

## Chapter 3 – Business Development

### Lesson 26: Making Long-Term Investment

Zweig Group CEO Chad Clinehens wrote a very nice article<sup>17</sup> regarding some tips for taking a long-term investment approach in our A/E/C business. Here are a few highlights:

- **Focus on client experience.** Most firms are doing worse at client experience. Zweig is observing declining satisfaction scores, especially in the areas of accessibility and responsiveness. Firms are saying, “We are just too busy.”

- **High workloads are shifting focus to putting out fires rather than proactively servicing clients.** Asking clients to provide feedback and not doing anything with the information is worse than never asking at all. Be careful that your flexible work practices do not erode the client experience.

- **Spend more on marketing and business development.** Over the last three years, Zweig Group has seen a declining investment in marketing and BD activity. In a highly competitive market, now is the time to invest more in marketing and BD resources to build a backlog and brand preference. It is critical to act while the economy is good. There will come a day when your clients have fewer dollars to spend. Position yourself now so they spend those dollars with you.

- **Commit to continuous learning firm wide.** The number one challenge firms face is recruiting and retention. The number one benefit identified and highly valued by employees of A/E/C firms for the past two years is training and development.

- **Make strategic planning a yearly activity.** The opportunity for you to make your firm strong now when times are good will greatly improve your resilience in future turbulent economic times. Firms with strategic plans are 12% more profitable and enjoy stronger recruiting abilities.

Zweig Group is dedicated to recommending best practices based on solid research and data. These investments in client experience, responsiveness, marketing and business development, training, and strategic planning will produce positive results. The clients say so and the data proves it.

### *Challenge*

Whatever your position of influence or decision-making within your firm, commit to staying focused on these areas of investment. Do not allow the everyday fires and distractions to keep you from a planned and strategic investment into the parts of your business that make the biggest impact.

### **Lesson 27: Business Development in 11 Words**

“Yes, I know it’s not Monday ... it’s Tuesday! But here’s your weekly dose of marketing medicine anyway.” (That is how I began this email later in the week. I decided to keep it in this book because it illustrates something of value: humor. Don’t get so bogged down in the minutia of the day-to-day that you miss opportunities for humor.)

This marketing tip was adapted from Michael Buell’s Marketer article, “The Entire BD Process in 11 Words.”<sup>18</sup> The process of business development, especially as it relates

to engineering services is quite simple. Here is a short excerpt from the article.

*“Sales is a result—business development is the process! Yes, we’re trying to generate sales, but with professional services that should be considered the preferred culmination of effective and timely marketing and business development efforts.”*

It is a good reminder to recognize that a sale happens after multiple business development tasks and marketing efforts have been accomplished. Michael Buell offers the following 11 words condensing the BD process: Identify, Engage, Listen, Understand, Respond, Inform, Pursue, Affirm, Win, Fortify, Cultivate.

*Identify* whether a prospective client is a good fit for your firm.

*Engage* the prospect. This may be a requested meeting, a shared networking event or conference, a phone call, or email.

*Listen*. Now that you are engaged with a prospect, be prepared with great questions, make them comfortable to talk, and listen.

*Understand* their goals, interests, ideas, likes, and dislikes. Get to know them and their organization.

*Respond* to the prospect’s requests and needs. Be quick in your responses and be helpful.

*Inform* your prospects of industry trends, funding opportunities, best practices, or anything else they may find useful and beneficial to their job.

*Pursue* opportunities for project tasks. Only after identifying, engaging, listening, understanding, responding, and informing do you now ask for work and pursue it!

*Affirm* everything you have learned about the prospect in previous stages and incorporate it into your pursuit of work.

*Win* the work!

*Fortify* your new client relationship with planned client experience touches. This can be done through a mix of client surveying, debriefing, entertainment, and a rock-solid work product.

*Cultivate* the initial steps by continuing to engage, listen, understand, respond, inform, and pursue. Create great client experiences with every project, solidifying your commitment, and the client's loyalty.

### **Challenge**

Look at your prospect list as it is right now. Take your top several prospects and determine where you are in the business development process. Have you skipped over any critical phases? Are you following the process? Commit yourself to faithfully aligning your BD activities with these 11 phases and measure the results.

## **Lesson 28: Business Development is Served**

Have you ever wondered why business developers go out to eat all the time? It seems that BD people are always looking to go out for lunch with someone and it is usually a client, a prospect, or someone who can get us to a client or prospect. These lunches are purposeful. If they are well-planned and executed, business lunches can provide a treasure of intelligence and insight leading to more work.

