

The One Piece Of Advice You Can't Sell Without

From 11 Experts On Selling Professional Services

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Introduction

Whether you're new to selling professional services, or you're a seasoned pro, RainToday.com is happy to present you with this content-rich e-book, *The One Piece Of Advice You Can't Sell Without*.

The concept is simple. We've read a lot of advice about selling professional services, and there are a lot of people who claim to know it all. But when you boil it all down — what's *really* important? What do you *need* to know? To answer this question, we asked 11 experts in selling professional services: *What is the one piece of advice you simply cannot sell without?*

Each expert wrote his or her own advice without knowledge of the other responses. As our team originally hoped, the experts all address different aspects of selling. Trust. Authenticity. Listening. Research. Passion. And plenty more.

You'll find some similar, evergreen advice across some of the responses, such as the importance of selling to a *person* and not a *company*. However, each expert brings a fresh perspective to the book, based on his or her own personal experiences.

The 11 experts work in global powerhouse companies, as well as single-person firms. Their backgrounds span across the professional service industries, including management consulting, law, A/E/C (architecture, engineering, and construction), technology, financial services, and marketing.

We hope you find this compilation informative and inspirational for your own professional selling. We welcome any feedback, and encourage you to share the book with friends and colleagues who would benefit from its advice.

Enjoy!

The RainToday Team

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It's All About Trust

By Seth Godin

author of *Small is the New Big*

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There is only one thing that matters when you're selling professional services.

Only one.

Does the person who is buying from you (and her boss!) trust you?

Now, "trust" is a loaded word, with lots and lots of elements to it, but there you go.

That's it.

Seth Godin is the bestselling author of more than seven books. He writes about marketing, the spread of ideas, and managing both customers and employees with respect.

*If you found this ebook helpful in any way, please go to Barnes & Noble and pick up a copy of my new book, **Small is the New Big**, published in August 2006. Thanks.*



Stop Selling & Start Making A Difference

By Jill Konrath
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If you're like many service providers, just the thought of selling sends shivers down your spine. Because visions of glib used car hucksters fill your head, you put it off until it's absolutely necessary. "Tooting your own horn" makes you uncomfortable, but what else can you do when you need more business?

So despite your best intentions, meetings turn into monologues as you try to convince prospects that your service offering is perfect for them. You cover your full range of capabilities, hoping that one will tempt them to hire your firm. You tout your unique methodology, prestigious client base, or award-winning expertise to really impress them.

Unfortunately, these self-promotional sales behaviors have just the opposite effect. As soon as prospects feel they're being sold, barriers are immediately erected, obstacles are thrown in your path, and soon you'll be on the way out the door. So stop this insane sales behavior now. It doesn't work.

To be successful today, you must ***focus on making a difference, not making a sale.***

By adopting this as your key operating principle, everything you do changes – including your success rate in landing new clients and growing existing ones. Your job is to help your clients reach their goals. That's all that's important.

Making A Difference

When your focus is on making a difference, you automatically:

- **Talk about your service in a whole new way.**

You'll realize that it's simply a tool that helps your clients achieve their business objectives. For example, my clients don't want sales training. Nor do they want to hear any details about my programs. Instead, they want to crack into corporate accounts and speed up their sales velocity. That's the kind of difference I can make for them, so that's what I talk about.

Your clients don't want to hear about how your firm was started, your glowing achievements, or leading-edge processes either. But what's of high interest to them is the business outcomes you've helped similar companies attain and the challenges you've helped them overcome.

- **Invest significant time upfront to discover the impact you can make.**

In fact, you wouldn't even pursue business with a company unless you had a good sense that you could make a substantial impact. This means you target specific firms where you suspect that there's a good fit between your expertise and their needs. It

means you research what's happening in their company, know about the direction they're heading, and identify likely challenges they're facing.

Once you have a good baseline understanding, then you put on your thinking cap. That's right! Before you're doing paid work for these potential clients, you're already thinking about ideas, insights, and information that could be valuable to their business operations. They don't have to be fully flushed out, but they do have to have enough depth to capture the decision maker's attention.

- **Craft a totally personalized account entry strategy.**

Your entire approach to potential clients will now be structured around what you've learned. You'll pique a decision maker's curiosity with your up-to-date knowledge of their firm, strategic imperatives, industry trends, and business challenges. You'll capture their attention with your thoughts on how they can solve important issues, close necessary gaps, and achieve critical desired outcomes.

Because you've done all this pre-work, you'll be undeterred when they don't call you back right away. When you know you can really help their company, you won't feel like a pest contacting them again and again. In fact, your quiet, but confident persistence stands out amongst the product-pushing peddlers who harangue them daily.

- **Create value with every client interaction.**

Since your major concern is to have a positive impact on your client, you'll establish clear goals and milestones at the onset of any project you undertake. It's simply not enough to "do the work" anymore. The services you provide must lead to the achievements of your client's objectives. If not, you'll use all your creativity and problem-solving skills to figure out what works.

While working with clients, you'll discover much that goes beyond the scope of your project. You'll find inefficiencies, bottlenecks, and problems waiting to happen. Because you care so much about your client's success, you share what you've learned, ideas you've come up with, and resources you know would be of value.

- **Continually expand your own expertise.**

To make the most difference for your clients, you must keep growing your knowledge base. Find out more about your client's industry, what their competitors are doing, and how their customers are changing. Look at how related businesses are tackling similar challenges. Learn more about what goes on upstream or downstream from your primary area of expertise. Keep your eye out for resources that can help your clients attain their objectives.

Become a student of your profession, too. Keep current on what's happening. Work on improving your skills in key areas such as written and verbal communications, presentations, teamwork, leadership, creativity, synthesis, and critical thinking. When you invest in your own development, you become even more valuable to your clients.

Good selling isn't about persuasion, manipulation, or being glib. In fact, the more you try to "sell" someone, the faster they want to get away from you.

Good selling starts with the question, "How can I make a difference for this organization?" Then it's about using your knowledge and expertise to find the answers. Finally, it's about sharing what you've learned with prospective clients so they can understand the value you bring. Much skill is required to do this successfully. But if you look at all the top sellers, that's what they're doing.

So focus on *making a difference, not making a sale*. It's always amazed me that when you do this, the sales take care of themselves. Clients want to work with you. They give you more work to do. They refer you to others. And that's the good life!

Jill Konrath, a Contributing Editor to RainToday.com and author of *Selling to Big Companies*, is a recognized sales strategist in the highly competitive B2B market. A popular speaker/trainer, she helps sellers crack into corporate accounts, speed up their sales cycle and create demand for their offering. With a client list that includes Hilton, 3M, General Mills, Medtronic and UnitedHealthcare, she knows what it takes to win big contracts.

Check out Jill's information-rich website at [SellingtoBigCompanies](#) and sign up for her e-newsletter & free Sales Call Planning Guide (\$19.95 value) while you're there.



