



How Networking Creates More Career "Shots on Goal" - Tom Sellig

This transcript was lightly edited for clarity.

Chris: Today, my guest is the Senior Vice President of Global Sales for Patheon, Tom Sellig. Welcome to the show.

Tom: Thanks Chris, thanks for having me.

Chris: Sure, it's my pleasure. The topic for today is networking and professional development. First, tell me a little bit about Patheon and your role there.

Tom: Sure. So Patheon is a leading contract development and manufacturing organization, CDMO. The company's about two billion dollars in revenue, almost 9,000 employees. We provide drug substance and drug product, both large and small molecule in a variety of development and commercial manufacturing formats for pharma and biotech around the world.

Chris: Okay, and tell me a little bit about your role. I come more from the research side and so I'm still learning about the service provider side.

Tom: Got it. So we engage in companies starting in pre-clinical all the way to clinical development and commercial manufacturing. And my role is global head of sales and business development services, which means I have a responsibility for building relationships with customers. Again, large pharma down to a small pharma. We work with about 400 different clients. My team engages with clients all around the world, helping

identify their development needs or commercial manufacturing needs, and working with our internal teams to find creative solutions.

Chris: Got it. So let's start with development, Tom. Is there one thing in terms of development that's been particularly helpful to you in your career?

Tom: So, in my career, I've been fortunate, I guess, to have a variety of opportunities. I've always seek situations where I can continue to develop, continue to grow, expand my knowledge base in places where I can really add value. And for me, it's the two things that you really have to be considerate of when you're thinking about an opportunity and development is, "Is it something I really enjoy, am I passionate about it, and is it something where I can really make a difference, and add value and contribute?"

Chris: Nice. So can you give an example of something like that?

Tom: Yeah, sure. This opportunity for me... I've been with Patheon about 15 months now. I was previously with Covance, a large contract research organization. When I looked at the opportunity with Patheon, the CMO industry is going through a radical transformation that the CRO industry went through 5 to 10 years ago. So for me, it's an opportunity where I can step in and almost look back in to the rear view mirror and say, "Hey, this is something I've already experienced," and be able to learn from those lessons, be able to apply it to the current situations, and hopefully add significant value to the company and to the team that I'm leading.

Chris: Right. So what if I were to ask you about looking forward, and I'm not asking your specific plans right now. But if you went back several years, do you have a way that you look forward and say, "These are the things I need to do to push my career in the direction I want to go," whether it's learning new skills or connecting with the right people or taking on projects. Do you typically have a plan for something like that?

Tom: Yes, it's a couple of things. First of all, you have to understand what's most important to an organization and understanding that, and then understanding your role in helping create that value to the organization. And if you're delivering at a high level, exceeding objectives year in and year out that's going to enable that growth. And typically, I look at a role with a two to three year horizon and say...I almost kind of think about, "Where do I want to be in two years or in three years from now?" What do I want to be able to look back and say I was able to achieve, and what will be important to me, and what will be important

to executives at my company, and what would be important to people in the industry as a whole.

Keeping the end in mind, I guess I've been very goal-oriented throughout my career, and thinking about where I want to go, and then what do I need to do in order to achieve those objectives, staying focused on those things and not letting kind of other things distract you or get on your way is how I've tried to operate.

Chris: Right, I like that...those two words for me come up often and I like to tie them together for people. So one important thing about goals is avoiding distraction. It helps you focus on what you're going to do but also what you're not going to do.

Tom: Yeah, it's a challenge because you have to prioritize your time. For any executive or any person in the role today, it's easy to worry about a lot of different things, especially with...think about all the different technologies between texting, and emails, and social media, and lots of things out there. You can get wrapped up and lose site of the primary goals that you have. Thus, you tend to eliminate the noise, focus on what's important, and you need a couple of lucky breaks along the way as well. But as long as you're delivering upon what is being asked of you, much will line up in a way of enabling you to have additional opportunity and growth.

Chris: Right. Well, a lucky break is the reason we're talking here today because when I interviewed Chuck Drucker, a little less than a year ago, that's led to this whole thing that I'm involved with. And he's really driven home for me the importance of networking. He seems to be the master networker. But tell me how networking has played a role for you?

