



# Overcoming limitations with innovation: building an inside sales lab.

**Use case**  
Research

**Industry**  
Government & Education

**Integrations**  
Salesforce

**Key metric**  
↑ Speed to productivity  
↓ Enterprise-level scalability

How many times have you been asked, “Why?” The question can stop us in our tracks and cause us to be more thoughtful and intentional about our actions. But as time passes and people get trapped in the same cycles, the more important question is: “Why not?” When you push back and challenge the status quo, that’s when real innovation happens.

I should know; I’ve challenged the status quo my entire life. I grew up with a low socioeconomic status, so the status quo represented a lot of struggles. I always wanted to do things better, and since I didn’t have the same resources as other people, I had to rely on my problem-solving skills.

One of the ways I overcame the barriers of my socioeconomic situation was to make the most of the public library. I couldn’t afford to go to fancy camps like other kids, but I could go to the library, and I out read everyone. Eventually, this “hack” helped me develop my own ways of doing things to get where I wanted to go.

I’d been working as a janitor for a number of years out of high school and I eventually got hired as a laborer at a steel mill. During my two years at the mill, sales were consistently down, layoffs were common, and I remember

one day telling a buddy of mine, “I wish they’d hire somebody to sell this stuff so we wouldn’t have to worry about getting laid off anymore.” A few months later, I saw a listing in the break room for an inside sales associate at the mill. Even though I didn’t have a college education, I figured, “why not?” To my surprise (and relief), they hired me. I guess you could say I got the opportunity to put my money where my mouth was.

Everything was brand new. The company never even had a proactive inside sales team before. My first day, they put me down in front of a computer, and I couldn’t even turn it on. I’m a quick learner though, and after a call to my younger brother, I got enough of the basics to spark some ideas.

I went on to develop an integration between an off-the-shelf CRM and our company’s antiquated mainframe system, which allowed us to dump a bunch of information and start using it to elevate our sales process. My reward for being successful with this was a move to more outside sales opportunities and then on to a new company. I didn’t use my CRM database anymore, but this new build would prove a significant experience for what was to come.

## A bridge between business and higher education.

I eventually went to college and then found myself drawn into higher education. Today, I'm the associate dean for the Undergraduate Program Office at the [University of Iowa Tippie College of Business](#). My background has a big influence on my work where I still challenge the status quo, solve problems, and develop my own way of doing things. And when I teach sales to my students, I always ask them, "How can we do it differently?" "How do we use technology to convey a story that resonates with people?" That's the real value proposition.

I see myself as a bridge between analog and digital. I came up in an analog world, where I used a typewriter to write my final paper in high school in 1990. By the time I started in sales, we were using Windows 97. Technology had revolutionized the world in those seven years. I also see myself as a bridge between the professional business world and the world of higher education.

I started working for the University of Missouri (Mizzou) in 2010 as an assistant teaching professor, and while there, I felt the world of higher education would undergo another big shift in my lifetime. I wanted to be part of that change, so in 2013 I returned to school to get my Ed.D in Educational Leadership.

When the associate dean position came up at the University of Iowa, I saw several opportunities emerge. I was a non-tenure track faculty member at Mizzou, so for a school to want to hire someone with my background as a sales leader and a doctorate in a discipline apart from business spoke volumes about their desire for innovation. Senior leadership was adamant that the business school was "open for business" and wanted it to be more engaged in the business community. I saw it as a place where I could further my vision of engaging students **in** business rather than just **teaching** business.

## Who would help us innovate?

In the spring of 2022, less than a year after I started at Iowa, we launched the Inside Sales Lab at the [Tippie College of Business](#). Our focus was to give students hands-on sales experience while simultaneously providing a sales and marketing resource to businesses. There are only two labs of this kind in the country, and I created them both. The other lab is at Mizzou, where I combined practical, experiential student learning in sales alongside data collection for faculty. As an enthusiastic proponent of growing sales programs in higher education, I am happy that Missouri has continued to sponsor that lab.



The purpose of a research institution is to generate and disseminate knowledge, but that knowledge collection process can be complicated. Before we built the first lab, faculty members had to buy data for research. For example, one faculty member at Mizzou was researching the effect of word choice, vocal tone, and cadence on sales outcomes. They had to spend \$25,000–\$50,000 a pop for market data sets from leading data collection companies. They would then spend an entire semester cleaning the data for research with the help of graduate students. Only then could they run the data through an AI program to determine the correlation of vocal range to sales success. I thought, "How can we do this better?"