If You're Talking About Price, You've Lost Control Of The Discussion

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If you're selling professional services, then you must focus on value—not price, not features, not benefits. You might believe that features and benefits *are* value. They're not.

The key question is this: How is the buyer better off once you walk away? Astoundingly, most professional service providers have trouble answering that question. The buyer is *not* better off because you've run a focus group, provided an insurance policy, coached a key executive, re-organized an office, or re-designed a web site.

The buyer *is* better off if you've created more discretionary time, reduced stress, improved profit, enhanced repute, and enlarged market share. Those are business outcomes. Yet most service providers extol their methodology, approaches, and technology, which no one really cares about. (My favorite nonsense is the "principles statement" in so much collateral material, e.g., "We believe in the highest ethical approaches." Really? I was looking for someone unethical....)

The Apothecary Scale

If you're talking about price, in particular, you've lost control of the discussion and that is totally your fault. The only important discussion point is about value, and particularly that value which pertains to the buyer's emotions. Logic makes people think, but emotion makes them act. Behind every corporate and/or business objective is a personal objective. If a buyer is looking for better teamwork, it's because he or she is tired of playing referee with the teams. If the buyer wants better sales performance, he or she is looking for a better bonus.

Services are totally unlike tangibles, where people sniff, touch, and compare the product. Services are about the degree of emotional attachment to the value provided. They are, potentially, far more valuable than tangibles. At one point, Kodak stopped selling "film" (because it couldn't compete with Fuji on price) and started selling "memories," a much more valuable need, justifying a higher price. It's one thing to buy a car, another to buy transportation, and still another to invest in a lifestyle statement. Even tangibles are transformed to non-tangibles to enhance value!

Picture the apothecary scale that the statue of justice famously holds. Assume that the left platform holds impediments to doing business: lack of money, insufficient time, belief that the issue can be resolved without help, skepticism of outside providers, bad experiences in the past, and so forth.

Unfortunately, most service providers immediately engage in defending themselves against these impediments. They are taught to prepare for and “rebut” objections. They reduce their scope, make concessions, provide unreasonable guarantees, and—the worst transgression of all—they lower their fees.

The best approach is to immediately ascertain what values are most important to the buyer professionally and personally, and meet as many of them as your services and competencies allow. In a realty firm, that may mean arranging for job interviews for a trailing spouse so that he or she is immediately employed upon the move; in a consulting firm, it may mean transferring skills to the buyer's staff, so that they can be internal leaders in future change management; in an accounting firm, it may mean proactive mid-year assessment to provide better preparation time for the finances required for taxes.

Time-Share As The Crucible

No one is more prepared for rejection than the time-share salespeople who are encountering prospects offered a free weekend at a hotel or resort in return for sitting through the time-share “pitch.” The potential customers are often bragging that they're not about to buy anything, and they've obtained a free weekend because of their clear intent not to buy! Yet, the time-share business is thriving, and I'll tell you why.

The best time-share salespeople—and they are among the best anywhere—don't try to overcome any objections. They focus purely on value. They match the needs of the prospect—spend more time with children or grandchildren, escape to climates better for their health, create an annual experience with close friends, etc.—with the particular value of the resort. By the time finances are discussed, at the very end of the tour or presentation, they are strictly seen in terms of return on investment.

And the strength of focusing on value is that, once it is conveyed and agreed upon, any price or fee becomes a rational part of ROI. A price that would seem unthinkable sitting out there by itself or even “dressed up” with features and benefits, suddenly becomes a quite reasonable amount when viewed in context for the value delivered, especially value which meets or exceeds personal objectives and needs.

“Insurance” is boring and perceived as costly. Security is not. A consultant can be seen as a “vendor” by the accounts payable people, but not if a buyer sees the consultant as a partner producing value. Tax reporting is not valuable, but tax savings are. Reorganizing an office, kitchen, or warehouse is a task, but providing the buyer with control over his or her life, greater productivity, and less frustration is invaluable.

Output Over Input

The secret to focusing on value—which I've kept to the end to see if you've read this far—is to concentrate on output, not input. An advertisement is an input, increased customer traffic is an output; a training program is an input, faster sales closing time with less cost of acquisition is an output; plans for a house extension are an input, but a more gracious, comfortable lifestyle is an output.

Inputs are expense items. Outputs are results items which justify investment, providing the ROI is significant, rationally and emotionally. Yet view most service provider web sites, brochures, collateral material (and listen to their conversations), and you'll hear about features, benefits, credentials, and methodology.

Don't tilt the scale in the wrong direction. If you're talking about fees or prices and not value, you've lost control of the discussion, and that's your fault. If you do nothing else but focus your practice and marketing around value, you'll increase your profitability *and* decrease your labor intensity dramatically.

Alan Weiss, Ph.D., is a contributing editor to RainToday.com and has been cited by the *New York Post* as "one of the most highly respected independent consultants in the country." His clients include The Federal Reserve Bank, Hewlett-Packard, Mercedes, JP Morgan Chase and over 200 similar world-class organizations. He has written 25 books which appear in 7 languages. You can reach him via his web site:

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If you like and can apply the ideas presented here, go to my web site for over 100 free articles and checklists, and also find out how to join my Private Roster Mentor Program to dramatically improve your business and life:

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The “Real Thing”: Why Authenticity Rules

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As the founder and CEO of a global strategic marketing consulting firm, I have learned a lot about selling professional services over the years. Before starting the firm, I was on the client side for many years, so I also know what works from the other side of the table. There are many things that contribute to selling your services and closing the deal—your reputation, expertise, a referral from a trusted source, your sense of humor, style, chemistry, etc.

But, if I had to point to only one thing that has had the most impact in the success of my firm, I'd have to say it is being authentic. I am assuming you are good at what you do, and you have people willing to vouch for that. If not, this is still a good place to start, but you will, in fact, need to become a recognized expert in something to stand out from the pack.

I used to work at The Coca-Cola Company as assistant to the Chief Marketing Officer, so maybe I am predisposed to buy into the concept of the “real thing,” but I truly believe that when you show up every day as your very best, true self, then you become a magnet for other like-minded people who are naturally attracted to your offering. One of my favorite sayings comes from Dr. Seuss, “Be who you are and say what you feel because those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind.” This advice has served me well in my company and in my life.

Whether you are looking for a client, friend, or mate, I never really understood why people try to be something they are not just to fit in or be accepted. In the end, imposters are always revealed, so it does catch up eventually and then you will be confronted with either feeling like a fraud, or wanting to take an integrity shower, or both. Either way, you lose.

By being honest and straightforward from the start about your strengths, intentions, hopes, dreams, and yes, even your shortcomings, you would be amazed how your candor will set the tone for the relationship. No hidden agendas, no second guessing, just an open dialogue so that you can determine whether this is a productive and meaningful opportunity for both parties.

