



The Day the Job Fairy Died

It was almost 30 years ago, but I can still remember it clearly. I'd just started my first "real" job working for a consulting engineering company and I'd been there about three months. Every day, someone had given me billable work to do. Pretty soon, I'd started to believe that a "Job Fairy" came around every night and put work on my desk. But this week was different. It was Friday and I was filling out my time sheet—but I didn't have an hour of billable work. The Job Fairy had died.

It was like a light bulb going on. I remember the realization: if I didn't have any billable work to do, "these guys" were going to fire me! I also realized that it was going to be up to me to find work to do. Nobody was going to take care of me --- and, if I really wanted to be successful, I could learn to find work for others, too. This is a landmark moment in a young consultant's life.

Of course, for most (including me), the big question was how to do it. Few scientists and engineers come out of college with the level of thinking and skills necessary to develop new business.

I was lucky, though. I had great mentors to teach me. Charles Gupton, Porter Knowles, and, later, Bob Winn, helped me realize that to be successful as a consultant, I was going to have to do more than just technical work. I was also going to have to develop new business. I remember Bob Winn saying, "We do three things in this business – sell, manage and do. People who learn to do any two of the three well, will do just fine."

Other than mentorship, I had little training. I learned by doing, but it was a long, slow process as my career progressed. Eventually, I became "unconsciously competent" in the Business Development area.

Career Progression

In a consulting business, the usual evolution of a professional's career is to start off working for a Project Manager. Early on, people in the company may help young scientists and engineers find work, but in tough times, this gets harder. The best thing for young professionals to do to develop "job security" is to learn to "market" themselves internally. To insure a steady flow of billable work, they need to do a great job with the projects they're assigned, and then "network" heavily within the company to make sure that those senior individuals who manage new work know their skills and seek them out when they have work to do.

As time passes, successful professionals will probably begin to manage their own projects. For many, this will be their first real exposure to clients. Their goal must be to do an outstanding job by making sure that clients get what they want – on time and within budget. When they do this, they will "grow"

additional work “farming” with their clients and begin to develop a *professional practice*. Clients will seek them out because they are professionals that can be trusted to look after their clients’ needs and get the job done.

Eventually, as their careers progress, professionals may be called on to assist their firm’s growth by developing new business. This is where it starts to get hard for most people. Developing new business requires “cold calls”—visiting people they don’t know and believe are trying to “sell” them something. In fact the harder they try to “sell” services, the harder it gets. The skills required to be successful in this new endeavor aren’t taught in college and learning through trial and error is a long, tough road.

Mechanical Limitations vs. Conceptual Limitations – Knowing What to Do, How to Do It and Why It Works

Investing in training in business development can accelerate the learning process. In almost any sport, a few hours working with a good instructor, coach or guide is worth weeks of trial and error.

Many traditional “sales training” programs focus on presenting mechanical skills— the “what to do” – prospecting, qualifying, learning who the “influencers” and “decision makers” are, and “closing”.

But it’s not all about understanding and doing the *mechanical* skills – the “what do you say after you say hello”. For most scientists and engineers, the biggest hurdle is *conceptual* – it’s how to do it, why it works and why they won’t do it -- the six inches between their ears. It’s not just what to do. We find that even though they may be taught what to do, they won’t do it, because they can’t get past their *conceptual* problems.

For many, the biggest conceptual hurdle is that they associate “traditional sales” with what should be “professional business development”. In our work with literally thousands of professionals, we know the words that everyone associates with selling and uses to describe “salesmen”-- “slick”, “sleazy”, “pushy”, etc. For too many “traditional” salespeople, it’s an accurate description – it’s how they have been taught to think and act. Is it any wonder that scientists and engineers don’t want to be “salesmen”?

However, they learn that in *professional business development*, their purpose is to provide their clients what they need or want in solutions, fixing problems whether or not they purchase it from them. They learn that they are helping their clients --- and there is nothing “slick”, “sleazy” or “pushy” about that. Business development is something they can do with honor.

Another *conceptual* problem that we see in many professionals is “fear of rejection”. They don’t understand that in the best of times, they will meet rejection most of the time. They have to develop the level of thinking necessary to understand that it’s not about them. It could be timing, budgets, or a slew of other considerations. It just is. If they take it personally, they will fail.

Once these conceptual problems are out of the way, scientists and engineers are ready to learn the mechanical skills that will help them qualify leads and develop prospects efficiently and effectively.

Mastering Business Development

Many of the people in our classes want to jump to the “what to do”, but we’ve found that simply teaching them “what to do” isn’t effective. It’s far more important that they understand the thinking behind business development first, and why the skills that we teach them work. Ultimately, thinking drives behavior. So, it’s vital that people who want to *master* business development understand not only what to do, but also the *thinking behind it and why it works*.

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