

Mastering Rainmaking Conversations With RAIN SellingSM



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About *Mastering Rainmaking Conversations*

Mastering Rainmaking Conversations is a how-to guide for speaking with prospects and clients about *their* needs and *your* services. At the heart of *Mastering Rainmaking Conversations* is the concept of RAIN SellingSM, an easy to remember, easy to apply sales methodology specifically designed for professional service Rainmakers, those people at services companies that bring in the new clients and revenue. The objectives of this guide are to help you:

1. Sell as you serve: So many service providers think selling, by its nature, is a distasteful and less-than-ethical process, the sole purpose of which is to part someone from their money for things they don't need. They believe that to be successful at selling, service providers must leave their values and everyday personalities at the door and adopt a sleazy persona and voice, one that that would naturally say something like, "What's it gonna take to get you into this shiny red pre-owned sports car today, ma'am?"

Nothing is further from the truth. The best rainmakers bring in clients and cash into their firms because they are no different when they sell their services than when they deliver their services.

They prepare.

They listen.

They solve problems.

They care about their clients' wellbeing and success.

They create new futures for their clients that the clients didn't know were possible. They are interpersonally sensitive. They can either push the limit or slow down when it is in the client's best interest. The best rainmakers meet mutually set expectations over and over again, building trust, relationships, and two-way confidence. The best rainmakers are ethical at all times.

In other words, the best rainmakers are simply great professional service providers. In effect, they are starting the process of being great service providers during the sales process *before clients officially engage their services*.

2. Sell to need: Great service providers are masters at uncovering the goals and the challenges of their clients and prospects. Great rainmakers are no different.

However, service providers often lack the tools to engage the types of conversations that allow them to fully explore all of the client's needs. *Mastering Rainmaking Conversations* provides a process for service providers to uncover and fully explore client needs.

3. Sell the value: Great service providers understand the value they provide clients. They craft compelling solutions based on specific client needs, and can *communicate that value* to the client clearly and articulately.

Mastering Rainmaking Conversations shows you how you can uncover, quantify, and communicate the Impact of engaging your services, which allows you to better articulate your true value to each client.

4. Plan for success: It's been said that if you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there. Rainmaking is no different. It requires planning on multiple levels such as:

- Individual conversations and interactions
- Outcomes for specific accounts
- The entire business development process—how many clients you need to gain, how often, and for how much revenue and profit

Mastering Sales Conversations will provide the foundation to help you plan on each of these levels.

Rainmakers Make RAINSM

To advance in their careers and become rainmakers, professionals such as accountants, lawyers, management consultants, financial consultants, and technology consultants eventually need to excel at selling professional services.

Rarely, however, are these poor souls given a primer on rainmaking, especially when it comes to leading sales conversations and sales meetings. As a result, they often wing it and learn by doing, making too many avoidable mistakes and losing opportunities to win new clients.

There is a better way to learn to become a rainmaker. Professionals can use RAIN SellingSM as a guide to becoming a rainmaker. Geared 100% as a consultative sales process and conversation methodology for selling services, RAIN SellingSM helps professionals like you win new clients and retain existing ones.

RAIN SellingSM Basics

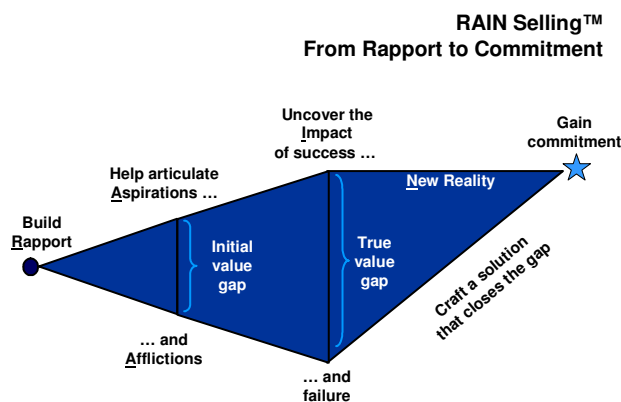
Since trial and error are the norm when it comes to learning how to be a rainmaker, the learning curve is long and often filled with anxiety and pain. This leads us to ask the questions, "Is it possible to shorten the learning curve when it comes to selling professional services? Is it possible to make selling itself feel less 'salesly'? Can we increase the level of success of the seller?" The answers (as you may have guessed) are yes, yes and yes. We've worked not only to provide a process for selling professional services, but to improve the process of learning to become a rainmaker.

So how does it work?

RAIN SellingSM is an acronym for Rapport, Aspirations and Afflictions, Impact, and New Reality. The word 'RAIN', of course, is also a nod to the fact that this process is focused on rainmakers—the traditional name for those people who bring new clients and big fees into service firms.

7 Principles of RAIN SellingSM

1. Build Real *Rapport*
2. Uncover *Aspirations and Afflictions*
3. Make the *Impact* Clear
4. Paint a Picture of the *New Reality*
5. Balance Advocacy and Inquiry
6. Listen Actively
7. Plan for Success



When you put the first four principles together they look like the graphic above. We will refer to this visual representation of RAIN Selling throughout *Mastering Rainmaking Conversations*. As we take you through the 7 Principles, you will see how you can master your own Rainmaking Conversations.

Principle 1: Build Real *Rapport*

Personal Connections

“The farmer, it appears, must not be approached too abruptly. If you are to get his money you must break the news to him gently. You should first talk about horses, soil, and market conditions. This conversation will show that you are interested in things close to him and likewise give you a chance to study his temperament and to learn his likes and dislikes, and *discover his weaknesses.*”

- Clarence Darrow in *The American Mercury* in 1925 writing about the topic of “Salesmanship”

The concept of Rapport building is not new. You can find book after book written from the 1920’s onward that will teach you ‘techniques’ for Rapport building with your prospects. For example, you might be told to look around their office and talk about what you see. “Ah, I see you have a big fish on your wall. Are you a fishing enthusiast? I go trout fishing all the time in Wyoming. Let’s talk about trout.” Unfortunately, many people today, both buyers and sellers, equate the concept of Rapport building with this type of contrived chit chat.

Rapport building is not the planned buttering up of the buyer before a sales person moves in for the kill. The mindset behind this approach to Rapport building is underhanded. Our emphatic response to this approach: don’t do it.

