



Geo-Strata

November/December 2013

Geo-mélange

ALSO
Meet the new
Geo-Institute Board



Sell. Sell. Sell.

The first thing really good salespeople sell is themselves. That's why they're able to convince their clients and customers to buy more than they originally had in mind and, generally speaking, their clients and customers wind up delighted with their purchase. Really good salespeople do this by exhibiting self-confidence without arrogance, an unwavering belief in their products or services, and a genuine desire to help. Those attitudes help convince their customers and clients to trust them – to “buy” their point of view – an outcome strengthened through technique; by talking less about cost and more about benefit, like the lower cost of construction derived from more comprehensive design-phase services.

Really bad salespeople seem to lack confidence in their interpersonal capabilities and so are intimidated by the thought of selling themselves in order to earn trust. So they don't. They simply offer the lowest price they can live with, believing (not incorrectly) that low price can make the sale for them. When most salespeople in a given marketplace take this approach, the marketplace cannot help but become a hotbed of price competition, underlain by pitches like “We all have the same licenses and meet the same standards. It's just that I can do it for less.” If the pitch is made often enough, customers and clients will come to believe that all those who provide a given product or service *are* just about the same. Keep that up for a generation or two and customers and clients will regard what's being sold as a commodity.

So, what are things like in your marketplace? In most areas, for many geoprofessional services, the focus is low price rather than high quality and the lasting value it provides. I submit that one of the major causes of this is unsupported reliance on the “seller/doer” model of project management: “Bring in the business and then provide the service.” That's great as

long as seller/doers possess not only outstanding technical/managerial skills, but also the innate ability to sell themselves to anyone. But face it: Few geoprofessional project managers are self-confident individuals who know how to sell themselves. Instead, most are technically focused individuals whose decision to pursue a geoprofessional career was influenced at least in part by a strong desire to avoid certain responsibilities, like having to sell. Is it any wonder, then, that they let low fee do the talking for them? “But what else should you expect? I

don't know how to sell,” they might comment. But that isn't true. Just about all geoprofessionals have jobs they had to sell themselves to get, and most are or have been married, another outcome for which selling themselves was a prerequisite. Those were BIG sales. How'd they do it?

First of all, they probably told themselves, “This isn't selling.” Second, they put themselves in the right place at the right time and, third, they simply exhibited who they were, and that's all they needed to build the trust needed to make the sale.

If you believe conditions in your markets have caused you and other geoprofessionals there to

be regarded as commodities, you've got to do a better job of selling. Your firm can help by providing sales training (ASFE/GBA's “Hassle-Free Selling for Project Managers” BackYard Seminar could help) and developing at least a rudimentary sales organization; e.g., appointing a sales manager who gives each seller/doer monthly targets. But you can help yourself most by doing what you've done before to make a big sale: Put yourself in the right place at the right time.

One easy way of doing that is through involvement in a meaningful professional society or trade association that would put you into comfortable contact with client-organization representatives. Just being a member is not enough, though: You need to be actively involved, something that's achieved by joining a committee whose members work as a team to achieve



In most areas, for many geoprofessional services, the focus is low price rather than high quality and the lasting value it provides.

mutual aspirations. That kind of involvement builds bonds of friendship and trust. It allows others to see you as someone who cares; someone who is knowledgeable and passionate (even if tacitly) about getting the job done. That breeds respect and exactly the kind of trust that makes others willing to listen to you and so learn why all geoprofessionals are not the same; why those who, like you, are at the top of their game are in a position to add the kind of value that can make a project more enjoyable and far more cost-effective.

Over time, if enough geoprofessionals took this approach, the entire marketplace would change, and geoprofessionals would finally be able to do something meaningful about the commoditization caused by their erroneous assumptions about selling and their inability to do it. Frankly, I don't know if that change will ever be realized, but one thing's sure: It can happen to you. Just do it!

AUTHOR

John P. Bachner is the executive vice president of ASFE/The Geoprofessional Business Association (GBA), a not-for-profit association of geoprofessional firms; i.e., firms that provide geotechnical, geologic, environmental, construction-materials engineering and testing (CoMET), and related professional services (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geoprosessions). GBA develops programs, services, and materials to help its members and their clients confront risk and optimize performance. Contact john@asfe.org

Statement of Ownership

Geo-Strata is published by the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), with general business offices at 1801 Alexander Bell Drive, Reston, VA 20191-4382. The Managing Director of ASCE's Member and Corporate Communications Division is Stefan Jaeger. The magazine is wholly owned by the American Society of Civil Engineers, a nonprofit educational and professional organization with more than 140,000 members. There are no individual owners or stockholders.

I certify that the above statements made by me are correct and complete.

Stefan Jaeger, CAE
 Managing Director of Member and Corporate Communications



	Average Number of Copies Each Issue during Preceding 12 Months	Actual Number of Single-Issue Copies Nearest to Filing Date
Total number of copies printed (net press run)	10,683	10,700
Paid and/or requested circulation		
Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, and counter sales:	0	0
Mail Subscriptions:	9,932	9,944
Total paid and/or requested circulation	9,932	9,944
Free distribution outside county	46	50
Free distribution by mail earner or other means—sample, complimentary, and other free copies	0	0
Total free distribution	46	50
Total distribution	9,978	9,994
Copies not distributed		
Office use, leftover, unaccounted for, spoiled after printing:	705	706
Returned from news agents:	0	0
Total	10,683	10,700