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Christy Van Der Westhuizen

Hi. Welcome to the Bridge The Gap podcast. I'm your contributor host Christy Van Der Westhuizen, and in this series I talk all things sales and marketing in senior living. And like I always say, even if you're not in a sales and marketing role, whether at the community level or the corporate or home office level, this episode is for you.

Because aren't we all on the sales team? Yes, sales is a team sport, or as I like to call it, the revenue generating team because without revenue we don't have a senior living business. So yes, if you're listening, that means you're on the sales team. So this means you too. So today I want to talk about something that is very real in our day to day world.

But I don't think we talk about it near enough or we say it loud enough. Okay, two little words sales fatigue. And I don't really mean the kind of cute tired where you just need a latte, a quick walk around your building, and a motivational quote or a funny sales meme. Yes, my team knows this. I love myself a sales meme, but that's not what I'm talking about here.

I mean, real sales fatigue, the kind where your team or you is physically tired, mentally tired, and emotionally tired. And it feels like every single conversation starts with occupancy or movements, leads, tours, deposits. What's in the CRM? What's not in the CRM? Why aren't we converting and where is our pipeline? What does this month look like? What does next month look like?

So pour yourself a cup of that latte that I mentioned. Settle in, and I want to get honest for a few minutes because if you've ever felt it, I promise you are not alone in all of this. So let me paint you a picture. So it's Thursday afternoon. You've made your calls. You've done two tours this week that felt so promising, and both families said, we just need a little more time.

Not ready yet. You've got a daughter who keeps calling, crying because she doesn't know what to do about her mom. And you've carried that conversation home with you three nights in a row. Your move in goal is staring at you from the whiteboard. And somewhere in there, very, very quietly, a little voice says, I'm so tired. That, my friends, is sales fatigue.

And here's what I want you to hear first before anything else that I talk about today. Sales fatigue is not a weakness. It's not a character flaw. It doesn't mean you're bad at your job. In fact, it often shows up in our very, very best salespeople because the people who feel it most deeply are the ones who care the most deeply.

And by the way, I am not immune to this at all. Just last week, I called an executive team member here at Jaybird and I said, I don't need you to answer this, but am I good at my job? So that my friend might be a symptom of sales fatigue? That doubt creeps in and so it can happen at all levels at any point.

So it's a little sneaky. It doesn't always announce itself as I'm burned out. Help me. It might show up as slow or follow up. Maybe that speed to lead is not top of mind. Maybe it's a sales director who normally has a ton of sparkle and enthusiasm, but when you call him or her, they sound flat or defeated on the phone.

Maybe it's an executive director just avoiding the sales conversation altogether because they're already feeling like they're drowning in other things. Operations, for one. And maybe it's a whole team saying all we ever talk about is sales. And so when I hear that, I don't dismiss it. I want to know more, because often what they're really, really, really saying is we need to feel seen for more than just the number.

Okay, so now hear me. I'm a sales leader. I believe in urgency and accountability. Oh, I love those two things. And I believe occupancy matters deeply. But I also believe this, that you cannot pressure people into maintaining sustained performance without also pouring energy back into them. So if all people ever hear is what's not enough, what's not moving fast enough, eventually they start to feel like nothing they do is ever enough.

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And so that's when fatigue, especially sales fatigue, might creep in. And so in this world. This is a little different than in other industries. We're not selling a product off a shelf. It's not a transactional sale. We're walking families through some of the hardest, most emotional decisions of their entire lives. And every day we help untangle. And if you remember one of my first Bridge the Gap podcasts, that Giant Spaghetti Bowl, we untangle fear and guilt and grief and worry and so many other emotions that come along with even talking about senior living.

And so that is emotional labor, that is emotional. You're giving yourselves emotionally all the time. You're listening for emotional clues, you're on high emotional alert. And that is real labor. And so you can give and give and give into your own tank is completely empty. And so today we're going to talk about doing three things. So we want to recognize it again that sales fatigue.

Let's recognize it. Let's talk about it. Let's understand why it happens. And then because this is a Bridge the Gap podcast. And we hope that we always leave you with something you can actually do. Let's talk about how to build momentum right back up. So ready again. Hope you grab that cup of coffee because here we go. So I love a good metaphor.

And so let me give you just one to hold on to today as we talk through sales fatigue. So have you ever watched geese fly south in that big V formation? Or if you're a mighty Ducks or Disney fan, remember that formation that won them the game or in the championship? So that big V formation. It turns out that it's not just pretty, it's pretty to look at, but there is a reason for it.

