***AJ (Adam Joseph):*** Can you tell us more about your background?

***LD (Lauren Denault):*** Absolutely, I am currently the VP of Customer Success at a small start-up called Skupos. Prior to that I spent five years at Demandforce which was another company that was focussed on the SMB space; our customers were very small (with a small subscription price) and I have built my career on how to automate and scale to a smaller audience and how to give a great experience to SMB clients. I left Demandforce and joined Skupos where we have a similar client base and we focus on mainly on convenience and small grocery stores (i.e. "Mom and Pop" type places).

***AJ:*** What do you think is important when you implement Customer Success for SMB customers?

***LD:*** **I think what's important is not to lose sight that the fundamentals of Customer Success still apply when it's a SMB role. You still want the customers to feel like they have a personal touch from a CSM, you still want them to have that feeling of a relationship with your company, you still want to be proactive and help them to use the product more and get as much value as possible**. You also still want to use your customers as referrals as well as "land and expand" to get upsell opportunities; you just have to think about doing it in a slightly different way as you can't spend as much 1-on-1 resources on them.

***AJ:*** How does that approach work on a day-to-day basis?

***LD:*** What I have found in my experience works best is that it is a combination of personal outreach and marketing communications. The CSM and Marketing Teams should be really in synch and what's good is to have a CSM that is assigned to an account but what is different in SMB is that you could have one CSM that owns 1,000 to 1,500 accounts (verses Enterprise where someone may own only 2-3 accounts).

Irrespective, **SMB customers should still be familiar with the name of their CSM whether that's through in-product messaging that the Marketing Team has built in conjunction with the CSM where you see their picture. This could also be from emails that are coming from the CSM (which could have been automated and written by the Marketing Team but have the CSMs details on it). There could also be instances where a customer is really "off-course" and needs some extra help and in that case you might want the CSM to reach out and call the customer and work with them 1-on-1**.

***AJ:*** Given that there could be so many accounts per CSM in the SMB world, what role can technology play in helping them in their work?

***LD:*** The fundamental for any customer management is Salesforce. We've used Salesforce at all the roles that I have been in to be the "single point of truth" for the customer across all teams within the company. On top of that, one of the tools that I have found really helpful is in-product tours and I have used in the past solutions such as WalkMe, Chameleon (a more affordable tool for start-ups / smaller teams) and also Pendo which incorporates the analytics piece as well as the tours.

At my previous role at Demandforce we also had Gainsight which was a really helpful tool in setting up a lot of the automated emails and deciding when a CSM would need to step-in rather than having an automated response. I would say that something like Gainsight, Totango or ClientSuccess (specific Customer Success software solutions) are meant for larger teams so we are not using them at Skupos but it's very helpful to have those tools and be able to really see exactly what is happening with your customer and where all of those touch-points are. It's also great to have software that expand beyond departments so that someone from Sales or Marketing can jump in and see what's going on at any given point.

***AJ:*** What are the key metrics that would indicate to you that a customer outreach is needed (i.e. that they are not getting value)?

***LD:*** I think that depends on your product; **CSMs really know the product almost better than anyone else in the company as to how it relates with the customer. It's important for the CSMs to really come together and talk about what are those things that indicate that someone may not be happy or about to churn**. There are some that are common however; someone not logging in – that's a pretty good indicator. For us, it's about how much of the product are they using; are they using the key features that we know are providing the most value and are the most "sticky" or are they just using the service-level product.

What I have found to be very useful is to talk about what the most important product pieces are and then to start targeting customers that aren't using those features through automated outreaches. For instance, the first touch might be when someone logs into the product and something pops up to say *"Hey – you're not using our communications feature yet!"*, this is a feature that a lot of my clients are seeing a lot of value from. Provide a couple of value propositions about exactly how much success their seeing (in a monetary or other kind of quantitative value) and then try and walk them through turning on that feature, giving them all of the information that they need to use it. If they still haven't adopted that feature then it might be time to use some kind of outreach that's more personal (i.e. a call) to talk about them starting to use that feature.

***AJ:*** What advice do you have for start-ups for what signs they should look for that they need to invest in a Customer Success function?

***LD:*** One of the things about the current role that I am in now that really made me decide to take the role with Skupos was that they hired me before we had any customers at all. I think that speaks volumes about our company and where their priorities lie and a company that really understands that the success of the customer is something that does touch all other parts of the company and all other departments.

**I personally think that you should hire a CSM as soon as you are starting to think about acquiring your first customer because it really helps you to set up the fundamentals**. For example, making sure that you have a CRM that can track customers, making sure that your on-boarding processes makes sense and that you have all of the tools to help those first customers be successful.

As far as hiring more CSMs, I think it's really important to spend part of your time focusing on really scaling and being able to nail the one-to-many (from the SMB side) or making sure that you have "playbooks" (from the Enterprise side) but you also have to be conscious that at the beginning of a company when you first start there is going to be a lot of manual work. A lot of 1-on-1 touches that maybe automated down the line and so you will probably need to hire a few extra people in the beginning to make sure that nothing slips through the cracks and you don't lose any customers because you don't have the bandwidth to take care of them.

**Have those first CSMs really be people who can think "big picture" and are interested in scaling and building processes** – not someone who is a traditional CSM who can come in and manage the relationship – but someone who can also build that foundation for the future when you have tens of thousands of customers and everything is running a bit more smoothly.