Yet the fundamental underlying need for a buyer to connect with a service provider—or at least to generally like him or her—exists and must be attended to. At least, it must if you want to generate new clients and retain your existing ones.

In the RainToday.com research report *How Clients Buy: The Benchmark Report on Professional Services Marketing and Selling from the Client Perspective*, 26% purchasers of professional services surveyed reported that they have experienced having no personal chemistry with service providers. In and of itself this might not seem like a problem. (Although, who wants to feel that they have cultivated no personal connection with 26 out of 100 potential clients?)

We also learned that 85% of these same unconnected buyers would be either somewhat or much more likely to consider purchasing their services of the provider *if some kind of personal chemistry was established.*

Decisions Decisions...

One company where I worked was going public. The process of selecting an accounting firm to help take us public included engaging discussions with all five of what was, at the time, the Big Five accounting firms. When we ultimately selected one of them, I asked our Chief Financial Officer—the primary decision maker—why we chose one firm versus the others.

We proceeded to his office where he showed me the detailed grid of the decision criteria and why this firm met them the best. We talked about it for a few minutes and then he closed the door. “Do you want to hear the real reason I picked them?”

“Sure,” I said.

Then he told me, “I liked them better.”

He went on to tell me that three out of the five firms had the experience and capability to do a competent job of taking us public. He could argue, even, that one of the firms we didn’t select had a couple of advantages (though nothing too important) over the firm that we did select.

All things being equal, he picked the provider he liked. And he’s not the only buyer who does it.

Building Real Rapport

Many professional service providers are natural “people people” and connect with almost everyone they meet. Many of us, however, feel uncomfortable making initial connections with potential clients, especially when we are meeting them for the first time.

When you look to build Rapport—real Rapport that helps you make a connection with your prospect or client—keep in mind the following advice:

- **Be genuine:** Before the first day of school, first jobs, camp, and any family get together dad would always say, “Just be yourself and everything will be fine.” Same goes for generating Rapport with clients and prospects. Don’t try to be anything you are not; don’t create a new persona; and don’t adopt a sales-like tone. Just be yourself and relax. Good things will follow.
- **Don’t be in a rush...but don’t dally:** New would-be rainmakers are very sensitive to the time of a potential buyer. They often think, “I have an hour for this meeting and she’s a CEO of a mid-sized company. I need to use the whole

time to get my points across.” From the administrative staff right on up to the CEO, buyers want to know that you’re a real person before they will engage your services.

If you jump right in with the “OK, let’s get down to business” meeting kickoff before you give everyone a chance to take a breath and say hello, it often creates a tense atmosphere. You have to gauge when to start talking business at the right time; too early and a chilly abruptness fills the air...take too much time chatting and the buyer wonders, “Are we ever going to get going here?” Time the conversation right and you’ll be well on your way,

- **Dress and act professionally:** One would think that professional service providers do a good job dressing and acting professionally. Yet in *How Clients Buy: The Benchmark Report on Professional Services Marketing and Selling from the Client Perspective* just shy of 20% of surveyed purchasers of professional services reported that potential service providers, during their businesses development processes, did not act professionally.

Don’t disqualify yourself by using inappropriate language, being too colloquial to quickly, wearing khakis when you are headed to a suit-and-tie company, or otherwise crossing the line of professionalism.

- **Balance advocacy and inquiry:** One of the best ways to establish a true connection with buyers is to balance asking questions (inquiry) with talking or giving advice (advocacy). Talk too much and the prospect will tune out. Ask too many questions and they’ll feel like they’re getting the third degree. The Rapport building sweet spot is usually somewhere in the middle. (This is also Principle 5 of Rain SellingSM—Balance Advocacy and Inquiry—which we will talk about in more depth later.)
- **Actively listen:** In the above mentioned research report, the single most prevalent problem that buyers reported encountering with sellers of professional services is that the service providers don’t listen. If your prospects perceive you to be not listening to them, building real Rapport will be virtually impossible. (Principle 6 of Rain SellingSM—Listen Actively—will help you develop Rapport and more as it is used through the process. We will say more on this later in this guide).

While the heading for this section is “actively listen” it could just as easily read, “actually listen.” Many service providers are too caught up in what they’re saying

or too focused on what they are going to say next. So they're not only not *actively* listening, they're not *actually* listening. Tune into what your prospect is saying and tune out everything else, including your email, your pager, and your phone.

Willy Loman said in *Death of a Salesman* "The man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates a personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want." Sure, not everything worked out for Willy the way he might have wanted it to. He needed a lot more than being well liked in order to succeed.

Many professional service providers, however, should take a page from Willy's book. Being liked won't win you the clients, but it sure does help.

Principle 2: Uncover Afflictions and Aspirations

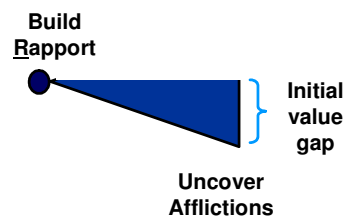
Importance of Afflictions

Problems, frustration, pain, irritations, challenges...call them what you will; a business developer must uncover his prospective client's *Afflictions*. Once you've established Rapport with a client, you now have the opportunity to begin the discovery process of learning what issues the client has and how you can help.

Uncovering Afflictions is a crucial step in the business development process. The reasons are simple:

- If the prospect communicates his business Afflictions to you, then it is likely that he will want them to go away 1) if it's possible, and 2) if it makes sense to invest the time, money, and brainpower to get rid of them.
- Each affliction you uncover gives you the chance to explore it fully to discover its true business Impact (see page 14 for more on Impact).
- The more you openly discuss Afflictions with prospects, the more those Afflictions take front-and-center space in the prospect's mind.
- Uncovering and discussing one affliction can lead—much like brainstorming—to other Afflictions of which the client may not have been thinking in the first place.

If no business problems afflict the buyer, inertia may (but not always) keep him from doing anything that rocks the boat, including purchasing your services. If you establish an affliction or set of Afflictions, you also create desire for your prospective client to seek relief from those Afflictions.



Once you've established Rapport and then uncovered Afflictions, you have created an *Initial Value Gap*: the difference between where they want to be and where they are now.

But Afflictions are only half the story...

Importance of Aspirations

Uncovering Afflictions is only half of the story because Afflictions only focus on half of the client's needs—the negative half. Especially when selling your professional services, if you

focus only on the negative, you are leaving opportunities on the table for expanding your existing client relationships and generating new opportunities.

