprehensive and have a more detailed picture, so yes, this takes a lot of time, it is very time intensive, absolutely.

Joe: And you brought technology into... Does technology make you job easier?

Adam: It has, and it hasn't. The technology of applying for a position, I typically don't post our positions, most of them are at a level where any responses is not really going to be meaningful but we do occasionally, but even from my extensive referral network or in terms of reaching out to people who may not be the right person for this role, but let's say they work in that industry, they may be a venture capitalists or private acuity, executive who would know people like that or there may be someone who writes articles for the Wall Street Journal or Harvard Business Review and would have interviewed that kind of person, so I'm reaching out to people constantly and what's interesting is that they pass that information along to people they think may be potentially qualified.

Today's technology allows pretty much anyone with the click of a button to send me a resume. Unfortunately, you know that means there could be a tremendous volume of really nice people and probably very well qualified but not actually a fit, not actually the right person for the role I'm trying to fill. So the downside of technology is there is this huge volume of data that's actually not meaningful to me that comes across my threshold, but

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yes, on the positive side, on the positive side, what I've been able to do is reduce the cycle time of my process of the search project if you will, so I'm improving the speed with which we get things done, with which information flows that means I can talk to more people, more quickly, interviewing in one way is like doing a lot of different experiments until you finally find one that holds some promise then you dig deeper.

I can do those experiments more quickly, I can be thorough when I need to be thorough, I can build in some process checks that will allow me to very quickly tell people who aren't gonna be qualified, I could tell them no very quickly, very easily, so there are things that allow me to work more effectively, more efficiently and with less costs to myself and to my clients. So yes, technology can be very helpful but it has to be done in the right way. At the end of the day if you let technology take over the actual decision-making process, you will just simply fail at hiring people, you will just not succeed whatsoever. I don't ever want it to become impersonal, I don't ever want to become about just the metrics, again, I spoke earlier about the process of recruiting, of hiring and therefore of interviewing as being a holistic one where we do take into account, take into consideration more than just, you know, can this person use the calculator, you know, did this person graduate with the PhD in microphysics, right? That's one thing, but that doesn't tell us enough of the story, surely not the whole story and you can't base hiring decisions on that, so I got to always work to keep that personal connectedness, that personal element in the process.

Joe: Why that was interesting that you talked about as you write notes furiously down and stuff, so that means during the interview you are capturing the information with your note taking.

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Adam: Yes.

Joe: So you very seldom record the interviews or...

Adam: There have been studies done on recording whether it'll be an interview, whether it be even, you know, if you think of people been asked opinion on television in front of a camera or people tend to become a little bit more careful, a little bit more guarded, a little bit more closed rather than open when that's happening. Now, there are some people who are so much of an outgoing personality and almost in a sense, you know, I call it the Facebook mentality where they are willing to share everything and anything with anyone anytime and via any medium, those people tend not to care about being interviewed with a recorder going, but most people I think tend to be just a little bit more cautious when that's happening and so it just doesn't work as well.

Joe: You've gathered the notes, you have resumes or CVs in front of you, you've kind of put a couple of people into that hole in a doughnut there and how do you find the right fit now?

Adam: Ok, well that really brings us to the third stage of the process, right? Preparation, execution and now evaluation. I will tell you that evaluation actually begins a little bit even during, well, a little bit of it takes place at every stage of the process and the reading of the resume initially and the initial phone call or two or three and obviously during the face-to-face interview and it's almost something that has to be built into every step of that

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process, so that I can very quickly at some point when I see a signal, the figures rise 'aha, this isn't going to be a fit.' I need to basically tell that person kindly and gently that it's not going to move forward, but move on, all right, interviewing six hundred people for every position and take it to the final process and of course, that doesn't do anyone any good, so a little bit of evaluation takes place really throughout the process, but the evaluation that I then do, the thinking about the person and the company and the job really goes very, very intensive and very deep once that face-to-face interview has been completed.

Now remember, my client hasn't seen these people yet, my job at this point is to make the decision 'yes' or 'no' to present them as a potential candidate, so they haven't seen him yet, they may have been informed and in fact, we haven't talked about that but part of my overall search process follows some of the plan 'do, check, act' or plan 'do, see, act', model which means that I'm constantly communicating with the company with the hiring executive so I can correct if I'm off the track in terms of finding the right people, pursuing the right target companies and everything. So that's going on, but that's outside of the preview of our discussion today the actual interview process, so there is some assessment going on throughout, but now I need to make the decision go or not go to present as a candidate or not, so the purpose of that now is determine how well this person is going to align with the organization and the position.

