

## Part 2: Winning Through Your "Guru Quotient"

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### *Second of a series*

This series considers the question of "gurus" - business professionals with a particularly high level of skills, knowledge and expertise that allows them to stand out from others. The first article looked at the issue of what a guru **is** and what makes that crucial difference that makes clients value this person's time more highly. This second article looks at what a guru **does** that makes her or him stand out from the crowd.

A guru, if working in a larger firm, is often important to building the entire business, as we saw in the case of the engineering firm that won the airport job, described in the first article.

Let's first look at how a guru's business-development aspects differ from other professional archetypes.

A guru's role is not that of a **salesperson**, who is a specialist hired by the firm to cold call, network and bird-dog business leads. This person is expected to bring in the client-service professional when the time is right. Titles include "Director of Business Development" or "Client Service Representative." I prefer to think of them as "Suits," the term used in advertising agencies for staff who act as liaison between the client and the "creative" people.

A guru is also different from a **rain-maker**, who is a professional who can network, develop relationships and connections, and by an almost-magical process, attract work like a magnet. The rain-maker then generally off-loads some or all of the work onto others. Those "others" then do the intellectual heavy lifting, while the rain-maker's heavy lifting generally involves hoisting yet another miniature egg-roll-on-a-toothpick at a cocktail reception.

A guru's business development value also does not lie in the realm of the **high-profile business developer**. My former firm, KPMG LLP hired one such for its forensic accounting and investigative services practice in Canada. Norman Inkster had recently retired as Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. His time was largely spent networking and giving presentations to conferences. Does he count as a guru? Not in the sense I'm defining it here, which is someone with a substantial body of leading-edge work and original methodology.

Washington consulting firms, including what critics often call "Beltway Bandits" have also been known to recruit high-profile retired politicians for the same purpose - business generation. They aren't necessarily gurus either. However, they do have a

good Rolodex.

So how does a guru bring in business?

She or he combines elements of all three previous styles. A guru may be like a salesperson in being the front person, offloading some work when appropriate onto lower-billed individuals. A guru also has aspects of the rain-maker, in having the ability to attract business simply by being there.

These elements are necessary but not sufficient. A guru has another essential aspect in being a resident expert, an in-house sage, someone who has the intellectual stature to stand tall like a tree in the middle of a field. It's someone who attracts respect, clients and billable hours simply by virtue of what she or he does and is.

### **How is a guru different?**

#### **Expen\$ive - but worth it**

Another aspect to being a guru is financial.

For anyone working in a for-profit environment, who has been doing the work for some time and has a good position in the business community, income is a good analog for competence. Someone with a high billable rate is assumed to be worth it. Sure, in every field there are unacknowledged geniuses, but generally, someone truly brilliant will be rewarded accordingly.

It's economic Darwinism at its best.

#### **A good body of work**

A guru needs a substantial body of work. Call it a track record, a CV, a resume, a Statement of Qualifications, whatever. This work needs to be:

**Lengthy.** This demonstrates staying power and commitment to the industry. There are Boy (or Girl) Wonders, but these need to stick around to be thought of as real gurus. In contrast to much of the youth-obsessed world, this is one area where gray hair and glasses are an asset.

**High-profile projects.** There must be a substantial number of recognizable names among the list of clients and projects.

**Challenging work.** Thorny problems, which would have defeated lesser "experts," must be met and dealt with effectively.

**Unique solutions.** A guru needs strong imagination skills, and to come up with new ideas.

**A branded methodology.** By "branded" I mean something that is unique to that individual, in the way that gurus Al Ries and Jack Trout branded the concepts "positioning" and "bottom-up marketing."

***In the next article in the series, we'll look more closely at the steps for becoming a guru.***