The best way to understand why this is true is to think about how business leaders buy professional services. There are two core buyer mindsets you will encounter when selling professional services: 1) problem solving, and 2) future seeking.

Buyers are in *problem solving* mode when something is bothering them or not performing up to expectations. It typically gets to a point where they want to fix it so they seek out products or services to do so (or they accept marketing and sales overtures from providers to discuss their offerings). When you encounter this buying mindset, uncovering Afflictions and helping to solve those Afflictions, particularly with your products and services, is a core goal.

When buyers are *future seeking*, they're looking to grow, make their companies better, or somehow improve their current circumstances, often in new and innovative ways. In other words, maybe what's keeping them up at night is not a problem in their business at all, but the passion and excitement that stem out of innovation, growth, and endless possibilities.

What does this mean? Consider this example. You are a partner at diversified accounting, financial, and business advisory firm. You have a meeting scheduled with the owner of a medium-sized business because he is not happy with the tax services he has been receiving from his CPA firm. Through a series of questions, you have uncovered several problems this business owner has with his current accounting firm, including missed deadlines, impersonal service, and a suspicion that the firm isn't fully keeping up to date on the latest tax regulations. He's nervous that any one of these three issues may come back to haunt him if he doesn't change firms.

Because you know your firm specializes in his industry, and because of your dedication to exceptional client service, you know you can stack up well against his current firm and have a good shot at winning the business. You ask him "What keeps you up at night?" You get a straight answer about his Afflictions, and now you know how you can help. You continue the conversation, proposing next steps on how to move forward with a potential new relationship. You feel fairly confident in how you managed the sales conversation and believe that a new client will be in your future.

You are just about to say goodbye when he says, "I'm meeting my company's legal counsel for lunch. You two don't know each other. Want to join us?" Not wanting to pass up an opportunity to further the relationship (and because he eats at expensive French restaurants), you are happy to oblige.

You get to lunch, exchange pleasantries all around, and sit down to eat. A few minutes into the conversation the lawyer asks your potential client, "So what's going on at your company lately?" Other questions follow such as, "What do you want to get done in the next year or so?...What are your stretch goals for the businesses?...What do you think you need to do to get these things done?...What don't you know yet that you need to find out?"

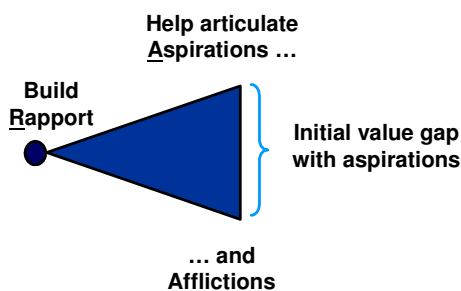
These questions are focused on future seeking (Aspirations), not problem solving (Afflictions). They open an entire new range of possibilities. You are amazed by some of your potential client's answers. You find the client has opened up, going on for good chunks of time about the major initiatives at his company, and some initiatives he has not yet even launched.

As you listen, you realize there are at least three areas within these strategic initiatives for which your expertise is a perfect fit and your firm can greatly help him. One such initiative—valuing a niche company he's thinking about acquiring—is your personal expertise and passion! And the size of the fees in these areas is usually three times as large as what you just talked about in your meeting with the prospect an hour before.

Capturing Missed Opportunities

What happened? How did you not uncover these opportunities earlier?

During the initial sales meeting, you focused on uncovering and soothing the client's Afflictions. You did a good job of learning about the buyer's problems and found how you could help.



During the lunch meeting, the lawyer focused not on the buyer's Afflictions, but on his Aspirations. And by doing so, he uncovered a whole other set of needs that you neglected to surface at your meeting merely an hour beforehand. He focused on the second half of your client's business needs—the positive, the future, the possibilities. Thus your Initial Value Gap is truly twice as large as it was when you only uncovered and articulated the Afflictions by themselves.

So the next time you are preparing to find the areas of the buyer's pain and problems that you can fix, try focusing on his Aspirations as well as his Afflictions. You'll find the conversations to be richer, your relationships deeper, and your business development success greater.

Principle 3: Make the *Impact* Clear

So What?

After you uncover the potential client's Aspirations and Afflictions, you are ready to take your rainmaking conversation to the next level.

The questions now follow along the lines of, 'so what?' If you're Afflictions don't get resolved, so what? If your Afflictions don't get solved, what won't happen? Will they get worse? How will they affect the bottom line of your company, division, or department?

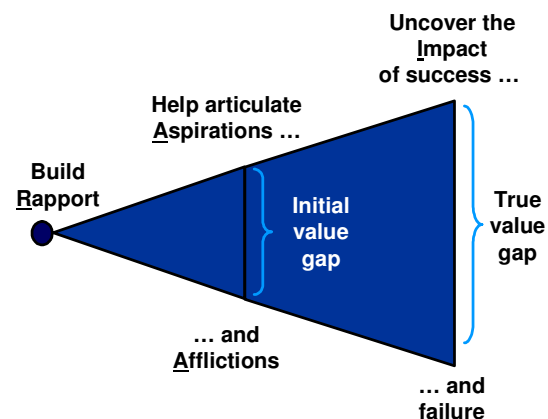
If your Aspirations don't become reality, so what? Will they drop by the wayside never to be picked up again? If they do become reality, how much better will your competitive position become?

While the Impact can sometimes be personally motivated (e.g. the client will get promoted to Senior Vice President if your service works out well), most of the time the *Impact* is, simply, your ability to make the business case for either solving the Afflictions or helping the *Aspirations* come to fruition. In a business-to-business scenario, if you can't make the business case you're at a major disadvantage.

The exact 'so what' questions will vary depending on the situation, but your ability to quantify and paint the 'so what' picture is the cornerstone for just how important engaging your services is to the prospective buyer. This is extremely important in selling professional services because your competition is often the inaction of your client, not another organization or service provider. So creating urgency for buying your services hinges on how well you help your client answer the 'so what' questions.

When you understand the Impact of helping the client reach their Aspirations, you establish a new baseline for where the client *could* be. When you understand the Impact caused by your clients' Afflictions you establish the true business obstacles that they present.

