

MARKETER MUST READS

Business Development

These definitive articles from *Marketer* offer best practices for developing business and moving your firm forward successfully.

Featuring "How To Earn the Role of Trusted Adviser,"
Michael T. Buell, FSMPS, Assoc. DBIA

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SMPS *Marketer* Must Reads: **Business Development**

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How To Earn the Role of Trusted Adviser

By Michael T. Buell,
FSMPS, Assoc. DBIA



In the A/E/C and other professional services industries, marketers and business developers use a plethora of terms to describe their firms and their work. Many of them get so overused they become obsolete or even meaningless. With colleagues or peers, we hear how everybody is collaborative, responsive, professional, creative, team-oriented, client-focused, or open-minded. My favorite, however, is when I hear design firms share how “design-oriented” they are. Are there really other focuses of design firms?

Point being, these terms of self-proclamation should really be basic expectations, not unimaginative ways to try to differentiate yourself. On the contrary, if your clients actually call you all these things in the public realm, then you should share those earned characteristics as testimonials any way you can.

This is the foundation for branding for all of us—what your clients think. Who do you think determines your firm’s brand in your marketplace? It’s not senior leadership, marketing/business development, or an outside PR firm ... it’s your marketplace! What client organizations say or think of when they see your logo, your communications, or your face ... is your brand!

Hence, the most powerful tool for understanding what your clients really think of you is to simply ask them. Make sure you’re having face-to-face client feedback meetings between, during, and after projects on a regular basis. Don’t leave these meetings before you get genuine and detailed responses to: “Where would you rank us among other firms, and why?”; “How would you differentiate us versus other firms?”; and “How can we improve?” No matter what they say, this feedback is real, and it’s pure gold. You won’t get the depth of insight you need over email, so get with them in person.

From Informer to Trusted Adviser

We’ve talked about the characteristics we’d like our firms (and ourselves) to be associated with. Now let’s step it up to roles we would like to earn. The one in particular that many of us should strive to be considered is that of a trusted adviser. Whether you’re a technical professional, a business development professional, a seller-doer, or a marketing professional, you really should want all the clients you engage to come to you when they need something. Rarely does a day go by that someone

doesn’t reach out to me for advice, support, or a good laugh. Very few things make me happier or more satisfied professionally than when I know I’m helping somebody out.

With clients, that same desire most definitely applies. There’s no better proof that you’re doing things the right way than when clients contact you for assistance or information. This should tell you that they trust you will be timely, honest, and trustworthy. Isn’t that what you want your clients to think of you?

I’m sure you’ll agree that clients hire people they trust and continue to work with those they both like and trust. Having an engaging personality is powerful. Having a presence when you walk in a room is powerful. Having confidence in your abilities to enlighten or inspire others is powerful. Putting in the effort to be a constant informer, however, is the most critical element to earning the role of trusted adviser.

Yes, the role of informer is the consistent precursor to the role of trusted adviser. Nothing shows a client you value them more than always being ready to act or respond. You want your clients to believe unconditionally that you’re there for them. Proactively, you should constantly be looking for information to share on industry trends, upcoming events that relate to their interests, or fresh lessons learned that could benefit their next project or development. These efforts are the cornerstone for building trust and rapport.

Reciprocity is the powerful residual of this type of relationship. This reciprocity is not a tit-for-tat or *quid pro quo*, if you will, but a client’s genuine comfort level for sharing insight regarding their concerns, obstacles, ideas, plans, or personal interests. Unequivocally, you want your clients to be comfortable sharing their perspectives with you on a regular basis. That’s what a strong client relationship feels like.



It's not about being at the right place at the right time ... it's about being at the right place all the time!



Modern workspace, Boston, MA.
Hacin + Associates. ©Ramsey
Bakhom/Parallax, parallaxagency.com.

Help, Don't Sell

The challenge that too many still have, however, is the lack of ability to stop coming across as agenda-driven or "salesy." The moment a client feels that you think you're entitled to information, insight, or a project opportunity, you're on the way out. The key is to genuinely care about them first and foremost. I'd hate to call it an art or a developed skill, but it remains that plenty of poorly trained business development and technical professionals simply can't get the "I just want a new project" out of their heads.

Believe me, if it weren't for my client relationship development classes to graduate architecture students over the last seven years, they would have entered the workforce with the idea that projects will fall at their feet. In the same sense, young business developers tend to feel that cold calls and face time will guarantee a certain amount of project wins. I've learned over the years that it doesn't. What does impact your number of project opportunities and pursuit hit rates more than anything is a consistent focus on helping, not selling to, your clients. "HELP, DON'T SELL!" signs should be displayed throughout your office.

If you want to stay ahead of your competition, you must realize that intelligence gathering, due diligence, or discovery (whatever you call it) never stops. Every day has to be filled with the desire to gain as much insight as you can

regarding your marketplaces. Sitting at your desk and waiting for RFPs is futile ... unless you work for a firm that thinks a 15% hit rate is OK.

As we've discussed at length, you get the absolute best information from your clients. But that only happens when, you guessed it, you focus on them and their needs. And that starts with the first contact and never ever stops.

