Redesign Your Sales Strategy To Future Proof Your Sales Organization With Aaron Reinitz

Introduction

[0:17] Joy Dumandan: Hello, and welcome to the CXO Masterclass: Future-Proofing Your Sales Organization During Times of Change and Uncertainty.

In today's episode, we're going to focus on redesigning your sales strategy in the face of uncertainty and future-proofing your sales organization.

Our special guest today is Aaron Reinitz, Head of Sales, New York Enterprise Digital Natives at Google Cloud.

Welcome, Aaron.

[0:39] Aaron Reinitz: It's a pleasure to be here. Thank you for having me.

Section 1: The Evolution of Sales Leadership in a Changing Market

[0:47] Joy: Aaron, we're certainly in a different phase of uncertainty when it comes to sales. Tell us a little about what you've seen over the past year and what you expect in the year ahead.

[1:02] Aaron: I don't think anyone can ignore the changes happening in the macroeconomic environment. Those changes are influencing our customers, how we organize ourselves, and where we focus our energy.

What has remained consistent is that becoming comfortable with change is essential. It may sound simple, but adapting to change is critical if you want to consistently deliver value over time.

The second principle is leading with empathy. During times of pressure and uncertainty, it's easy to focus on yourself. It takes more effort to think about your customer, your partner, or your teammate and let their perspective shape your actions.

If you can consistently embrace change, lead with empathy, and seek to understand others, you'll be well equipped to handle whatever comes your way. At the end of the day, we can't control external circumstances. What we can control is how resilient we become and how consistently we deliver value—for ourselves, our customers, and our organizations.

[2:12] Joy: When it comes to your internal team, how has that influenced the way you invest in them while still working toward your organization's goals?

[2:24] Aaron: We believe our success is directly tied to our customers' success. It really is that simple.

My team works with software-as-a-service companies and digital-native businesses that were born on the internet. As an infrastructure provider, we're in a unique position because our customers are trusting us with the technology that powers their businesses.

When they grow, we grow. If they face challenges growing, we face challenges as well.

Because of that, we approach every customer interaction by asking, "How can we help them succeed?" Rather than focusing solely on the value of our products or services, we look for ways to bring new ideas, solve challenges creatively, and help them achieve their business objectives.

When we do that consistently, the business results follow. Revenue targets, quotas, and growth become a natural outcome because we're helping our customers grow.

[3:56] Joy: You're talking about leading through uncertainty. How do you help your sales team stay focused on achieving their goals during periods of economic uncertainty?

[4:06] Aaron: It starts with focusing on what you can control.

If you're performing well in the areas you directly own or influence, then you're doing your job well. It's important to understand what's within your responsibility, stay informed, and contribute thoughtfully in the areas where you can make an impact without overextending yourself.

There will always be factors outside your control, and that's where energy management becomes critical. You don't want to spend your time worrying about issues you can't influence or decisions where your input isn't required. That only drains your energy and takes your focus away from the work that truly matters.

Section 2: Why Adaptability Is the New Sales Superpower

[5:08] Aaron: If you spend all your energy worrying about things outside your control, you won't have the right mindset when opportunities arise where your input, effort, and focus truly matter.

When I coach my team, I encourage them to separate what's within their control from what isn't. Ask yourself, "Am I doing a good job with the things I can influence?" If the answer is yes, keep building on that. For everything else, stay informed without letting it consume your energy.

The other important piece is community. There's something incredibly powerful about surrounding yourself with people who are going through the same experiences. Uncertainty and change feel much harder when you believe you're facing them alone.

That's been one of the unfortunate side effects of remote work—people can become isolated. Fortunately, we have a strong office culture at Google and a real commitment to building community. It's not just about your identity as a seller, but your identity as a Googler and, more importantly, as a person.

The more you invest in those communities, the more support you'll receive in return. These challenges are moments in time, but your career is a much longer journey.

[6:27] Joy: We've been through the pandemic, lockdowns, and now economic uncertainty. It can feel like we're constantly being hit with one challenge after another.

How do you continue motivating your team, helping them realize they're not alone, reassuring them that things will improve, and keeping their ideas fresh?

[6:49] Aaron: It starts with motivating yourself.

If you can't bring that energy yourself, it's difficult to authentically encourage others. Leaders are experiencing these challenges just as much as their teams, so it's important to develop self-awareness and understand how you're personally responding to everything that's happening.