To me, being authentic means that both sides see the power of working together. It is in everyone's best interest, and each person will be better off together, versus going at it alone. Selling never works if only one side will prosper—it has to be mutually beneficial, or it will not succeed long term.

Authenticity is about having a long time horizon; it is not just about what you have done for me lately, or what can you do for me today. When you take a broader perspective on the relationship, you realize that what really matters most is not about making a quick

buck today, but being that trusted resource so that at every critical juncture down the road, you are part of the inner circle of advisors who they consult for counsel—whether it is in your sweet spot or not. That is when you know you have succeeded.

I wrote an article recently about how honesty was the killer application of the new millennium. When you tell people the truth, they almost don't know what to do with it since it can be such a rare commodity these days.

They may not actually like to hear that it will take 10 weeks, not 5, for the work to be complete, or that it costs \$75k, not \$40k, to solve a particular problem using statistically significant research techniques. You may, in fact, lose the business by telling them the truth. But in my experience, when the original time or budget promises cannot be met, and the client learns the hard way they have been lied to, they call you back and want to reopen the discussion. Now they know they can trust you. Sadly, they have wasted precious time and other resources learning that lesson first-hand, but you did not mislead them just to win the business, and for that they will always respect you.

So keep the promises you make—you'll be amazed how few people do. It seems simple enough, just following up on your word. It is not something you need an MBA to learn how to do. In fact, your mother probably taught you that lesson long ago. Your clients and prospects will appreciate your candor and follow through. If you say you will call on Tuesday, or send the proposal by the end of the week, then as Nike says, *just do it*.

Authentic brands cannot be copied, but programs and promotions can. Leverage what it is that makes you unique, special and different from your competitors. Whether you are an attorney, architect, accountant, or consultant, there are qualities that make you and your firm stand out. Whatever it is, embrace it.

For my firm, our name is fun, memorable and a bit irreverent. We try to leave each client better off than we found them. We are, in fact, brutally honest (sometimes to a fault), but we are never boring. Our clients appreciate that about us. I have learned which clients are the best ones for us, and sometimes it is hard to walk away from business that is not a good fit. However, if your goal is to build a sustainable business with the right clientele, be true to the core of your essence, and you will be a magnet that attracts more of the right people, more often.

So here's to being the real deal, because authenticity always rules.

Paige Arnof-Fenn is founder & CEO of Mavens & Moguls, a global strategic marketing consulting firm working with early stage, emerging as well as Fortune 500 companies on branding, media relations, marketing strategy, advertising, and market research. Paige has worked in senior marketing positions at three successful startups, the Olympic Games, Procter & Gamble and Coca-Cola before starting her own firm. She is a popular speaker on topics ranging from branding to leadership and also writes a monthly column for *Entrepreneur*. Contact Paige at info@mavensandmoguls.com.

If you want to grow your business, tell us more at info@mavensandmoguls.com and we'll see if we are the right team to help you achieve your business goals!



Mastering The Art Of The Client Interview

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Of all the advice on winning the professional services sale, mastering the art of the client interview floats to the top of my list of must-have skills. Whether it's done by phone or a personal visit, a sales interview with a prospective client kicks off the sales process and sets the stage for what—if anything—you will get the chance to do for that client.

When a prospective client calls about a project, it's natural for your pulse rate to rise a bit. After all, it means your marketing worked. As you settle into the conversation with the client, the first and most important step you take is to learn more about the opportunity. How you handle this essential activity can make the difference between winning the job or heading home empty handed.

First Impressions Are Tenacious

Whether we like it or not, a client's initial impression of us influences the outcome of a sales opportunity, and that impression is formed in the initial sales interview. A client's first impression may not last forever, but beginning the sales process with a good impression beats having to overcome the fallout from a poor one.

Creating a positive, initial impression means emphasizing substance over technique. Instead of relying on canned sales questions, PowerPoint slides, and body language "techniques," lead your client through an insight-based discussion of the issues. You may not win the "Smooth Salesperson of the Month" award that way, but you'll win in the client's mind—and that's what counts.

Of course, you'll need a few questions to get the conversation rolling, but expect to develop most of those questions as your understanding of the client's issue evolves. And if you're ever tempted to ask a client, "what keeps you up at night," cover your mouth and count to ten.

When you first step into a client's office to discuss a project, you're likely to be viewed as a salesperson, and that can be a tough impression to shake. But using the power of insightful questions and discussion during the interview, you can shed the salesperson label and replace it with that of business adviser. That will add immeasurable strength to your sales process.

Discover Differentiation

Professional service marketers know that every project opportunity deserves its own "win theme." It's rarely enough to compete solely on a firm's expertise. Instead, successful firms compete on the basis of both expertise *and* client-specific insight.

You can search the Internet about a company's issues until your fingertips are numb, but that search can't replace the insight you'll develop from a client's answers to your relevant questions. If you uncover just one nuance about the proposed project, whether it's about the specific client issue or potential barriers to completing the project, you have the basis for crafting a differentiated—and winning—proposal.

But you have to dig for those subtleties. It takes time and, more importantly, trust, for a prospective client to open up to you. After all, the client is probably talking with other service providers and hearing similar questions. So your ability to conduct an interview that forges trust with the client and encourages candor gives you an important differentiator—client insight.

You'll also eliminate needless guesswork about how to frame your proposal if you've conducted thorough interviews. And if you have a need to follow up with the client after the interview, you'll have substantive matters to discuss. The information you glean from the client interview will advance your sales effort by providing you with the raw material to create a compelling and differentiated offer.

People Buy From People

If you're in the market for a washing machine, price, quality, and the manufacturer's reputation enter into the buying decision. But you're not likely to base your purchase decision on the skills of the specific factory worker who assembled your machine, or the driver who brought it to the retailer. Brand, reputation, and price are most often the key buying criteria for such products.

In a services sale, brand and the firm's reputation are important, but are not the only factors in the buying decision. Above all else, clients engage people. They'll put their money on the people they believe can help them, not the promises made in the firm's sales collateral. Sure, it's helpful to have the power of a brand supporting the sales process, but if the client believes the person or team isn't up to snuff, it doesn't matter how many countries you operate in. Your firm won't win the work.

The sales interview is a mutual evaluation process: the service provider is discovering what's driving the need for the project, and the client is evaluating the service provider's suitability to do the work. Your conduct during the interview supplies an answer to the client's most pressing question, "Is this person right for the job?"

The Rest Of The Story

The business world is full of sales advice, and much of it is very good. One thing is certain, though: If you do a great job in the early stages of the sales process, you're more likely to benefit from all that great advice. Stumble out of the gate, and you're likely to play catch-up just to stay in the race.

The sales interview gives you a chance to put your best foot forward as you demonstrate your skills at analysis, diagnosis, creativity, and empathy. And few things serve your sales process more effectively than great interviewing skills. It's not unheard of for a client to hire a service provider on the spot after a great interview.

So keep this skill in top form, and odds are you'll be able to use the rest of that good advice about sales—from crafting great proposals and closing, to execution, follow through, and building long-term client relationships.

