



WHY GOOD WORK IS STILL THE BEST APPROACH TO BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

BY SUE-ELLA PRODONOVICH

The best approach to business development (BD) for professionals is always to do a good job. That's always been the case and, as far as I can tell, it always will be.

But doing a good job isn't just about doing the best work or finding the best solution for a client. It's also about having a systematic method to on-boarding a client, managing their expectations and engaging with them after a file is closed. Because, while you might not be able to control the outcome of a job, you can manage the experience of working with you to create career-long fans and turbo-charge word-of-mouth recommendations.

Here's my approach to getting it right.

1. THE START PHASE

For many of us, getting a new client means simply opening the file and starting work. However, there should be a lot more to it than just picking up the pen, or banging away on the keyboard. There's even more to it than simply agreeing to a scope of work and a delivery schedule.

The start phase is all about getting to understand where the client's heart and mind is at. You're trying to understand what motivates the client and where your services fit into the picture, just as much as they're trying to understand you.

For this reason, you should always go into the start of a new client relationship with a list of probing questions. You want to know what they're trying to achieve, what success looks like to them and, importantly, why they came to you in the first place.

If they say they've tried several other advisers but no one's been any good, alarm bells should start to ring. Here, I often think the type of client you want is the loyal one, who's been giving their work to the same firm for years but have been forced to switch due to someone retiring or moving on.

The start phase is also when you explain a bit about who you are. Let them know what you do, how you do it and, most importantly, why you do it.

2. THE ENGAGE PHASE

This is the phase where you've opened the file and you've actually started doing the work and delivering it. As a professional, this should be your comfort zone, your wheelhouse, your happy place. After all, this is what you've been studying and training for pretty much all of your adult life.

But just like the start phase the engage phase isn't just about doing a good job; it's also about managing your clients' expectations. It's about understanding how often they want to be kept in the loop, keeping the lines of communication open, checking in regularly and making sure you're on the same page.

Don't promise them the world (and give them an atlas). It's always better to under-promise and over-deliver than the other way around. The key is to be easy to work with and minimise surprises - especially when it comes to cost.



For instance, once a lot of professionals have estimated the time involved on a project, they just start working away and running up the hours. They don't work out how much time they've spent on a file until they run up 75% of the estimate. Then it's suddenly panic stations as time gets written off and fees get lost.

A better approach is to check-in the moment you hit around 25%. Work out where that time has gone and map out where to from here. Often, I've seen that running up time can be simply a task that was more complicated than you initially thought or a young professional out of their depth.

This is the time to take back control of a file, not when you've spent 75% of the fees you estimated.

3. THE EXIT PHASE

So pens are down and the final bill has been issued. For most professionals, this is where the matter ends. But it shouldn't be.

The exit phase is the perfect time to chat with the client and [ask them how it went](#). How did they find the experience of working with you? What did they like and what, with hindsight, would they do differently? And what does your relationship look like when there's no matter on foot?

A lot of professionals feel uncomfortable at this point. They become thin-skinned about potential criticism or worried about poking the proverbial bear. But client feedback is vital if you're ever going to improve your processes and understand how you can provide the kind of service clients want.

The key to doing it well is to set expectations upfront. Tell your clients at the very first meeting that you'll be asking for their assessment the moment the matter has ended. Remember, no surprises.

4. THE EXTEND PHASE

The last phase of any matter is ensuring that the client remains a contact. (If you want it to that is. Some clients [you'll be happy to see the back of](#).)

This part of doing the job is about both relationship management and relationship marketing. You want to stay top of mind with your client for their work but also turn them into the kind of marketing engine who attracts other good clients. If you can find two people willing to vouch for what you do from each client you serve, that will quickly turn into a steady stream of work coming your way.

That said, don't assume your clients know how to describe your services to others. That's your job. So invite them to your seminars (whether physical or virtual), send them your regular articles and educate them on your specialties and the range of what you can provide.

After all, if they're happy with what you've already done for them and they can see the value you'd bring to a range of work, why wouldn't they use you again and also [recommend you to others](#)?

AND FINALLY...

While doing a good job isn't the only form of BD you should be engaging in, it should be the starting point, your ticket to the game. But you need to make sure that you run the right processes, capture the right feedback and keep up the contact once the file is closed.



If you'd like help building your own process for doing just that, get in touch for a personalised Zoom chat or call.

FURTHER READING

Sue-Ella Prodonovich (2013) [Do Clients Really Want You To Exceed Expectations?](#)

Avery J, Fournier S, Wittenbraker J (2014) [“Unlock The Mysteries of Your Customer Relationships”](#) Harvard Business Review, July-August Issue.

WANT MORE?

If you'd like help with building the skills and smarts of your team email [Sue-Ella](#) or [get in touch](#).



Sue-Ella Prodonovich

Principal, Prodonovich Advisory

sueella@prodonovich.com

(02) 9241 5575

Sue-Ella is the Principal of [Prodonovich Advisory](#), a business dedicated to helping professional services firms sharpen their business development practices, and attract and retain good clients.

© Prodonovich Advisory. Please respect our copyright and the effort taken to produce the original material in this document. This document or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the author. If you'd like to share this article, please don't forget to acknowledge the author. Thank you.