And so each bird's wings create a little lift for the one behind it. And so flying together, the whole group can travel a lot farther than any single one of them could go alone. And so when the bird

out front, the one doing the hardest work gets tired, it doesn't drop out of the sky, it just rotates to the back and another one takes the lead for a while.

They take turns. You can see this in so many different team sports, but my husband and I love to watch cycling, and this was something that we watched just this morning a race on TV. There's a leader there bringing their pack along with them, and then when they're done, they go ahead onto the back and someone else leaves the pack for a while.

So they take turns. And so I love that, because it's the exact opposite of how most of us run our sales careers. Let that sink in. That's the exact opposite of how most of us run. Most of us are this solo flight bird who flaps their wings over and over and over and till you get tired and you fall out of the sky.

I was just talking about this today. Again, none of us are immune to this feeling of. Just keep going. One more flap of the wings. But this is when I want you to lean on your team. And so the trap we fall into, we feel like we have to be out in the front alone into the wind. All day, every day, forever.

We think what being strong means. It means never taking a turn at the back. We think asking the person next to us for a little help is somehow admitting that we can't cut it. We're not really good at this. And that right there is how our strongest people burn out. That's when that sales fatigue has crept in and without raising the hand, they fatigue out.

And so let's name the why that this fatigue creeps in because you can't really address what you can't see. Number one, the emotional weight we carry families and a good salesperson in our industry absorbs a lot. You feel all the feelings. You feel the daughters guilt, the spouse's fear. And then you have the high highs. You celebrate the move ins, but you also quietly grieve the ones who waited too long or chose to say, stay home or past before they ever got the chance to thrive in our community.

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And so that accumulates. And so we rarely give ourselves permission to set it down. Number two, the grind without the glory. And so I think sales is farming, not fishing. You prepare the soil, you plant the seeds, you water and weed and nurture. And the harvest comes later. And so when the days are in between, when nothing has bloomed yet, it can feel like you're doing all this work and nothing is happening.

You see none of the reward. And so that gap between effort and outcomes, the behaviors of success, and then the actual success is that is ground for fatigue. All right. Number three the no pile. And so in our role we here not yet or not the right time. We need more time to think about it. We hear that far more often than we hear.

Yes. Unless you are this magical unicorn sales person who has never heard a no in their life. But that, friends, is not me. I've heard know a lot more. And so if we're careful or if we're not careful, we start to internalize those nos as rejection. And so I love to say that an objection is not a rejection.

It's actually a request for more information. There's something that we have not tapped into that is really important to them and we haven't addressed yet. And so when we take it personally and all those nos compile, it can really chip away at us. Number four guilty. I wish you could see my hand right now. I'm putting it up.

Guilty. Running on empty and calling it dedication. This is a sneaky one. We skip lunch, we answer the inquiry when it's really not convenient. We work the weekend event, and then we come in on Monday like nothing happened. We're ready to go. And we tell ourselves that that's just what it takes. But you cannot pour from an empty cup.

You can't create magic for a family when you yourself are completely depleted. And I'll be honest, there are days that the pressure pile so high that a quiet little job at a bakery sounds really nice. Remember those muffins that we love to drop off? Just kidding. But something like baking, having a job where you can check in in the morning and check out and go home and not think another second of it.

That sounds really nice sometimes. No CRM notes, no reports, no call recordings to listen to and analyze your sales skills. So if that thought has ever crossed your mind, you're in really good company. You're safe here. So let's talk the practical part. And here's the thing I want you to hold on to. Sales fatigue is real, but so is momentum.

And momentum is one of the most powerful things we can create inside a community. Because momentum changes the energy it takes a team. From here we go again to we can do this. So here's where we roll up our sleeves. And I've got some things for you, some for you to do as an individual and some for you to do as a leader of a team.

So number one, refill from your why. So when you're fatigued, go back to the very beginning. Why did you get into senior living in the first place? I promise it was not a spreadsheet that got either you or me into this industry. It was a person for me. It was my grandma. So I want you to keep a win file.

So that's a folder. Whether it's a note on your phone, a drawer of thank you cards from families, but on the hard days. Open it, read it. Remind yourself that you're not just filling apartments. You are changing lives. Full communities have more energy, fuller dining rooms, more friendships, more laughter, and more life. And that's the why that carries me further.

Number two, reframe the no. So I'm going to ask you to stop counting rejections. So stop counting the nose and start counting connections. So did you help a family feel a little less lonely today? Even if they didn't reserve that apartment just now, that's a win. Every meaningful

connection moved someone one closer to clarity. Whether that clarity lands with you or with another community.