Michael W. McLaughlin is the coauthor, with Jay Conrad Levinson, of *Guerrilla Marketing for Consultants*, and the publisher of *Management Consulting News* and *The Guerrilla Consultant*. For more than twenty years, he was with Deloitte Consulting, most recently as a principal in the firm's strategy and operations practice.

Check out my book *Guerrilla Marketing For Consultants* at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).



Do You Really Care About Your Client? No, Really.

By Paul Dunay

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Volumes have been written, and surely more will be, on the importance of gaining a client's trust.

And count me among the authors. I've often said that the slickest presentation, delivered by your toughest competitor, simply cannot compete with the trust you develop in the heart and mind of a client.

Many factors go into developing a client's trust. Knowing your stuff. Knowing the client's stuff. Bringing fresh ideas. Asking the right questions. Listening intently. Doing what you say you'll do. And delivering results.

But nothing contributes more to developing trust when selling professional services than forging a special bond with a client. It's a relationship in which the client says: "I believe that this person and this firm not only can and will help me, they *truly want* to help me."

Now I expect you're saying, "Of course we want to help our clients. Isn't that why we're in business?" Well, perhaps, although "to make money" would likewise be an acceptable reason. The more important question, though, is *why* do you want to help them?

One big reason is that you want happy clients. Happy clients mean more business, more referrals, and more revenue. You also want to help your clients improve their organizations and operations. After all, what stronger testament to the value of your wise counsel than a company that's running better because of it?

Of course you want to help your client. Why? Because doing so helps you!

I know that sounds pretty cynical. But think about it. What is your mindset when you're trying to sell a new piece of business? Is it, "Oh, man, I have a whale on the line. Landing this one will be huge"? Or how about, "We clearly have the best solution to their problem. They'd be nuts not to go with us"?

My point is when you're thinking about the engagement, and all the wonderful things your firm will do for the client, there's a good chance you're mostly thinking about yourself.

And why shouldn't you? This is how you put food on your family's table.

I would suggest, though, that you consider another, equally important reason that you

should want to help clients. For me, it's become a personal motto: *be truly interested in other people's success*. It's not an easy motto to live by. We can quickly revert to "what's in it for me" if survival instinct kicks in, or we see an opportunity to gain advantage. Such lapses aside, I firmly believe that the foundation for a truly trusting relationship is to care about whether people succeed because of what it means *for them, not for you*.

Here's the tricky part, though: If you don't, you probably won't. Caring about people comes from within. It's a product of our genes, our upbringing, and our experiences. For most adults, it's something we have, or we don't.

And we know it when we see it. I certainly see it in my colleagues who are most successful in selling services. These folks are creative, practical, focused, and whip smart. But beyond those estimable traits, they have something else.

A devotee of the True Colors personality profile might say these super salespeople have more "blue." Blue represents depth in feeling and a relaxed sensitivity. Blues have empathy and reflective awareness. Or, the singer Billy Joel would just sum up this special quality in a lyric: "It's all about soul. It's all about knowing what someone is feeling."

I believe the people who are best at selling professional services are indeed the ones with soul. Sure, these folks are in it for the money, the success, and the satisfaction of a job well done. But they're also in it for the look of true appreciation in the eyes of a client who will sleep better thanks to the solution they're providing. They're in it because, with their help, the client is now a stronger company that can provide good jobs, deliver great products, and better serve its community.

Do you have soul? Are you truly interested in other people's success?

Here's one way to find out. When you see a noteworthy news item or hear an interesting idea, are you thinking about how it might be helpful to a client or prospect? Are you taking the initiative to pass it along, regardless of whether you have a big project underway with the client, or you didn't get the engagement?

Showing that you care, with no expectation of reward, but simply the desire to help, is one of the most powerful ways to begin building a trusting relationship. I try to live my life in that spirit, both professionally and personally. When I'm successful, the rewards are sweet. And they have nothing to do with money and success. They are rewards of the heart.

Paul Dunay has spent more than 20 years in marketing, creating buzz for leading technology companies such as Google, IBM, Microsoft, Oracle, SAP, Avaya and Cisco. He also has delivered work for American Express, Motorola, Genzyme, Novartis, Citigroup, Cendant and Ernst & Young. Paul currently is a Director of Global Field Marketing for [BearingPoint](#). His unique approach to integrated marketing has been recognized as winner of the 2005 Driving New Demand award of the Information Technology Services Marketing Association (ITSMA) and as winner of BearingPoint's Best Overall Marketing Campaign award in 2004.

Check out my blog called *Buzz Marketing for Technology* at buzzmarketingfortech.blogspot.com.



Do Your Homework

By Keith Ferrazzi
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Before I meet with any new prospect I've been thinking of introducing myself to, I make sure I do my homework. And when I say homework, I mean more than checking to see if the company has a website by typing www.BarnesAndNoble.com to do research on a marketing executive at Barnes & Noble. Sure, you should be up-to-date with the major news about the prospect's company. Have they recently released a new product? If it's a public company, how has the stock price been doing? But what you really want to know is much more personal.

Think of it this way: A good salesperson does research on companies, but a great salesperson does research on people. Why? As my company's tagline says, "Business is human," and as I say every time I speak, "Business relationships are *personal* relationships." No one has ever sold anything to a company. All sales are made to people. And, without fail, *all* people naturally care, above and beyond anything else, about themselves.

I like to have a one-page synopsis on any person I'm going to meet, one page all about what's most important to him: his hobbies, his most remarkable achievements, what he's most passionate about. What about his favorite charity or the college he attended? Perhaps his kids are hoping to land internships, he himself has health issues, or he just wants to cut strokes off his golf game.

Information about the person's company is only included if it also affects him personally, in his daily life. Did the company have a good quarter, but his division is on the rocks and his career status questionable? Is there a hiring freeze at the company, and he's pissed that his team is overworked and others aren't pulling their weight?

These days, doing such research is easy. Here are a few places to start:

- **The Internet.** Use search engines, like Google, to check a person's affiliations and see when he's been mentioned in (or written for) books, magazines, trade journals, or newspapers. Annual reports and recent press releases will give you a good idea of where a company is headed and what challenges and opportunities lie ahead. Try using "social networking" tools like LinkedIn or Ryze, too. If your prospect uses them, you'll be able to see his self-updated professional profile and some connections he has.
- **Your Own Backyard.** Call or e-mail your friends and friends of friends, telling them you're trying to learn about your prospect and asking if they know him. Even if you can't find anyone who knows your prospect personally, it's still useful to hear what people know about him.

- **Inside Your Prospect's Company.** Any opportunity you get to talk with people who work a couple levels below your prospect, take it. These people can give you the lay of the land and will probably mention personal tendencies about your prospect without even thinking about it. Also, in setting up meetings and dealing with your prospect, be sure to engage in real conversations with his assistant. Assistants are called gatekeepers for a reason, and they know everything you'd ever want to know.

