

Good morning, everybody. Dennis Engelbrecht with the Digging Deeper series.

Over the last few weeks, I've had a couple of my last strategic planning sessions with companies as I'm moving toward a semi-retirement. And during those, a couple of very interesting companies that are pretty successful with their clients have a lot of loyalty. But they haven't really reached that point where most of their customers really know them as the place to go to, the company to go to. So, they're still out there competing for work.

And so, a lot of the early discussions in these meetings was about, "Well, how do we compete better? How do we find these customers? How do we bring them in?" Sort of thing and I was sort of thinking, "Wait a minute, quit competing for work. Just quit competing for work." Well, wait a minute, we got to have work. And I don't mean it literally to quit competing for work because you're always going to be competing for work to a certain sense.

But what I'm thinking about is shifting your strategy to becoming indispensable, indispensable for your clients so that you don't really have to compete. Of course, you compete every day by performing and creating that indispensability and proving day after day that indispensability, but really changing your focus from getting work to becoming indispensable. And then the work will follow, and the work will be natural, and you'll have more lifetime customers, more loyalty from your customers. And you'll have more advantage even when it comes to fee and other things.

So how do you become indispensable to your client? And so, we got four things we're going to talk about here. The first part of how is become part of their decision-making. Really what you want to do is use your expertise to inform their decision-making. If it's a developer and the developer's always looking for land, for example, you can provide expertise in that area. Whether it's a good civil engineer that can look at sites or review sites and say whether this is good or bad, or this would be costly or not costly.

Whether it's your ability to work with the zoning authorities to help them make things, get the permits you need or get the adjustments in zoning or whatever it is. It could be any number of things, but you have certain expertise in your business, and you want to use that expertise to sort of inform their decisions to become part of their decision-making process.

The other thing with that to become part of their decision-making, you really have to know that company. You want to know their priorities; you want to know their mission and you want to make sure that your team is really on the side of the client helping them to try to pursue their mission. If they have a certain vision for what their project's going to be like, let's be the team that helps them achieve their vision. Not the team that sort of kills their vision or sacrifices their vision to price or something like that. Try to figure out how to make that a win-win for the client.

So that's number one, becoming part of their decision-making. Number two is really to deliver unfailingly on their priorities, whatever their priorities are. Whether it's schedule, safety, budget, responsiveness, quality you want to know, first of all, what their hot buttons are. And then you want to deliver unfailingly as an organization. So that's a huge word and maybe that can be inspiring to your teams or whatever, but if you deliver unfailingly that's going to separate you from the competition.

And ultimately when they're making these decisions, whether they want a bid to be competitive or they want to give you last look, or they want to negotiate with you ideally and negotiate in a way that allows you a good fee hopefully. If you deliver unfailingly, they're eventually going to make that decision because they want their work delivered unfailingly.

Third, organize your business around the customer. All right, so what does that mean? Well, in some cases that means you might have a business unit that is specific to the customer or a sector. And again, the idea of a business unit is to create expertise within your group that is specific for that client and/or specific for that sector. So, you really understand how they do business, what they want out of their business. And by getting a particular business unit built around that to

both people who have the expertise or can learn the expertise, but also care specifically about the hot buttons of that client or sector. That can be a real advantage.

You want to make sure you have a go-to leader for every customer so that they know who to call for any kind of issue, any kind of problem. And that leader, of course, must be responsive to that client as well. And then also make sure there's a go-to executive. You definitely want that first line of leadership that they call because they're going to be able to service them better than say the president of the company who's not going to have awareness of everything that's going on. You do still want that executive participation as a go-to as well, I think because that just gives them a layer of level of comfort and a layer of security that they otherwise wouldn't have.

The next thing, of course, when you sort of have that group that's dedicated hopefully you develop specific capabilities. Whether that's a pre-con capability, a service capability, the ability to travel. It could be any or all of those particular things. You may even be co-located with them or located near them as a way of servicing them. But you want to build the capabilities that are specific to that client.

Finally, the fourth item of becoming indispensable for your client and quitting competing for work is to build that level of trust. And that comes through all of the three things we've talked about before. Becoming part of their decision-making, delivering unfailingly and organizing your business around them. But building that level of trust delivers on probably ... If there's one thing that every client wants, it's be able to go to bed at night, sleep well knowing that you've got it, that you've got their project, you've got their best interests at heart.

There's a problem, you're going to solve it. You're going to be Johnny on the spot, that you've got it. So, building that level of trust and if you build that level of trust, you have a chance to become indispensable for that client. So, think about it. Quit competing for work and be indispensable instead.

Thanks for tuning in. Dennis Engelbrecht, Digging Deeper.