

Winning your deals

You should aspire to get 100% of the contracts for which you and your firm are the right choice for the client or prospect. To get these assignments, you need to both build a strong relationship and show that you can deliver business value to the client. You show you can deliver business value during the sale by helping the prospect articulate their problem and by helping them evaluate their choices for solving it.

When will prospects be ready to buy (and how you can get them there)?

A prospect for professional services will be willing to buy when they:

Have a problem or opportunity they can articulate clearly. You can help prospects explore different views of their problem, and help them ultimately identify the best way to state the problem -- the problem statement that gets at the underlying cause and not just the symptoms. You can listen to fully understand their point of view. Then bring your specialized knowledge, experience and business insight to bear; you extend the client's thinking and provide alternative ways to see the situation. You don't try to solve the problem (yet), but rather explore it fully with the client and demonstrate your capabilities at the same time. You sell by showing how working with you brings insight and progress.



Know the value of resolving the problem or seizing the opportunity. The prospect needs to know what a solution will look like and how it will feel to have a solution implemented. They need to know if the payoff will be \$100,000 or if it will be \$100 million so you and they can together calculate the financial return. You help flesh out the corporate benefits of the solution. You help prospects think about outcomes in terms of revenues, expenses, investments required, cash flow, stock price, risk, and any other important dimension. You also help identify the personal benefits for the prospect of the solution -- how it will make their life easier, more secure, less stressful, etc. Make sure the prospect also understands the implications of choosing to do nothing, because "do nothing" is almost always a leading although frequently unmentioned competitor.

Believe having outside help will substantially improve their ability to address the issue. To hire professional help, especially in tight times, prospects need to know that without help they will fail or be very likely to fail. You need to push the prospect to fully explore the option of forgoing help. For some professions (e.g., consulting, some kinds of engineering, some fields of law) potential clients may have the option of using internal resources to do some version of what you might do for them. As long as "do it alone" remains an unspoken possibility, the prospect may

choose it. So mention explicitly the option of not going outside and help the prospect identify the advantages and risks clearly. This thorough discussion will help the client make the best decision -- which often will be to choose you.

Believe you can help solve the problem better than any other outside resource (based on knowledge, experience, and trust). You are not the only professional in your field the client may talk with. To convince them you are the right resource, demonstrate your firm's capabilities and your own capabilities beginning at the first contact. Show how you think; show how you listen; show how you respond. If other firms might be considered (and usually assume that's likely) talk openly about the circumstances where you are the best choice and when others might be the best choice. If you have developed a good relationship with the prospect, then you will gain far more by helping the client make the right decision than you will by getting work for which you are not a great choice.

In the long run, you will benefit most when the client picks you for work you can perform outstandingly well. So you can feel free to always push the client to make the right choice for themselves; if you are pursuing the right opportunities making the right choice will often mean picking you.

Something to try this week

Think about your current pipeline of potential work from new prospects and from existing clients. Identify where each prospect or client stands on each potential project against the four issues that must be addressed for them to decide to choose to pay you to work with them. Decide how you can demonstrate your competence and commitment to their success by helping each prospect or client move forward with their decision. And then act on what you've figured out.

What are these tips?

These monthly tips are intended to 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.