***AJ:*** Do you think CSMs should be focussed on purely adding value or do you think in the SMB world they need to be more flexible?

***LD:*** **I think it's really important to stay focused on the proactive outreach and providing that value. I think when you start to provide too much technical support from a Customer Success team you can get stuck in a very reactive-type of mind-set**. Especially someone coming from a technical support background, a lot of times it's hard to break that pattern you're very used to reacting when a customer calls, I pick up the phone, I'm solving the problem right now and you can lose sight of that value that you need to provide.

I think it's important to separate the two; obviously at the beginning of a company when the resources are limited you will most likely have someone who is doing both (i.e. Support and Customer Success). We at Skupos have that right now but long-term I think it's very important to separate those two and really focus on providing value and having a really strong relationship between Customer Success and Support.

For instance, one of the things we did at Demandforce was that we had set up all of these important proactive outreaches that we wanted to do with all of our customers and the Customer Success team was purely focussed on this and constantly calling customers, getting proactive emails out, etc. However, on the Technical Support side, someone called in for help and the Rep was able to solve the issue and at the end of that call they would then look into Gainsight or Salesforce and see what other things that the customer needed to do and they would take some of that CS role and try and help the customer or forward them to a CSM if they needed that help. I think it's possible to do a little bit of both roles but I definitely think it's important to have them in separate teams in the long run.

***AJ:*** Even if you have CSMs doing both proactive outreach and technical support what are the signs that you should look for that means you should separate them?

***LD:*** I would say that the easiest and most apparent one is when your CSMs got overrun by handling Support tickets. If you find that your CSMs are taking a lot of tickets in a day (e.g. 5 to 10 Support tickets that are coming in one day) then it's probably time to move to having two separate teams that are handling those issues.

***AJ:*** What's your view on the important of the CSM role inside a business and the relationships that they have with other functions such as Product Management and Marketing?

***LD:*** **I saw a slide a while ago that had all the different departments in an organisation and the CSMs in the centre and it really resonated with me because a CSM knows the customer and knows the product so well – they really are the "voice of the customer" to the business**. In a typical day you may see a CSM who have spoken to customers, they know what a "good" customer looks like and they can help provide feedback to the Sales Team on whether a customer will be a good fit or not.

The CSMs typically knows the "ins and outs" of the product a little bit better so they can jump on a call with the Sales Rep and help them push that sale through the contract and get it signed. **As CSMs are on the phone with their customers constantly and they have a great "pulse" on what's going on they can help identify which customers are going to be really good referrals or which customers maybe ready for an upsell and can pass that along to the Sales Rep**.

**When it comes to Product, I strongly believe that the Customer Success Team should really drive the Product Roadmap**, tracking what types of features customers are asking for and really understanding not only what the feature is, but also what is the underlying need behind it, what's the problem that you're solving for the customer and then being able to translate that to a Product Team is so important for the success of the business. Being able to track not only those features that are being requested but what is the priority (which does not correlate simply to how many people had asked for it but how many people are willing to leave because this particular feature is so important to them they would be elsewhere or how many are not signing up to a contract because they are waiting for a particular feature they really need). Being able to take all of that data and then translate it into an easy, digestible format for the Product Team to look at and say "this is pretty clear and we know what is top priority on our roadmap now".

***AJ:*** Given the importance of CSMs both internally and externally how do you stop them being spread too thinly and don't have enough time in the day to get their core tasks completed?

***LD:*** One of the things that I found is really important is when you have a team, really understand each person and what their personal goals are. One of the things that keeps people at the company (in addition to it being a great company and having a great product) is that people really feel that they have the potential for growth and that they are building their career. One of the things that I have always tried to do is to understand each person on the team, what are their goals and what they do they want to be doing in 5-10 years.

A lot of times you will find there are people that are in a CS role that are interested in some day moving into a Product Management role or really enjoy Marketing and finding who those individuals are and then having them be the point-person for that helps them be more productive in their roles. At Demandforce for example, we had some people who were really interested in technical roles and they would generally be the ones that would gather the product feedback from the rest of the team and have a weekly meeting with Product to go through all of that information. I also had some people who were really interested about Marketing and were always passionate about the copy of the emails and how the product tours were designed so that individual would be the one who worked with the Marketing Team and it made it a lot easier especially when you had a big team at Demandforce (we had close to 50 people) and you can't have everyone jumping into a Product meeting at once. You really identify what someone's passions are and then being able to build from that will really make the relationship between teams a lot stronger.

***AJ:*** How do you sell Customer Success to a CEO who is not sold on the value that it can bring?

***LD:*** **Look at any churn in the business; if there has been churn – especially on the SMB side – being able to show what sort of efforts can be done and what the incremental value could be from things such as in-product tours and a little bit of pro-active out-reach**. A lot of the companies that provide Customer Success solutions have really great decks on why that's important and provide some case studies from other businesses that have implemented some of these tools and the value that they have been able to bring in terms of saved revenue from churn, increased revenue from expansion or using more and more of the product.

I also think that the product piece is important; being able to show that you can make the Product Team even more effective and streamline their processes – whilst it hard to put a $ value on that however being able to show that you can get the feedback from a customer and be able to put that into a concise format (i.e. here are the features people need, here is the $ amount associated, etc) is something that is traditionally hard to gather unless you have a true Customer Success outreach programme.