

Tim: Welcome, Thomas Steenburgh, to the Behavioral Grooves Podcast.

Tom: Thanks so much for having me.

Kurt: Well, it is our pleasure.

Tim: We are excited about this. We got introduced to you from Michael Ahearne who we had on a podcast earlier, but you guys just recently wrote an HBR article called How to Sell New Products, focus on learning and not performance. We just thought it would be a good way to start if you told us a little bit about some of the findings from that and what that article is saying.

Tom: I think that the basic findings of the article are around what's different about selling new products from selling existing products. Really, the thing that we were interested in was learning more about really new-to-the-world products, not product line extensions, what are companies doing differently?

Tim: Okay.

Tom: You know, some of the big picture stuff is that companies aren't doing a third of what they should be doing in selling new products because, really, what happens with new products is, it's a very different sales process. Different types of people excel within that process, and then organization structures need to be built to support people in this type of sale. Some of the surprising things for us were really around how little companies were doing and, also probably from a personal perspective, the thing that surprised me most is how much a salesperson's emotions play into the sale and how it's very different than other types of work that they do.

Tim: Can you expand on that? So, you're talking about the emotions and how they play into the sale. Specifically, how do those emotions play in selling a new product versus and existing or a product line extension?

Tom: Let's think about a normal salesperson's life or what they normally do is that you might be meeting with a customer frequently. You might know them really well but, if you don't have new products, you don't really have that much to talk about after a while. New products, actually, are this great opportunity in your mind because you think, "Wow! I can break through with a conversation. I have something new to talk about. It's going to ease the tedium."

So, as people approach the sale, this has two sorts of behaviors, let's say, that people exhibit. One is, because they have something new to talk about, they actually just talk about the product itself, and it's also like I've just run on and on about all the features and all the things, all the things that you don't normally do in selling a normal product. If you're selling a new product, it's very counterproductive with the account. Some of that is just excitement with the salesperson. They have something new to talk about.

There's this great old study done by Neil Rackham, and what he showed is that when people are selling existing products, they actually ask many more questions about the client and what's going on in their business than they do when they're selling new products. When it's new products, it's all about, "Oh, I'm going to tell you about all the features," and just go on and on about the product information, which doesn't work. We know it doesn't work, but the excitement sort of gets the best of people.

Tim: Yeah, so that excitement of having something new to talk about ends up actually detracting from talking more about the need that the customer might have or some of the background around that, and they get right into talking features and buttons and bells and all that kind of stuff. Is that ...?

Tom: That's exactly right. If you look at other types of behaviors that often happen when the reps go out to sell new products, they don't discriminate amongst customers all that much.

Tim: Wow!

Tom: So, actually, it's a widely spread type of message.

Tim: Okay.

Tom: The excitement, though, actually turns into sort of frustration or people have described about how they had the rug pulled out from under their feet later in the sale because, a lot of times, the customer really isn't all that interested in buying.

Tim: Okay.

Tom: When we talked with customers about new sales, sometimes they talk about how, basically, they just want to know what the latest and greatest thing in the market is, so they'll talk to anyone. They're actually super open to talking to the salesperson at this point in time because they can learn something. A senior vice-president buyer that we talked to said, "I'll talk to anyone. I'm just looking for new ideas." They very rarely buy, but I will talk to anyone because I need to know what's happening in the industry.

Kurt: Yeah, but there are some things that ... There are some aspects of both the personality and the sales process that can make selling new products more effective.

Tom: That's right.

Kurt: So, give us a couple of insights on those fronts.

Tom: Behaviorally, one of the things that turns out to be really effective when selling new products is somebody who has more of a learning mindset.

Kurt: Okay.

Tom: This is really hard in a sales organization. If you think of how we manage most salespeople, it's quarter to quarter, make your quota. Of places to work in a firm, it's probably the place that has the most focus on performance, but the salespeople who are most effective in selling new products actually have more of a learning orientation. This has some negative consequences because, early on after a new product is launched, what the salesperson, the most effective salespeople do is, they go and really learn the account.

What that means is, they spend more time meeting with cross-functional teams. They may spend more time in face-to-face selling, which new product sales require. What happens to performance due to this investment in time is that it dips immediately after product launches, but these people in the long run, after they learn about how to sell in the account, they learn what the customer's really interested in, their performance goes to a higher level in the long run, so the investment is worth the time.