Tom: Yeah, it's been huge. As I think about every new opportunity that I've had, I'm just thinking about my career, thinking if this is true. Each successive role I've taken, whether it's with the same company or whether it's a different company, there's always been kind of a relationship or connection who was important in my previous role who ends up either moving on or being in a position to hire me in.

Specific example, a guy named Mike Lehmann, I worked with at Covance. We're in different divisions. He was leading a pre-clinical division. I was leading sales for the clinical division. We worked closer together in a couple of projects and governance committees, things like this. Mike ended up coming to Patheon about two years before me, and reached out and

said, "Hey, I've got a role that I think you might be interested in." One thing led to another and here I am today.

So in any role, if you're delivering and taking opportunities to engage with a wide range of people, we kind of never know when those people are going to show up. And the broader the network, the more "shots on goal" ultimately you're going to be able to have and that's going to create...as you build your network of relationships and your career becomes more and more important, those relationships to be able to tap in to, whether you're looking for a new job or looking to hire people in to a job, it's interesting to see the connections and how you can leverage them.

Chris: Is it a conscious effort on your part to think about building your network or is it something that people like you are just naturally good at, or where do you fall on a spectrum?

Tom: Definitely extroverted and not afraid to...if I'm at a reception to meet new people and engage, I don't know if I'm conscious about it. There are certain people that I will make a mental note of say, "Hey, this person, I really like what they stand for," or, "I respect some of their points of view or perspectives or some of their accomplishments." And if I don't know them well enough, I'll try to go out of my way to find an opportunity to reach out to them, to engage and get to know them a little bit better.

Doesn't always mean that that person is going to be important for my career later on, I just do it naturally because I like to ask a lot of questions, and learn about people, and learn new things. And in doing so, you kind of naturally...one thing leads to another and you meet some other people, and it just keeps building upon itself. So I'd say it's part natural, but if you're less natural at it, then, again try to find those people that you really respect or people that, "Hey, they're just really interesting." I'd like to get to know this person a little bit better, find the reason to, "Hey, can I take you out to lunch and pick your brain," or, "Will you take a 15 or 30 minute phone call so I can ask you a few questions?" Most people are pretty open to and receptive to those kinds of requests.

Chris: Yeah, I like that. I personally favor this kind of network. Honestly, we're doing my favorite kind of networking right now. It turns out that podcasting has been a phenomenal networking opportunity for me. But what's possible now is things like LinkedIn and other opportunities that you just mentioned, you don't have to be someone.

I'm not one of those people who's comfortable in a room full of people, like going in to a group and talking, but I'm comfortable here, and I'm totally comfortable reaching out to an individual on LinkedIn and just saying, "Hey, we have something in common. I'd love to ask you something." Like you say picking out the people that you think you know you can learn something from rather than hoping to bump in to the right people in a room even if it's full of, possibly the right people.

Tom: LinkedIn is a really powerful tool and I leverage it quite a bit. I'm getting, on average, a few requests a week for new connections and I'll probably make not that many, but a couple new requests a month, whether it's just people popping up. I've seen somebody or somebody I know of, I'll reach out and try to connect.

The other comment I guess I'd make is it's interesting as I'm getting older, the convergence of your professional and personal life. What do I mean by that? I'm finding people that I'm personally friends with, whether it's father, or mother of one of my kids' friends or someone that's in my neighborhood or whatever. You find that more and more often. I'm seeing people that are in similar spaces that are in adjacent or parallel industries that I'm reaching out to more and more often for input, advice, recommendations or just general networking.

Chris: Nice. So let's shift gears a little bit and talk about the ACP-LS annual meeting. So for people who haven't heard of ACP-LS, it's the Association of Commercial Professionals for Life Sciences. This organization is all about what we've been talking about there today. Development, professionally and networking. So you have spoken at the last couple of annual meetings, where does the ACPLS meeting fit in your world? What do you get out of it?

Tom: It's really an interesting opportunity to engage with people from very different backgrounds. Most conferences these days, it's either focused on a particular function, a particular therapeutic area, a particular segment of the industry. ACP-LS enables that as well because it's all around commercial professionals and life sciences. However, what it brings together are people from big companies, from small companies, from marketing, from sales, from some providers, and some, either device or pharma companies, and some senior executives, and some people more junior. So it really gives kind of a broad cross section of all people centered around commercial topics in the life science industry, which to my knowledge, it's the only venue that enables that kind of interaction.