When you take into account the consequences of the Aspirations and Afflictions on the business, the value gap widens from the initial discovery of Aspirations and Afflictions into the True Value Gap.



Make the Impact Tangible

Professional service providers almost invariably declare that their clients buy their services not because they are the most price competitive (or cheapest solution), but because their clients value their work.

Before your clients become your clients, they cannot know what the value of working with you will truly be—unless you clarify what the Impact of your services will be as they relate to the prospects' Aspirations and Afflictions.

When you are working to make the Impact of using your services tangible:

- **Calculate the Dollar Impact:** Each Affliction that you solve, and each *Aspiration* that you help clients realize should have a financial Impact. Simply put, you should strive to make the case for the financial effects of engaging your services whenever possible.
- **Communicate Non-Dollar Impact:** Increased prestige. A more enjoyable day. Your sparkling personality. There are quite a few non-financial influences on the sale that can tip the scales in your favor. So while you must make the Impact in dollars clear, you should also know what non-financial factors are in your favor. It's been said that people buy with their hearts and justify with their heads. Don't neglect the heart in the sales process.
- **Impact Against the Alternative:** There's one top to the mountain but many ways to get there. Let's assume your client's goal—the top of her mountain—is revenue growth through increased marketing. She may be considering:
 - Public relations
 - Advertising in trade journals
 - Direct marketing
 - Internet marketing
 - A host of other possibilities

It's also possible the client may be struggling with the decision to hire an internal marketing team instead of hiring your firm. If you know other alternatives your prospect is considering, you can demonstrate tangibly how your approach has strong *Impact* on her results versus the other approaches.

- **What Won't Happen?** Sometimes the prospect sees the positive Impact of engaging your services, but doesn't see any negative Impact if he doesn't move forward. The result is usually a very slow decision making process.

If this is the case, you can ask the prospect, "What won't happen" if they *don't* move forward. By doing this, you probe for consequences of inaction. If the consequences are strong enough (and, like a good lawyer would, you should have a sense of what they are before you start asking the questions), engaging your services will move higher up on the prospect's urgent to-do list.

- **Build Credibility with Similar Impact:** They have Aspirations and Afflictions. You have services to help them meet their goals. The value proposition is clear, but they are still unsure. Sometimes they want to know if you've been there before. And, when you were there, what happened. The right story or case study can be a powerful demonstrator of Impact and a strong positive influence on the ultimate sale.
- **Demonstrate Impact Tangibly:** The more you can make the Impact tangible, the stronger the case for the Impact will be. In essence, you need to paint a picture for them so they can see, as tangibly as you can depict it, what is going to change for them if they engage your services. In the next section, we will show you how to approach painting a picture of these changes, thus creating for them a New Reality.

Principle 4: Paint a Picture of the *New Reality*

I Can't Describe It

"...but I know it when I see it."

- Potter Stewart, Associate Justice, United States Supreme Court

In writing his ruling on pornography, Justice Stewart probably sounded like so many of the clients you work with as a professional service provider. Since you are selling something clients cannot see or touch, *before they work with you* they often have a hard time knowing exactly what they are buying and what value they will get in return.

Thus, one of the most important skills in selling professional services is helping potential clients to understand exactly what outcomes they get when they work with you, and then communicating the benefits to those involved in the buying decision.

Whatever your service may be, engaging it will somehow change your clients' world. In other words, you will create a New Reality for them.

To do this well, you need to:

- Discover what you need to do in order to create the best New Reality you can for them (i.e. what's your solution to their needs?)
- Translate your solution into a case for moving forward with you
- Paint the picture of the New Reality so they can understand it and its value

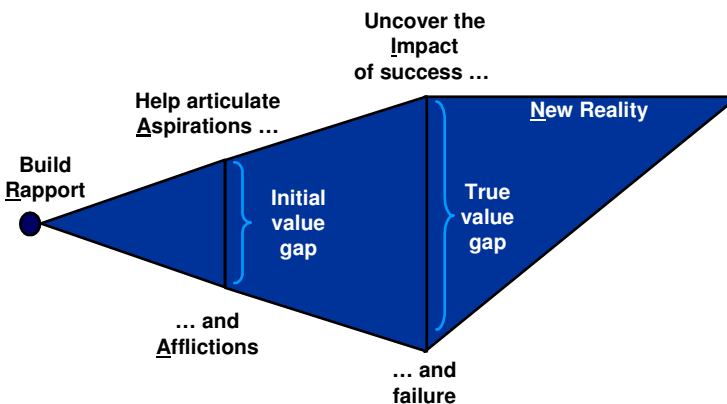
Establish the New Reality Benchmark

In the end of a well-managed sales process, your job is to create a New Reality that will be the best for your client, given their specific Aspirations and Afflictions and the Impact of doing (or not doing) something about them.

This process can start even before you have engaged your complete needs discovery and solution crafting process. Ask them what they want the world to look like once your work is done. Broad questions that start them envisioning the future are a good way to get the creative juices flowing.

- At the end of this engagement, what will success look like?
- After working with us for 6 months, what do you see happening?

- What is your current service provider delivering in terms of creating the changes you need? Where are they falling short?
- What do you want to have happen as a result of our work together?
- What would the Wall Street Journal article say about you (your company, your group) three years from now?



Don't be surprised if the prospect's first answer to these questions is, "I don't know." More than likely they also will say, "That's a good question." If this happens, do not jump right in. Silence will indicate you expect an answer, and with some thought they will give you one. Prompt them if need be.

Craft your Solution

Armed with your clients' answers and the following (which you have already discerned during the RAIN process):

- A growing relationship and Rapport with the client
- Deep knowledge of their Afflictions
- Deep knowledge of their Aspirations
- Understanding of the Impact of taking action with you

...you can now craft a solution.

With this much client knowledge, most service providers believe that they can make a huge positive Impact for their client. Then they write out (or simply tell the potential client) a list of their services that will make his world a better place. But the client doesn't yet see it. In the end, all the good work the service provider did in the sales conversations is lost in a blurred picture of reality.

To combat this, you as the service provider must translate the New Reality into dollars and cents, and then (literally) paint the picture for the client so they can see the difference between their current state and New Reality.