Another piece of advice I often receive—and try to pass on—is to be gentle with yourself. High performers who closely tie their identity to their careers tend to be their own toughest critics.

It's about managing that mental game. Focus on what you can control, observe what you can't, manage your energy wisely, and show up authentically in every opportunity you have. If you do those things consistently, the results will come. It may take longer than you'd like, but they will come.

[7:52] Joy: You've been with Google for more than five years and have experienced significant growth with the company. What was business as usual like during the pandemic?

[8:01] Aaron: The pace of work was definitely faster. At the same time, people had greater focus and were able to produce higher-quality work because there were fewer distractions.

The personal cost, however, was something we had to pay close attention to. Many people were spending nearly all of their time at home with their families or partners, and that was challenging.

At the same time, it was an exciting period because the world was rapidly embracing digital technologies. Video conferencing became the norm almost overnight, and more immersive digital experiences quickly gained traction.

For example, we conducted a diversity, equity, and inclusion training initiative using virtual reality. It allowed participants to experience workplace situations through someone else's perspective in a way that wouldn't have been possible otherwise.

I'm not sure we would have pursued something like that had we not been working remotely and been willing to invest in new ways of learning.

Companies like Google are well positioned to adapt during periods of rapid change. That gives me a lot of confidence as we look ahead and prepare for the economic and business challenges of the coming years.

[9:46] Joy: Aaron, what are your key priorities as a sales leader?

[9:50] Aaron: First and foremost, it's about meeting—and exceeding—the expectations set by the organization, my team, and the people who support us.

Second is consistency. I want everyone contributing to the organization to consistently meet or exceed their goals. That's what keeps people engaged, helps them succeed personally, and ensures they're rewarded for their performance. It's also how we retain great talent—by making sure everyone shares in the organization's success.

Finally, it's about investing in training, coaching, and ongoing support. Whether I can provide that guidance directly or connect people with the right resources, helping individuals develop and succeed is one of my most important responsibilities.

Section 3: Leading Teams Through Uncertainty and Change

[10:52] Aaron: Another priority is energy management, something we touched on earlier. It's about making sure people have the right tools to navigate uncertainty.

There will always be moments in your career when you feel like you're hitting a wall. The question is whether we've equipped people with the mindset and support they need to work through those moments and use them as opportunities to grow.

That's why the culture we build is just as important—if not more important—than ever.

[11:40] Joy: What changes are you seeing in your customers' approach to business?

[11:49] Aaron: For a long time, growth was the primary objective for most businesses. Today, the expectation has shifted. Growth is still important, but companies are also being much more deliberate about where they invest their resources.

That changes the conversations we have with customers. Instead of focusing solely on customer acquisition, we're asking how we can help them optimize what they already have, improve efficiency, and maximize the value of their existing investments.

We're trying to do that proactively because those pressures are being felt across nearly every industry.

Technology companies, especially software businesses, are developing new capabilities around efficiency. They're looking for ways to get the greatest return from the capital they have today so they can continue funding growth over the next several years.

[12:52] Joy: Are you finding that customers are asking for more while expecting to spend less?

[13:00] Aaron: As long as those conversations are built on transparency, self-awareness, and a constructive approach, I think that's completely reasonable.

At the end of the day, businesses have responsibilities to their investors, customers, shareholders, and employees. I would never fault a customer for trying to maximize value or negotiate the best possible outcome.

That's why I like to lead with transparency. I'll often begin by explaining what success looks like for my team, and then I'll ask what success looks like for theirs.

What's interesting is that those goals aren't always zero-sum. There are often ways for both organizations to succeed.

Leading with transparency and a genuine willingness to collaborate also creates an opportunity to differentiate yourself. Many customers have had experiences with salespeople who weren't collaborative or open. When you approach the conversation differently, you stand out, and while the benefits may not be immediate, they create stronger long-term relationships.

I encourage my team to see those moments as opportunities to demonstrate how thoughtful and customer-focused they are.

[14:55] Joy: Do you think your customers are still willing to invest when it comes to improving their brands and products?

[15:07] Aaron: Absolutely, but the bar is much higher than it used to be.

The responsibility is on us to clearly demonstrate the value. If we're asking customers to invest more, the return on investment has to be measurable, supported by data, and grounded in sound business logic.