We contrasted that with salespeople who had more of a performance orientation mindset, and what happened with these people, they're always focused on making numbers, so their performance didn't really dip in the short run. In fact, they are more likely to keep more focus on their existing product portfolio and less focus on the new product portfolio if they're selling both but, in the long run, what that meant is their performance didn't rise to the same level. You know, from a managerial perspective, the only thing I can say is this is really tough ...

Tim: Yeah.

Tom: ... because what you're asking a manager to do is say, "Well, forego some sales today and trust me. It'll happen in the long run. Good luck with that. That's a tough message. What it means from a managerial perspective, you really have to be dwelling in that earlier part where you know right after launch that sales are dipping, that the reps actually are out there learning and spread knowledge at that point, work to find best practices.

Tim: Right, and it's interesting, too, because you think, at least in the companies that I've worked with, the new product launch is this opportunity to take that sales up to the next level, at least that's what the executives are talking about and various different things, and the incentives around it are usually built around that quick start, as well, and what you're saying is it's almost counterintuitive to say, "Well, actually in the long run, that may have a slower uptake, might lead to longer term success if you do that." Is that ... Not putting words in your mouth there, right?

Tom: I think a more focused effort around a set of customers were really willing to adopt the new products and invest in that sort of process, or the ones that do best. I think one way to think about it is, we'll often talk about change management within a company and how difficult that is even to execute within your own company.

Tim: Right.

Tom: Essentially, what we're asking salespeople to do here is act as a change agent within the customer side. What that means is, I have to be more focused. I have to find the right customer, someone who's open to change. I have to think through the incentives of all the individual players at the client site, anticipate the hurdles and the roadblocks, and develop strategies to help the customer change. It's a really tough job.

Tim: The qualifying component of working with the customers in order to qualify them and to get them, there's a lot more work going into that. I know in the article you talk about just that 32% more time face to face and 35% more time in meetings and various different things, so that whole process of getting to know that customer just is a lot longer and more intensive than what had been done for maybe a traditional or existing product.

Tom: It's exactly right. For some of these products ... Again, we really wanted to study new-to-the-world type of innovation, and what you're asking the customer to do is to change the way that they're doing business, so that's difficult. Everybody has trouble changing, so it's difficult.

Kurt: Yeah, by the way.

Tim: I love the story you told about the customer who said, "I'll take any of those meetings because I want to learn what's new and out there, but not necessarily with the intent to buy."

Tom: You can't really do it.

Kurt: They're more like vampires.

Tim: You think about that and you're going ... As a salesperson, you're excited because, "I got all these new potential people that are wanting to talk to me, but the reality of it is they're just out there searching for information, not really in that buying mode."

Tom: That's exactly why they describe it as having the rug pulled out from under your feet. It's like you think, "Suddenly, my funnel is full. I have all of these opportunities. The world is rosy," and then you look three months later after you invested this time and you're like, "Oh, wait a second here." It's the worst thing on earth.

Tim: Right! Right! Particularly for salespeople, typically, it's like, "Wow! I've just spent three months and what do I have to show for it?"

Kurt: Because the sales manager's going to be asking, "What do you have to show for it?"

Tim: When it comes to having this very performance orientation versus a learning orientation, organizations need both, right? I mean, the sales manager needs to have people who are selling that have a learning mindset to pick up those new products, but the performance orientation, that's an important mindset as well, isn't it?

Tom: It definitely is, so some interesting things as you develop a team, it's really a portfolio of people, right? It gives you some indication of how you might have them allocate their time. We talk to plenty of really, what I would describe as, a star-performing rep with the average portfolio who basically says when it comes to new products, I'll just wait a year.

Tim: Oh.

Kurt: Wow!

Tom: They have this mindset, "I need to make my numbers. They're really good at making my numbers." When I did incentive comp at Xerox, we'd have people, let's say, that spent or that, for 29 out of 30 years, would have made President's Club level performance. I mean, these are people that are people you could not stop if you wanted to.

Kurt: Right.

Tom: That person might say, "Yeah, I'll wait until somebody else learns how to sell that product because I'm going to make my number this year. Let them invest the time and then, once they learn it, I'll adopt all those practices.

Kurt: Tell us a little bit about how you conducted the research. How did you go about ... Obviously, you had to find companies with new-to-the-world products and various different things, but tell us a little bit about the process that you did for the research.

Tom: We did a whole bunch of things. This project took a lot longer to complete than either of us thought when we started it. There's probably about five years of [crosstalk 00:13:47].