I recently read a saying, "It's not about being at the right place at the right time ... it's about being at the right place all the time!" If you can be at the right place with valuable information, genuine support, or personal interest for your clients all the time, then you'll have the relationships you desire and possess the most important role of trusted adviser. ■



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How To Think Like a Scope Creator, Not an Order Taker



By Wayne O'Neill

Those of us with a few years behind us have learned that business development is hard work that should involve everyone in the firm. To make it easier to be successful, I developed a proactive approach that enables opportunity creation.

Over the past few years, despite a slowing global economy and low oil prices, U.S. and Canadian economies have grown or held relatively steady. Opportunities for A/E/C firms to pursue and bid work have been plentiful in most public and private market sectors. However, a report released in September 2019 from The American Institute of Architects (AIA) shows a significant drop in national architecture firm billings and new project activity.¹

On the heels of strong opportunity, with modest concerns and indications of a slowdown ahead, wise firm owners and business development professionals are pausing to assess the future. Competition will increase for available work; creative approaches to acquiring and delivering contracts will spike. How will you stay ahead and position yourself for success in the event our market does begin to slow down?

The Traditional Approach: Order Taking

Professionals who are responsible for marketing and business development understand that waiting for an RFP to be issued is not the most effective or sustainable approach to winning work. Most of us know success requires attending events and building relationships prior to the RFP, and then bidding competitively on the scope of work. But often that isn't enough.

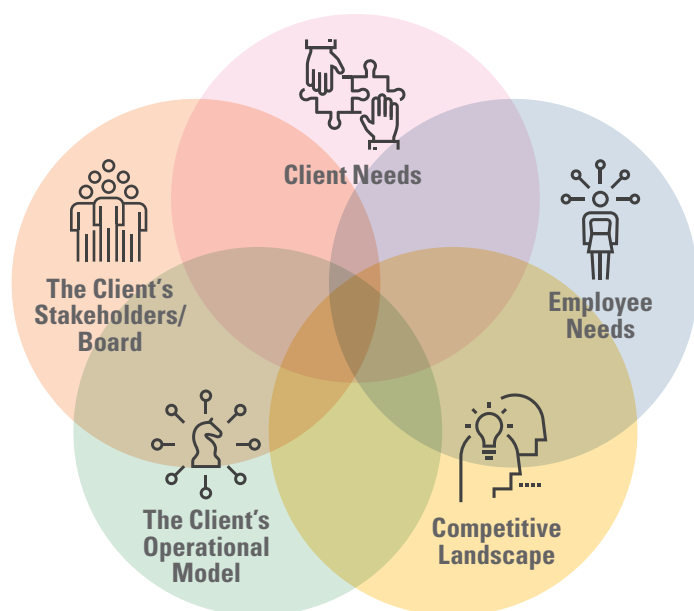
Are you selling past what's asked for? How can you assure you'll win these projects if you're not truly connecting with the business and political issues that drive your clients' decision-making? How can you adjust your business development approach so you find success through the ups and downs?

Becoming a Scope Creator: It Begins With Five Key Areas

Here's the secret: You have to understand emotional wish lists. And by the way, you won't find these on any capital improvement project list!

Savvy business developers gather information about five key areas of any entity they target as a potential

Figure 1. Five key areas to becoming a scope creator.



client or a client with whom they want to do more work (See Figure 1):

1. Client Needs
2. Employee Needs
3. Competitive Landscape
4. The Client's Operational Model
5. The Client's Stakeholders/Board

Scope creators are relentless about tracking and studying these areas. This in-depth effort helps us understand the business and political issues that influence decision-making, and ultimately helps us understand the emotional wish lists that are often difficult for owners to put into words. Once we unlock that vault, the opportunities we can create are almost limitless.

Let Me Show You: An Example from Higher Education

How might you apply this approach? I'll use a simplified example from our own practice in the higher education industry. We learned these points by talking to clients, reading articles from news sources both inside and outside higher education, following consumer trends, reading university board meeting minutes, talking to

chancellors and board members at industry conferences, and speaking with private equity groups who have institutional funds to invest in higher education projects.

You have to be diligent and pay attention to a diverse collection of knowledge points because you never know how all the dots of information will converge into seeds of opportunity and potential scope. Think of the information you gather as a complex venn diagram. As overlapping information coalesces you begin to identify areas of opportunity.

1. Client Needs

In our example, the higher education institution's clients are parents and students.

Parents want value. They want their kids to get an education at a great value. They want their kids to go through experiences that teach them how to become responsible adults who are ready for the real world. And most important, they want them to be gainfully employed.

Students want to be engaged. They want memorable experiences like football games, concerts, and t-shirts and tacos handed out during

campus events. They want guidance and support from their professors, and connections to internships and other career opportunities. They want ease and accessibility to university facilities, as well as just about anything else they need from food to internet to movies.