Here are some tips for a great business development lunch. If you plan ahead and execute your plan, you can help gain more work for your company.

Tip #1: Show up 10-15 minutes earlier than scheduled. You don't want your client waiting on you.

This may be difficult because there's always one more email to read or one more piece of information to circulate before you get out of the office. And of course, several people are wanting your time and will ask for it as you are

trying to walk out the door. Do whatever you must, but get yourself to the restaurant early so you are there to greet your guest when he or she arrives. Being early and greeting your guests is hospitable and shows you are there exclusively for them.

Tip #2: Go prepared with knowledge of the client's organization (operations, history, current needs, and challenges).

Like any good project execution, you must have a well-researched plan. Creating a successful business development lunch also requires that you know who you are visiting, why you are visiting them, and how they relate to their organization. Have some general knowledge of their business, their industry, and typical issues they may have. If you cannot discover very much, then the business lunch is a perfect time to ask, which leads directly to Tip #3.

Tip #3: Ask questions about the client organization.

Be prepared to ask open-ended questions. What are your biggest concerns, obstacles, issues? Where do you hope to be in five to ten years? What makes your company better than competitors? Start with big, over-arching questions before asking specific 'engineering-related' questions. Ask questions like you are on a date, not an FBI interrogator. A good date listens and is genuinely interested in you. That is how you want your questions to land.

Tip #4: Show genuine interest in everything, even if it doesn't apply to your services.

If they want to talk about their pets, their car, their kids, or whatever, just listen and show interest. Small talk is a way for the client to get used to you, examine, and trust you. It is okay if you spend more time talking about nothing, as long as it is building trust and a genuine connection. Once you feel the connection is good, ease into more business-related topics.

Tip #5: Make sure your server knows early in the meal that you will be picking up the tab.

Get this task out of the way early. I prefer to let the server know as we are initially being seated that I will be paying the bill for the meal. If you are ordering at a counter, simply ask your guest to order first and you will pick up the bill. This only gets awkward when people make it awkward. Smile, be courteous, and simply make it natural.

*On occasion, you may be eating with a government employee who cannot let you pay for their meal. You must accommodate the rules of their employer, so simply say you understand and let them pay for their meal.*

Tip #6: Turn off your phone or at least put it on silent and *do not check it!* Only take a phone call if you think it is an emergency.

Everyone agrees with good phone etiquette but I rarely view people practicing it. This is serious and can damage your best efforts if you violate respectful phone manners. If it is too tempting to respond to the vibrations, then turn it off. Do whatever is necessary to make sure you are not answering or checking your phone during your lunch meeting. Checking your phone or answering a call says to your guest, "I have someone or something more important than you right now." That is not the message you want to send.

I recall going to lunch with a business developer for an industry-related firm with whom my firm occasionally partnered. I had initiated the meeting and he recommended a great lunch spot. When I arrived, he was already present and waiting. We were seated and he informed our waiter he would be taking the ticket. Then he did something remarkable and memorable. He took out his mobile phone and shut it off. He literally said, "You and this meal are the most important things for the next hour, so you have my

undivided attention." I, of course, had to oblige and turned off my phone as well. It was refreshing and warm to stay engaged in conversation with a colleague and friend throughout a meal with no phone interruptions and no chance for one.

**Tip #7: Do not sell!**

Do not confuse business development with selling. You are not out to lunch to sell anything. You are out to lunch to build a relationship with someone who may or may not need your services. You are there to represent your company and discover if the person with whom you are dining perceives value in knowing you. Business is people and it is personal. If someone feels like a means to your ultimate end, they will feel used and disconnected. You want them to leave lunch feeling heard, understood, and valued.

Make a purposeful plan and recognize you are doing a job. Your job is to learn and understand more about your client or prospect and translate that knowledge into opportunities to solve their problems. Having lunch together is a social event with the expectation to enjoy each other's company. It may take a couple of lunches before the relational trust is built, so be patient and follow these seven tips to ensure business development success.

***Challenge***

Before your next BD lunch, review these tips. If you do nothing else right, get one thing right: *turn off your phone!* This is not a pet peeve. I am doing you a tremendous favor. You will differentiate yourself from nearly every competitor with the simple step of turning off your phone. You will be tempted to argue the need to be available. I will argue that as soon as you so much as look at your phone in front of a client or prospect you have communicated that whatever you are looking at or whomever you are talking with on your phone is more important than they are.