Kurt: Wow!

Tom: Not all the time, obviously, but a fair amount of time. We did a lot of one-on-one interviews. We did it with sales managers and salespeople, and we also did it with buyers. We conducted a couple of surveys with sales reps to sort of get at how does your time allocation change? How does your process change? We did a couple of studies with sales forces at a sales force level where we did some profiling of the reps within the company, you know big competency assessments within the company, and then also had customers do a competency assessment of the rep, so we had these pairs of people. That led to some very interesting findings.

Tim: Wow! Can you talk more about that? I don't think I've ever heard of a situation where you've had customers provide an analysis or an assessment of an individual sales rep where you also had the sales rep's own individual assessment of themselves. How did that go? How did it work? I'm thinking it's fascinating.

Tom: Yeah, it was really fascinating and very telling about behavior, I think, in the account. What we did, essentially, was had people answer questions about themselves to get insights into their mindset. Are they more performance oriented or learning oriented?

Are they open to change? Do they have knowledge of the product? Are they adaptable? Do they have market knowledge, these sorts of characteristics? Then, we'd ask the customer, "How do you see the salespeople along these dimensions? This is what's fascinating. I think it gives you a real ... It gave us a very clear insight into how companies behave, as well.

The only dimension which the salesperson's perceptions of themselves and the customer's perceptions really matched was on product knowledge. When you ask those two groups, "Does the rep have a lot of product knowledge?", the answer to that question was pretty close. It's like, "Yeah, they have lots of product knowledge," which is, in some level, that's good because that's what companies train. They give product training. That's it.

Tim: Right.

Tom: When you then compared, "Do they have a learning mindset or performance mindset?" or, "Are they adaptable?", that's the one that struck us the most. This was totally fascinating to us. When you asked the rep if they thought they were adaptable, many of them thought, "Yeah, I'm pretty adaptable. I understand how things change, and I can go with it." When you ask the customer, they said, "This is the least adaptable person on earth."

Tim: Oh, my gosh! No way!

Tom: It was awesome, right?

Tim: Blind spot, Baez! Wow!

Tom: Yeah, so it was really great, so it just sort of gives you the sense of, as we were doing the research, really the things that companies should be training has a lot more to do with behavior or mindsets of the rep, emotions of the rep than actually the product knowledge itself. Product knowledge is not the problem in these situations. In fact, the best reps think about this very, very differently, are worried about different things. The best managers sort of help the reps in different ways. I could talk a little bit about that, too.

Tim: Yeah, go on that. Expand upon how to train and where the focus should be.

Kurt: Right.

Tom: So, one company that we worked with and talked to a senior manager there is in the digital advertising space, digital media space. He talked about some of the struggles he was having getting their reps to sell into this new marketplace. It was an awesome conversation, in part because the initial training that they had done from the reps was like every other company. Basically, they gave them specific product knowledge about this digital content that they were trying to sell, and the training wasn't effective at all. When he stepped back and looked at the problem and interviewed the reps, what he

realized was that the reps actually, in this situation, were having a really hard time having any conversations with the customer at all. They didn't want to put themselves out there. They basically didn't want to look dumb, right?

Kurt: Right.

Tim: Save face.

Tom: Yeah, so they stuck to what they knew, which is the product itself, not talk about market trends and, if they could avoid the discussion, they would. They'd just sell the new product. Then, his solution to the problem was different. It was very unique. One of the things that he had his reps do was do journaling to talk about what their fears were in front of the customer, to sort of say, "Well, just talk through what's going to happen."

Tim: Right.

Tom: Another thing that they asked their reps to do was to say, "Write down what your job is and what your job isn't," which is just a way of making the problem smaller, right? It's to manage your emotions, not manage the sale, so then the second wave of training had things also that were knowledge based, but it was more market focused. This is how the market's changing. This is how you can make yourself be a thought leader in the space, but then here are other things that you need to do to control your emotions through the sale, and that's actually the stuff that worked. To me, that was just fascinating.

I'd say if I had one thing that I took away from this experience of doing the research was, I was not prepared for how much therapy people had to go through, like the emotional side of it. I don't know. I didn't expect that when we started.

Kurt: It sounds like there was this component of fear that the sales reps had again around their self-identity and that looking bad in front of a client or not knowing what they needed to know, and so that journaling exercise and, as you said, identifying what their role is and what their role isn't is really just looking at, "So, here are the pieces that you need to understand, and here's some things that's okay not to understand" and just get through that and help them overcome some of that fear and that saving face kind of component.