2. Employee Needs

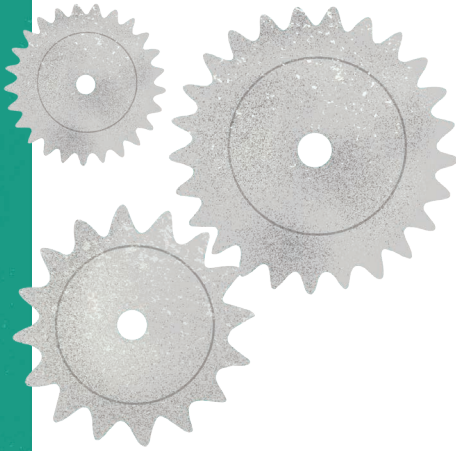
Professors want to be part of an institution that delivers high-value education and prepares students to make an impact. They want a supportive work environment with access to research grants and industry experts to improve their curricula. And most important, they want long and successful careers.

The facilities group wants a university that prioritizes improvements and operational efficiencies. And most important, they want a budget that supports capital projects and ongoing operational budget needs.

3. Competitive Landscape

Universities in neighboring states offer scholarships and grants for top high school students to attend their schools with the hope they start their careers and lives there. Those states are trying to build their talent pool and ultimately increase their tax base.

Trade schools and community colleges offer shorter programs and certifications that prepare young adults to begin their careers at a lower overall cost. This appeals to students who haven't saved for college and don't want to take out large loans. Most important, these options appeal to students who want to get started in career fields where they can generate income quickly.



4. The Client's Operational Model

State-funded public universities are battling for capital funds to quickly move forward on projects that will help them stay competitive and meet ever-evolving client needs. They realize they can't continually increase tuition, room, and board because families can't keep up with costs. They know they have to push themselves further to compete with trade schools, community colleges, and private schools with large endowments and scholarship programs.

5. The Client's Stakeholders/ Board

State and local governments want to create jobs and keep students in state to grow their labor force and tax base. They are also looking for public-private or corporate partnerships that can match qualified graduates with local job openings.

Local businesses want to grow their workforce with people educated in the latest technologies and trends.

Private equity funds want to invest in education programs and businesses helping to grow the community, which then provide long-term investment value.

Board members want to meet the needs of all the groups mentioned above. These are the people with emotional wish lists and objectives for their university leadership teams

to achieve. These board members and leadership teams are struggling to keep their arms around the entire ecosystem previously outlined.

Now What? Connect the Dots and Create Scope

Your research makes it clear that those responsible for the health and future of the institution don't have it all figured out. They are hungry for ideas that help them create solutions to remain competitive.

By running down some of the well-known business and political issues in higher education, coupled with the deep dive you just took into the market, you can start to see how and why certain dots connect. Your Venn diagram starts to highlight areas where multiple needs overlap.

When I look at this information, and pair it with other market knowledge, I see the potential for solutions that could help all parties above win:

- A cybersecurity degree program, a cyber range facility co-developed with corporate partners, new job opportunities, and growth in the tax base
- A mobility solution that includes a parking structure, corporate partnerships with Amazon or Lime, and university revenue from parking concessions

You may say, "Whoa. How did he get there?" It's all about thinking creatively. It takes practice. It requires triangulating information from multiple sources.

Asking Better Questions Places You in Control of the Future

Armed with the information above, think about how you might approach

a board member at a university. It could sound something like this:

"I've been studying the trends in higher education over the past few years. And I'm noticing that you face tremendous challenges to meet a student's needs for engagement, and a parent's need for good value. You are fighting to compete with the states around you for the top students, and you are seeking corporate partnerships so that you can keep graduates in-state.

What if I showed you how a concept focused on mobility could help you?"

This dialogue will cause owners to see you differently. Now you're not just another A/E/C firm. You're perceived as a creative professional consultant capable of helping a company or institution accomplish their emotional wish list, which will really set them—and you—apart in the market.

You've changed the substance of the conversation from "Can I bid on your 60,000-square-foot facility?" to "Can I help you improve your ability to compete, your operating bottom line, and student engagement?" You have become a scope creator. ■



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1. "Substantial Decline in Architecture Billings: August report suggests greatest weakness in design activity in several years." The American Association of Architects (AIA), September 18, 2019. <https://www.aia.org/press-releases/6201773-substantial-decline-in-architecture-billin>

By Michael T. Buell, FSMPS,
CPSM, Assoc. DBIA

The Entire Business Development Process in *11 Words*

IDENTIFY ENGAGE
LISTEN
UNDERSTAND
RESPOND INFORM

Earlier this year, I was asked to describe the A/E/C sales process to a room full of peers. My initial reaction was, “Sales is a result—business development is the process!” Yes, we’re trying to generate sales, but with professional services, that should be considered the preferred culmination of effective and timely marketing and business development efforts.

In a vernacular sense, sales or customers are more transaction-based, similar to retail. Business development is the process of securing clients, and clients are those with whom you have to earn trust before there is any chance of working together. And that process, as you’ll be reminded, does not start at the RFP!

That being said, I gathered myself and decided to create a simple list of words that align with the chronological process of what I (and all you other business development leaders out there) do on a daily basis. I wanted to be able to write

these on a flip chart very quickly. I thought of key action words that I execute from Point A to Point Infinity. These words are:

*Identify, Engage, Listen,
Understand, Respond, Inform,
Pursue, Affirm, Win, Fortify,
Cultivate*

That’s it ... the 11 words that best describe the entire business development process. Now, let’s take them one at a time to clarify what they mean.