The purpose of all this research is to find a point of common ground that is deeper and richer than what can be discovered in a serendipitous encounter. But even more important, and impressive, than finding commonalities is discovering what currency you have to offer them. How can you possibly make them more successful, as individuals, inside or outside their companies?

Recently, I took part in a roundtable discussion sponsored by the Milken Institute's Global Conference in Los Angeles, an annual three-day gathering that brings together the world's top thinkers and CEOs to work over global problems. There were fifteen participants, each one an executive of a company far bigger than my own.

In many settings, I probably wouldn't have been rubbing elbows with them, but because I had helped organize the conference (always an advantage), I was invited to participate and knew beforehand who all was coming (useful to do my homework on the few people I most wanted to meet).

The events were planned with a CEO's tight schedule in mind. There was a brief mixer before the event to allow the participants to mingle and get to know one another. Then, a panel discussion on the future of marketing, given the challenges facing big brands. Afterward, a short dinner. In other words, there was about a three-hour window of opportunity to transcend the trivialities of polite chitchat and establish a foundation for one or two relationships. So how did I do?

I discovered that one of the CEOs, John Pepper, was also a fellow graduate of Yale. I had admired him since I was an undergrad and had seen him speak on campus. The former CEO of Procter & Gamble, Pepper was committed to human rights and making sure the story of the Underground Railroad was preserved in a museum devoted to the subject he was founding in Cincinnati. Pepper was known for his leadership and the innovations in marketing he had brought to Procter & Gamble. Even now, after stepping down, he continued to be a powerful influence on P&G's board and on the boards of several other companies.

Knowing he had attended Yale, I knew that he'd have a bio listed on the Yale University Web site. So I tapped into my alumni network for more information. There, I found a treasure trove of old college affiliations and interests. It turned out we had both been in Berkeley College at Yale. That meant he must have known Robin Winks, a warmly admired and much-respected professor for whom I had worked while in college. When I brought up our many common experiences, we hit it off.

By the end of our conversation, John was giving me insightful advice about and contacts for my young company. He invited me to keep in touch in the coming years, and we certainly have. When Professor Winks—Robin—passed away just a week later, we shared our memories of him. A few months later, I met a successful businessman from Cincinnati who was bragging about the museum enshrining the Underground Railroad

and I made a point of putting him in touch with John Pepper for fundraising. I've probably introduced two or three potential donors to John in the last year.

I had no affiliations or organizations in common with the other CEO I wanted to meet. Luckily, a Google search revealed that she had run the New York City Marathon the previous year. I know firsthand how much commitment and sacrifice it takes to train day in and day out to run and complete a marathon. I had tried—and failed, because my knees started to act up.

When I ran into this CEO, I said, "You know, I don't know how you do it. I like to think I'm in great shape, but the training for a marathon killed me. I had to stop."

Of course, she was surprised. "How the heck did you know I ran a marathon?" she happily quipped.

I never shy away from mentioning the research I've done. "I always make a special effort to inquire about the people I'd like to meet." Inevitably, people are flattered. Wouldn't you be? Instantly, the other person knows that rather than suffering through a strained half hour with a stranger, they're able to connect with someone with whom they share an interest, someone who has gone out of his way to get to know them better.

As it happened, the day before I had gone through "Barry's Boot Camp," a tough-as-nails but totally exhilarating exercise regimen in West Hollywood, not far from the conference. I said, "If you want an amazing and different workout sometime, you should consider boot camp." In return, I received some welcome advice for extending my running regimen. Later, she tried boot camp with me and loved it.

To this day, each time she and I meet, we talk about Barry's Boot Camp and I give her my progress report on my goal of running a marathon. And what I have found with those I've converted to my boot camp workout is that when they visit L.A., they might not have time to take a meeting or lunch with others, but they often do make one non-business detour—and we have one hardcore workout together.

Once again, your goal when meeting new people is to transform what could be a forgettable encounter into a blossoming friendship. While there are some shortcuts to building relationships that you can learn from my book *Never Eat Alone* and Ferrazzi Greenlight training, this isn't one of them. I wouldn't have been able to reach out to these individuals, and truly connect, without really doing my homework.

Widely hailed as one of the world's most "connected" people, **Keith Ferrazzi** is the national-bestselling author of *NEVER EAT ALONE: and Other Secrets to Success, One Relationship at a Time*. He is also CEO and founder of Ferrazzi Greenlight, a strategic consulting and professional development firm that helps many of the world's most respected companies grow through improved relationships with customers, partners, and employees. Learn more about *Never Eat Alone* and get Ferrazzi's free tip of the week at www.NeverEatAlone.com. For more about Ferrazzi Greenlight, visit www.FerrazziGreenlight.com.

Subscribe to Keith's free tip of the week at <http://www.NeverEatAlone.com> and you'll also receive his new "Conference Commando" e-book.



You Must Have A Controversial Opinion and Tell People

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Now more than ever, professional services are being commoditized in ways unimaginable less than one generation ago. The rise of the internet and the collapse of some high-profile firms have left most of us sellers in a decidedly buyers' market.

Nevertheless, many professional services firms continue to grow sustainably and enjoy record operating profits year after year. Their clients place high value on their services, and are willing to pay for this value.

The overwhelming majority of these habitually successful firms have one single thing in common: they have succeeded in creating a controversially irreverent opinion about a critical issue in their client's business and, as a result, they are perceived as different from their competitors.

Two Steps For Creating A Controversial Opinion

Everyone talks about getting to know a client, but most advice on what to find out is generic at best. In order to generate a controversial opinion about a critical issue in your prospects' and clients' businesses, you need to get real facts on what actually goes on. Here's a method for doing this effectively:

Step One: You must know the top 5 issues facing your prospects. I don't care how you get the data, just get it. Know the issues so well that you can hold a *long* conversation with anyone about them. If you're unable to answer an obvious question about the topic, it will make you look uninformed at best, and stupid at worst.

Step Two: Once you've gathered the data, you need to have an opinion on the prospects' most important issues. Having a controversial opinion will certainly alienate a large group of potential clients. However, it will also guarantee that the rest of your potential clients will hold a higher level of respect for you because of your opinion, and will seek out your services.

Turning An Irreverent Opinion Into Business

Once you've gotten the facts you need to use them assertively, get your prospects' attention and command the highest possible price for your professional services. Firms that are afraid to take a position on anything continue to low-ball each other on price, competing over the opportunity to sell 'hours' to clients at the lowest fee.

Here's how one of PSMJ's clients used this strategy successfully:

Hundreds of cities and towns across the country annually seek to engage design firms to study new city plans. However, this in no way means that taxpayers are eager to pay high fees for such services. This sets up numerous competitive fee scenarios.

