

Doing It For The Money

By David H. Maister

It was one of those familiar conversations that I often have:

“We want to get more of our people involved in business development.”

“Is this a new idea, or have you been working at it for a while?”

“Oh, we’ve been working at it a lot. We’ve tried quite a few things.”

“Such as?”

“Well, the first thing we did was try to convince them of the wonderful things business development would do for the firm if we were all successful at it.”

“And?”

“They all agreed, but only a few were moved to action by things that were good for the firm. Most of the others were more interested in things that were good for them personally.

“So what did you try next?”

“We tried to make it personal. We changed our compensation system to put more reward in for business getters”

“Did that work?”

“A little, but it mostly just ended up paying more to the people who were

already good at it. It turned out that promising to pay you if you got terrific at a completely new skill wasn’t enough to overcome the lack of confidence that many had about whether they *could* learn it.”

“What happened next?”

“Well, we tried using the pay scheme again. We started rumors that we would cut the pay of or fire people who couldn’t generate business.”

“And how well did that work?”

“Well, it generated a lot of fear, but even fear and terror didn’t turn non-marketers into marketers. We ended up spending more time fighting about the new reward system and even less time discussing new marketing ideas. It seems as if the minute you discuss money, people can’t think about anything else.”

“Interesting. What did you try next?”

“Well, we put all our people through sales training courses.”

“Were they effective?”

“They were very useful for those who were already interested in business development. They didn’t have much impact on those who weren’t interested. It was pretty

much a waste of time, because it was the ones who weren't interested that we were trying to reach."

"Anything else?"

"Oh, yes. We designed a process for targeting our key clients with cross-discipline teams and we gave people access to marketing staff specialists, laying out a program of how to make relationship building programs effective."

"And what happened?"

"Well, where individual people or groups did what we planned, it worked fabulously. Some people always wanted to do this in an organized fashion. But many of our supposed teams never did execute the programs they had themselves submitted as plans."

"Why not?"

"The same syndrome, I suppose. Tools, systems and organization are wonderful aids for people who already want to do this stuff, but they seem to have little impact on people who don't want to. If the underlying problem is attitude, no amount of processes, forms and support is going to change things."

"So?"

"Well, what do you think we ought to try next, David? What's the latest thinking?"

First, Stop Doing What Doesn't Work

Notice the amazing range of things that firms have tried to get people involved in business development. Included in the preceding dialogue are references to:

- Visions
- Rewards
- Punishments
- Training
- Processes
- Support Resources
- Restructuring of Teams

And, I'm told, they haven't worked as well as people hoped they would. There's still a need to find a way to elicit enthusiastic participation in business-getting.

The primary reason most of these business development management initiatives tend to deliver poor results is exactly that word: a *reason*. Firms do not address the central question that those who do not participate have: "Why should I get involved in all this?"

Firms keep trying to prove to people why their efforts would be good for the firm ("Do it for the glory of the institution; do it to achieve our strategic goals") or because it will make them rich ("Don't worry about whether this is interesting stuff—do it for the money!")

Not only are these appeals not always effective (if they were, I wouldn't have been asked to write this article or to constantly speak about this subject) but, perhaps surprisingly, encouraging professionals to put effort into business development for the money turns out to backfire badly—less money is earned, not more.

There are two reasons for this: the impact of incentives on people's motivations, and the impact of the "money orientation" on their business development approaches.

What's Wrong With "Do it For the Money"

In 1999, Alfie Kohn published an important book, *Punished by Rewards*, (Mariner Books) in which he pointed out that all incentive schemes are doomed to failure because they divert people's attention away from inherent meaning, purpose, fulfillment or fun in the activity. Rather than these things, all motivation is shifted to getting the reward.

He also argues effectively that the most important things needed to *get* rewards in any field of endeavor are the energy and dedication created by meaning, purpose, fulfillment and fun.

He reports an interesting non-business example. An experiment was conducted with two groups of children, each given some toys to play with. One group was left alone to play, while the other group was given rewards for playing with the toys (ice cream, cookies and such.)

After a short while, the experiment was halted and the rewards removed. The outcome was (in hindsight) readily understandable. Those children who were playing with the toys for the fun of doing so happily carried on.