During that discussion I've had with the candidate, I'm paying very close attention listening, questioning, understanding, I need to make very specific judgments now – how the individual is going to be potentially a fit, so here's some critical things that I look at, the judgment piece and this comes back to the questions you asked earlier as well about

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culture, so I'm looking at alignment and I have four or five, maybe six key areas of alignment that I'm looking for and by the way, alignment is a fluid thing, so I refer to it as alignment as opposed to fit because fit is at a state in time but alignment is more of a flowing and developing. Both, the organization and the position and the person change over time, so alignment means the ability to flow with that.

If a company is focused and perhaps it is a private equity firm that wants to fix someone quickly and sell them and make a profit, so that's a very short-term thing, it's not good or bad, but their purpose is to buy, fix and sell companies and make money quickly. If a candidate is more focused on joining a company where she can help build long-term sustainable value and grow the business over a five, ten, fifteen year period of time that person won't be motivated, won't be inspired by working for that private equity firm, the same will hold true, for instance, for a company maybe that is really, really focused on sustainability and environmental issues and those kinds of things. TESLA, for instance, is a company that makes cars. People who are more aligned than motivated to join TESLA probably have, you know, some environmental feel good, do good kind of interests in their personal lives and, of course, who they are and so it's a part of their profession. So motivation is going to be very important. Second point, I'm going to call it a compatible work ethic. We all know people on Wall Street who thrive on 80-120 hour work weeks and they are there to make deals and the reason they work 80-10 hours a week is cause, you know, that's what they want, that's just how that drives them, that empowers them, charges them up. There are some people who maybe would like, some people call it balance in their lives, they want to devote more time to leisure pursuits, to their families and other things and again neither person is good or bad but we have to understand that

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there are different organizations built around different work ethics and a person who wants to put in 40-45 hour work week is not going to fit into the high charging environment of an 80 hour Wall Street week. Does that make sense as well?

Joe: Oh, definitely.

Adam: Shared or, I'm going to call it a communality of value, so aligning along values and that's a little bit different than the motivation I spoke about previously, so I'll give you an example that, I mean this goes back in history, but there was an executive by the name of Welch, his reputation was as a ruthless job cutter in retrospect he destroyed a number of organizations that at one point had been pretty successful. He was very hardnosed and, some people even questioned whether what he did and how went about doing this cost cutting and this business improvement certainly it wasn't any definition of Lean that I ever heard of and some people would even say possibly bordering on the unethical. People who value integrity, people who have a strong sense of self-worth and people who basically always want to do the right thing, they are not going to fit in that kind of organization and again, I'm not talking about companies that do things illegal, but there are ways in which we act and how we do things that impact the business differently, so what I'm looking for is plain and simple – based on what I know through all that preparation that I did is the candidate compatible in the sense of value with the organization, maybe not the major but certainly very important one and I'll stop with this fourth one is... There are personalities and styles, and I guess almost talking about trades, in some people you really almost have to be a rocket scientist, a Ph.D. to succeed.

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Somebody can be very, very smart, somebody can be very aggressive and someone can in a sense have the ability to do that job, but if they haven't earned that credential, they are not ever going to be a fit with that organization. And that's just how it's going to be. If you think about some of the top-notch consulting firms, they want to hire people with pedigrees, you could be a terrific person with a great track record but if you went to what is it, Indiana university, a great school, they would look at that as differently as at a person who went to Harvard or Stanford or Columbia, again, probably able to do the job very well – if he's surrounded by people who graduated from elite schools and with colleagues who had done the same. So again just another one of those things that you look at in the assessment process, the judgment process and if (you do gather?) a lot of information and been able to connect who the candidate is and how they do things with what the company needs and its expectations. Again, hopefully, that makes sense.

Joe: It does. It's all about alignment, right?

Adam: Well, you know, I make that distinction only because I've seen so many times and even at the time we began a search by the time we wind up hiring the successful candidate a couple things have happened. The job may have actually change a little bit and it's because the person that we wind up recruiting may have had all the strength and all the skill sets and had done things in exactly the way that they would want them done in a new role with a new company, but they brought something else, something that was surprising, something that we have not anticipated or even been recruiting for, but in this unique individual we found somebody who was just absolutely great at something that we have never even thought about. Because he could do the job as it was today what they wind up

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doing is basically redefining the role to take advantage of that person's unique strength and skills and so they actually created better alignment by allowing the person to excel at something that he's going to be really, really great at and at the end of the day everyone benefited and the company was stronger, more successful and more innovative as a result, so again, that's why alignment, I think, it's not so much about the actual qualifications, it's about something you said earlier, to a large degree it's about the attitude and then how the ability is channeled because the attitude is the right one.