IDENTIFY

The first thing we all need to do is identify a prospective client and determine if they’re a good fit for your firm (and if they’ll eventually have interesting projects). No matter the client or owner organization, somebody must stand up and say “Hey, why aren’t we working with them?” We have to start somewhere, right?

Hopefully, you're part of the strategic planning process and there are champions created to establish optimum market share with each top client or preferred vertical service market.

ENGAGE

This topic usually takes up a half-day discussion in my workshops, but for this article, we'll condense it to two paragraphs. A personal introduction to a prospective client typically happens through a trusted partner or peer (my first choice), a meeting



at an event, or a phone call to share a quick introduction/understanding/offering message (which, if done properly, is not a sales call). Your first action after the introduction is to gain a face-to-face meeting with a decision-maker or influencer.

Until that happens, you have little-to-no opportunity to develop a meaningful, trust-based relationship. From the moment you get a prospective client on the phone or start your first conversation, you need to stay away from coming across as salesy or pitchy.

LISTEN

Once you're engaged and in front of your prospective client, you clearly want to organize the conversation around your phone call or whatever inspired them to set the meeting. It may sound cliché, but listening is your most important activity. You got the meeting because you weren't selling on the phone, and you'll have a productive first meeting if you don't start asking for work during your conversation. This is the first of many opportunities to listen and learn valuable tidbits. Make the client



Make the client comfortable and they'll talk, talk, talk!

comfortable and they'll talk, talk, talk! That's a good thing because just about everything they share can and should be used in the future to develop the relationship.

UNDERSTAND

Just as important as being listened to, clients want and need to be understood. From the first meeting and beyond, you need to make sure you fully understand their goals, interests, ideas, likes, and dislikes. A great way to prove that you're actively



listening is to constantly clarify. "So what you're saying is...", or "Just so I'm following you..." or "That's very interesting, tell me more about..." Building the foundation of trust with clients begins with showing them you truly understand their perspectives and concerns. The better you understand them, the better you can do what comes next.

RESPOND

Whether it's during your initial meetings or as part of a follow-up regimen, you must now start the effort of doing what you say you're going to do. For any information, introductions, or activities that you've offered, you must follow through exactly as you promised ... if not better or faster than anticipated. Remember, responsiveness is a regularly used word, good or bad, when you're executing your client feedback/performance review meetings (face-to-face, please) about ongoing or completed projects. You should place the same importance on that effort during this courting stage as well. Meaning, it never goes away!





INFORM

The best business developers aspire to excel at the role of consummate informer. You want to have the reputation with your clients that you're always looking for opportunities to enlighten them with industry trends, interesting events, or recent lessons learned. The reputation of consummate informer can usually turn into one of trusted advisor. That's the ultimate position you want to gain with your clients and, again, it takes constant effort to prove your value and worth to them and their needs.

PURSUE

This step happens when the right project comes along with your prospective clients and you decide to go for it. Hopefully, you've already completed your go/no-go process. If you don't know all or most of the project drivers and selection committee hot buttons by now, it's typically too late to create the most productive message. This means you'll have to guess, and that's not a healthy strategy.

During the pursuit stage, the entire team needs to be engaged. Business development, marketing, and the design or project management team must be fully inspired to win this project by (1) understanding all the client's issues; (2) caring about the impact of the project to its users; and (3) knowing that at this point, qualifications only got you here ... they won't win the project. Inspire your audience to want to work with you, not your résumé!

AFFIRM

This goes alongside the pursuit phase, but is too often forgotten. From the first paragraph of your proposal's cover letter to the closing statement of your presentation, sprinkle as much of the intelligence you've gained from the client since your first meeting. We've already discussed the importance of listening, understanding, and responding. Now you can prove you've listened by acknowledging what you've

learned they care about the most; affirming how you will help make their vision happen; then affirming why your people, culture, and process match so well with theirs.

WIN

This is the goal you've been looking for ever since you decided (a long time ago) that you wanted to work with a new client. If you've followed the previous steps conscientiously, you'll likely get the results you're striving for. I've often shared that the most applicable evaluation criteria for a business development effort is hit rate. It's really the best thing to determine effectiveness.

I've also frequently shared that the three elements that impact hit rate the most are: (1) an effective due diligence effort before the RFP; (2) an honest go/no-go process (this is sometimes tough to get technical folks to stick to); and (3) a proposal and presentation effort that's focused on the audience (the client, the purpose of the project, and the project's users) and not on your firm.

After a win—call it a sale if you want—you'll know it happened because of the process you've executed well before the RFP hit the streets. If you say you only won because of your price ... we can't be friends!

FORTIFY

Now you have a new client. The business development process is not over, not by a long shot. This is where you need to focus on slowly, but surely, earning client loyalty. I've already mentioned the face-to-face client feedback/performance review meetings. Find a good spot during each project to find out how your team is performing in the eyes of the client. Don't wait until after the project is complete, as that could be too late to fix a possible fractured relationship that was never shared. What also helps to fortify client loyalty is doing your best to make sure your colleagues understand and

believe what makes your firm unique and special. Quick hint ... it's not what you do. It's how and why you do it. Focus your differentiating messages around your people and culture, as well as the lessons learned that only come from your specific experiences.