We frequently work with CFOs, and they're among the strongest financial stewards within an organization. Naturally, they have a very high standard for evaluating whether an investment will truly improve the business.

So yes, customers are still willing to invest. The difference is that we have to show—not just tell—them that the return on investment is real.

[16:04] Joy: Beyond empathy and transparency, what advice do you give your sales teams to help keep customers engaged during times like these?

[16:17] Aaron: I'm a big believer in becoming a student of your customer's business.

When you're working with a publicly traded company, there's an incredible amount of information available—from earnings calls and investor days to regulatory filings. Those resources tell the story of what the business is trying to achieve.

Our responsibility is to come into every customer conversation with a point of view. Instead of talking only about our products, we should be saying, "We understand your business goals. We've been thinking about the challenges you're trying to solve, and here's how we believe we can contribute."

That's a much more valuable conversation than simply saying, "Our product is 10% cheaper." Cost savings may matter, but by themselves they rarely inspire strategic change.

The real opportunity is to connect what you offer to the customer's broader business objectives.

Section 4: Building Resilient Sales Organizations

[17:21] Aaron: It's usually a combination of factors. Can we help customers reduce costs? Can we improve operational efficiency? Can our technology help them innovate or compete more effectively?

Just as importantly, we need to connect those outcomes to the priorities their CEO or CFO has already shared with their board and shareholders. If they've identified three key objectives for the year, our role is to show how we can help them achieve those goals.

That's how we stay relevant.

When I coach my team, I encourage them to invest in understanding their customers' businesses. Be curious about their successes, their challenges, what they're proud of, and what's causing them pain. Those insights allow you to have authentic conversations, especially during periods of uncertainty.

That's when real relationships are built—not when everything is going smoothly.

[18:31] Joy: Can you talk about the role of design thinking in post-recession selling, particularly as customer behavior continues to evolve?

[18:40] Aaron: I think it's widely understood that the era of easy access to capital is behind us, at least for now. Low interest rates and abundant funding shaped business strategy for many years, but today's environment is different.

That means we need to stay closely aligned with the core priorities of the organizations we serve. It's not just about sales. It influences how we market, package our products, position our messaging, and even how finance supports the business. Every part of the go-to-market organization needs to work together to deliver value to customers.

We're operating in a highly competitive market, and we have strong competitors doing excellent work. To stand out, we need to differentiate through our people, our brand, and our message.

While we can't control economic conditions, we can control how we respond to them.

That means holding ourselves to a higher standard when it comes to the value we create. It's no longer enough to say, "We'll save you money," or "We'll help you grow your market share." We have to clearly demonstrate how we arrived at those conclusions, the data behind them, and why we're confident they'll deliver results.

[20:55] Joy: When you're looking for new sales opportunities or new customers, what are you looking for? How do you approach those conversations?

[21:20] Aaron: It starts with understanding the story we have to tell and why that story matters to the customer.

If they're looking to grow, improve their business, or capture more market share, we have to ask whether Google has capabilities that can genuinely help them achieve those objectives in ways our competitors can't.

If the answer is yes, it's much easier to capture their attention, especially if they haven't worked with us before.

It also comes back to being a student of the customer's business. We need to demonstrate that we've done our homework and developed a point of view. Rather than leading with a presentation about ourselves, we should be having a conversation about their business and where we can genuinely contribute.

[22:36] Joy: Have you noticed any shifts in what your customers need today?

[22:42] Aaron: Customers are definitely more conscious about how they invest their capital.

That's why I encourage our teams to be proactive. Rather than waiting for customers to ask how they can reduce costs or become more efficient, we should be bringing those ideas to them first.

Those conversations build credibility and often create opportunities for growth for both organizations.

We owe it to our customers to bring thoughtful ideas to the table, especially during periods of economic uncertainty.

[23:28] Joy: Given today's economic environment, what does the future look like for organizations that rely on direct sales to drive revenue?

[23:39] Aaron: I think there will be an even greater emphasis on coaching and professional development.

There's a Warren Buffett quote about how, when the tide goes out, you discover who's been prepared. I think that's especially relevant today.

Organizations need to make sure they have the right people in the right roles, equipped with the right skills, coaching, and support systems. That way, when they're representing your brand in the market, they're able to maximize every opportunity to help customers succeed and grow the business.