Those who had been rewarded for playing with the toys had transferred their focus of attention from the play to the reward. If they were no longer to be

rewarded, they would no longer play, and ceased to do so.

Doesn't this sound *exactly* like a group of professionals? Say "Do it and I'll pay you" and they will immediately translate it into "I'm not going to do anything you don't pay me for!"

What happens if people's primary (or even exclusive) reason for doing marketing is to get the money?

In *True Professionalism* (Free Press, 1997), I first gave the results of a simple survey I have conducted (for more than fifteen years now) among professionals around the world. People tell me that they truly enjoy their work 20 to 30 percent of the time, and can tolerate the rest.

Similarly, they report that they really like the clients they work for and find the clients' sector interesting about 30 to 40 percent of the time. Again, the rest is acceptable.

Notice that this is what people tell me. It is not my judgment about their lives but their own assessment.

These proportions certainly help us understand why people aren't all that keen to go out, get active and work passionately on business development. Getting more business just brings in more stuff they can tolerate for clients they don't particularly care for!

If you don't love what you do or those you do it for, why would you want to go out and get more of it?

The traditional answer is, of course, because they'll pay me if I do. They'll

pay me to do stuff I have no feelings for, for people I don't care for! That, of course, is the dictionary definition of prostitution. Which is exactly the way many professionals feel when their firms try to get them to market themselves. No wonder marketing management efforts have such a low success rate!

If firms wish to get enthusiastic participation in business development, they need to start talking and behaving very differently in their attempts to entice non-participants into the program. The very *purpose* of being good at business development, the very *reason* to do it, needs to be reexamined!

What getting good at marketing can do for the individual is to help him or her find the clients they could care about and be eager to help, and the types of work that would be truly stimulating. The better you are at marketing, the more truly professional you can be, because you are not forced to take money from anyone and everyone just because you need the cash.

Paradoxically, if one takes this view of marketing (it's about finding things you really want to work on and people you truly want to help) the energy and involvement in marketing that would be created (in addition to the sincerity and passion immediately evident to clients) would make you much more likely to get the volume and the cash.

Go for things that turn you on and you'll get the money. Go for the money and you'll get less.

The trouble, of course, is that finding exciting work and enjoyable clients is not the reason that firms give their

people to participate in business development. Helping people find more fun, fulfillment and meaning in their practices is not really why firms hire marketing directors, is it? But if firms want increased revenues, it should be!

Clients and "Do it For the Money" Attitudes

These survey results also make completely clear why so many people fail at business development. Take a guess at the answer to this question: Do you think that clients can tell when professionals are doing it only for the money and have no special interest in them or their problems?

When *you* are the target of some other professional, how easily and quickly can *you* tell if they are interested in you or just trying to get your business and your cash? How transparent are their underlying motives when they are engaged in selling to *you*?

How easily or quickly can *you* tell if they have a passion for what they do—or whether they view themselves simply as solid, competent people just doing a job?

If you are able to detect these things when *you* are the buyer, how do *you* feel about them? Do such factors affect *your* decision about whether to hire specific professionals?

My guess is that *you* can spot these things almost always and that, most of the time, it significantly influences *your* desire to work with such professionals. It matters to 95 percent of the people I have asked around the world for more than two decades, and it probably matters to *your* clients too.

As it turns out, you and your profession are not unique even though you may think you are (sorry!), and your buyers, when they buy, are not that different from you and me when we buy.

“I’m doing it for the money” is an attitude most of us can spot a mile away – when we’re the buyer. And nothing is designed to make us less likely to want to hire such a person. Yet that is the number one reason firms give when they try to get their people to go out and generate business.

The message from management seems to be: “Do it for the money, but try and convince the prospective client that you’re not doing it for the money”

I have bad news for you. Your people are just not that good at acting. If their real motivation to engage in marketing is for the money, it will inevitably show. And they will succeed less often, no matter how many training courses you provide to them about how to fake sincerity, Motives matter!

