



# Geo-Strata

MARCH/APRIL 2012

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# Sell! Sell! Sell!

**I** conduct an ASFE BackYard seminar titled *Hassle-Free Selling for Geoprofessionals*. It's popular among firm principals, because they'd like nothing better than for all their firm's technical professionals to coalesce into an unstoppable selling machine. The vast majority of technical-professional attendees don't share that enthusiasm, their scowls tell me as I attempt to convey how easy selling actually is. "Does this mean I have to buy a pair of loafers with tassels?" one wit invariably asks. "No," I respond, "it's worse. You have to identify prospective-client representatives you share interests with, then play golf with them, take them to dinner, go to sports events... things like that. It's so much better to spend your life in front of a computer screen." But the joke's on me, of course, because – for many in the room – spending time in front of a computer screen actually is so much better. Which helps explain why so many geoprofessionals have become commoditized and marginalized: They don't know about relational sales, where you have to sell yourself in order to sell whatever comes next.

Consider this: How do you sell something if you believe you don't know how to sell and so have convinced yourself that selling is beneath you? Say, for example, that the something you have to sell is a new Porsche 911. The MSRP is \$95,000. What's the easiest way for you to make the sale? Simple: Offer the car at \$50,000. You'll sell as many as you can get your hands on.

Sad but true, my illustration is not that far-fetched, because so many geoprofessional firms encourage their technical-professional seller/does how to sell based on low price, something they can achieve by proposing the skimpiest scope of service they can live with, instead of teaching them how to convince client representatives about an important truth: That a high-quality professional service

provides far more value than a cheap, barely professional service.

It's easy to say that the commodity geoprofessionals and their clients deserve one another, but that's an oversimplification. True: Some clients and their representatives are not at all interested in a high-quality, noncommoditized geoprofessional service, where the geoprofessional of record is wisely selected and wisely deployed, from the project's inception to its conclusion.

But think about this: How many of those client representatives are at least intelligent enough to understand that value is an important consideration, especially when it saves time and money while reducing frustration and risk?

As it so happens, the ascendancy of commodity services has created a safe haven for firms that barely have a right to call their services professional. Unfortunately, all too many geoprofessional firms that can deliver a high-quality service – the kind of service more geoprofessionals need to provide in order to

overcome the commoditization and marginalization that affect so many – don't know how to sell it. Which is why their principals call on me for my seminar.

I'm not going to turn down business, of course, but I have to confess that the people I address already know how to sell, they just don't know it. After getting into the seminar, I ask the question, "How many of you have already made a huge sale?" No hands go up. Then I point out that "selling professional services is all about selling yourself. People who buy from you can't be sure of what they're going to get until after they make the purchase decision; it's not like buying merchandise. That means they buy a promise from you and, to do that, they need to trust you. And to get them to trust you, you need to sell yourself." Then I ask, "Are any of you married?" Most hands go up, and I explain that "getting someone to marry you is a huge sale. You sold





yourself. Your spouse trusted you enough to become your spouse 'for as long as ye both shall live.' What about a sell job! And speaking of job, does any of you have one?" Then I tell them what's now obvious: "Selling yourself is the essential first step, and all you have to do is more or less just be yourself, then put yourself in the right place at the right time. You can't make sales sitting on your butt in the office. Talk to people. Let them know about the genuine value that high-quality geoprofessional services can provide. If you believe it – and you should; it's true – you can sell it."

Enhancing your ability to serve as a trusted geoprofessional advisor is clearly essential to overcoming commoditization and marginalization, but it will all go for naught if you can't sell the value involved, because if you can't sell it, people won't buy the service; they'll continue to seek the low-cost provider. But you *can* sell, and you have proof of that fact every day. Just put yourself where you need to be in order to come into contact with the people you need to influence. Show them who you are; show them who a top-flight geoprofessional advisor is and demonstrate what that person can do. Then ask for an opportunity to demonstrate your value. It's really that simple.

— AUTHOR —

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