Customer Success and Sales Growth for Modern Databases with Ozge Tuncel

Introduction

[0:12] Jessica Ly: Welcome to Tech It Up with Jessica Ly. I'm here with Ozge Tuncel, who is the VP of Customer Success and Sales Development at MongoDB. Welcome to the show. How are you?

[0:25] Ozge Tuncel: Very good, thank you, Jessica. Thanks for having me. It's a pleasure.

[0:27] Jessica: Well, I wanted to celebrate International Women's Day, which is approaching on March 8th, by inviting you on the show because you came from Turkey, you've been an engineer, got your MBA, did consulting, and now you're at MongoDB. It's a great journey.

So, I wanted to also promote MongoDB in that it is a modern database company that enables you to create applications very rapidly at a fraction of the cost, which is phenomenal. So, great innovation. But, yeah, welcome to the show.

[1:06] Ozge: Thank you. Thanks, Jessica. Thanks for the kind words.

So, yes, it has been quite a journey for me in my career. And now I'm with MongoDB. It has been five years and counting. It's been an amazing journey.

As you said, MongoDB is a modern database. We are working to make developers out there even more productive every day. It's a different era. By now, it's cloud-native, it's mobile-first, so it's a database, it's a data platform that has been built for that new, modern world of applications out there.

We're seeing a lot of industry trends that are pushing the modernization of databases and data platforms to the next frontier, and MongoDB is definitely up there.

[2:02] Jessica: Yes, I noticed you've been growing a lot, and you have now almost, what, 2,000 employees?

Ozge: Yes, yes.

Section 1: Ozge's Career Journey: Turkey, Engineering, Toyota & Wharton

[2:12] Jessica: But let's talk about you because you went from doing consulting at McKinsey, and now you are a VP. Tell us about the journey. How did you end up being in America, New York, and MongoDB?

[2:28] Ozge: Oh, okay. Okay. So, without dating myself, I am born and raised in Turkey. I studied Computer Engineering, and I wanted to always have broad experiences. I cannot really explain it now, looking back, but I don't know, something drove me to have that mobility, to have that experience.

So, after graduation, I applied for a job in Europe, Toyota, actually, the automotive company. And I joined their European headquarters in Belgium, in Brussels, where I was there for four years.

But like many engineers out there back in the day, I was always fascinated with the business world, understanding how the whole ecosystem works; the marketing, the sales side, the finance side, the operations side.

So, I decided to learn about it through an MBA, through an MBA program. And I applied. Obviously, America is the center of MBA and business education, so I applied, and I was lucky to get into Wharton Business School. And that's what brought me to America about 10 years ago, and the rest is history.

Section 2: Why Customer Success & Sales Development Sit Together

[3:45] Jessica: Now, when you look at your journey, you built this customer success program, and it was so successful that you were then invited to take on sales development.

So, to some people, sales development is the pre-sales phase, and then customer success is the post-sales phase, and they tend to be two different departments. But why are you the VP of both departments? You know, what similarities are there? So, I wanted to help you share that experience.

[4:20] Ozge: Yeah, yeah, definitely. I'm very aware that it's not a traditional role, or two hats that I'm wearing. And to be very honest, in the beginning I also had my own questions and doubts about why they even make sense under one leader.

But as time passed and as I started to learn from both sides, there are actually a lot of similarities and learnings that can cross-pollinate from one side to the other.

For instance, if you think about the sales development job, it's all about creating pipeline for sales, giving good experience to the prospects that are trying to learn about your company. So, there is a very,

very large element of early customer success or early customer experience in the SDR world.

And then, in the CSM world, in the post-sales side, you know, the primary role of a CSM is obviously retention, customer success, and advisory of the customers. However, it's actually a secret weapon of expansion in the accounts that you are dealing with.

Because you're building trust, you're a trusted advisor. CSMs can be an amazing channel of creating new opportunities, understanding and finding out new projects in the account.

So, there are so many parallels to both worlds. And I think what I've learned, what I was humbled with, is this separation of pre- and post-sales, you know, division of the sales channels, are actually going away.

[6:03] Ozge: Yes, because customer demand, or customers' preferences, are dictating how we, as providers, need to engage with them.

Section 3: SaaS, Continuous Engagement & the Changing Renewal Model

[6:16] Jessica: Yeah, and I think that's also because of the SaaS model. It's an ongoing sales development. There's no beginning or ending when it comes to the subscription renewal model of business, right?

[6:27] Ozge: Correct, correct. Because renewals are not even an event anymore like they were in the past with the subscription model. It's actually a continuous engagement.

I mean, don't get me wrong, renewals still exist for some large corporations or some large contracts out there, but they're not an event anymore.

[6:54] Jessica: I see. So, you're saying it's not like an annual date of renewal. It's everyday consumption.

