

Reward, Motivation and Pain

Do your business development (BD) professionals understand the pain interview? Do they repeatedly report back from 'good meetings' and have no real progress in their pursuit? Are you wondering if your team has quietly resigned, doesn't get it, or simply hasn't been trained?

"I need to find the pain," exclaimed one of my enthusiastic and overwhelmingly successful BD professionals as he headed into the elevator and off for a client visit. A colleague of his, much junior in experience, looked at me perplexed, clearly not understanding what had just happened. Out of my frustration and impatience at his lack of understanding, I simply commented to him, "Google it." Hearing nothing from him the balance of the day and into the next, I thought I should have a look at what "Googling it" would yield and what I might have unintentionally done to the thinking and behavior of my junior BD professional. There are 14 Essential Questions according to one result (Forbes, 2020), but only 5 in another (Outboundengine, 2022). Many other results focused on interviewing BD candidates or interviewing for pain from a medical perspective. Nowhere did I find an explanation of the BD pain interview that I wanted to pass along. It was time for patience and understanding, and a teaching/learning moment.

We learn early in our lives of the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch) and find great thinkers (Aristotle, Darwin) have debated the characterization of pain as somehow related to the senses, but also acknowledging that pain depends upon context and past experiences. In professional business development, that context and experience is what we seek to uncover when working with a prospect. We complete our homework to understand all that we can around the four pillars of the engagement process (the organization, technical requirements, funding, people). We know our script going in about how we will connect/bond with the prospect and develop our understanding and roles. We will have practiced stating our purpose, communicating our goals, and negotiating the rules, rights and responsibilities of the engagement. Only after all of this, can we move forward to the pain interview.

Professionals who are trained and skilled in the art of the pain interview understand when, in their client relationship, they have built enough trust to get to the First Cause of the first-person, personal pains that he or she can address. If there were only 4 or 5 questions to ask, then professional BD would be straightforward with everyone carrying around their card of questions and collecting the client's information. It is not easy and requires an understanding of the fundamentals of behavioral psychology. Those fundamentals are the foundation of a client

engagement process aimed at uncovering, qualifying and pursuing opportunities. Uncovering those opportunities are the rewards for BD professionals that lead to enthusiastic exclamations of “I need to find the pain.”

Educating the junior or unseasoned BD professional in the art of the pain interview is not easy and it is not cheap. It requires a commitment on the part of the organization to invest in education that allows the professional to recognize their own behavioral psychology and feedback to help them become emotionally detached from it. It requires ongoing management support, through repetition and candid discussions, of the principles involved. Professionals will draw upon their professional business development training and life experiences to appropriately motivate clients toward resolving pain. After the training, feedback, and about 800 hours of hard work (practice), the junior BD professional will also be excited about finding pain.

Business development education is not wholly found in a book, a webinar or even a workshop. It is created in the environment of the organization by reinforcing the learnings found in books, online, or through in-person training. You should be asking yourself, “Am I providing the environment that allows my BD professionals to grow?”

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About the Author



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