[24:34] Joy: Who's really in the driver's seat when it comes to managing changing organizational priorities? Is it a shared responsibility between the customer and the sales team?

[24:44] Aaron: It depends on the nature of the relationship.

Some customers look to us as strategic partners and actively seek our perspective. They'll ask, "How are you thinking about this?" Those conversations give us a great opportunity to share best practices because we're seeing similar challenges across many organizations.

Other customers prefer a more transactional relationship with their technology providers. In those situations, our role is to clearly communicate what we're doing and why we're doing it, and then it's up to them to decide how they want to use that information.

At the end of the day, it really comes down to people. We often think of organizations as large, monolithic entities, but business is ultimately built on individual relationships. Those relationships shape how every partnership evolves.

[25:46] Joy: When it comes to your own sales teams, what are some key steps to rebuilding and strengthening them after periods of uncertainty? What advice do you give your team?

[26:02] Aaron: We're a very data-driven organization, so everything starts with understanding what's working, what isn't, and developing a clear hypothesis as to why.

There are many factors to evaluate. Is it the product? Product-market fit? Pricing? The target customer? Our people?

Marketing? Messaging? There are a lot of moving pieces.

I feel fortunate to work in an organization where we have a strong understanding of how those factors translate into outcomes for our customers.

The first step is always the analytical work—using data to understand what's happening. Only then should you start thinking about change.

And when change is necessary, it needs to be thoughtful, purposeful, and supported by clear principles that you can confidently communicate to your team.

[27:17] Joy: Can you share any examples of what worked during the pandemic and what's working now in the post-pandemic environment?

[27:28] Aaron: I think it's still a little too early to draw definitive conclusions.

Many of the broader economic shifts—such as rising interest rates—have only recently begun affecting businesses. We're still learning how those changes will shape customer behavior and the market over the long term.

What we're doing today is gathering as much information as possible.

For example, we're looking at product mix across Google Cloud's portfolio. We want to understand whether there's a relationship between the products customers use and the strength of their relationship with us. We're also analyzing team structures and how different approaches influence outcomes.

There are many ways to examine the data, but we're still in the process of identifying meaningful patterns before making significant changes.

[28:51] Joy: Can you talk a little about sales pipeline management? When should sales leaders focus on sustaining pipeline versus increasing velocity before, during, and after periods of uncertainty?

[29:05] Aaron: Pipeline management is the fundamental work that has to happen every day. It requires discipline and consistent execution.

The first priority is building the top of the funnel. That means creating repeatable processes for generating new opportunities—whether through business development representatives, personal outreach, expanding relationships within existing customer accounts, or other prospecting methods.

Every team needs to determine the right messaging, outreach cadence, follow-up strategy, and communication channels based on the customers they serve.

It's important to pay close attention to top-of-funnel activity because it's easy to lose focus when existing customers require significant time and attention. While supporting current customers is essential, you also have to continue building future opportunities.

The second focus is pipeline velocity. Once opportunities enter the funnel, ask what's moving, what's stalled, and why.

Are opportunities stuck because there's no real customer need? Is the timing wrong? Is there something missing from your solution or your approach? Those are questions that data can help answer.

If opportunities remain in the early stages for too long, you need to determine whether that's something you can influence or whether it's better to step back and reinvest your efforts in building new pipeline.

Finally, once opportunities move into the middle and later stages, the focus shifts to deal execution and relationship management. At that point, it's about ensuring both sides share a common understanding of the buying process and are aligned on the path toward a successful decision and implementation.

Ultimately, effective pipeline management requires rigor, discipline, and a methodology that's tailored to your territory, your customers, and their level of maturity.

[31:32] Aaron: Ultimately, building a successful sales career comes down to rigor, discipline, and having a methodology that fits your territory, your customers, and their level of maturity.

If you invest consistently in those fundamentals, you'll build a strong foundation for long-term success in sales.

Section 5: Broadening Stakeholder Engagement During Economic Uncertainty

[31:52] Joy: What would you say are the key investment areas organizations should focus on during periods of economic uncertainty?

[32:01] Aaron: I think it's important to broaden your perspective.

For example, in infrastructure technology sales, it's easy to spend most of your time talking to technical stakeholders—CTOs, CIOs, DevOps leaders, and engineering managers. Those relationships are important, but you're missing a significant opportunity if that's your only focus.