Tom: Yeah, I think that's exactly right. It's overcoming fear.

Tim: So, Tom, this is ... I just want to clarify, make sure that I'm understanding that managing the emotions of the sales reps came through sort of therapeutic methods? Is that a fair summary?

Tom: Yeah. I mean, I'm not a psychologist, so I don't want to ... I use that in a layperson sort of sense but, yeah, that's how I took it. I think anything that people do that's new, like with my job as a business school faculty, when we bring new people into the school, a lot of what your job is is to help them cope, just help them make sense of what's happening, make the problem seem smaller. We saw a lot of that in this environment. Anyone

who's doing something, you have this. It's obvious in retrospect, but it's clearly not obvious to a lot of companies because they provide none of this support and resource to their salespeople.

Tim: Yeah, it's always about learn the product feature, top to bottom, all the features, be able to spew off all of the bits and bites and all the specifics and how it compares to the competition, and then you're on your own.

Tom: Then you're done, right?

Tim: Yeah.

Tom: You're obviously not done.

Kurt: You talked about it earlier about change management and being able to identify ... Salespeople have to go through that themselves. They have to change how they're approaching some of this stuff, and that's not always easy, so you have to address that as an organization and really think about what is going to be, to your point. We can train them on the product. We can train them on the features, but we have to also get them to be able to say, "Hey, yes, I need to change my behaviors, and how do I go about doing that effectively?" Retrospectively, you go, "Duh!", but in the heat of the moment.

Tom: I think it's hard. I don't want to diminish the problem in a sales force because, as we talked about earlier, it is one part of the organization, very numbers-driven, and failure's not really an option but, when you're doing new things, you have to celebrate failure in a way, so there's that contradiction, I think, that makes this a harder problem to deal with in a sales organization than there is in other parts of the organization.

Kurt: In the article, you guys talk about the benefits of strategic account management. Can you talk a little bit about some of what you learned about that and how that plays into selling new products?

Tom: Yeah, there's lots of benefits of strategic account management. If I were to think about how its application's changed over the last 25 years, if I were to describe the types of programs you'd see 25 years ago, they're much more geared towards cost reduction, and now it's geared much more towards selling of innovation, both creating of innovation and selling of innovation. In the article, we talk really about the sales site. Let's go back to the challenge.

One of the challenges in selling a new product is that you're asking the customer to make changes. What that means at the customer side is that people have entrenched motivations. They've built up an entire. They want to continue to grow their engineering group, that sort of thing. They may not have incentive at the customer site to talk to one another, so the really effective strategic account management programs that we saw sort of cut across business divisions, both at the customer site and at the seller site. They would make connections. They built this great network.

Another thing, because they had the network that they could use from that, they could anticipate problems. They could anticipate where power dynamics might be changing the customer site and to get out in front of that. If you had product line reps only, they're in a much smaller world. They don't know about those connections at the customer site. They can't anticipate that stuff, so they have to start developing those to even get started on this new product. You almost ... It's just making the task a lot harder.

The other real advantage of strategic account management, although even this is amusing in some ways, is that strategic account managers typically have a longer-term focus than an ordinary rep. If ordinary reps are worried about quarter to quarter, strategic account managers might have multi-year planning horizons that they look over, so they have less of a need, let's say, of making this quarter's numbers.

We did a different set of research around earnings management and how companies manage earnings. When you looked at the pressure that company's have put on strategic account managers relative to the normal sales force to make quarterly numbers, it was much less. It was actually the one part of the sales force that that they wouldn't jerk expenses away from, so that longterm mindset actually is something that's really helpful in selling new products, so there's lots of reasons why that part of the organization is effective, not only on the product development side, but also on the sales side in getting new things adopted.

Tim: Yeah, interesting.

Tom: I want ...

Tim: Go ahead, Tom.

Tom: No, I ... Please ask the question.

Tim: I'm curious about ... We get to talk to a bunch of ... We get to talk to academics, people who have spent most of their careers in academia and researching. We spend a lot of time in our podcasts talking to practitioners, and we love that, as well. You cross both ... You were at Xerox and now you're in academia, so I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about your personal journey to go from someone who's practicing and working on strategic sales incentives to the work of studying them and getting your PhD and that sort of thing.

