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55 YEARS

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There are good things happening in our industry as we climb out of the recession

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Still snow and ice on the ground and the temperature still feels like winter. In contrast, the newspapers are hot with new projects getting approved, breaking ground or leases being signed, so we see there is a lot of positive activity.

There are good things happening in our industry as we climb out of the recession. Yet, many of us have become too busy and complacent, thinking that all is well with our businesses. We may be getting new projects and happy to be busy but are we doing the type of projects we want, and working with clients that are doing the kind of work that we feel is invigorating? There are ways that we can work towards gaining more clients or projects but finding new clients doing exciting projects is something else entirely.

There are some things to attract and retain clients that you enjoy working with on projects that stimulate you and your employees.

As a first step, determine the qualities amidst the projects that you have enjoyed. Research those projects and list the developer, architect, lawyer, landscape architect and see if you have any connections. Keep those associations in mind when going after potential business. The next logical step is to market yourself in a very unique and deliberate way toward the people doing the types of projects that you seek. You must exude the utmost confidence, both in yourself and in the work you deliver. Letting someone know that you truly believe your company produces the highest-quality work goes a long way toward attracting people that you will enjoy working with. Be flexible when approaching these potential clients. Always keep in mind, clients may come through the door with very specific ideas that represents the polar opposite of what you had in mind, but it's important to remember that you work for the client and not vice versa. Sticking to your principles on a very important issue is one thing, refusing to budge, even a little, to meet a client's expectations is something else.

Once you have identified target projects and clients remember your actual role. Clients enter into a business agreement under the assumption that you'll be able to service a particular need or fix a specific problem that they have. If you don't actually fulfilling your end of that bargain, you'll find yourself with lower-quality outcomes. Keep every job on time, on target with the client's goal, and profitable to keep you enthusiastic and engaged.

Anyone in a business setting interacting with clients on a regular basis knows just how important referrals can be. While there are a large number of ways to get new clients and attract new business, personal referrals are by and large the most reliable. If you're having a hard time attracting new referrals, there are a few key things that you will want to try. Remember existing customer interactions can help keep a steady stream of work coming through the door even during periods when business is slow. If you want to get more referrals that are of a higher quality, always make

sure that you're doing the best possible work. You can market yourself in many different ways with varying levels of success in a quest to get as many referrals as possible, but the simple truth of the matter is that after a certain point the work will more than speak for itself. If clients can see that you're doing high quality work, which will separate you above others, it will materialize in more and more referrals. The reverse is also true. If you are doing sub-par work, it will be harder and harder to gain more business no matter what methods you attempt. Before starting guerrilla marketing tactics or paying referral service agencies to do heavy lifting for your company, remember that referrals have to be earned the hard way. If you aren't putting your best foot forward with regards to the quality of your work, no magic referral trick in the world will be able to help. Doing great work that you are proud of is what will attract more work and of similar quality.

Another tip that you can definitely consider as a way to get more referrals has to do the firm's culture. Involve your employees in the projects and expose them to clients and seeking new opportunities. If your employees are engaged in looking for new business, there are more opportunities for broader exposure of your firm and its capabilities. Find a way to incentivize them to get out into the world and try to drum up as much business as possible. If you give your employees some type of incentive, they will be much more likely to get involved and help the company in the quest for generating as many referrals as possible.

So remember spring is here and the economy is improving. The tendency as we all become busier is to plow through the current workload but you cannot neglect the business development side or else the future will not be a happy one.

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