CULTIVATE

It may have happened a time or two over the years, but I doubt many firms get repeat work by saying at the end of a project, "Hey, give us a call when you've got something else!" If you're not staying diligent with your engaging, listening, understanding, responding, and informing, then you might have to start from scratch with that client. And who wants to do that?

We spend a lot of time and effort securing new clients and earning their trust. Let's make sure we're doing everything we can to maintain our preferred status because believe me, many other firms are trying to take that position away from you. Stay diligent!

BONUS STEP

Between and during every step we've discussed, there's one key phrase or sentiment that must be shared consistently, and that's "Thank you!" Never stop saying it and never stop sharing your appreciation.

When we ring the bell to signify a new project award in our office, people know not to ask, "What did you sell?" Instead they ask, "What did we win?" That's a question that never gets old and comes from a proactive, persistent, and professional business development process. ■



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How To Prepare for Client Interviews Like a Broadway Star

By Leslie Blaize, CPSM

What do engineers and architects have in common with Broadway actors? They both perform. And great performances lead to public acclaim and future work.

The decision to deliver a winning presentation at a client interview begins with the go/no-go decision. Ideally, a team goes after work with the odds stacked in their favor. Key players know the prospect and the proposed project. They've been following its development for months, if not years. They know the prospect's hot buttons and are researching potential solutions reflecting the latest technology.

Following this ideal scenario, how do you create a successful presentation? Here's a five-step process that will address client needs and build your team's performance confidence.

Step One: What's Your Purpose?

What's your production about? Actors get into the head of their characters. They want to deliver the playwright's message in an authentic performance.

In the same way, you need to understand the obvious and hidden motives of your clients. Address your prospect's presentation questions but go deeper. What are your differentiators that will seal the deal for your clients?

How can you address their specific pain points? Solutions could include the following:

- Your project team knows how to deal with unexpected obstacles
- Your construction staging plan will cut down on traffic delays for citizens
- You'll establish a process to communicate with stakeholders to answer concerns throughout the project

Have you researched the decision-makers? Do they have a technical background or are they public officials or appointees with various backgrounds?

Have others in your firm worked for this prospect, perhaps providing a service outside of your area? Take the time to listen to their insights—if they won or lost a previous job. They may even share queries posed by prospects during the Q&A session.

What's your main goal? Yes, you'll deliver a successful project. But you also want to make your clients look good. Their re-election or job security may depend on it.

Step Two: Select the Proper Cast

Pick the right professionals for the job. Typically, prospects want to meet the project manager and specialists.

A business development professional or firm leader may introduce the team, but they should have a minor role. Key subconsultants also may participate for a few slides to demonstrate how their expertise will enhance the project.

Celebrate connections. Look for team members who excel at public speaking—or who are willing to learn. They may be junior staff members who would bring an infectious enthusiasm to the presentation.

Step Three: Organize Your Talk

When you attend a play, attendees frequently check out the playbill to review the play synopsis, scenes, characters, and actor bios. Most plays follow a three-act structure. The audience meets the characters, a complication develops, and then it's resolved in act three.

In A/E/C client presentations, follow a similar format. Your judges meet you in person. They may have reviewed your résumé or LinkedIn profile in advance of the meeting. Then they wait to see how you'll describe their challenges and offer your proposed resolutions.

Begin your presentation by stating your purpose and offering a preview. Then clearly identify your prospect's hot buttons and show how you're qualified to resolve problems. Finally, sum up your approach and ask for the job.



West Texas A&M University, Canyon, TX. Kirksey Architecture. © G. Lyon Photography, glyonphotography.com.

During your presentation, look for ways to stand out. Consider successful plays. They may use period backgrounds or multimedia to help set the stage and add interest. How can you add local photos or other dramatic graphics to show your understanding of your prospect's challenges?

Step Four: Practice Your Presentation

The project team should expect to devote significant time preparing an engaging presentation. The marketing team schedules brainstorming sessions to review the client's hot buttons and practice sessions.

Smart firms insist on practices for all team members. Broadway actors practice alone and then with the full cast, often for weeks. Professional services personnel need to follow the same approach on a more limited scale. Seasoned personnel with only a few slides can assist the less experienced. And during the practice, the pros may discover new information about the project or client that will enhance their contributions.

Compare this process to a harried team forced to pursue work by a manager looking for a quick fix to declining revenue numbers. They've neglected standard marketing practices because the pipeline

was full. Now it's not and they're grasping at straws. Unless team members find last-minute inspiration, the presentation probably will fall flat.

Even teams that expect to win projects neglect to practice presentations. Here are some standard excuses:

- I'm too busy with client work
- We'll do a run-through in the car on the way to the interview
- I only have two slides
- I'll practice on my own

And secretly, presenters may want to avoid practicing in front of their co-workers and looking foolish.

With practice, all presenters gain confidence that will be evident when it's showtime in front of prospects.

Step Five: Deliver With Confidence

Cast and crew know what to do before the curtain goes up on a Broadway play. Nothing is left to chance and all know how to handle an unexpected problem.

