



Make the Connection

Recently I had an enlightening, yet disturbing, conversation with a client who is trying to cope with a slowdown in work. One of my recommendations to him was to make a list of several people – whether current or past clients, referral sources, or prospects – to whom he hadn't spoken in a while. I asked him to contact them, preferably by telephone. My client came up with three or four possibilities, then said: "Here's the problem. Every time I call someone just to touch base, I sit and watch my clock tick the minutes off. Pretty soon, a half hour is gone, and that's a half hour I can't bill. It's thirty minutes I have to make up somewhere else if I want to meet my billable hour requirement."

For good or ill, most professional services firms operate on a billable hour model. The formulas become more rigid as firms grow, because there is more overhead to pay. Billable time becomes the measure of an individual's success at a firm.

It is interesting that the most successful business developers are seemingly undaunted by this model. They consistently meet their billable requirements and bring in new work, very often without the help of colleagues, consultants, or in-house marketers. If every firm were filled with these natural business developers, I would not have any work to do.

Most firms, though, aren't so fortunate. They typically have a very small percentage of rainmakers with a much larger percentage of technicians, and they rely heavily on the rainmakers to keep

feeding the firm. To counteract the risk and woe that accompany this imbalance, more firms are offering marketing or sales training and support to all professionals. They are also making business development an important, sometimes essential, element in advancement to partnership.

Such training and support are useful, but it is also important to allow time for the mere mortals in your firm to practice the skills they are learning through training and coaching programs. Managing partners (who usually are good business developers) often say that no one will be penalized for taking the time to build relationships, especially when they show continuous improvement in business development. However, that benign sentiment is not clearly communicated to or consistently reinforced with the professionals who are still learning how to develop business. The result is often stagnation in individual and firm growth.

If you want your professionals to build business development skills, start by including marketing time into the firm's overall strategies and plans. Let them know that the leadership supports them in their marketing efforts. Be explicit and specific in helping them understand how to fit business development into their daily lives. When finding, creating, and sustaining relationships becomes a clear, consistent part of your firm's culture, you will see the benefit in the bottom line.

I serve clients by:

- ▶ Creating or enhancing marketing culture and infrastructure.
- ▶ Aligning recruitment, hiring, training, and marketing programs.
- ▶ Helping professionals set and achieve individual business development goals through marketing plans, coaching and communication skill development.

Define Your Culture

Most of my clients are searching for ways to differentiate themselves from competitors. They are beginning to understand the value of differentiation as it relates to business development, recruiting, and retention. You can begin the differentiation conversation by asking two questions within your firm:

1. Who are we?
2. What do we stand for?

The answers to these questions will help you understand your culture as it is today, and will serve as an excellent starting point for your firm's strategic development. You can do something as

simple as an email posing the questions to everyone or you can take a more in-depth approach by gathering the willing together to discuss your culture.

Either way, you are likely to glean useful information. If you can codify the multiple answers into a clear statement, you can use it as a differentiator in your business development, recruiting, and retention strategies.

Sometimes the simplest questions yield the most complex answers, and that's useful. You want to generate awareness and understanding of this large issue. That understanding leads

to cohesiveness, because everyone can tell themselves and the marketplace the same story. If you know who you are and what you stand for as a firm, you know essentially what level of performance is required to be successful, how you expect to be treated and are expected to treat others, as well as what kinds of employees and clients you will want to attract.

So take the risk. Send an email or call a meeting and see what happens. It could open up a whole new world of understanding.

Remember: We're All Human

Life as a marketing consultant is never dull. I learn something from just about every encounter with clients. Recently, a lawyer wrote an email where he stated that his practice area had "cases, not clients". Many of his clients are large corporate institutions; presumably, the individual players within the institutions change regularly. Hence, his theory.

I disagree with him. If you accept the argument that effective business development is a function of finding, creating, and sustaining relationships, you really can't operate under the cases-not-clients axiom. It's difficult to have a relationship with a legal matter or an accounting file. To depersonalize a client in this way is to discredit the human beings in a relationship. This is true even if your

relationships are with individuals who are simply cogs in a large institutional machine, and even if those cogs are replaced regularly. Certainly it's frustrating when your contacts in a client's office leave the company, but it's just the nature of things. You must not allow yourself to become callous, and you must remain open to developing new relationships with old clients.

If you want to be a provider of extraordinary client service (not to mention a decent human being), always think about the human who is on the other side of the table or on the receiving end of your phone calls, letters, and emails. Put yourself in his or her shoes for a moment or two, and decide whether you like what you are experiencing from their perspective.

Optimize Your Marketer's Effectiveness with Big Steps Forward

Firms are hiring marketing professionals now more than ever and are investing considerable time and money in the process, yet the results are uneven at best. While the marketer may be qualified on paper, a firm's culture and infrastructure can inhibit the marketer's learning and reduce initiative, creativity, and effectiveness.

Before you do anything rash, please contact me. I've created a program called Big Steps Forward that will improve your marketer's effectiveness almost immediately. While it's an in-depth six-month tutoring program, you will see results after the very first session.

The class is not inexpensive, but it is much, much less than you will spend on the deadly cycle of hire, train, fire and hire anew. And if you don't think it's worth your investment, I'll give you your money back.

Communicating Leadership Seminar

In response to recruiting and retention issues, partners are understanding the need to improve internal communication. Very often, however, desire exceeds ability. If this describes your partner group, call or email me. In one day, I can help your partners understand what's working and what isn't. I

will provide them with specific tools to communicate more effectively. You can reach me at mguillemette@comcast.net or at 505.263.9460.