Despite this price competitive market, Andreas Duany, of Duany Plater Zyberk & Company in Miami, FL, continues to charge higher than average fees for solutions, based on his controversially irreverent opinion about how towns should be planned. His firm is dominating its market by making a passionate commitment to a controversial solution—Neo Classical Design, a nontraditional approach to designing residential neighborhoods. And even though the firm's fees are perhaps the highest charged by a planning firm, they have no shortage of clients. They are continuously sought out to work and build around Neo Classicism. For decades now, the firm has built an enormous wealth of intellectual capital on this topic, and they use it as an arsenal when 'selling' their solution to a particular client at a high fee.

Spreading The Word

Since this strategy will not appeal to everyone in your market, you must be willing to find prospects sympathetic to *your* controversial opinions. In order to do this efficiently, you must develop a strategy for disseminating your message. Simply creating a brochure and hoping the client will buy is not an option. You must embark on an active, intense campaign of frequent, useful communications with prospects. Your messages should feature content specifically centered around your controversial opinion. Content that is immediately helpful to your clients.

If potential clients discover that you and they share the same opinion, supported by data that's easy to use, you will wipe out the competition. You can promulgate your message in a number of ways, including speaking at industry events, publishing in industry magazines, sending a periodic newsletter to prospects and clients, and implementing client perception surveys.

You might be thinking that this kind of thinking only applies to big-name professional services firms and may not apply to you. Wrong. Ask yourself: what comes first—the famous firm name and reputation, or the controversial opinion that paves the way toward higher fees and fame?

The hardest part is finding prospects who share your opinion. What are you passionate about? What's your opinion? Where are the people willing to pay more because you have a solid opinion? Instead of spending all your firm's time fighting fee competition in commodity services, selling nothing more than one hour of 'anything the client wants,' then begging to get paid six months later, put your energy into inventing an opinion that works. Then tell the world your opinion. By the way—this is very hard work, and if clients keep price shopping your fees, it's a sign that you have failed at doing this!

With more than 30 years of experience in providing valuable information to the building and design industries, **Frank Stasiowski's** in-depth knowledge of architecture/design, construction, and business has created the foundation on which [PSMJ Resources, Inc.](http://www.psmj.com) is built. As CEO of PSMJ Resources, Frank has advised more than 40,000 architects, engineers, landscape architects, and interior designers on a variety of management issues.

PSMJ Resources, Inc. helps architects, engineers, and construction managers choose and keep great clients. PSMJ offers books, newsletters, seminars, and consulting to help A/E/C firms write more effective marketing and business development materials, conduct better presentations, and build stronger relationships with clients. For more information, visit www.psmj.com.



Understand The Client's Concept

By Sam Reese
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As professional service providers, we are constantly pursuing additional projects with our top clients. Whether we work to uncover a new business problem, or expand our services to provide additional expertise, we understand the value of strengthening our client relationships.

Each additional project provides us with more insight and intelligence regarding our client's business, thereby creating a solid foundation to provide more value and lock out competitors. However, even with the greatest intentions, the most aggressive business development efforts, and highly sophisticated marketing strategies, it is difficult to consistently win more business

By focusing on our client's "Concept" of what *they* want to fix, accomplish, or avoid, we can greatly improve our win rates for new business and generate continued added value for our existing clients.

The Concept is something that develops in the client's mind. It is his attempt to frame a solution for a problem that may or may not have anything to do with what we are selling. The Concept may consider ideas that the client has about us or our competition, but is more directly related to what he believes must be accomplished—and how he believes he can make it happen. A client's Concept is her mindset or her "solution image," of what she wants to get done. Clearly understanding this is the starting point for all good selling.

Because of the individuality of Concepts, we must be highly selective about how we describe our services. Marketing departments do a great job explaining features and benefits. What they do not do well is explain what feature or benefit is likely to appeal to which client. That is what we have to do during sales calls.

It is never the service that makes or breaks the sale, but the prospect's subjective view of what that service can do for him. During a sales call, first concentrate on the individual's solution images, and then move on to describing your services. The client's Concept, which is entirely subjective and different for each prospect, is tied directly to something they want to fix, accomplish, or avoid. We must be crystal clear about what that Concept is before presenting any solutions.

It is also important to point out that companies don't have Concepts—individuals do. So when selling to a company with multiple buying influences, we must address all of their Concepts. Remember that it is not enough to connect with the just CEO's Concept for a given project, because although he or she may be the key sponsor, several other buying

influences will certainly help determine the success or failure of the initiative. To make matters even more challenging, clients' Concepts are dynamic. They change as the client's perception changes. Therefore, we must be prepared to start almost from scratch on every sales call, and be willing to listen rather than speak.

The bottom line is that clients are always looking for results. If they think we can provide them with the results they need, then they will listen to us when we explain all of our firm's capabilities. Professionals who understand that they are selling to help the client get results have a clear advantage over those who simply describe their services without first connecting with the prospect's Concept. Luckily, we know that the Conceptual results a client expects are always related to one or more of these three basic areas:

1. **Discrepancy.** When there is a perceived gap in the client's mind between where she is right now and where she wants to be, then there is a catalyst for change. Unless the consultant can probe and listen well enough to really understand the client's issue, then he really doesn't have much of a chance at a sale. If our potential client is content with his current situation, then there is no way he will expect us to deliver results that will improve upon it. If there is no discrepancy, then there is no sale.
2. **Importance.** It is key to understand the level of importance a prospect assigns to a task that needs to be accomplished. If someone is just vaguely dissatisfied, then there is no trigger event to change. Yet, many business development specialists continue to keep running through their own "sales calisthenics," in hopes that the prospect will suddenly realize that the problem identified is extremely important. Regardless of the creativity or the complexity of the solution presented, it will create no impact on the client if the client does not view the problem as a priority.
3. **Solving A Problem.** As mentioned earlier, a synonym for Concept is "solution image." If the client has an urgent problem, the discrepancy level is, by definition, going to be great. If we can provide something that ties to the ideal solution he has in mind, then our chances of winning some new business are very good. But even if our client's problem is not easy for him to see at the moment, we might still be able to sell to his solution image by demonstrating that our solution can help him avoid a problem in the future. In summary, understanding our client's Concept is the basis upon which all long term success is built—because it is the only thing that directly ties to what the client wants to get done.

In today's competitive market, it is not enough for us to approach potential clients in a consultative manner. A true understanding of client issues and priorities requires a Conceptual selling orientation. By focusing on the client's Concept, we are then assured of a client-centric approach that is by definition results oriented. Selling is really all about what the client is trying to fix, accomplish, or avoid, and understanding this clearly and precisely will help us sell more effectively.

Sam Reese's prolific and dynamic career in sales and marketing management provides a foundation that has made him an ideal leader and CEO for Miller Heiman. His ongoing tenure at Miller Heiman has led to expanded product offerings, valuable e-learning initiatives, and significant advancement within the industry. Sam moved to Miller Heiman from Corporate Express, the world's largest corporate supplier of office products and services, where he was corporate vice president of sales and marketing. There, he managed all aspects of the Corporate Express sales management system and was responsible for a staff of more than 1,400 salespeople. Sam's experience supervising sales training and development at Corporate Express greatly contributed to his leadership and ingenuity that would later come into play at Miller Heiman.

