

Relationships: Why Professional Services Are Bought, Rather Than Sold!

A PRESENTATION AT

The Sales Association—Midwest's Fall Conference

November 14, 2013

Moraine Business & Conference Center

Paul A. Dillon, CMC

- Prospective clients must have CONFIDENCE in the COMPETENCE of the people providing the service. All that a professional service organization has is the competence of the collective minds of the people that it employs.
- Prospective clients must have **confidence** that the work will be performed with the highest quality, and at the agreed upon price. They must have **confidence** in the integrity of the service provider, and **confidence** in your integrity.
- YOU are the firm. It is you who has to stand behind the work. A “firm” is a faceless entity. If something goes wrong, the client is going to call you, not the “firm.” If you can't, or aren't permitted to, stand by the work, then get out. You WILL NOT be successful in this job.
- People buy professional services from someone whom they know and trust. A person who is known to the prospective client as trustworthy and competent puts a “face” on the service provider, and gives the prospective client a comfort that the service will be provided as stated, and at the agreed upon price.
- You need to listen carefully to a prospective client. Often, they will tell you things about themselves that will enable you to understand their business, and to form a relationship with them. You need to be their business friend, genuinely (they will spot phonies), and may be called upon to help them in many, many ways for which you will never be compensated.
- It takes a long, long time to form a relationship with a prospective client that might lead to a purchase decision. There are no quick purchases in this business. So-called “sales quotas” are out; long-term business friendships—that may, and I stress *may*, lead to a purchase decision—are in.
- This is an art, not a science.
- Most often, the business development process is random, not linear or “targeted.” Treat everyone whom you meet as a potential client. You don't know where your next piece of business might come from.
- There are really 3 “clients” in every professional services engagement. Do you know who they are?
- Even if you offer the best service in the world, and offer a very competitive price, the purchase decision can be extremely—extremely—arbitrary. First impressions count. You can lose a prospective client because you are too short, too tall, or wear a yellow tie. You can't worry about losing a prospective client for these arbitrary reasons. Just forge on to the next opportunity.
- Consequently, a lot of activity is critical. The more activity you have, the more chances you have to “get up to bat.” And some of that will fall through the cracks.
- You win some. You lose some. But hopefully you win more than you lose.

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- The proper compensation package is critical. You need a base salary that you can live off of to start, plus a commission override. Later on, if you're successful and build up a stable of clients, then you might consider switching to all commissions. But NEVER start out a job that is all commissions.
- Live way, way below your means.
- Finally, in order to have long-term success in the business development of professional services, you need to be a nice person, who is truly concerned with the welfare of others. You have to “give before you get.”

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