Translate the New Reality

Whatever the New Reality is, you need to describe it to the client. For example, you might tell them they will:

- Save 22%, or \$1.2 million on costs of XYZ Widgets
- Improve their cycle times by 13 days, cutting out major inefficiencies in their operational process
- Set up new operations for them in a new city that will improve quality levels by 17%
- Improve revenue by \$600,000 by increasing the effectiveness of their lead generation programs
- Eliminate the headaches of working with their current service provider who is always late and does not call them back

Paint the Picture

It is now time to put the New Reality into your proposal to the prospect. If “a picture is worth a thousand words,” then a chart, a graph, a table is worth at least that many words and probably more. The goal is to paint a compelling picture.

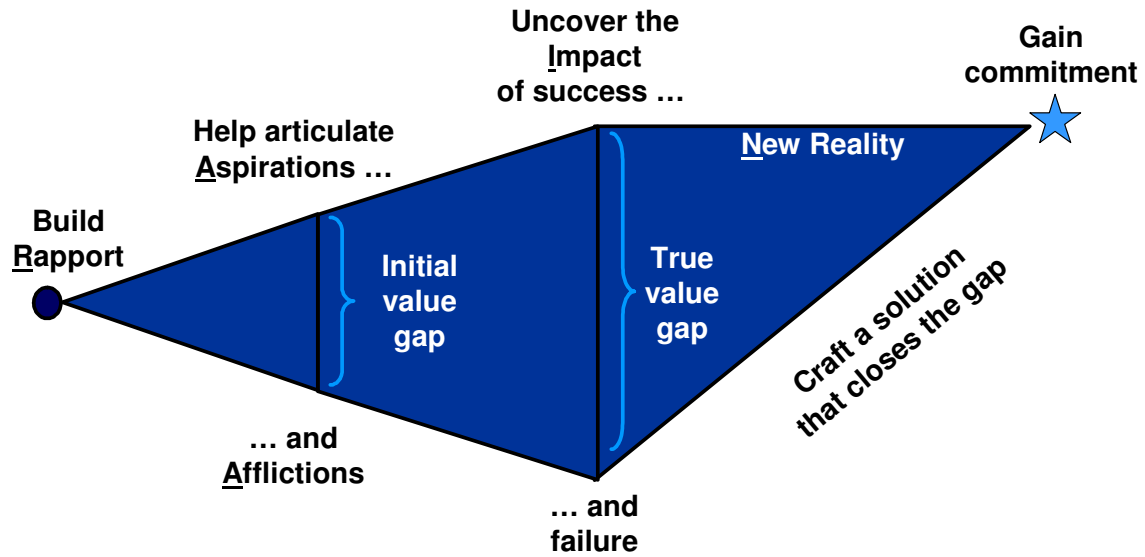
A simple chart outlining the value of each of your services will deliver to the client will sell better than paragraph after paragraph of prose. In other cases, a table of figures might be the right approach.

You do not have to rely on just one picture. As much as is appropriate, you can present the New Reality in both qualitative (descriptive or conceptual) terms as well as quantitative (financial or other numerical-based measure).

Purchasing professional services can be as difficult as selling them. It is tough to get a handle on what to buy because it is difficult to differentiate between competing services and competing service providers. For the buyer, understanding and communicating to their colleagues the value of moving forward is where the difficulties often surface.

If, however, you follow RAIN Selling™ and paint the picture of a compelling New Reality your prospects will know the solution is you...because they will know it when they see it.

RAIN Selling™ From Rapport to Commitment



Principal 5: Balance Advocacy and Inquiry

When Less is More

Willy: I don't know why - I can't stop myself - I talk too much. A man oughta come in with a few words. Charlie's a man of few words, and they respect him.

Linda: You don't talk too much, you're just lively.

- Arthur Miller - Death of a Salesman

We all have sympathy for poor Willy Loman in Death of a Salesman. He knew he talked too much, but he couldn't figure out why. And he couldn't stop talking too much even though he wanted to be like Charlie—a man of few words—who was respected by all.

When business developers talk too much, they generate too few clients. So why do those of us trying to develop business constantly find ourselves in a similar position? Perhaps because, like Willy, we do not understand why we talk too much.

While some folks in business development talk too much, on the other side of the spectrum, some learn somewhere along the line that good business developers ask great questions. They then take the advice too strongly and ask question after question, offering no advice and making the person on the other side feel like they're getting the third degree. So instead of talking too much, they're asking too many questions.

The key to talking the right amount is balancing advocacy (giving advice...talking) and inquiry (asking questions...finding out more...letting the client have the air time).

Still, most fall in the trap of talking too much. Let's start there.

Why We Talk Too Much

At first 'selling' was not on many of our radar screens when we chose our career paths as professionals. Many of us chose our professions because we liked the work and, over time, became very good at it. What made us good and successful was being expert at what we do.

Yet, when we are asked to become business developers, we experts find ourselves at a loss for what to do and what to say. So we end up going on and on. Most professionals fall into the 'too much talk trap' for one or more of the following reasons:

- **I need to show my expertise:** Of course, you do. How else will the prospect know if you are any good? However, clients at first want to know whether you are

a good fit for working with them as much as they are evaluating your level of technical competence.

- **I like to hear myself speak:** Your prospect may even like the sound of your voice for a while, but after a few minutes he or she may be looking for the door. If you look around the room after a while and the prospect's eyes are glazing over, your melodious voice has lost its luster.
- **I get nervous, so I talk:** If this is the case, explore why you are nervous? Are you not comfortable with business development conversations? Are you uncomfortable talking to senior level managers? Do you not know your services very well and the value they provide? (By the way, many rainmakers felt like this when they first started generating clients.)
- **I have no plan or objective:** There is a well-worn saying in sales, "If you don't have a plan, stay in the car." When you enter into a business development conversation and you are not sure where you want to go or what you want to accomplish, the conversation meanders everywhere and ends with neither clarity of purpose nor helpful action steps.
- **I easily get distracted:** Much related to the previous point, if you don't have a plan, you can't be sure of what you are trying to communicate. Thus, any new topic that gets introduced in the business development conversation can lead you down time consuming and fruitless paths.
- **I don't talk too much, I am lively:** Yes, indeed, you may have a dynamic, effervescent personality that springs forth in every conversation. Don't hide your personality; just learn to share it in easy-to-swallow doses. Your prospects will appreciate your liveliness even more.