Tom: Yeah. I do have an interesting career. I feel like I've lucked out in many ways. When I was ... I always knew that I wanted to teach. My dad taught at a community college and was the academic dean there. My uncles were all in big business, board-level people who had terrific careers there, and this is, I guess, my way of combining those two things.

Tim: That sounds good.

Kurt: Your family history led you to where you are.

Tom: That's right. That's my way of making sense of the world. I'd spent some time at Xerox. I actually loved my job there. I worked for great people who let me do ... They gave me a lot of autonomy to do interesting work. My last job, I was responsible for the U.S. Direct Incentive Strategy for the U.S. Direct Salesforce, so we spent like 140 million dollars on just incentives for about 4,000 sales people. We developed these compensation plans. We would support them through the year. We got very good at sort of explaining the company's strategy because pay focuses the mind and people often were not happy with us.

Kurt: I can imagine.

Tom: You got good at sort of understanding why the company was doing what it was doing, and your one safe haven in life was to explain how the strategy made the customers' lives better. Reps were never happy with you if they lost pay, but they could understand why you were doing something and the noise would be variable if you could do that.

I got to be about 30 and I realized if I didn't leave Xerox then, I would never leave because the money was good. They were offering me great opportunities for advancement, but I really wanted to teach and do research, so I left. I did a PhD at Yale and then was at Harvard for eight or nine years, and now I'm at the Darden School, so I've really been lucky to be part of some really great organizations, and I've learned a ton along the way.

Kurt: So, Tom, what are some of the fun or interesting topics that you're looking at now? What research are you doing that you're just really excited about where it's going and various different things?

Tom: We have a paper coming out soon about managing low-performing salespeople and some of the challenges associated with that. We allude to some of that research, actually, in our old sales motivation article.

Kurt: Right.

Tom: That's something that's interesting.

Kurt: It's not just the GE model of lopping off that bottom 10%? That's not ...

Tom: Actually, this particular program did have an element of that in it. It's called ... I forget what we called the paper finally. I think it's called The Bench Effect or something like that.

Kurt: Okay.

Tom: The basic idea, we did a field experiment with the study and, basically, this company had never laid anyone off in ages, ...

Kurt: Oh, my gosh!

Tom: ... which is unusual in sales, but they'd have stories about how the reps would help each other, and it was counter-cultural to lay people off. Then, a new sales manager came in and said, "We would like to run a program that will get rid of some of the dead weight," as he described it. They put in a program where, basically, they'd hire a trainee into the company and put him in a district, and then they ran a program where if you were the lowest-performing rep and you missed your quota within a sales team, you would be out and this new person would come in and take your job, which is very harsh.

Kurt: Yeah!

Tim: Yeah, just extremely harsh! Wow!

Tom: I should be clear. I'm not recommending the company's ...

Tim: Okay, good to know.

Tom: But what you saw was, because they didn't have much performance management at the company before this time, you saw an immediate spike in performance, 5% spike basically in sales, and it maintained throughout the year, so it wasn't like people were shifting business across time periods. It wasn't that people didn't know how to do their job. There was basically some shirking that went on. They ran the program for a year, and then ... They only ran it at part of the company, let's say a third of the territories, and the other two-thirds, they left alone.

They stopped to see what happened. Tens of millions of dollars, basically, to the good they made with this program. The interesting thing is, the CEO and the vice-president had a chat after that year and said, "Okay, we're not going to roll this out to the other territories. This is so counter-cultural to who we are because I don't like how it's going to change the company," so they found other ways to manage performance.

Really, to me, the study's interesting in a number of ways. One is, I do believe that you have to have practices in place to manage low performers. I could talk a little bit more about that, as well, but it also has to fit within the culture of your firm. If you talk to some of the high performers at that firm that were in those territories, they were almost like, "Thank God somebody's doing something about this!"

Tim: Yeah, right.

Kurt: Yeah.

Tom: It still is very harsh, a harsh practice, so finding ways, though, that get people out of the business that shouldn't be there, really don't belong in sales, but also always respectful of the culture is critical. If I can just say one other thing about performance management and what I've seen with top sales managers is that really good sales managers move that whole performance curve up. It's not just that they focus on the

low end and are good with the laggards or not just that they focus on the stars and are good with the stars, they get everybody to levels of higher performance.

It's interesting. Companies go through their challenges. Every company has a different challenge, so some targeted programs are important to run. This company, they probably did need something at the lower end, but the really good managers, actually, are ones that can relate to everyone.

