

# What They Don't Teach You in B-School

A transcript of an interview of Doug Fletcher, co-author of *How Clients Buy: A Practical Guide to Business Development for Consulting and Professional Services*.



# Introduction

Business development is essential to sustaining and growing a professional services businesses. Why is it, then, that we aren't trained to sell the services we provide?

In this third of a series of interviews, Andi Baldwin of Profitable Ideas Exchange asked *How Clients Buy* co-author Doug Fletcher to explain why, as providers of professional services, we're taught to *do the work* but not *sell the work*.

Sales isn't featured in the curricula of business, law, architecture, or other professional schools. Furthermore, few professional service firms offer sales training to its up-and-coming employees. Instead, we're left to our own devices.

Doug explains some of the historical reasons and persistent biases that create obstacles to our learning. Focusing on how clients buy reconnects theory and practice, acknowledges market reality, and allows us to be more effective salespeople without compromise.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dave", with a stylized, cursive script.

Dave Bayless, Co-founder of Human Scale Business

# About the Authors

Tom McMakin and Doug Fletcher are practicing consultants who live the challenges addressed in their book.



Tom is CEO of Profitable Ideas Exchange (PIE), a leading provider of business development services for consulting and professional services firms. Previously, he held leadership positions in private equity and served as the chief operating officer of Great Harvest Bread Co, a multi-unit operator of bread stores. Tom is the author of *Bread and Butter*, a critically-acclaimed book that describes his work at Great Harvest and how he and his team created a nationally recognized corporate learning community and culture of best practices using collaborative networks. He has appeared on the pages of *Fast Company*, *Inc Magazine*, *Newsweek*, *Business Week*, and *The Wall Street Journal* and speaks widely. He is a graduate of Oberlin College and former Peace Corps Volunteer in Cameroon.



Doug currently splits his time between speaking/writing/coaching on the topic of business development in consulting and professional services and teaching at the Jake Jobs College of Business & Entrepreneurship at Montana State University. He also serves on the Board of Directors of The Beacon Group, a growth strategy consulting firm headquartered in Portland, Maine. Prior to that, he was co-founder and CEO of North Star Consulting Group, a technology-enabled consulting firm that specialized in global web-survey projects. Earlier in his professional life, Doug served as a consultant with the management consultancy, A.T. Kearney, and was trained at General Electric in its leadership development program. He is a graduate of Clemson University and has an MBA from the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business Administration.

# Transcript

**Andi Baldwin:** Doug, in *How Clients Buy*, you highlight the issue that those of us in the consulting and professional services face: we are taught to do the work, but not taught how to sell the work. Can you explain this issue to us?

**Doug Fletcher:** It's an interesting problem that every accountant, every architect, every attorney, engineer, and management consultant faces, and that is we have been trained, and in many cases certified, to do the work, but we've never been taught how to sell the work.

One of the rainmakers that we spoke to when we were doing the research for our book is a senior attorney in Columbia, South Carolina, named Chuck McDonald. He said, interestingly enough, he says, the one thing they do not teach you at law school is how to bring in new clients. Yet, to be successful, to become a partner in a firm or to be successful going out on our own and starting our own firm, we have to learn how to win clients if we're going to survive and thrive.

**Andi:** Why do you think this is so? Why aren't we taught this?

**Doug:** I think, by and large, it's-- there are some historical reasons, which I'll get to in just a moment-- but I think, by and large, it's a perceptual and it's a cultural issue. Let me explain what I mean by that. First of all, selling professional services is not taught anywhere in academia. It's not taught in business schools, law schools, architecture schools, you name it.

And I think, by and large, there is-- sales is just seen as not being intellectual. It's not seen as being academic enough. So it's just not covered. Furthermore, it's a topic that's not discussed often in firms, in professional services firms. We're not provided the training that junior partners need.

There's an historical reason for that, and that goes back a long, long time. Up until

the 1970s, it was actually forbidden in most professions to do any selling or advertising. This was overturned in 1976 by a Supreme Court case. But in fact, many firms-- many law firms, for example-- didn't allow their partners to even carry business cards. It was considered too commercial, right? So we think this is a topic that needs examining, and we hope it's a topic that will be well-received in *How Clients Buy*.

**Andi:** So if we aren't actually taught how to sell the work that we do, how does an up-and-coming professional services provider or consultant actually learn how to become a rainmaker?

**Doug:** It's a really interesting dilemma that all up-and-coming professionals face. We're not taught it in school. Most firms do not provide this type of training. There are very few credible, third-party training programs that are available to up-and-coming professionals.

Then interestingly, lastly, I would say is that many successful rainmakers, senior rainmakers, don't make the best mentors in many cases. So at the end of the day, we're left to our own devices to learn on our own how to become a successful rainmaker. It's a real interesting problem, and one we hope the book will help address.



# HOW CLIENTS BUY

## The Real-World Guide to Selling Professional Services

A survival guide for every service professional, this book helps you up your game by schooling you in the secrets of finding, connecting with, and build lasting professional relationships with the clients you want and deserve.

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