You should also be engaging with finance, sales, marketing, and strategy leaders, tailoring your message to each audience.

The goal is to connect the value your technology delivers for practitioners with the business outcomes that matter to executives. Every stakeholder has different priorities, and your messaging needs to reflect that.

More importantly, you want those conversations to continue when you're no longer in the room. If people across the organization are talking about your ideas and the opportunities you're creating, much of the hard work has already been done.

Developing that level of engagement comes back to disciplined pipeline management. Building relationships shouldn't be limited to technical buyers.

For example, you can approach a CFO with a conversation centered on cost optimization and operational efficiency rather than leading with a technical product discussion. Those are two very different conversations, but together they create a much stronger business case.

[34:29] Joy: Those different teams are probably grateful when you involve them because the product creates value in different ways across the organization. If they feel excluded, they may have different priorities or expectations. Everyone ultimately needs to work together toward the same goal for the solution to be successful.

[34:53] Aaron: That's exactly right.

People are often left out of the sales process until the very moment they're expected to approve a decision. As the seller, it's your responsibility to define how stakeholders are brought into the conversation and what role they'll play.

Take the relationship between a technology team and the CFO organization. If you've spent months working only with technical stakeholders and finance enters the conversation at the final approval stage with no context or buy-in, you've created unnecessary friction.

But if both groups have been part of the conversation from the beginning, you have two engaged stakeholders working toward the same outcome instead of one trying to convince the other.

That's a much stronger position to be in.

[35:39} Joy: What are some of the key steps to rebuilding sales teams during periods of uncertainty? What have you found works best?

[35:48] Aaron: It starts with principles.

Ask yourself, "What do we stand for, and why?"

Those principles should be grounded in data—understanding what's helped the organization grow, where it has matured, and where additional investment is needed going forward.

Once those foundational principles are established, the next step is ensuring you have the right people in the organization who can bring those principles to life in different ways.

You want individuals to align themselves with the parts of the strategy that best match their strengths, interests, and skills.

<u>Section 6: Key Leadership Lessons for the Future of Sales</u>

[36:19] Aaron: You want people to connect with the parts of your strategy that best align with their strengths and interests.

As a leader, your role is to guide that process while also inviting input from your team. People are far more likely to embrace change when they see it as an opportunity for their own growth and development.

You want willing and engaged participants in your organization's evolution, especially during periods of change.

The third piece is being crystal clear about how success will be measured. Define what success looks like, explain why those metrics matter, and establish regular checkpoints to ensure you're achieving the outcomes you expected.

Finally, communication is critical. The words you choose matter, especially during times of change. Thoughtful communication can create alignment, focus, and buy-in, while poor communication can lead to uncertainty and distraction.

Strong leadership requires deliberate planning and equally deliberate communication.

[37:42] Joy: As we wrap up, from a culture perspective, what do you believe are the essentials for sales teams navigating periods of change?

[37:51] Aaron: It starts with having a clear understanding of what you set out to accomplish, why those goals mattered, and where you ultimately ended up.

That process of self-reflection is incredibly valuable.

I believe self-awareness and a willingness to reflect are some of the most important qualities a sales professional can develop. Ask yourself: What did I learn from this period of change? How did I grow through adversity? What did I gain from being uncomfortable?

Become a student of both yourself and your profession.

Every year, my team begins by sharing our strategy and our individual commitments. Each person stands in front of the team and explains who they want to be, how they want customers to perceive them, and what they hope to accomplish.

Some of those goals are tactical, while others are ambitious and aspirational.

[39:06] Aaron: As the year progresses, we come back to those commitments and ask ourselves what worked, what didn't, what was within our control, and what wasn't.

Those reflections shape how we become better leaders, better sellers, and ultimately better organizations moving forward.

If I had to summarize it in one idea, it would be self-awareness and reflection.

Finding a process that works for your team and your organization is where the real work begins, and that process will be different for every company.

[39:41] Joy: Aaron, thank you so much for sharing your sales strategies and insights with us today. We truly appreciate your time.

Once again, that was Aaron Reinitz, Head of Sales, New York Enterprise Digital Natives at Google Cloud.

Thank you for joining us for this episode of the CXO Masterclass. We hope you enjoyed the conversation.

[END]