For more information on how Miller Heiman can help your organization improve its sales performance, visit <http://www.millerheiman.com>.



Listening Your Way To New Business

By Larry Bodine

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According to a German proverb, "A man has two ears and one mouth so that he hears much and speaks little." Mark Twain followed up the thought by saying, "If we were meant to talk more than listen, we would have two mouths and one ear." And I'll add: We were given two ears and one mouth, and they should be used in that proportion in a sales call.

Listening is the one sales technique that I can't live without. It saves me from having to make a pitch. Prospects hate being pitched (see discussion below).

The way to sell effectively is to meet a prospect and have five intelligent questions ready. The questions should demonstrate that you've made an effort to understand the prospect's business. The questions are designed to get him talking. They will *tell you* all the things you're supposed to look for to close the deal:

- The prospect's business "pain."
- What they want and how they want it.
- What's not important to the prospect.
- Whether they have the money to hire you.
- Every detail that should go into your proposal.

In fact, the prospect will *write the proposal for you* if you ask open-ended questions (those that cannot be answered by "yes" or "no," such as "tell me more about that") and just get them talking. For me, it goes back to my newspaper reporter days of my youth. I went out on every story with a list of questions I needed answered to write my story. As an honest newsman, I was forbidden from writing my opinion into the story. However, I could *quote* someone to make a point, but I had to ask them a question to get *them* to say it.

I continue the list-of-questions approach today. As a result, I have so much marketing consulting work, I had to hire an associate to keep up with all the work coming in. I love having my own business, and am earning way more than when I was a company employee.

Turning Leads Into Sales

I get 80% of my leads from my Web site, the [LawMarketing Portal](http://www.lawmarketing.com), and the rest by referrals, from friendships I've cultivated, and by having a good reputation. As a result, I get a lot of calls out of the blue from someone saying, "I looked you up on the Internet." (If they don't say that, then I ask them, "How did you hear about me?")

My initial question is always: “Why are you calling about this *today*? What has brought the matter to a head?” The prospect will fill me in on the company’s internal politics, what’s motivating them, the history of the project, and why they need outside help.

To keep them talking, I ask them, “tell me more about that” or “what makes you say that?” I’ll be taking notes the whole time the prospect is talking, because I will translate it directly into a proposal, if that’s what they want. I ask other key questions:

- What have you tried before? Why didn’t that work?
- If the decision were up to you, what would you do?
- Who’s in charge of the project, and tell me about your role in it.
- If everything worked out perfectly, what would that look like?
- Tell me about your customers—what industries are they in? Describe your ideal client. What makes them buy from you?
- What’s the main way your company makes money? What’s your most profitable service? Are any of them losing money?
- Who are your competitors? Name five.
- Do you have a budget for this?
- What other consultants are you talking to about this project?
- What’s your deadline?

When I’ve got a good picture of the situation, I’ll say, “OK, here’s what I recommend we work on first.” Note that I’ve assumed the close and act as if we’re already doing business together. Then I ask them the BIG QUESTION:

- What’s your email address so I can send you:
 - ⇒ An invoice for a retainer of 10 hours of my time or for my flat fee.
 - ⇒ A proposal to show the decision maker.

In-Person Sales Meetings

Often, the prospect will ask for an in-person meeting. This is what I really want, because new business comes *in person*, or “belly to belly” as one rainmaker told me, who had the large belly to match his advice.

I’ll ask them to fax or email me “homework,” so that I can study the firm’s business. I’ll send them a confidentiality agreement and ask them for their top client list—ranked by revenue and labeled by industry, their most profitable services, any written plans or strategy (usually there isn’t one, but I ask anyway), copies of all their printed marketing materials, and the names of five competing firms.

I can learn a lot by studying the prospect's Web site, such as whether their site sucks, whether they have a logo and tagline, whether they have any points of real market distinction. I particularly read the prospect's bio, and memorize two or three points to bring up when I see them, like, "Oh, I noticed that you're an electrical engineer. How does that help in your business?"

I'll build my list of questions, plus find a few simple things they can fix. I'll describe the quick fixes to them as a "free sample" of my advice, which also demonstrates my expertise.

There are key differences between a phone call and an in-person meeting. When the prospect is talking in person, I'll take off my reading glasses and look them directly in the eye, and stop doing anything else (like checking my PDA or looking for a file). I want them to know they have my full attention. At some point, I'll break eye contact to write down a note about what they said. They can tell I am *really* listening to them, and prospects really like that.

I'll keep asking questions until I can form an opinion on what the solution or first step should be. At this point, I'll hand out the free samples plus my invoice for a retainer or flat fee. Then I'll suggest what I'll start working on next and ask if they agree that it's the right choice.

Ask. Ask. Ask. Answer. Answer. Answer. At the end of the conversation, the new client really feels that they have participated in the solution. They do not feel that they have been "pitched" or "sold," but they transformed from a prospect into a client. They view me as a trusted advisor, not someone who is going to cram hard choices down their throat. And I know that I'm on the same wavelength as the client.

The Importance Of Listening

New research conducted by my firm and market researcher Suzanne Lowe of Concord, MA, proved how important listening is. Our new research study, "Increasing Marketing Effectiveness at Professional Firms" compiles the responses of more than 375 marketers and practitioners in 12+ sectors*. They told us that a key way to measure your marketing effectiveness is *listening to the client and responding to what they say*. Those companies that listened to their customers reported that their marketing was "extremely effective."

At the most basic level, we're talking here about garden variety client satisfaction surveys or client perception interviews. (Among law firms, which are my specialty, only 40% conduct client feedback surveys. This is pathetic.) At a strategic level, we're talking about digging to find the client's pain and responding to their needs. Why is listening so effective? One respondent at a successful construction firm told us, "Because we are listening to our clients and making adjustments based on their input. Employees have also been surveyed for their opinions and, while the survey is confidential, we are able to obtain objective information."

David Koren, Marketing Director at Gensler, a New York architecture firm, told us, "Many people think there's a secret to marketing Gensler, that there's some magic

* See <http://tinyurl.com/qdame>.

formula to our success. There aren't any secrets. The magic formula, to the extent that there is one, is listening and responding to clients."

Don't Pitch Your Prospects

Why do used car salesmen have the worst reputation in the field? Because they pitch you. They bombard you with facts and information, and they try to trap you in a little room. Prospects hate that. But most professionals are no better—they present their credentials, often with mind-numbing detail. They tell you how great they are and their firm is. This bores the daylights out of prospects. If you didn't have the credentials, you wouldn't be meeting the prospect. Again, ask questions and treat the pitch as if it's the first meeting after you've been hired. This eliminates the need to pitch.

