



Customer Journey

Susan

Susan's journey explores confidence, resilience, navigating organizational change, managing pressure, and leading through uncertainty.

CUSTOMER JOURNEY: SUSAN

Meet “Susan,” a biotech sales executive navigating rapid organizational growth, leadership pressure, acquisitions, and team scaling.

Her journey explores confidence, resilience, navigating organizational change, managing pressure, and leading through uncertainty.

Each post explores a real coaching conversation or leadership challenge from that journey.



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From High Performer to Organizational Leader

Just got promoted into a bigger role — more team, more travel, more politics — and wondering if you're actually ready for it?

Susan came to me at an inflection point. She was a high-performing sales leader for a biotech medical device company and was being promoted to oversee sales across EMEA. It would require handling a much bigger team, more travel, and more corporate politics than before. She felt she needed someone she could trust to support her transition.

The challenges evolved quickly over the months that followed. Sales targets everywhere were increased as she stepped into the role. That meant her role expanded and at the same time, the demands increased for everyone on her team.

In her newly expanded areas, she inherited a few low performers that she had to deal with right away to reach the targets.

At the same time, pressure from above intensified. Her boss was erratic and not always supportive of her, but she learned to stay steady regardless of his behavior, focus on her team, and give them what they needed to be successful.

There were also some surprises along the way, requiring adapting to a whole new set of circumstances, another new team, yet more new expectations.

I worked with her for six months, over which time she transformed from a high performer to an organizational leader.

Several lessons emerged over the months that followed, which serve as the themes of this series.

- **Leadership is not about heroics. It's about listening to your team and giving them what they need to be successful.**
- Develop your high performers so they can become leaders and help you grow.
- Your boss's stress is not your stress.
- Prioritize self-care. Take needed breaks to avoid burnout and be fully present when you are at work.

- Take time to self-reflect on what's happening, ideally with a coach, so you can be more strategic and less reactive.

Over the time we worked together, Susan stopped thinking of leadership as pushing harder or carrying more herself. She built a habit of self-reflection which helped her project steady leadership presence and be more strategic. That shift changed not only how she led, but what her team became capable of accomplishing together. She developed other leaders and created alignment across teams under pressure.

Susan's Leadership Values

One of the things I ask coaching clients to do is define their leadership values. Leadership values become a compass during difficult decisions and help leaders consistently show up the way they want to be remembered.

Susan's values evolved as her role evolved. She did a lot right and her values centered around the practices that made her successful throughout her evolution.

- Listen a lot to figure out what others need to be successful.
- When others are stressed, remain calm and give them space to talk it out.
- Alignment is key. Make sure your plan is aligned with company goals.
- Develop your high performers into leaders
- No matter how busy things get, prioritize your mental and physical health and encourage your team to do the same.

What Low Performers Actually Need From Leaders

Inherited a low performer you can't just let go? Here's the question that actually turns them around.

In one of our earliest conversations, we tackled the common challenge of low performers. The conversation below is a version of the conversation, nearly as I remember it. It's a good model of how a coaching conversation turns into insight and direction for action.

Susan inherited a team with two low performers. Both were formerly good performers who were lagging recently due to changes.

Over the course of this conversation, Susan learned what they needed to turn around: a lot of attention and listening, good questions to surface the problems and solve for them, coaching and support for improving outcomes.

Susan herself started as a sales rep and moved quickly into leadership. She was very driven, and even as she rose into the VP level, she crushed sales targets even when she was not fully staffed.

Her team members generally returned ten times their salary in sales.

When I met her, she was just being promoted from N. America to also head up EMEA. It was a daunting challenge, especially because at the same time, headquarters increased sales goals for all regions. She requested coaching to help support her through the transition.

The first question I asked her was: **What's your biggest problem right now?**

She said, "low performers. When things are tight, everyone counts."

We broke them down:

Fredrick was based in Germany. Susan inherited him when she took over the Europe team. He was formerly a high performing sales leader but had recently been lagging. He had been demoted to sales rep, but the boss believed he

was valuable, so she had to keep him.

Mark worked under Fredrick, now they are peers. He was way behind. He spent two quarters selling one unit. She needed him to sell four units per quarter to be successful.

Mark got in his own way. He was insulted if Susan made good suggestions. Recently, he made an offer to someone and forgot to follow up. The customer bought a competitor's device. He had been successful before because Fredrick had been handing him very good warm sales leads. Now they have a product launch, and Susan needed him to get up to speed and even upsell.

I asked: **What do they need to be successful?**

Susan reflected for a moment then answered: Training didn't work. They don't apply it and think they are above it. They need strong marketing support, so they get the leads they need. Once they have the leads, I can be on top of them to close.

Once Susan was clear about what they needed, she was ready with an action plan: "I can talk them through generating leads and doing proper follow-ups. I'll set up weekly 1:1s with them and we'll work through it together."

That was the turning point for her.

She stopped focusing on what she needed from them and started focusing on what they needed from her.

She gave them what they needed and started consistent 1:1s to manage small issues early and work through them. Their performance turned around and they started hitting targets again.

Your Boss's Stress Is Not Your Stress

Your boss says things under pressure that don't add up — and you're left wondering if it's you. It's not.

"I don't know how to handle my boss," Susan said.

"He's putting a lot of pressure on me, and it's distracting me."

This is a classic sign of a senior level executive under pressure. It's not that he doesn't trust that the team is going to handle the work, but he's absorbing the pressure.

But for some people, it can be difficult to see who normally handles executive level pressure.

At that level, each other is the stakes, and steadiness. When stress, it's a sign well in you, too, pa

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HOW DOES SUSAN HANDLE THE PRESSURE?

Continue Reading

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