

How your professional vision affects business development

Some professionals are trusted advisors and some are technical experts. How professionals see themselves (and how their clients see them) drive how they should approach business development.

Being a trusted advisor makes talking to clients (and prospects) easy

Trusted advisors put their clients' interests first. Here's how two well-known firms describe their positions:

“Our clients' interests always come first. Our experience shows that if we serve our clients well, our own success will follow.” – Goldman Sachs

“We measure our success by our clients' success. We make all our resources available to our clients and commit ourselves wholeheartedly to their success. We seek to identify our clients' real needs, not just deliver good work. In tradeoffs between BCG's and a client's interest, the client comes first” – Boston Consulting Group

People from these firms commit to the client's success. When they are with clients or former clients (or even prospective clients), they are listening for opportunities to help. These opportunities might involve buying the professionals' services, or might not. They don't try to sell something all the time, although they are happy to sell when the right thing for the client to do is to buy. Most of the time, they are trying to understand the client's most pressing issues, and then helping the client get those issues resolved. Because the client always has pressing issues, there's always an opportunity for the professionals to talk with the client about them.

Trusted advisors are usually technically skilled - they are credible investment bankers, consultants, accountants, real estate specialists or other kind of professional. But they offer their services as part of a package. Trusted advisors have faith that capable professionals with the right kinds of relationships with the right people will find ample opportunities over time to do professional work for pay. These trusted advisors have relationships that are financed by the paid work done from time to time.

To become more effective business developers, trusted advisors focus on *making themselves more valuable to the clients they have*. They keep trying to learn more about their clients' industries, and anything else that might affect their clients. And they build broad networks because that lets them bring more value -- in terms of contacts and others who can help -- to their clients. They know that when they help their clients uncover new challenges and then help clients address those challenges, the advisors will also be building their own ability to be valuable to other clients.

It surprises me how few firms emphasize their “client first” values in their self-presentation – and how many take another path and emphasize their competence.

Identifying with your expertise or your professions requires targeted conversations

Many other professionals focus on their own skills more than the clients' needs. The marketing challenge for a professional who sees him/herself as an expert in a field is *finding the people who need the professional's help now*. If you are such a professional, you must look for someone whose foot fits the slipper you've developed into – if the shoe fits, then you are their Prince (or Princess) Charming. Or you show off the shoe you have, hoping people who fit such a shoe will call you. An expert can deliver great value when he/she finds the right problem to work on, but often cannot figure out what to talk about when that problem isn't obviously present. An expert's challenge is staying visible enough (and memorable enough) to be called when their expertise is needed.

Deciding who you are and what you want

Deciding how you want to deliver value to clients -- by being a trusted advisor with technical skills or by being a technical expert -- is an important decision for a professional. Your choice affects your business development challenges, but more importantly, it affects the trajectory of your professional career. Happily, any choice is not permanent. Trusted advisors can deepen their technical skills over time, and technical experts can begin to learn to be trusted advisors. Thinking about who you are and what you want is a first step.

Something to try this week

Think about whether you want to be a trusted advisor. If you do, figure out how it would feel to begin to put the clients' interest first, and think about the conversations you might have with a client if you did. For a list of some ideas, see [Get Clients by Focusing on Their Success](#).

If you are already a trusted advisor, think about how to keep broadening your contacts and your skills to be more valuable to your clients.

If you are a technical expert, think about one or two new ways to get and keep your expertise out in front of potential clients.

What are these tips?

These monthly tips help professionals create more business and enjoy their work more. We focus on how to start relationships, how to build relationships, and how to convert those relationships into sales.