We wanted to gather our own data for research, and that began with our phone calls. When made calls through a typical VOIP system and then recorded them using Zoom. Using the lab space to experiment on word choice and scripting was important for us, but making heads or tails of it later for research purposes was incredibly difficult. A few months in, I knew we needed a better solution. I began to explore the market, and [Talkdesk](#) was one of the options.

## A platform that sees—and seizes—opportunity.

Why Talkdesk? For starters, they were the only company who would speak to me. Most of the companies in this space typically deal with 1,000-seat call centers, where I needed much less than that. These companies weren't interested in the higher education market. But rather than brush me off because it wasn't a typical use case, **Talkdesk wanted to explore the opportunity and engage with people who are innovating.**

I also saw right away how intuitive Talkdesk is. Back in the day, one of the reasons my CRM integration worked was because I didn't have to do a lot of work explaining it to people who weren't comfortable with technology. During the Talkdesk demo, I saw how easy it would be to explain. My students are tech savvy, but they don't necessarily have a complex understanding of how the underlying technology works. The technology behind the features is complex, but the user experience is relatable and connective.

Unlike a typical call center new hire, I don't have weeks or months to get someone up to speed. I have students for three and a half months, so I have no training runway. Talkdesk is intuitive enough that my students can look at the program and know how to use it.

The other difference from a call center? I can't add more physical space for more seats. There are only a handful of lab workstations, and that's all the square footage we'll get. I can create a schedule to give everyone lab time but what I really need is enterprise-level scalability. Talkdesk delivers this with an app students can download to their computer or phone. They get all the functionality of Talkdesk for recording phone calls and storing the data in the platform, but I don't need to cram another workstation into the lab.



The Talkdesk for Salesforce integration has been key when it comes to building contact lists, making notes and tagging, and transferring data seamlessly. For many of our partner businesses, a strong Salesforce integration is a must. Sharing data is as easy as drag and drop.

While I didn't intend to rebuild the exact thing I'd created at Mizzou, I could see and overcome the stumbling blocks of the process much faster because I'd already been through them. When it came time to marry research and the practical at Iowa, I knew Talkdesk was the best option.



**The underlying technology of a solution may be complex, but the user experience should be relatable and connective.**

## Talkdesk helps turn sales theory into sales innovation.

Part of my purpose for building the Inside Sales Lab was to gather our own data, and Talkdesk enabled data capturing with easy-to-access call recordings. But we've gone so much further than that.

I'm building a sales culture at the University of Iowa, just as I managed to build a sales culture at Mizzou. By the time I left Missouri, being in our sales program was like a badge of honor, sought out by students and employers alike. Employers hired our graduates because we had developed a reputation for a high level of engagement and quality. When I arrived at Iowa, that sales culture didn't fully exist yet, but a solid foundation had been laid, and there was a demand for it. In my first year, my sales classes filled up immediately.

I had a clear mission to go out and engage the business community when launching the lab at Iowa, and like any good salesperson, I had a list of prospective companies to work with when I made this transition. One of them, which we started working with in January, is a startup out of Boston. Some other companies in the pipeline for the upcoming school year include a logistics company in Chicago, a service company that works with medical technology, a medical device company, and consumer goods prospects. These industries have a solid pipeline, they're appealing markets to students, and we want to work with a wide range of industries for better research data.

But as much as a business school should be open for business, the University of Iowa should be the university for Iowa. We need to engage with local businesses, too. So we have a local company—that sells nationally—headquartered 15 minutes from campus who will work

with the lab in the fall. We also have a company affiliated with the university's medical division that does a lot of R&D. We have a short-term project with them to gather market intelligence, which is a win-win for the business and our students.

The Inside Sales Lab is a new way of thinking about higher education and its role in the business community. We used to have this idea that research was in one silo, teaching in another, and although research might impact the industry down the road, everything should be kept separate. But my experience has taught me that the status quo isn't good enough. If we can integrate these two worlds, why not?

Talkdesk allowed me to create a living proof of concept. I don't have to talk about this in theory anymore—we've done it in practice. We've hit that sweet spot between innovation and theory, allowing our students to enter the marketplace more prepared and experienced in their field.



### About Talkdesk

Talkdesk® is a global AI-powered cloud contact center leader for enterprises of all sizes. Talkdesk CX Cloud and Industry Experience Clouds help enterprises deliver modern customer service their way. Our trusted, flexible, and innovative contact center platform leverages AI and automation to drive exceptional outcomes for their customers and improve the bottom line.

[Learn more](#) and take a [self-guided demo](#) at [www.talkdesk.com](http://www.talkdesk.com).

**talkdesk®**

Experience. A better way.

[Customer stories:](#)  
[University of Iowa](#)