This is not an idealistic “anti-money” argument. When I’m your buyer, knowing that you want the money is nothing to be embarrassed about or to apologize for. We all want the money. But if you truly want me to give you my business, then you will need to be a little more sophisticated about how to actually get it.

You must win my business by showing me that you are interested in *more* than just the money. You need to prove that you are prepared to *earn* and *deserve* my trust and my business by being interested in me.

We know all this as buyers. Why do we keep forgetting it when the time comes for us to get hired? And why do so many firm marketing efforts seem to show so little understanding of how people actually buy?

How Managers and Marketing Directors Make a Difference

There are other ways in which the way a firm’s management of its marketing efforts actually leads to less marketing success, rather than more.

In many firms, rewards for marketing success are based upon exactly that: *success*. There is no credit within the systems or, perhaps more important, the culture of the firm to reward marketing contributions that cannot be linked to a specific piece of business.

There is no “origination credit” for writing a good article or putting on a good seminar. There is no bonus for contributing a new tax idea that everyone else in the firm got to tell their clients about. Unless *you* were the one to tell *your* client and *you* were the one who got the “here’s a deal” call from the client, you don’t get acknowledged.

Not surprisingly, this mentality leads everyone to under-invest in articles, seminars, innovative ideas and the like, and instead, rush to “selling” activities. They focus on the final event of trying to get hired, rather than the “romance” of successfully laying the groundwork by tempting the prospective client into wanting a relationship. They start approaching prospective clients with an overeager rush of “Do you want to do it?” – not usually a recipe for success!

Firms also mismanage marketing by fervently preaching team efforts (such as cross-discipline approaches to key clients) while clearly running reward systems based on individual performance. If you pay me on what I do personally, I'm not going to be silly enough to waste my time on any team efforts that don't carry my name attached. Make up your mind, management! What do you *really* want me to do?

Firms also try to encourage long-term relationship investments by their people while visibly running short-term focused management and reward systems. Again the paradox or contradiction is soon spotted. You say you want us to do all the right things to build long term relationships, but you also want to reserve the right to be short-term decision-makers yourselves? Come on, get real, guys!

What all these problems have in common is that firms are not only "in it only for the money," but they want the money *now*! As a result, while they talk a good game about long-term relationship building marketing efforts, the truth is that these are never really executed well unless they deliver results *immediately*.

Managing As If What We Do For a Living Has Meaning

It should be clear by now that my experience has taught me that most firms' marketing problems are not marketing problems at all, but "management of marketing" problems.

Specifically, people are being encouraged into ineffective and

counterproductive mindsets and habits by the words and behaviors of firm management and marketing directors as they go about getting their professionals to think about business development.

It will come as a surprise to many, but if firms wish to be more successful at generating revenues, they need to stop saying, "Do it for the money," or even "Do it for the firm."

They do not need to stop saying these things not because they are immoral, but because they cause many professionals (particularly the novices who need the most help) to profoundly misunderstand what actually works in business development. By saying these things they are, just as Alfie Kohn pointed out, drawing people's attention away from the true reasons they might want to be enthusiastically involved.

They need to start saying, "Let's do it as if we were planning to be in business for a long time. Let's do it to really be helpful and valuable to people we can care about, and let's have more fun and fulfillment!" Then they will be able to say: "Oh, and by the way, a wonderful consequence will follow—clients will love it and we will get richer!"

So how does a marketing director or managing partner help the firm's professionals get good at being trusted and hence start generating the cash?

They need to help professionals understand that we don't get rich by "selling"—we get rich by making people want to hire us and work with us.

Pulling *that* off requires a whole new attitude toward why we are doing

marketing and selling, and why we work in the profession we chose. It is the job of management and marketing directors to create those attitudes in the firm (and to not generate precisely the opposite attitude, which is all too often the case.)

You do *not* need to teach your people how to sell. You need to find out, partner by partner, what kind of work turns each partner on and what kind of clients each partner could actually get interested in.

Your people can't love everyone (or everything), but if they can't learn to really care about *some kinds of clients* and *some kinds of work* (or the problems of those certain kinds of clients), they are not going to get a higher percentage of clients to give them business.

And if your professionals truly are interested in no one and nothing, there are almost certainly bigger issues at stake!

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