Tim: What tips would you share with a sales manager who happens to be listening about how to deal with their bottom performers?

Tom: The behavior's totally different between the laggards and the stars, and the techniques you use to motivate them should be very different. There's a great parallel I can make to educational testing. Stars basically, no matter what you do, are going to succeed at the end of the year. They find a way.

Tim: Right.

Tom: So, they don't need a lot of direction to do that. In fact, the best salespeople that I've seen, if you ask them, "How are you planning out?" They'll have, let's say, an annual outlook, and they'll say, "Well, in March, this term lease is coming up, so I need to be at this account. In September, this opportunity's going to happen, so I need to be at this account." They sort of plan out their whole year, and they'll even start from President's Club level performance and then work backwards. "Well, what do I have to do to achieve it?" Like I said, when I was at Xerox, we had a market that grew at 5%.

I used to set President's Club level targets and, in general, there were about 160% of plan, so you get people that would knock it out of the park. There were amazing people! It was incredible performance. These are the planners, right? With laggards, they behave totally differently. Basically, they have a much shorter term focus. They only react to what's in front of them at the time. There's no real strategic plan, so then you need different interventions to move them up the curve. We have a paper ... I had a paper with Doug Chung and K. Sudhir a while back, and one of the things that we showed is that if you put in quarterly bonuses, the people who respond to that sort of incentive are the laggards.

Basically, what they're doing is they, "Okay, I'll plan a quarter out. I can make the quarterly targets," and if I can get them to do that, then they train themselves to be in the game at the end of the year. If you don't have these sort of interim incentives, and it doesn't have to be incentives, it could be any intervention that's sort of helping people keep on focus, what happens is, by June, they're so far out of the game that there's no way in hell that they're going to make their target.

Tim: It's easy for them to drop out at that point. It's hit the eject button.

Tom: That's exactly right, so we see the same phenomenon in education, as well, whereas if you have a year-long comprehensive exam, like in Great Britain, they often have exams

like this. For people that are star students, this is no problem because, all throughout the year, they keep right on track. They're learning along as they could. They're self-motivated. They developed a strategy. Great! Works for them just fine.

If you take people at risk, maybe people who first generation go to college types or families, let's say, that have never been to college, this system doesn't work as well for them. They have to train themselves how to study so, then, actually weekly interventions where you put in quizzes or you have small tests at a much more frequent cadence trains people how to study, so those interventions, actually, are very effective for your low-performing types of students. The same phenomenon. It just gets back to orientation towards longterm planning and longterm thinking.

Kurt: Yeah, you can only pull so many all-nighters in a row before you actually ...

Tom: Yeah.

Tim: Or not.

Kurt: Or not, as we know, right?

Tom: As the case may be.

Kurt: Yeah.

Tim: I was wondering if we could talk a little bit about music, Tom?

Tom: Yeah, sure.

Tim: We have a couple of minutes left here. Don't grimace, Kurt!

Kurt: This is Tim's section usually, and he always brings in a mus-, which is really fun, but go for it, Tim.

Tim: Well, sometimes, sometimes. You know, Tom, when we were getting ready for this, you said, "Yeah, I'm game for talking about music," so tell me a little bit about your interest in music. Are you a big listener? Are you a player? Do you gig on the weekends? I mean, where are you on the scale of musical interest?

Tom: I love music. I cannot say that I'm a gigger on the weekend. I wish I were. I played guitar when I was younger, but I don't have that ability. Fortunately, my kids seem to. I love to listen to my daughter play piano. I think it's great.

Tim: Oh, nice.

Tom: Yeah, so for interest, I'd say I have very eclectic interest. I love modern classical music, like Philip Glass. I was listening to that just before we started talking. I love jazz, like real modern jazz, like ... Well, I guess it's not modern anymore, but John Lurie and the

Lounge Lizards, I love that music. I'm probably listening to a lot of bluegrass and country music now and Kurt Vile, too. It's real ... I like music across the whole spectrum of things.

Tim: What kind of bluegrass are you listening to? Is this where Yo-Yo Ma meets Appalachian Spring with, gosh, who was it? Tim, I can't remember his name. Is it that kind of bluegrass or like are you really deep into the old style Kentucky Appalachian stuff?

Tom: Probably the more modern old stuff, like Dave Rawlings and Gillian Welch, I think are fantastic. I love that music. It's so complex and interesting, and the combination of the two are just, between the voice and the guitar, are amazing.

