



Mentoring Young Rainmakers

>> *Here are three simple concepts that if taught to young professionals, will help them start their journey toward business development success.*

A couple of weeks ago Paul, one of our junior team members, asked me for advice about how he could develop a new client relationship. Paul's question surprised me, as his current role doesn't include client marketing. I fumbled through the conversation and gave him advice about being relaxed and friendly, but was unsatisfied with my response. Since that conversation, I've thought a lot about how I would answer that question if given another chance.

Paul's new interest in client marketing is encouraging. In this challenging economic climate, it's important that everyone on the team understand the need to nurture client relationships. As firm leaders, we can leverage our staff's talents by mentoring them to assist with the firm's business development efforts. For many, it may take years to develop the skills to successfully foster client relationships. However, the following three concepts can help young professionals begin to develop the necessary skills.

1.) *Client relationships are built one encounter at a time* – I recently read an interesting book by Steve Yastrow entitled *We, The Ideal Customer Relationship*. Yastrow's most compelling concept was the simple idea that client relationships are built one encounter at a time. This means that every encounter can either improve a client relationship, deteriorate a relationship, or have no effect. As I acknowledge the importance of every client encounter, I focus more intently on being *in the moment* during client meetings or when on a client phone call. This means that when with a client, I don't multi-task, I turn off the computer screen, I silence the buzzing smart phone, and I request that my administrative assistant hold all competing calls.

2.) *Practice the habit of empathy* - Empathy is the ability to put oneself in someone else's *mental shoes*. In my experience, professionals who are naturally empathetic are also great rainmakers. Unfortunately, few in our profession seem to have developed this skill. Perhaps this is because it is a difficult skill to teach. However, I do regularly use small client interactions as teaching moments. Simple questions like, "How would you have felt had you received that hastily worded email?" help team members consider how they might better handle similar situations in the future. Reinforce the importance of empathy in all client interactions, including written communications, invoice formatting, phone interactions, etc.

For me, my client relationships are what get me excited about my business. I enjoy getting to know my clients, learning about their businesses or departments, appreciating their challenges, and then the feeling that I've made a significant contribution toward their success. All of this is made possible when I practice empathy.

3.) *Understand the value you bring to a client relationship* – In our proposal writing process, we spend a lot of time identifying the unique value we offer our clients. If we can't offer unique value for the project, we don't prepare the proposal. The ability to think strategically is an important and learnable skill. You can help your team better understand your value proposition by asking simple questions like:

- *What is driving the need for this project?*
- *What are the characteristics of a perfect firm for this project?*
- *Why would they choose not to hire us for this project?*
- *Who are my competitors, and what are their strengths and weaknesses?*

These are just a few examples. However, don't just consider these questions when preparing formal proposals. Instead, use them to understand the value you bring to every client

relationship.

I'm convinced that many young professionals avoid participating in client development because they mistakenly believe their role is to make the potential client *like* them. This mistaken belief may make some uncomfortable. Certainly, it is true that people buy services from people they know and trust. However, the focus of client interactions should be to understand the answers to the value questions shown above. Relationships will develop naturally out of your sincere desire to understand the client's needs.

Above all, share with your staff your passion for our profession. Make sure they understand the important, community changing products and services you provide your clients. Employees who share your passion for your services and who understand the unique value you offer clients will naturally create opportunities to develop new client relationships.

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