These are just some of the reasons we tend to talk too much when we are in business development conversations with current or prospective clients. Other reasons people talk too much could be they don't like silence, they feel the need to cover perceived objections, or they simply have too much to say.

The key for you is to understand why you, specifically, talk too much. That way you can develop a personal plan to cut down on the soliloquies.

What We Miss When We Talk

You may be thinking, "So what if I talk too much. I am, after all, a very good consultant (or lawyer, accountant, technology service provider, etc.) and I know my stuff. Isn't it important for my prospects and clients to know what I know so they can understand what I can do for them?" Perhaps, but here is what you miss when you do too much of the talking:

- **Opportunity to build trust and Rapport:** Buyers don't just buy your services; they buy a trusted advisor relationship. If you are doing all the talking, you will not pick up on the signals that indicate what in a relationship, besides your expertise, is important to your client. You miss the connection—the Rapport that you can build.

Plus, everyone loves to talk about themselves; to tell their story. If you do not give prospects a chance to do so, they often feel ignored, overwhelmed, and most importantly, unheard. This is not a very good way to start relationships.

- **Uncovering needs:** When professionals enter initial business development conversations, many have strong knowledge of what they can do for clients, but understandably only a vague notion of what the clients truly need. If you are doing all the talking, you can only guess which components of your service set will offer the greatest value for the client.

You miss the chance to craft something special for them. And if you don't know all the needs, you miss out on building larger solutions (and generating the most revenue possible.)

- **The chance to demonstrate what it is like to work with you:** What better way to engage potential clients than to have them experience what it is truly like to work with you as their trusted advisor. When you listen, show interest in a client's issues, and ask insightful questions, you provide the prospect with a glimpse into the real you.

Guidelines for Balancing Advocacy and Inquiry

Assuming you would like to break the habit of either talking too much or asking too many questions, what next?

- **Approach business development conversations like client conversations:** Before you engage a business development conversation, think to yourself, "If this

were a client meeting, and I needed to get a full picture of the client's world before going forth and building a solution for them, how would I approach it?"

Approaching the conversation this way, versus thinking, "I am now selling a new client," will help the conversation move along more naturally, keep you from talking too much, and help you avoid sounding too 'salesly'.

- **Think about balancing advocacy and inquiry:** While you don't want to talk too much, you don't want to give the prospective client the third degree with question after question. A good business development conversation should have the client talking more than you, but clients are also looking for your insight. Just make sure you wisely and appropriately choose how much wisdom you impart, and how much air-time you take to impart it.
- **Ask open-ended questions:** The goal is to get the client to start talking. So when you ask questions, don't ask too many closed-ended questions like "do you do this or that." Instead ask questions like, "tell me about what you do in this area" or "what expectations do you have when working with us" or "how do you go about" or "tell me about the most difficult aspect for you when you..."

You'll be surprised at how much you will find out, how much it will help you generate more clients, and how much it will help you be the best service provider for them.

- **Become overtly conscious of your air time:** If you've gone on for more than two minutes (yes, 120 seconds) without a very good reason, simply cut it off. Sometimes we head down a path and we think to ourselves when we start talking, "OK, I started discussing this and it will take me 10 minutes to explain...how did I get here again?!" Avoid letting this happen, but if you start down the path, get off as quickly as possible.
- **Practice your conversations:** We heard recently from a participant in *The Rainmaker Development Program*, "I hate role playing, but it was helpful and useful." Nothing is better for getting good at something than practicing. Find a way to practice and you'll find yourself talking the right amount and listening the right amount.
- **Seek coaching:** Many of us can point to a time when a more senior business developer, after seeing us lead a sales conversation, gave us a piece of advice that made a significant difference in our conversation approach and success. Seek out this kind of coaching. Either from someone at your firm or an external business

development coach, the right feedback can help you win more clients and sell more services, sometimes immediately.

- **Be genuine in your approach:** Professional services business development is not about learning old-style 'selling' techniques, but about developing relationships with clients that lead to fruitful business interactions. Whatever style you use in your business development talking approach, make sure it fits you like an old shoe. The best conversations you will ever have are those you have when you are really being you.

We all know the more we listen to our clients, the more we can help them. So listen to your clients even before they are your clients. Ask open ended questions. And be wary of talking too much. Balancing advocacy and inquiry will help you win more clients, and you will transition seamlessly from business developer to trusted service provider.

If all else fails, just remember "Charlie's a man of few words, and they respect him."

Principle 6: Listen When You Listen

We Can't Help Ourselves

In *How Clients Buy: The Benchmark Report on Professional Services Marketing and Selling from the Client Perspective* 73 out of 177 (42%) of those surveyed reported encountering potential service providers that did not listen to them when the service providers were selling their services.

Active listening is perhaps one of the most important characteristics a rainmaker can exhibit. With active listening, you can:

- Establish real Rapport by demonstrating sincerity—don't listen and your potential client won't feel connected to you (and they shouldn't)
- Understand Aspirations and Afflictions—don't listen and you won't be able to help you client solve problems and create a new future
- Ask the questions that will help the prospect reach their goals
- Give the best pieces of data and advice to help them move forward and solve problems
- Sense the prospect's underlying needs and concerns by hearing what they're really saying and perceiving their body language
- Bring these latent concerns and needs to the surface

Often times the technical training and development of service providers hinders their ability to be good listeners. Due to the nature of their work, engineers, lawyers, accountants, and technical specialists of all types know a lot. To get their jobs done and done well, they often need to be directive and tell people what to do to complete the tasks on which they are working. When it comes to active listening, this doesn't help.

Developing Active Listening Skills

Consider the following five points to help you develop active listening skills:

- **Plan to listen:** Once your chance to listen is gone, it's gone. There's no Tivo rewind button for a live conversation. Before you enter any rainmaking conversation you should always know what your goals are for the meeting. Until it comes naturally every time, make listening a pre-planned goal. After the meeting, rate yourself on how well you did.

- **Watch your talking:** If you're in play mode, you're not in record mode. If you find yourself talking too much, take a breather and start listening.
- **Rephrase:** "Just so I understand" are four very powerful words. When someone else is describing something to you they often take a long time to make relatively few points. They may go on for 10 minutes without a breath. When they're done, you can say, "Just so I understand, it seems that A and B are happening, and that's creating the problems of X, Y, and Z. Is that correct?"