Professional services teams also need to prepare as much as possible.

The day before the big event, presenters should discuss what they'll wear. Typically,

presenters select outfits that are one level above their audience.

Research the community so you're aware of landmarks, key news events, and winning sports teams. You may find an opportunity to connect with officials and establish rapport before or after your presentation.

When it's showtime, try to relax and let your personality and passion for your work shine through. You've practiced the presentation and you've come prepared with potential questions. At the end of your talk, reaffirm that you want to work with the prospective clients because you can solve their challenges.

After the presentation, take time to analyze results. Whatever happens, you've done your best. Use the lessons learned for continual improvement. And don't forget to celebrate your effort—no matter the outcome. ■

It's Time To Change Your Story About Business Development

By Rich Friedman

I've witnessed many A/E/C and environmental consulting professionals and firms shroud the topic of business development in a level of mystery and complexity that's just not serving them well.

In fact, when I conduct training, I ask people to share what comes to mind when I say the words "business development." Often what I hear is that business development is salesy and reserved for extroverted, outgoing people who like to play golf. In other words, many folks are telling themselves a lot of false stories about business development.

So, in this article, we're examining what business development is—and is not—and what it really takes to succeed at it. I truly believe that anyone can learn the skills and develop the mindsets needed to be great at business development. Here are a few stories that need to shift to make that happen.

Honest curiosity, not sleazy small talk.

Business development is not a cheesy, disingenuous process of passing out business cards or relentless cold calling. Yes, we have all met people like that, but the truth is, the people who are best at bringing in business are those who are comfortable being themselves and genuinely curious about everyone they meet. It's hard to make meaningful,

lasting connections when you're trying to be someone that you're not. Instead, relax. Let go of the overly canned elevator speech and consider every conversation your opportunity to learn more about potential clients and their goals and challenges.

Building relationships, not making a sale.

Business development is about listening, not selling. This distinction allows you to better learn who your clients are, what keeps them up at night, and how you can meet their needs in a way that is better than your competitors. What is the psychology of your client? What do they need and want? What are they thinking? You answer these questions by continually reaching out, asking good questions, providing value, and actively building relationships. In the client's mind, you're not just a subject-matter expert, but one they have a relationship with who has taken time to understand their business. And that minimizes the perceived risks involved with hiring your firm.

Long-haul strategy, not instant results.

A strong business development strategy does not mean coming home with a new job every time you attend a networking event. It means setting clear objectives, identifying target clients, and staying the course. Credibility and reputation are built over time. Making a few calls this week isn't likely to bring in a new client next

week. The true return on your investment may take months, even years, depending on your strategy and goals. The best business developers understand it will take time and multiple interactions, and are prepared for the long haul.

Persistence, not trying it once or twice.

The long-game strategy of business development requires putting your ego aside and learning not to take perceived rejection personally. It's not unusual to be blown off after your first or second phone or email outreach, and often, that has nothing to do with you. Expect to follow up many times, and to vary your methods. (This is where you can out-persevere and finesse your competitors.) You can choose to believe your negative stories: "I never should have called. You see, I'm terrible at this business development thing. They obviously don't want our services. I am bugging them." Or, you can try another perspective: "She's busy, so I'll make it easy and give her another call. We're not top of mind right now, so I'll send a reminder. This article will help them, so I'll quickly send that over."

Valuable asset, not salesperson. One thing that makes cultivation easier is your solid belief in your firm's value. When you believe that prospective clients are genuinely making a mistake by not hiring your firm, you become a more confident relationship-builder. Need help? Review

your current and past projects to clearly identify where your firm has saved time or money, reduced liability, and/or made the client look good. When satisfied clients have given rave reviews, what was most important to them? Your enthusiasm and confidence about the results you can provide can be contagious.

Questions, not answers. You do not need to show up with all the answers. In fact, it's better that you don't. Ask probing questions that get into the heart and head of your client. Listen to their answers so that you understand their challenges and what drives them. Excellent business developers understand that exceptional client service can start before they are your client. Just get to know this person in front of you (or on the other end of the phone) and their firm. What do they need? And when the time is right, don't forget to ask for the business. If you don't ask, you won't get!

Connection, not deal-making. We have, in this industry, what I call "the myth of the male golfer." This is the principal who heads out to the golf course, plays a few rounds, and lands this year's big project. While these people do exist, most business doesn't happen that way. Not everyone is a golfer or a deal-maker. For example, I prefer to eat, drink, coach, mentor, and volunteer—and that's how I choose to connect with colleagues and



Client & Business Development



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clients. The key is for you to find out how you like to connect with people. It's all about personal preference, as long as you are connecting.

Strategy and action, not arm-waving sales targets. I often see firms setting arbitrary sales goals without a larger strategy. They might target a percentage increase over the previous year. This can discourage many seller-doers because they don't know how to meet those targets. If you want to build a business development culture, it's more effective to develop outreach goals and break them down into clear actions. Consider targets such as joining two client-facing organizations, volunteering on two committees, attending six events and connecting with two new people per event, or checking in with three past clients each quarter. This is especially important for helping establish business development habits with emerging leaders and young professionals who

don't yet have the experience or perspective.