Ellen Ostrow, Ph.D., of Silver Spring, MD, founder of Lawyers Life Coach LLC wrote a sardonic article "How To Lose A Client in 10 Days."** She devilishly advises, "Dominate the conversation. As long as you're talking, the other person won't have the opportunity to tell you about her needs, goals, concerns, threats and opportunities. After all, you only want the engagement, not the messiness of a relationship. Why listen to the pressures the prospective client faces in his organization? You have enough worries about your own position in your workplace. In fact, you might even use the opportunity to complain about how hard you're working and indirectly convey how desperately you need to get this business."

In an article in the September 2003 *Harvard Business Review*, "How to Pitch a Brilliant Idea," Kimberly D. Elsbach, professor of management at the University of California, Davis, wrote about a six-year study in which she observed 50 Hollywood film and TV producers fielding scores of 30-minute pitches from screenwriters.

She showed that if you are pitching, you are probably doomed. Those receiving the pitch make snap decisions and quickly put you into a box that fits their preconceived notion. Once you're in the box, you can't get out. They apply subjective and inaccurate criteria to the salesperson, and they do it in a blink, as author Malcolm Gladwell might put it.

Imagine how much more successful the salespeople would be if they knew in advance what films made the most money for the studio, which were the biggest losers, the target audience they wanted to reach, and what kind of films the studio was looking for. How would a salesperson find this out?

By asking good questions.

Larry Bodine, Esq. Larry Bodine is a strategic marketing consultant based near Chicago. He has helped dozens of professional firms nationwide get more clients. Larry advises firms on marketing strategy, individual coaching, and retreat presentations. He can be reached at 630.942.0977 and <http://www.LarryBodine.com>.

Learn more about law marketing with free advice at www.Larrybodine.com.

** See <http://tinyurl.com/e6cnu>



Sell With HPI (Hustle. Passion. Intensity.)

By Mike Schultz
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"Take time to deliberate; but when the time for action arrives, stop thinking and go in."
~ Napoleon Bonaparte

I've seen more people *intend* to sell than I have seen people *actually* sell. They talk about how they're going to make the transition to rainmaker and build their own practices. Or how they're going to achieve phenomenal, top-line revenue growth for their service firms. They read books and attend seminars. They make plans to sell. They talk a good game.

Then many do nothing. Oh, they can justify their inaction: they were busy with other things. Perhaps worse than the nothing-doers are the people who shuffle papers or do next to nothing. These toe-dipper-inners deceive themselves by saying, "I did my practice growth work today!" even if their action was listless, untargeted, and nothing came of it.

If you really want to bring in some clients and some dollars, you've got to STOP THINKING AND GO IN! With hustle. With passion. With intensity. (HPI, folks). And your HPI needs to go on for hours on end. For days on end. For months on end.

If you don't, then you'll never know if you could have succeeded.

As the Publisher of RainToday.com, I happen to know that there are a number of sharp cookies that will be contributing to this publication with me. I don't know, however, the nature of their contributions, as our editorial team has kept the submissions under lock and key.

I'm going to guess, though, that you might see good advice about building trust and relationships, communicating and selling the value of the solution vs. the price of the service, listening, focusing on the best buyers, helping others to succeed, and a host of other topics.

Luck is when preparedness meets opportunity. Everything above is about *preparedness*. If you aren't trustworthy, you don't deserve the sale. If you don't sell the value, buyers will buy on price. If you don't focus on the best buyers (or don't have a good business development plan), then you will spend all your time selling to people who won't or can't buy. If you don't listen, you'll fall apart in so many ways you won't know what hit you.

Here's my two cents on the most important piece of advice about selling professional services. If you don't stop thinking and go in, if you don't create *opportunities*, then you won't even have the chance to succeed (or screw up) with all of the above.

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar is the NBA's all time scoring leader with 38,387 points. He hit 15,837 field goals in his career. He also missed 12,470. That's a 56% field goal percentage. (For those who don't know basketball, that's pretty darn good.) When he got the ball, he sure was *prepared*. Then again, he figured out a way to create 28,307 *opportunities* for himself.

Don't get me wrong. I understand why some service providers are squeamish about selling. They don't understand what it means to be in professional sales. They have competing priorities for their time. They're not sure if they have the skills to succeed. They're afraid of having sales conversations. They're afraid of failure. They're afraid of success. They're afraid.

If selling is truly a priority for you, and yet you're not taking the actions you need to sell, here's my best advice:

Your Challenge to Selling with HPI	My Advice
You don't feel you have the best selling skills.	Visit RainToday.com and see what training and reading you should take advantage of (yes, shameless plug). Then stop making excuses, use the skills that you have, and get in the game. Regardless of how much practice you've had, time for some game experience.
You are afraid of failure.	Talk to Tony Robbins. Find your inner strength. See what Stuart Smalley has to say this week. Then stop making excuses and get in the game. You're going to fail here and there. Perhaps more often than you succeed. <i>Fuhgedaboutit.</i>
You have too many competing priorities for your time. You don't have the hours available to make calls, generate leads, write and speak, etc.	Change your priorities. Stop making excuses and get in the game.
You are taking the actions, but in your heart of hearts, you know you're just going through the motions of marketing and selling. You're not really getting it done.	Stop making excuses and get in the game. Or get out of the game and do something else. No halfway <i>in your head</i> . In or out.
You think selling is distasteful.	Do you believe that when people use your services they're better for it? Do you believe that more people should be using your services versus other people's because they get more value with you? Selling is the process of bringing your value to more people. Now that we have that all cleared up, stop making excuses and get in the game.

If you get in the game and do the work with HPI, you'll likely figure the *preparedness* topics out, too. You'll bump into the right person who helps you figure out your value and articulate it. You'll learn how to lead sales conversations with methodologies such as RAIN Selling. You'll figure out how to build trust the right way (hint: start by being trustworthy and delivering on your promises.)

But if you don't get passionate about selling, if you don't approach revenue growth and new client acquisition with HPI, you might just find yourself heavy on preparedness (even if it might not feel that way), and light on opportunity.

It's been said that people will judge you by your actions, not your intentions. You may have a heart of gold—but so does a hard-boiled egg.

Don't intend to sell. Sell!

People judge sales by the numbers. If you don't get fully behind taking action—and sustain your action with HPI over the long term—the numbers won't add up...no matter how good you are at everything else.

Q: The One Thing You Need To Do?

A: Sell with Hustle, Passion, and Intensity (HPI)

Mike Schultz is Publisher of [RainToday.com](http://www.raintoday.com) and a Principal with the [Wellesley Hills Group](#). Mike is a frequent speaker and consultant to service firms worldwide on topics such as service firm branding, marketing, lead generation, e-marketing, and rainmaking. Mike's current and previous clients include firms such as Ryder System, Bank of America, John Hancock Financial Services, American Management Association, Pegasystems, Instron, Fidelity Investments, and a host of other major and emerging growth service firms.

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