When you rephrase a 10 minute soliloquy into 30 seconds of summary, clients are impressed...partly by how smart you are (and you didn't even say much), but mostly by how well you listen.

- **Explore:** After you rephrase what you partner-in-conversation has said, asking follow on questions becomes much easier. For example, you might open with the sentence noted above, "Just so I understand, it seems that A and B are happening, and that's creating the problems of X, Y, and Z. Is that correct?"

After you ask this question, you can follow up your rephrase with an:

- Aspiration question, "If that's the case, where do you think you can be if you were to add new capabilities in the C and D areas?"
 - Affliction question, "With X and Y happening, is that causing a lot of downtime for your staff?"
 - Impact question, "Really? How many hours per month do you think each person is losing?"
- **Concentrate!** My jujitsu Sensei, Master Daniel Cohen, is one of the most perceptive people I have ever met. He can sense from 50 feet away the best way to help someone improve their skills or learn a new technique. Sometimes he asks questions, sometimes he makes adjustments, and, everyone once in a while, he will just yell out "Concentrate!" And I can tell you, it gets attention.

Sometimes you don't need a tip or technique to help you get better at something, you simply need to break out of your pattern and apply a bit more intensity. If you're finding active listening difficult (or you are simply not listening), go past *active* and force yourself to listen *intensely*. Dare I say, "Concentrate!"

Principle 7: Plan for Success

It's Not Enough to Just Show Up

A good part of business development (or life) success is, as Woody Allen said, just showing up. But show up prepared and success is what you will get.

We acknowledge that sometimes you do just show up (or—halleluia— a prospect calls you out of the blue) and you haven't done any preparation for the sales call or the process in general. It's reasonable to suggest that, on occasion, sales calls are appropriately deemed 'exploratory discussions'; the kind of discussion in which we just talk and 'see where it goes'.

Take this approach in every business development situation, however, and you'll lose your share of sales that you should have won. Interestingly, whether you have a two thousand or a two million dollar price point, to increase your odds of winning new clients you still need to do the same basic planning and know the same essential information before your sales calls.

Six Call Planning Questions

Use the RAIN SellingSM model as your guide for both the sales process in general and for your specific sales conversations. Within the context of RAIN Selling, you can ask yourself (and answer) these six sales call planning questions before every sales call:

1. **What is the prospect's current situation?** Ask this question to give yourself the lay of the land. Often your goals for the client, the value your services can offer the client, and your action planning for the rest of the sales call come out of your detailed knowledge of the prospect's situation.

If you find that you don't know enough about the situation yet, ask yourself what research you can do before meeting with the client so you can 1) move quickly through situational discovery that can bore a client, and 2) demonstrate to him that you are the type of professional that does his homework and goes the extra mile to make sure the client gets the most value out of each contact with you.

2. **What are my business development goals for this client or prospective client?** Different goals for your clients will make for very different sales conversations. Questions you can ask yourself will include:
 - Is this the 'discovery' meeting in which we get to know each other and build Rapport while learning how I might be able to help them?

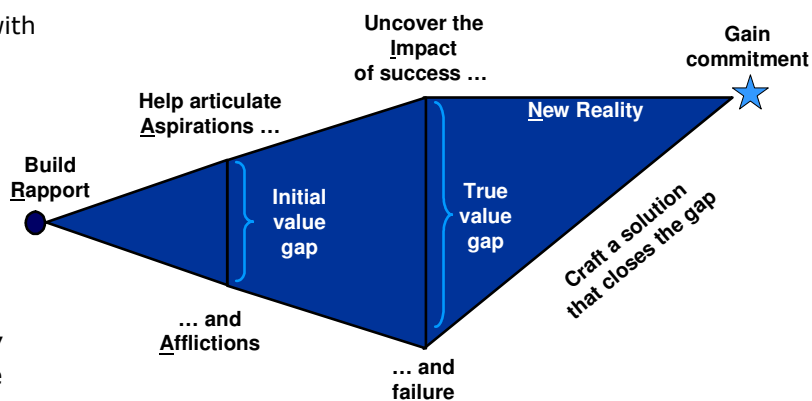
- Is this a current client to whom I am introducing a new set of services?
- Am I reviewing the results from the previous year with a client and this is the meeting where I 'resell' my value so the client stays loyal?
- Am I looking to cross sell or up-sell currently available services because I see how these services can add value?
- Am I trying to supplant a competitor?
- Is this a current client for whom I work in one of their divisions and I would like to get introductions into the other three divisions where I can also help?
- Is this a prospect with so much potential that I am willing travel on my nickel to five cities to visit their branch outlets and their competitors. And then put together a presentation and value proposition so compelling they are wowed like they've never been wowed and resolve to work with me on the spot?

I am sure you can add to this list depending upon your own situation. Whatever your business development goals for this prospect or client are, make certain you are as clear as you can be about those goals before you enter the actual meeting.

3. What is my desired next outcome? Sounds

simple enough, but this question is so often overlooked by professionals before they meet with clients or prospects. Our advice: if you don't know what you want to get out of your meeting with them, don't get out of the (proverbial) car (credit to Mack Hanan and his book *If You Don't Have a Plan, Stay in the Car*).

**RAIN Selling™
From Rapport to Commitment**



Just make sure you start your sales call planning process early enough. Sometimes you need time to investigate just what your desired next outcome should be.

At some point, however, assuming that you and the prospect are a good fit for each

other, and that you can truly help them with your services, your goal is to gain commitment for working with the prospect. Gaining commitment may not be the goal of every sales conversation, but it is the ultimate goal in the selling process.

- 4. What are my relative strengths?** In every sales situation, various forces are working in your favor. Know what these forces are for this particular client or prospect situation so you can leverage them to help make the client more successful. This will give you increased odds of winning the client.

The more specific you can be for the particular situation, the better. Certainly, it might be a general advantage that you are a well known expert in your field with a good reputation, but it's a better advantage to know who you are selling against (if anyone), whether or not you and the potential client went to the same graduate school, whether you've been particularly successful in this industry, or any other specifics that might be working in your favor.

- 5. What are my relative vulnerabilities?** This is the corollary to number four above. Maybe you have less experience than the competition. Maybe another company is the incumbent service provider and you are the challenger. Knowing what your relative vulnerabilities are will allow you to prepare in advance to either turn them into advantages or at least diminish them as vulnerabilities.