And so when you measure your day by the care you give, not just the contracts you signed, but fatigue loses a lot of its power. Okay, here's number three. Protect your energy like it's part of the job because it is. So take the lunch. Take a walk around the building between tours. Block 30 minutes of no meetings to do your follow up without interruption.

Set the phone down and trust your backup team will catch the lead and connect with them. Rest is not the opposite of productivity. Let me repeat that again. Rest is not the opposite of productivity. It's just not. Rest is what makes the productivity sustainable. And I needed to hear this today. So thanks all for listening and being my own personal therapist because I needed to hear that today.

And number four, this one is for our sales leaders. We want to celebrate the behaviors. So the great behaviors of success not just the move in okay. But I do love a move in. Obviously the move in is the confetti moment. And boy do I have a lot of that. But if we only celebrate the move in, we miss every behavior that created it.

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So that might be the sales mail video that actually created the tour, that got the family excited to come into her and eventually end up moving in. So specific recognition builds repeatable behavior. And so people repeat what gets noticed. So when something's off, we want to move quickly from shame to strategy. Because shame doesn't build momentum but strategy does.

Action does. And so one more leadership truth that I'll never stop repeating is it is so much easier to keep a tired, valued team member going than to recruit and train a brand new one after they burned out and walked away. So invest in your current team. All right, here's another one five trade panic for clarity. All right.

I need to make sure I'm listening to this myself. Trade panic for clarity. And I say this with love because I am also a person who can bring a lot of energy. I know, shocking, right? But not every sales conversation should feel like we're launching a rocket in seven minutes. Urgency is great, but panic is not. I think urgency says this matters and we're moving with intention.

But panic says everyone run in circles and send 12 emails with unclear subject lines. Hurry. Do it. So if everything is urgent, then nothing is urgent. And so, sales leader, instead of throwing 20 ideas at a tired team, pick a few that matter the most this week. And so maybe it's speed to lead and reengaging warm leads. Or maybe it's tour readiness, making sure your model apartment is sparkling and the best of the best.

But tired teams need clarity far more than they need another motivational speech. Although listen again, is this thing on? I love a motivational speech. I give them to myself. I give them to

the team. I'll give one in a lobby over the phone on a team's call. But I also realize that if we panic instead of provide clarity, that motivational speech is going nowhere.

Okay, so lastly, when the sales fatigue sets in. I want you to ask for help out loud, not just in your head. And this is the hardest one for a high performers. So hear me. You are allowed to ask for help. Hand off a tour to your executive director who is number one on the backup team. By the way, when you're stretched thin, lean on your nurse for the clinical questions call, appear at a sister community and just vent for ten minutes because they get it like no one else does.

And so we get so much farther together than we ever could alone. And so if you're a leader, make space for the emotional load to ask your sales director what family interaction is weighing on you this week and then actually listen. And so not every coaching moment is a correction. And sometimes coaching is actually just helping someone in pack a hard conversation that they don't carry it by themselves.

Because if we want our teams to lead families with empathy and yes, we do, we have to lead our teams with empathy too. And by the way, sometimes that support looks like snacks. Never underestimate snacks. So a tired team with no snacks is a team on the edge. I don't make the rules, I just follow them. So let me leave you with this.

If you are feeling sales fatigue right now, if you've been the one out front into the wind carrying families and goals and that little whiteboard number for way too long. I want you to give yourself some grace today. And the fact that you're tired is not proof that you're failing. It's proof that you care. And caring is the whole reason why you probably got into this industry, and probably why you're really good at this.

So please don't try to do it alone. Take your turn at the back when you need to. Let someone share the load for a while. Refill from your why. And trust that the people around you want to see you make it too. But when teams are tired, we don't lower the bar. We help them believe they can reach it, because momentum isn't built by pretending that the pressure is not there.

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Because it is. But it's built on one behavior, one conversation, one tour, one follow up, one bit of recognition, and one small win at a time. So this week, look for the sales fatigue and name it with compassion. Then go build the momentum right back up. So take care of your families in your teams. But please, please, please take care of you.

So that's it for this contributor. Bridge the gap podcast. I'm Christy Van Der Westhuizen, reminding you that we are all on the revenue generating team, and the work we do is far too important to let fatigue have the final word, because sales fatigue is real. But don't forget. So is momentum and momentum. My friend is where the magic starts.

So go sprinkle a little encouragement around and I hope you share this with someone on your team who needs to hear it today and keep leading with heart. Now go get those wins today. Have a wonderful day!