Structured for success, not winging it.

When you're being pulled in all directions or having an off day, it's typical to revert to the comfort zone of doing billable work and meeting deadlines. To build momentum with outreach and cultivation strategies, put them on your calendar. You can also use scripts and templates to simplify, save time, and help when you lack energy. Create a library of simple elevator pitches for specific services, templates for checking in with past clients, or scripts to use on calls. This can also be a great way for introverts to prepare, practice, and gain confidence with outreach.

Consistent outreach, not client complacency. Many firms get complacent, comfortable, and even cocky with clients when all seems to be going well. But you need to have business development strategy and practices in

place for all of your clients. Take nothing for granted. In all honesty, I have made this mistake myself and have lost more than one project because of it. I didn't ask my typical probing questions about important selection criteria, expectations, and who else they may be considering before sending a proposal. And I didn't actively follow up to see if they had any questions. If I had, I could have addressed the clients' concerns and better contrasted my solution with others they were considering.

You don't need to be born with the skills and mindsets required for successful business development. These are things you can learn, practice, and refine to be authentic. And they have value that extends far beyond bringing work into the firm. Whether in recruiting and hiring, problem-solving on a project, managing a team, or strengthening your non-work relationships, you'll see a positive return, personally and professionally. ■

Teamwork Is Everything in Basketball and Business Development

By Janki DePalma, LEED AP, CPSM

This summer, my first-grade son started rec-league basketball. If you've never seen first-graders play basketball, it's hilarious. After our first game, I noticed something from every player on the court, from both sides. Every single time a player got the ball, he would shoot. It didn't matter where he was, who was blocking him, or which player was open. The kid would always shoot. He'd rather miss than pass the ball.

After studying this for a few minutes, I realized that the motivation for each player wasn't winning the game, it was having the crowd cheer when he made a basket. Like any Mom, I was always there on the sidelines barking orders. Then it hit me—this team, these plays, my role—THIS is business development in a seller-doer firm! The only thing that I did, as the business development manager, that the coach couldn't was occasionally pass the ball to a player when I was on the sideline.

So, with this new mindset I started thinking, what coaching tips could I use for my team at work?

While a coach doesn't play or score points, her guidance, philosophy, and understanding of how to motivate a team are necessary tools. No one mutters that a coach is "overhead and doesn't even play!"

Even if a coach didn't make it as a pro athlete, her insight, strategy, and input are respected and followed. So, with that, let's look at how we can coach a winning team.

1. A good coach knows how to best use his players. My son was not blessed with height in the genetics department. While we practiced making baskets, the bigger task for my son was getting the rebound—every time! You know your team—who wants to go to an industry networking event, who would rather write an article, and who should present at a lunch and learn. Use the strengths of your team to win. The players don't need to be good at everything for the team to be great. Rather than send an introverted project manager to a 200-person luncheon, suggest she treat the project team to coffee after an Owner Architect Contractor meeting.

2. A good coach prioritizes teamwork over baskets. This is a tough one. Smart coaches know that, at some point, a talented player cannot single-handedly carry a team. Using your entire team makes a talented player more efficient. You cannot let one rainmaker be responsible for all the work in your firm. Aside from the "hit by a bus" scenario, when you have just one person who is pursuing work, the others in your firm don't realize the effort needed to keep and maintain clients. Make

sure you are helping to create a culture that rewards the score, rebounds, and assists! If you have an associate who is the main connection to one client, suggest that he organize a group happy hour, so several of your team members can connect with others at the client firm.

3. A good coach communicates. A good coach is constantly giving feedback, helping players improve, and finding ways to maximize potential. Business developers are naturally good communicators, but often don't know how to communicate what they want to their "players." This is where the business developer transforms into a true leader—when you can clearly communicate what you need from your team. It may be in baby steps and repetitive drills, but you can teach your crew. At a topping-out party, does your team cluster together during the BBQ lunch? Before the event, remind your project manager to mingle with all the project stakeholders and take pictures. Then, help her post/tag on social media.

Even if you, as the business development professional, never make a basket, you can transform your firm from being just a group of players to a talented, winning team.

The first step is to use one of your biggest assets as a non-billable staff member:



BHDP office, Cincinnati, OH. BHDP Architecture. ©Cory Klein Photography, corykleinphotography.com.

the ability to see the big picture. If you aren't mired in projects, you may be able to identify the gaps in service. You can see who is passing the ball, who isn't, and where collaboration can occur. This can start with your business development planning. As a team, collectively look at what your business development goals

are. You can help prevent the dreaded silos from forming by being the person who oversees all the goals. Then, in true coach fashion, you work together with the players to "create a play."

Creating a strong team takes time, trust, and a lot of hard work. I was thrilled to

report that after starting the season with an embarrassing 40–6 loss, my son's team won its final game, a nail-biting 27–25. You may never have your team carry you on their shoulders or dump a vat of Gatorade at the end of the year, but with the right mindset, you can help change them from individual players to a team. ■



A Heuristic Approach to Business Development

By Gabe Lett, CPSM

What does it feel like as a professional business developer to train technical staff in selling your services? If you are like most, you are attacking your business development tasks heuristically, while your technical staff attack those same tasks algorithmically.