Ozge: Exactly. Everyday consumption, everyday value creation, everyday building trust and understanding with the customer. That makes it a non-event.

But if you don't do a good job of customer engagement and experience, then, yes, renewal becomes this large, complex, sometimes very painful event.

Section 4: Women in Tech, Motherhood & Work-Life Balance

[7:21] Jessica: I want to turn to women in tech and the progress that we're seeing and celebrating. You wrote a piece about balancing being a new mom and working as a VP at the same time, and you found that actually it forced you to be even more productive.

So, I thought it'd be nice for you to share your thoughts about that the challenges and keeping work-life balance.

[7:48] Ozge: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I guess life creates really high demands for everyone, and mine was becoming a mother. For others, it might be very different things, right? Taking care of a loved one, other events where you don't have any other option than to do it, right?

And that's really, I think, what was my trigger. I didn't know what I was capable of until I faced the demand, and I had to relearn a new way of thinking, a new way of prioritizing, even a new way of communicating.

I don't really have the silver bullet to offer, but I think one thing that I can offer is I was very afraid. And knowing what I know right now, I think going through this journey with a bit of courage and openness will probably help others who might be embarking on their own life transitions, whatever that might be.

[8:57] Jessica: Yes. I think that technology actually has helped us to balance the demands of work and the demands of personal and family life, right?

We are now a lot more flexible in doing our work at home, so it's fine to take time out in your afternoon if you need to be somewhere for your kids or for your parents. And because we know that our work performance is measured by, in the end, the results, and not so much where exactly you are doing the work or how many hours you're at that desk doing the work.

[9:32] Ozge: Yeah, that's so true. I think also, to celebrate the progressiveness of the tech industry, tech is one of those places where that flexibility, that kind of mobility, that kind of personalized work-life balance is celebrated and encouraged. There is a lot of understanding and compassion towards balancing your life while, you know, as long as wherever it might be, your delivery to the expectations.

[10:01] Jessica: Yes. I think we are more than a worker. We are parents, you know, we have responsibilities. And I think there's a lot more acceptance of seeing a person as a whole than more than just as a colleague at work.

Section 5: Diversity, Inclusion & Representation in Leadership

[10:18] Ozge: Yes, definitely. I think that's a trend that, when I started working, was not there. And I think it was very clear to keep work and life separate, and it was expected. But throughout the years, definitely, there is a more welcoming feeling in the workplace to welcome the whole person.

[10:41] Jessica: For sure. As you said, and I'm also very happy to see progress in

Corporate America, where we now have a lot more executives leading diversity and inclusion, putting in metrics, making it accountable that there are enough minorities and women in leadership positions, looking at equal pay or equal equity in shares.

[11:07] Ozge: Yes, yes, definitely. Parity pledges are out there that are gaining a lot of momentum, especially in the tech industry.

I think one thing that's really important to highlight is that I carry a personal responsibility to continue to advocate for it, to continue to be the voice in the room, because it cannot be just the diversity head or head of inclusion, right?

Unfortunately, or fortunately, until this thing equalizes itself, we have to stand up for each other and talk and educate and advocate.

Section 6: Career Advancement & Prioritizing Personal Growth

[11:47] Jessica: What career advancement tips would you like to share, or lessons learned that you would like to share?

[11:56] Ozge: Yeah, wow. Okay, let me think for a minute.

Reflecting back to what I've learned, I can only hopefully pass on what worked for me. Especially after I became a mom, I thought taking care of myself or taking time for myself—I always framed it in my mind as a luxury, as something of a selfish thing to do, right?

Because there was either the family or the job that I had to actually pay attention to, and I always came as the third, until I learned, both through a lot of pain and also watching other executive women become successful, that it's actually a mandatory and strategic thing to do.

You know, as we plan for our businesses, we plan for our new year and budget cycle and what have you, you need to also think about your energy management—how you are going to spend or not spend your energy to keep on going, to keep on progressing.

I think that was one thing that I didn't know when I learned, and I hope it resonates for whoever is out there listening.

[13:18] Jessica: For career management and career advancement, you're saying make time and prioritize your own personal growth?

Ozge: Yes. And whatever that is for you—reading your book, going to the gym, eating a healthy dinner, having a coffee. I don't know what it is. It's very different from person to person.

But I guess find first what it is, and then really plan and incorporate it into your life.

Jessica: Good advice.

[13:47] Jessica : Well, it's been a pleasure to have you on the show, and I appreciate that you're sharing your thoughts with us.

[13:54] Ozge : Oh, okay. Thank you so much for having me. Appreciate it.

[13:56] Jessica: There you have it, folks. Tech It Up with Jessica Ly and Ozge Tuncel from MongoDB.

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