



THE DAY THE JOB FAIRY DIED

Making the Case for Professional Business Development Training

It was nearly 40 years ago, but I can still remember it clearly. I'd just started my first "real" job, and had been at it about three months. Every day, someone had given me billable work to do. Pretty soon, I 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 one 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. No one was going to take care of me. If I really wanted to be successful, I could learn to find work for others, too. This is a landmark moment in a young technical professional's career.

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

However, I was lucky. I had great mentors to teach me. They helped me realize that to be successful in my job, I was going to have to do more than just technical work. I was also going to have to develop new business.

I remember one mentor 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 what is termed "unconsciously competent" in the BD area.

Career Progression

In this 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 folks find work, but in tough times, this gets harder. I discovered the best thing to do to develop "job security" is to learn to "market" yourself internally. To insure a steady flow of billable work, I needed to do a great job with the projects assigned. Then I needed to "network" heavily within the company to make sure those senior individuals who manage new work knew my skills and would seek me out when they had work to do.

I learned that 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 customers get what they want ... on time and within budget. When they do this, they will "grow" additional work "farming" with their customers and begin to develop as a BD farmer.

Customers will seek them out and trust them because they are professionals that can be counted upon to look after their needs and get the job done.

Eventually, as their careers progress, they may be called on to help their firm's growth by developing new business, to become a hunter. This is where it gets very difficult 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" the harder it gets. The skills required to be successful in this new endeavor aren't taught in college.

Trust me ... learning through trial and error is a long, tough road.

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

Investing in Professional Business Development training can accelerate the learning process. As an example, 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” of prospecting, qualifying, learning who the real “influencers” and “decision makers” are, shaping deals and of course winning the business.

But Business Development is not just about understanding and doing the mechanical skills ... the “what do you say after you say hello”. For most folks, 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. They may be taught what to do, but 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”. We all know the terms that everyone associates with selling and uses to describe salespeople: “slick”, “sleazy”, “pushy”, etc. For too many “traditional” salespeople, it’s an accurate description. It’s how they’ve been taught to think and act.

Is it any wonder that professionals don’t want to be considered salespeople?

In Professional Business Development, individuals discover their purpose is to provide customers what they need in solutions to fix problems, whether or not they purchase the solution from them. They learn they’re really helping clients ... and there’s nothing “slick”, “sleazy” or “pushy” about that. BD is something they can do with honor and it’s nothing like the dark side.

Another conceptual problem is fear of rejection. In the best of times, BD professionals 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 limitations are dealt with and out of the way, individuals are ready to learn the mechanical skills that will help them qualify leads and develop prospects efficiently and effectively.

Mastering Business Development

In 30 years training many professionals, we find most individuals want to jump to the “what to do” part first. But simply teaching “what to do” isn’t effective. It’s far more important to understand the thinking behind Business Development first, and why the skills that are taught actually work.

Ultimately, thinking drives behavior. In the end, 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. *And that’s no fairy tale!*

MBDⁱ is a Business Development professional services firm based in Charlotte, North Carolina. For the past 30 years, MBDⁱ has assisted client firms in leveraging their high level expertise into bottom line business. For information on the company and the MBD (OIE-Q)ⁱ ProcessSM, email info@mbdi.com or access: www.mbd.com.



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