Joe: And after 30,000 interviews, ok, roughly multiplying the numbers you put out there, what should I have asked that I didn't ask. You've got to have something you can leave us behind with.

Adam: I do. The things I believe that in so many instances today were missing from this process is, it's in line with the idea of respect for people that we believe so much in when we talk about Lean and so the respect for people in some ways translates into, 'you know what, you need to treat anyone who's coming in to interview, someone who may be interested in your company, you need to treat them like your best customer or even better and you need to put on your best face and go absolutely all out to engage that person, to interest that person, to create a relationship with that person"... and you do that because, again, this is about people, it's about relationships, it's about the long term, the person that you threw out today and treat them poorly in a sense that you've not given them the opportunity to really showcase what they can do, you can make the decision and tell them but if you mistreat that individual, just like customers, the dissatisfied customers will tell a hundred people but more importantly, I think, it's the right thing to do and it

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does pay dividends, it does pay benefits because people remember and people have friends and they grow in their careers and they become suppliers or they become competitors or at some point they may come back and become an executive in your organization.

Why would you treat that any differently than you would treat your best customer? If you think like that, I believe you'll design the processes and the methodologies by which to attract and retain the best possible people and their friends and, I think, that just makes an awful lot of sense in today's definitely connected, definitely transparent world where you can at the flick of a mouse button research anything and everything you've ever wanted about an individual or a company, so just do the right thing.

Joe: You remind me of an older book, I think, it was written, and the title was something like *The Customer Comes Second*.

Adam: Interesting. Well, in a lot of companies, by the way, look at that that way. It isn't just the executive level. think a lot of it does apply to frontline if you're call center people, if you're rank and file customer service folks, if the people on the sales floor become a target or... Apple is a terrific example, those people are treated well if they are happy, you know what, they are projecting a positive image about your company, your business, your product and they make their customers happy and making customers happy is what everyone should be in business to do, right? To delight your customer and your success is assured.

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Joe: What is upcoming for you and what new projects do you have?

Adam: Oh, a whole bunch of things. First of all, my work is always about building continuous improvement into the things that I do. Exploring that on two fronts, getting better at the processes that I use to recruit. I need to get better understanding of my clients and their needs, their requirements anticipating, not just taking a list of requirements and getting out there and you know, trying to fill that list with what they are looking for but rather helping them understand and assess and evaluate how the right individual's going to affect their business, impact their company and help them design and create a better job profile in a sense, so that person has an opportunity to truly excel and get value in a maximum way by constantly doing that. On the other side I'm looking at better tools, technologies and also ideas for interviewing, for meeting. I want to travel less, I want to talk to more people, I want to have better and more effective conversations, so it's a constant process of evaluating every step of the recruitment process and how I do what I do, so again it's about continuous improvement, other things... doing a little bit of redesign, for instance, this year on my website so we're going to come up with the one that's more effective in terms of showcasing, the kind of work that I've done and how it's helped client companies also for the first time I'm actually incorporating some comments from people who've been my candidates, so people will have a better sense from a candidate perspective what's it like to work with Adam Zak, a lot of people say they care... does he really care? Well, you know, I want to build that in, so people will be able to read about specific examples where candidates I've worked with have felt like they were respected and things at the end of the day, they had a more positive experience with me that they've had with someone else. So doing those things, speaking at some conferences,

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working on a couple of white papers... too much to talk about but I love this work and it keeps me energized and you can probably tell I love to talk about it. You are right we could go on for hours but I know we don't have that kind of time and I appreciate the time you have given me.

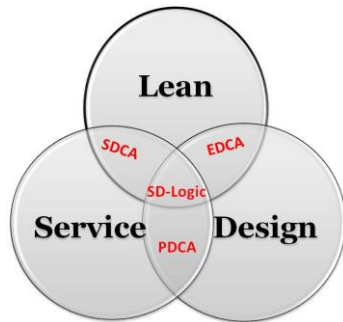
Joe: What's the best way for someone to contact you?

Adam: They can send me an email at az@Leanrecruiter.com and my website is Leanrecruiter.com

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Joe Dager is president of Business901, a firm specializing in bringing the continuous improvement process to the sales and marketing arena. He takes his process thinking of over thirty years in marketing within a wide variety of industries and applies it through Lean Marketing and Lean Service Design.

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