Chris: I think you're right. What do you think...I went to the meeting last year, for the first time, I thought it was fantastic. No one will be surprised to hear me say that. But what I find interesting...tell me what your thoughts are...sometimes, it would be hard for someone in our industry to share a challenge that they're having, right? Because there's kind of a, shall we say, we're all living in a sort of a competitive cloud and kind of afraid to reveal what something maybe we shouldn't.

And I don't know how to say this, but the meeting, in my opinion, gives people an opportunity to listen to a speaker and then talk about the topic that was just covered and their experiences in a way that they might not reach out to someone and say, "Hey, how have you solve that problem?" Do you get that sense?

Chris: Yeah, absolutely. Not to make this about me, but last year, my topic was one that I shared the vision for our commercial sales organization here at Patheon and the approach that we're taking to kind of reach and attain that vision. And the majority of other settings that I'm in for conferences during the year, usually, I get a room full of competitors, a room full of clients, and I wouldn't feel comfortable sharing that kind of information.

At the event last year, I looked around the room and these people from a wide variety of backgrounds, I actually felt comfortable talking about it, and there are a lot of great questions that came up that really was excited and passionate about talking about. So it was a lot of fun.

Chris: Were there any questions that made you think differently about what you had just presented even?

Tom: Some people definitely have a different perspective based on the background they came from. I don't know of any if the specific questions but certainly, some of the other presentations that I sat in on caused me to pause and think about, "Hey, are we really analyzing our effectiveness the right way?" So I brought back...I asked several of the speakers for their presentations or their notes or even a couple of follow up questions that I shared within my organization.

Chris: Nice. So certainly, an individual would go and listen to these presentations and have discussions with other people and take away a lot from the meeting. Why would a company consider sending a team of people to this meeting? What would they be looking at and hoping to get out of it?

Tom: Depending on whether it's a very specific topic, there's a person who I know is presenting on this, the three or four of you should go listen to them speak. Maybe they're working on a working group together and might be an opportunity for them to get some different perspective, how to get a breakthrough idea. That could be one example where you'd send a team. While the networking is advantageous, I think it's really the skill development and the fresh perspective that you get. Probably, in my view, it's one of the most beneficial aspects of the meeting.

So any group that's looking to try to gain that insight could consider attending as a unit or as a team, or for a some of the people to get a similar take away that they can then bring back to their organization and then hopefully, solve a problem maybe more effectively.

Chris: Fantastic. So are there any other valuable takeaways or benefits to the meeting?

Tom: It hasn't necessarily happened in the past but one of the things that I know is actively being considered, I don't want to give away any ACP-LS secrets if it's not yet a fully big plan. But I'm one of the strategic advisory community, and one of the things we're thinking about is a more dedicated training regime that could be specifically for, whether it's a sales or marketing individual.

Many companies today that have, let's use sales as an example, sales organizations are looking to build competencies and skills for their teams. Presentation skills, for example, could be one...I'm just using as an example...could be one area where it's not really competitive advantage for companies in different industries to have a similar training for how to be a more effective presenter.

By having that type of an offering at the event, and whether it's at the general session annual meeting or whether it's in a series of separate trainings, I could see tremendous value for people to gain those skills, perhaps have even an accreditation that could ultimately be used for future development. So that's an area that might be really, kind of an emerging area that maybe really of interest to potential attendees.

Chris: Yes, and you bring up a great point that, first of all, the value of the organization is not solely in the annual meeting and it is no secret, I'm pretty sure it isn't now, that being able to provide that kind of training with an industry specific angle on it for people in our community is one of the things we're working hard to bring to the table.

Tom: Absolutely.

Chris: Well, Tom Selling, I want to thank you very much for the time you've taken to talk to me today. I think this has been really useful. It's been really educational to me and I think a lot of people or any one listening to this is going to learn something about, thinking about their career development path and the value of networking, as well as possibly attending the ACP-LS meeting. So thank you very much.

Tom: Well, thank you, Chris. It's great to getting to know you. We didn't know each other before and so networking in action, I guess. And hopefully, this will be useful for someone out there, and thank you again for the opportunity to talk.

Chris: My pleasure.

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