Let me explain. Algorithmic thinking engages a set of rules for solving a problem in a finite number of steps. It is applying a logical procedure that, if correctly applied, ensures the solution of a problem.

Technical staff are, by nature and training, algorithmic thinkers. We should be thankful they are, otherwise, we would have buildings and bridges collapsing, contaminated drinking water, and many other serious failures.

Heuristic thinking engages experimental learning, discovering, or understanding to solve a problem—stimulating interest as a means of further investigation. Business developers must employ heuristic thinking to market and sell A/E/C services because every client and every project is unique in personality and politics.

Algorithmic and Heuristic Thinking

Let's look at some examples to illustrate the differences between algorithmic and heuristic thinking. You join a conference call for a go/no-go decision on a project pursuit. Your technical staff have completed the spreadsheet and come up with a number that represents why you should not pursue. It's a number on the edge, only one or two points away from tipping the decision the other way. You are seeing the opportunity as a go. The argument commences and two hours later, you are still arguing with a number on a spreadsheet.

Would this scenario feel differently if you could overcome the stalemate in 10 minutes with a clear team decision?

Look at one more example that does not involve numbers. Your project manager (PM) has reached out with an email to try and get a meeting with a hot prospect. No one in your organization has a previous connection, so it is literally a cold call email.

Two days later, the PM is upset that the prospect has not responded and concludes the prospect must not want

to do business with your company. To a business developer, this is exasperating. An algorithmic thinker logically concludes that unresponsiveness to an email equals disinterest or rejection, i.e., failure. Would this scenario feel differently if you had trained the PM to think heuristically about reaching out to a prospect, so he realizes the unresponsiveness is more likely due to poor timing, technical errors, or choosing the wrong communication medium?

The problem we face with a growing seller-doer culture in our industries is expecting technical staff to execute a business development strategy using an algorithmic approach. An algorithmic approach to business development tasks, like solving engineering problems, will lead your team into frustration and disappointment.

To solve this problem, it is incumbent upon business developers to train our seller-doers to be heuristic thinkers when it comes to completing sales tasks. A heuristic approach to business development provides a proper foundation for completing the sales process successfully.



Get Comfortable With the Discomfort of Heuristic Thinking

Engineers are trained to solve engineering problems. Their brains work in logical patterns and algorithmic processes. To help train technical staff in the art of business development, we must get them comfortable with the discomfort of heuristic thinking.

There are two words in the previous sentence that are key in this transition of thinking: art and discomfort. Art is creative and subjective. Art requires imagination and aesthetic appreciation. Art is intended to evoke emotion and a reaction. Business development is still foundationally art. We may use numbers, logic, and statistics, but fundamentally, selling professional services is an art. This emphasis on subjectivity, creativity, and emotion brings discomfort to the algorithmic thinker.

We must help our algorithmic colleagues practice experimentation, discovery, and stimulation. These are artistic methods for solving problems that are very uncomfortable for someone who needs to be right rather than someone who simply enjoys the process of solving. It takes practice!

Practice, Practice, Practice

In training technical staff to be heuristic thinkers in their business development activities, the first step is allowing them to feel uncomfortable. They have permission to look at their prospect list and prepare

to call on them with apprehension and some healthy anxiety. At the same time, they need to be encouraged to channel this uncertainty into power to act. This anxious power helps them make those calls, knowing they will experience unresponsiveness, disinterest, or even rejection. But the process will yield data helpful for future calls and strategy.

A heuristic approach is meant to process with discovery, understanding, and further investigation. If an email did not solicit a response, try sending it again during a different time of day or with a different subject line. If that is unsuccessful, try a phone call. Try stopping by the recipient's office with some doughnuts. In other words, discover the prospect's preferred communication method by understanding what they don't respond to and keep investigating until you get it right.

Next, once your algorithmic thinker has completed an uncomfortable task, process the task with them. What went well? What went wrong? What did you learn? What have you not yet tried? Let them process and practice their heuristic thinking with you. Show them what you have learned from them by their answers to your questions.

One of the biggest fears for algorithmic thinkers is networking. So much of this activity is subjective and unknown. There are too many variables to count and mitigate. Algorithmic thinkers will want to count how many people they talked to, how many business cards they exchanged,

and how many follow up appointments were made. These numbers will conclude whether the task was successful.

But taking a heuristic approach to networking allows the seller-doer to execute a networking strategy that is inquisitive and curious. Teach your technical staff to ask good open-ended questions and listen for problems and challenges others have. Train them to listen and synthesize what they hear in networking conversations, so they can be a helpful resource, not only for their own services, but also for the services of others in their network of relationships. Measure success by what you learned about other people and their work lives as well as personal lives at the event.

Results

Technical staff can learn heuristic approaches to business development, which will increase their success and comfort level with selling. We must be patient and understand that technical staff want to think algorithmically and need practice to think heuristically. It is expected they will have some fear and anxiety at the beginning. However, you can be instrumental in walking alongside them as they learn to process their business development activities differently. Give them permission to think with both sides of their brain so your seller-doers become all-star performers, nailing the technical solutions while hitting the bullseye on the next prospect. ■



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