



'Making Clients Happy'



Bob van Putten

"The 'Client Value Lab' we ran ourselves with a real client, was the turning point in our Thriving Commercially program. For several weeks after this lab, we kept coming back in our regular meetings to the positive vibes of that client session. We realized that our spirit is very much about making clients happy, so that became the spirit in which we do like to do business".

Bob van Putten, co-founder & managing director of Flatland is looking back at a year of uncertainty, swift adjustments and commercial experiments. In partnership with the Thrive they designed a commercial excellence program at one of the most undefined moments in their history: April 2020, one month after Covid-19 changed the business world in the Netherlands. At the start of the lockdown, Bob thought: "We either cut cost on everything we can avoid, or we invest now in how we do commerce in Flatland. That wasn't just a matter of rolling out a standard commercial program. "Commerce was kind of a dirty word at Flatland". We are creatives: yellow, bustling with pictures, images, creative ideas. Commerce is not our natural steal, we thought". Many of them had negative associations with commerce such as the 'typical car salesman trying to push something you don't want or having tough price negotiations. "That is just not who we are". Later on, they realized that these were just limiting beliefs.

The short-term goal of the program was to stay relevant and visible among their clients and to revenue at a level it would keep the company alive during the crisis. The more the short-term goals turned out to be within reach, there was more opportunity to look further ahead: "We sell ourselves short and leave value on the table by looking too much at short sprints

and projects. We wanted to make a bigger impact on our clients through sustainable partnerships. We also want to make ourselves more relevant in terms of SDG goals".

The Thriving Commercially program helped the people at Flatland to talk about commerce regularly over a period of four months. Through these sessions they defined their own flavor of commerce. "We learnt that we can be ourselves in commerce. Once we develop a relationship with our clients, we will get to talk naturally about work and the relationship will develop. Now we call our clients also without an expressed business request".

The impact of the program came from the practical 'doing' parts of the program. The session where they all showed up with their call lists. Ekipa Lisa Rodger of the Thrive asked them to put their lines on mute and start calling. Awkward at first, but the sight of all others doing the same, made it more conducive to get started yourself. It is like a bootcamp session where the energy of others doing the same, gets you going.

Everyone had set an ambitious goal to double the revenue from their focus accounts. In each session, a small group breakout gave them the opportunity to share the progress on their focus account. In the end many had increased the revenue from their focus accounts but there were more important outcomes. Bob: "Actually, I find the 'outcome' of this project at least as valuable as the 'output'. Commerce is no longer a dirty word. We have a common language and a joint experience to refer to when we help each other. We are in the process to become that long-term business partner of our customer. And in that positive buzz, we now regularly call a customer, just to get back in touch".