Tim: Yeah, that's interesting, which I think kind of blends into Americana. I mean, Dave Rawlings and Gillian Welch are certainly leaving the strict confines of bluegrass behind and getting into the bending of storytelling and gospel and all kinds of things that are influencing their work.

Tom: That's probably even a better description of it.

Tim: What's on your playlist right now? You said you were listening to Philip Glass before we got together. What else will you listen to today?

Tom: That's a good question. The last three weeks, I've been listening to Kurt Vile, so I'll probably listen to a little bit of that later this afternoon. Lord knows what else. I tend to become obsessive about things. I think, basically, that's how anyone with a PhD works. You know, your mind just gets going on something. You're like, "Yeah, I've just got to know more about that thing," and you just think more and more about it.

Tim: I would agree with that.

Kurt: Is that [crosstalk 00:43:10]?

Tim: Yes, it is.

Tom: There's something wrong with you if you get a PhD.

Tim: I knew it! I knew it! Tom, thank you so much! I knew there was something wrong with Kurt. It's the damn PhD!

Kurt: That's not the only thing that's wrong with me, so let's just make sure we got that straight.

Tim: Well, Tom, this has been really good. We do want to leave with just, if there were three tips for our listeners, and whether they be in sales or sales management or just people in general, what would be two or three tips that you would leave them with just so that they can be better at work or better in their life, whatever that would be?

Tom: Oh, that's a great question. One thing I'd say, I'd say this is certainly with sales is that a lot of people, when they think about selling, think it's a natural gift. I really do not have that perspective at all. I tend to be amazed, actually, at the variety of people who are successful in selling. There's introverts. There's extroverts. It's a really broad field, so there's lots of different places where people can be successful. I think having a learning mindset and being open to ideas and continuing to learn, like that's something that's inherent to everyone who's successful.

I've seen companies that, when they've made big transitions, the ones that sort of give their reps these learning opportunities do the best. I've seen that over and over and over again. I'd say one of the things I think that relates to people in general that I probably appreciate more as I get older is how little I can read somebody else's mind. With teaching, actually, I think it's really taught me this if I've learned anything is just to be more present or take people at face value. Make no assumptions about what their motives are.

Kurt: Right.

Tom: There's lots of things that are going on with them. I think when I was young and I was teaching, I was so worried about what it said about me, and you'd never get me to say that. I'm not sure I could even recognize that myself, but I got much better at the job when I stopped worrying about that part and could figure out what's going on in the student's head, ...

Tim: Right.

Tom: ... just sort of having no value judgment about it. They have their own motivations. Students do, customers do, and your job is to not to really have an opinion about that, just to help them along. That's something I appreciate more as I get older, and I think it's really useful. Good managers do this, good teachers do this, good salespeople do this, sort of have an ability to see where people are and help them get to the next level.

Tim: Good! That's terrific! That's great stuff to end on.

Kurt: Yeah, I couldn't agree with you more in thinking about we tend to, oftentimes, make assumptions about other people's motives and, most of the time, those are based on what's going on in our own head as opposed to what's going on in their head, so the ability to hold back from that and suspend that judgment for a bit, I think, is a very powerful tool that, if more people were able to do that, they'd have a much more, A, less stressful life, but be just better results as a result of doing that. So, with that, Tom, thank you so much for being on Behavioral Grooves. We really do appreciate it.

Tom: Thanks so much, Kurt and Tim. I really enjoyed this a lot. Thanks for asking me on.

Tim: Our pleasure! Our pleasure! Maybe next time, we'll be successful in getting you and Mike together. I would love to have a conversation more about your collaboration. Kurt and I always do one-on-one interviews. I mean, we're always interviewing a single

person, and we thought if there's anybody that we wanted to kind of break that mold with, it was going to be you and Mike, so we're still kind of excited about the opportunity to have the two of you on.

Kurt: Yeah.

Tom: Yeah, we'll have to make that happen.

Kurt: yeah.

Tom: Mike and I get on super well. I can tell that you guys do, too. We'd have a blast.

Tim: Yeah! I think we really would.

Kurt: We try to have fun and, I mean, this was great.

Tim: This was a blast. It really was.

Kurt: Yeah.

Tom: Yeah.

Kurt: We've cut off the recording part of this, so we're just now in our ...

Tim: Yeah, yeah.

Tom: Yeah, great.

Kurt: ... kind of roll here.