

Part 6: Winning Through Your "Guru Quotient"

The Guru Builder
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This is the conclusion of our continuing series on how to be a guru, describing some of the factors "wannabe" gurus need to build in order to be accepted as such.

Continuous improvement

One cannot come up with a brilliant methodology or idea at age 25 and then expect to live off it for the rest of one's career. Knowledge must grow, experience move into new areas, and thought process move forward. It's important to be on the edge.

Why? Because clients and potential clients *expect* it. They don't want to come to presentations, read articles, or pay for books, only to find the same stale information they received a year ago. Anyone claiming "guru" status must be able to come up with new ideas, methodologies and insights frequently.

This means that gurus need to periodically sit back and think of what they know about their subject matter that they didn't know six months or a year ago. Then, they should develop a plan for acquiring new insights and methodologies to present to the market. Continuous improvement demands continuous investment - just like continuing to live requires continuing to eat.

The network

No person is an island, to update John Dunn's famous phrase. Even for someone working independently from the classic spare-bedroom office in a suburban townhouse (as I do), a guru still needs to network. What kind?

A mentor: Almost everyone needs a mentor, particularly in the early stages of a career.

Referral sources: A piece of business that comes on referral is essentially pre-sold. Getting lots of referral engagements leaves more time for billable work, building skills, relaxing - and less on selling.

Subcontractors: For all professionals, there are times to refer work to others. This may include cases of being overworked, when the work isn't in the desired area, or when one lacks qualifications to do the work. This means a need to have a network of people to whom one can refer business, confident that the work will be done well.

Suppliers: Independents, in particular, need reliable sources of products and services - a good office supplies store, a favored airline, a printer, a graphic designer, income tax preparer - the list goes on.

Moral support. Professionals can be friendly with their clients, but there always has to remain a professional distance. This means a need for a group of people who can contribute input on business ideas, rejoice when things are going well, and support when they're not.

Physical plant

One's body or "physical plant" is much like the facility used by a company. If the roof leaks, the electrical power cuts out and the premises are dirty, the organization will be much less effective. Everyone needs to take care of their body. Why is such a mundane topic vital to being a guru?

Simply put, like the other aspects, they won't get there without it. Someone who is tired will not be very productive. Getting sick a lot means missing meetings, and gaining an unwanted reputation for unreliability. Taking care of one's physical plant shows up in energy, vitality and stamina - and effectiveness on behalf of clients. A high-performing physical plant is essential.

Elements of this are everything that Mother ever said - eating balanced meals, exercising, keeping a reasonable body weight, and getting enough sleep. It is important to have health insurance that allows for regular checkups, so that problems can be taken care of before they get serious.

Trying to go without is like riding a bicycle race with only one leg - it can be done, but it means getting to the finish line much later than the competition.

Self-management

Some time ago, the concept of "Me, Inc." appeared in the business literature. It's a good framework for thinking of becoming a guru. It won't just happen; it's necessary to make it so. One of the central elements of "Me, Inc." or the "Corporation of One" is to think of oneself as one's own company, investing in that career along the lines of the previous seven points.

A big part of success is tenacity, determination, willpower - whatever the term, it's what keeps one going when it would be a lot more pleasant to just stop. It means making one more call to a prospective client at the end of a day, continuing to pursue a professional designation even after failing an examination, and staying at the end of a conference to network when it would be easier to just head back to the hotel room and pack for home.

One of the central factors to this is visualizing the goal. Would-be gurus need to take time to sit back in a chair, close their eyes and visualize being in a situation that indicates reaching the goal. This might mean visualizing a meeting with a particularly desirable client, or inking a deal for a first project. Or, it might mean making the keynote address at a major business conference. Whatever the fantasy, it is important to imagine it in all the clarity and color possible. Those dreams have a way of coming true.

Getting there demands a plan. It must be clear, achievable and specific - and easy to tell whether one is "on plan" or not. This implies specific deliverables such as "write two magazine articles per quarter" or "arrange six speaking engagements per year." It's best to start with the end in mind and then work back to what steps are necessary to get there. That breaks it down into what must be done each month, to reach the goal. Having the plan written out helps, so it is possible to pull it out at odd moments for a mental refresher.

In conclusion ...

Becoming a guru is what some people would call a "big, hairy, audacious goal." Of course it isn't easy - otherwise everyone would have done it. However, just about any business professional can think of a colleague who isn't really any better, but who gets more gigs at a better rate. That difference is the "guru" premium. A deliberate strategy of building that premium pays off in many ways.

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