For example, maybe the other company has more experience in the industry, their reputation is quite good, and they've been doing this type of work for years. You can say, "Yes, they do have a lot of experience in the industry as this is their only focus. Because our focus is broader, we bring knowledge from outside the industry that has been very valuable to our other clients. Did you know that in the ABC industry they designed their divisions like this last year and got a 7% cost savings on average when they implemented it? The data source? It's from the objective research of the ABC Industry Association. I believe it will apply to your company. We can look into it together, if you like."

With good preparation and call planning you can have your responses to 'objections' and tough questions ready when you need them.

- 6. What actions do I need to take before the next call?** We all have to-do lists that help us get done what we need to get done. By taking the time to answer questions 1 through 5, your business development and sales call planning to do list will be as good as it possibly can be because your actions will be:

- Informed by the knowledge of your client's situation
- Guided by your goals for the client from a business development perspective
- Built to help you achieve your desired outcomes
- Planned with the knowledge of your relative strengths and vulnerabilities in this particular business development situation

Maybe for Woody Allen 80% of success in life is just showing up. But the most successful business developers we've seen over the years show up...prepared.

Putting RAIN in Your Forecast

Write Your Own Forecast

To succeed in your journey towards mastering rainmaking conversations you must commit to the process, your desire to be a rainmaker, and your vision of what success will look like as you put RAIN SellingSM into practice.

As a way of creating your own New Reality, we ask you to engage in a little creative and inspirational writing. Imagine three years from today. You are reading The Wall Street Journal. On the front page is an article about you. This is a positive article about how you have built your firm, your practice, and your career through your skills as a rainmaker. What does it say? How did you do it? What were the defining moments?

To give you a little push, we have started the article for you (and provided a happy ending):

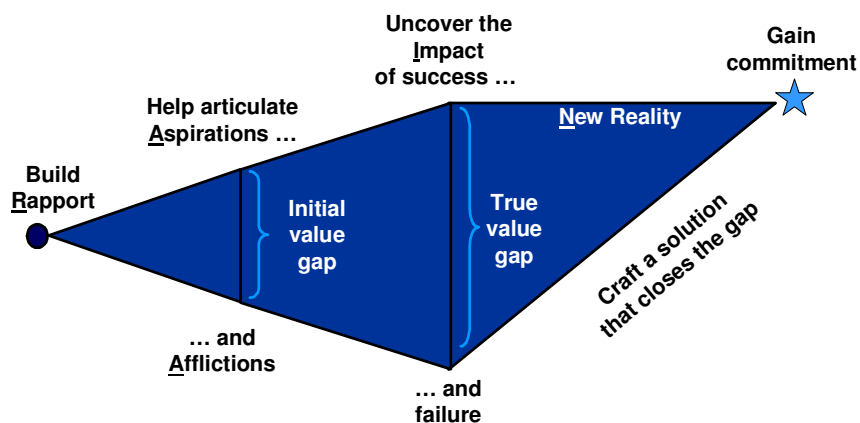
Dateline (Three Years from Today) – [He/she] claims [he/she] wasn't great at selling, but three years to the day after focusing more on business development efforts [your name] had become the top rainmaker in [his/her] [type of professional service] firm.

"I realized I needed to develop my sales skills and get out there and make it happen," [your name] remembers thinking. "Here's what happened and how I got there... [Your story here]"

"And I guess, the rest is history," [your name] said with the smile of a confident and successful rainmaker.

Now go out and make it RAIN.

RAIN Selling™ From Rapport to Commitment



About RainToday.com

RainToday.com – The Website

RainToday.com is the premier online source for insight, advice, and tools for service business rainmakers, marketers, and leaders. Based in Framingham, Massachusetts, RainToday.com's core offerings include:

- Free articles by well-respected marketing, sales, and service business experts such as David Maister, John Doerr, Patrick McKenna, Suzanne Lowe, and Charles Green on core topics in selling and marketing professional services
- Case studies on what's working in marketing and selling professional services
- Interviews with world renown services marketers, rainmakers, and firm leaders
- Best practice and benchmark research such as *How Clients Buy: The Benchmark Report on Professional Services Marketing and Selling from the Client Perspective* by the analysts and experts at RainToday.com Research
- Premium content, products and tools designed specifically for helping service providers to grow their firms
- Webinars, seminars and conferences for rainmakers and service marketers

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Since getting his start in professional services and in publishing in the early 1990s, Mike has been a management consultant, a leader of multi-million dollar highly-profitable division of a major professional services firm, an entrepreneur, and a rainmaker.

As Publisher of RainToday.com and a Principal with the [Wellesley Hills Group](#), Mike is a frequent speaker and consultant to service firms worldwide on topics such as service firm branding, marketing, lead generation, e-marketing, and rainmaking. Mike's current and previous clients include firms such as Ryder System, Bank of America, John Hancock

Financial Services, American Management Association, Pegasystems, Instron, Fidelity Investments, and a host of other major and emerging growth service firms.

Mike holds an MBA in Entrepreneurship from the F.W. Olin Graduate School of Business at Babson College, and a BA from Brandeis University. He is also an avid fly fisherman and golfer, and actively studies and teaches Kokondo Karate and Jukido Jujitsu, holding the ranks of black belt and Sensei in each.

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John Doerr's twenty-five year career in professional services has included senior executive management, sales and marketing, business process re-engineering and product development experience.

John lived in Brussels, Belgium for a number of years where he was President of Management Centre Europe, the largest pan-European management development and training services firm in Europe. At MCE, John expanded their market reach into Eastern Europe, Russia, and the Middle East through the development of strategic partnerships, expanded service offerings and client satisfaction levels.

Before MCE, John was a Senior Vice President of the American Management Association. At the AMA, John served as President of AMACOM Publishing, and as head of sales for AMA, responsible for all strategic and tactical activities.

John holds a MBA, magna cum laude, from the Graduate School of Management at Boston University, and an BA, summa cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa, from Boston College. John has also taken his coaching and leadership skills and applied them to his passion for youth sports, where he coaches both baseball and basketball.

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Learn More about RAIN SellingSM

More information on RAIN SellingSM, including the seminar *How To Sell Professional Services: The Rainmaker Development Program* focused on teaching the concepts and skills of RAIN SellingSM, can be found at the Wellesley Hills Group website, www.whillsgroup.com.

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