

Integrating the Seller-Doer Model with the Dedicated Business Developer Model for General Contractors

by Raymond Braswell

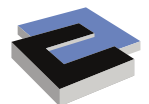
Many articles have been written about the advantages of the Seller-Doer model for business development in the A/E/C industry. In this model, key managers are responsible for business development as well as managing the design and construction of the project. One of the primary reasons cited as a benefit of the Seller-Doer model is that clients prefer to work with those who are actually involved in the design or construction of a project rather than a pure business development professional.

The following pages makes a strong case for General Contractors integrating the Seller-Doer model with dedicated Business Development Professionals for profitable growth.

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The Role of the Business Development Professional

The Seller-Doer model clearly has merit and should be a key part of every contractor's business development process. Contrary to much of what has been written, the Seller-Doer model should never be used alone for the growing General Contractor.

We talk to hundreds of contractors every year and one of the biggest misconceptions about business development is the role of the pure Business Development Professional. Too many executives believe that a Business Development Professional should be responsible from prospect to contract until the project is turned over to operations for construction. This is an unrealistic expectation and sets both the contractor and the Business Development Professional up for failure.

A Business Development Professional is responsible for building a broad and deep network of relationships aligned with the contractor's market strategy.

These relationships are leveraged to identify opportunities and clients long before the projects are announced publicly. Building and maintaining these relationships takes an incredible amount of time, starting with rigorous research. When done properly, this will heavily leverage the contractor's executives, managers, and technical experts, resulting in both profitable growth and enhanced customer satisfaction.

6 Basic Stages of the Sales Process

If you look at the entire sales process for a General Contractor, it can be broken out into six basic components. The pure Business Development Professional should be involved at all levels to some degree but is primarily responsible for relationship management.

1. Market Strategy
2. Marketing Activities
- 3. Relationship Development / Management**
4. Opportunity Review – Go / No-Go Decision
5. Estimating – Accurate Cost to Build
6. Selling – Setting Markup / Fee and Negotiations

Many owners and executives do a combination of all six steps, which makes it very difficult to develop a good job description with clear and attainable measurable outcomes for a pure Business Development Professional.

Clients spending millions of dollars on a project will want to negotiate directly with Contractor's Senior Management.

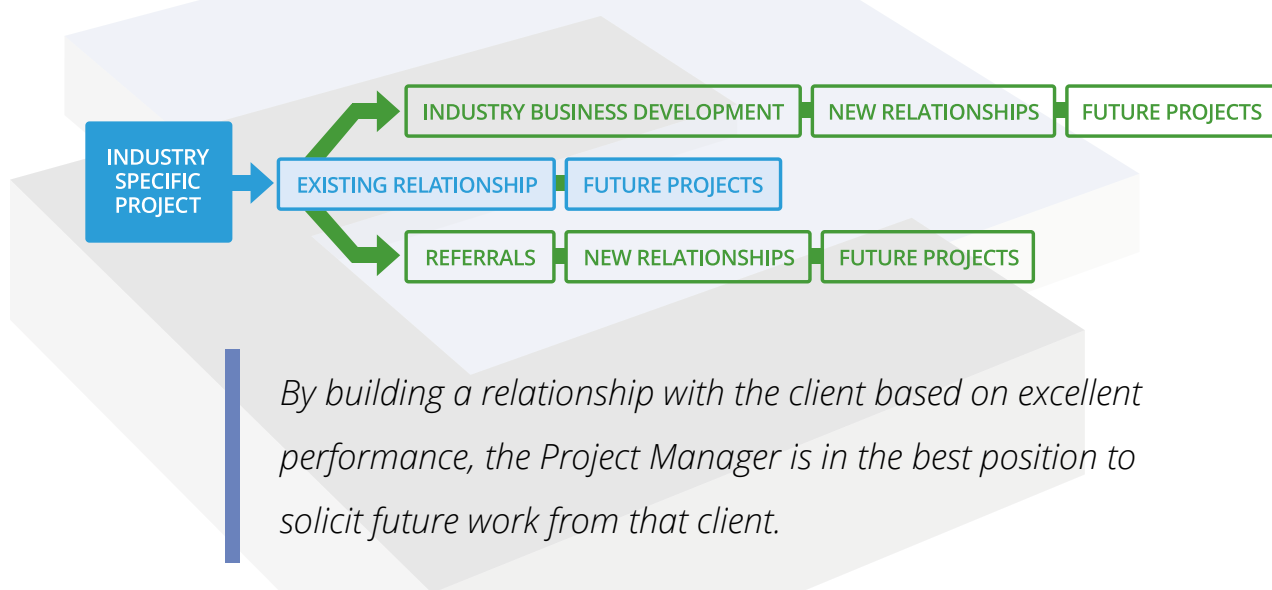
Once a project or a client is identified as one the company wants to pursue, Senior Management needs to take over the primary responsibility, but keep the Business Development Professional involved for relationship continuity.

Don't constrain your growth by letting relationship building activities take a back seat when your managers and technical professionals become consumed with client projects.

Growing Profitably with the Integrated Business Development Approach

The best business development approach for a growing General Contractor is to integrate the Seller-Doer model with the Dedicated Business Developer model.

THE SELLER-DOER MODEL works very well after a client and a project have been identified and secured. From that point forward, the Project Manager and their team has the best opportunity to build a long lasting relationship with the client through great project execution.



By building a relationship with the client based on excellent performance, the Project Manager is in the best position to solicit future work from that client.

If the project is in a certain industry i.e. medical, sports, entertainment, retail, etc., the Project Manager can leverage their experience with similar clients if they have the skill-set and time to do so. Building deep relationships with a client during the course of building a project is a very different skill-set than what is required to develop a completely new relationship. It takes consistent training, coaching, and management to enhance this skill-set. Too often the Project Manager becomes frustrated with the process and pushes these activities to the back burner.

The typical training, experience and personality traits of great Project Managers do not translate into being great at business development.

Great Project Managers stereo-typically loose patience attending social functions, cold calling, and having to invest time into building relationships with potential clients; *Especially*, when there is *not* a set of construction documents to discuss. Project Managers are problem solvers. They have the technical know-how and communication skills to turn a set of drawings into a reality. When you remove the multitude of details included in a set of construction documents that they excel at communicating; you take them out of their element.

On the other hand, Business Developers are very comfortable talking to potential clients without drawings. They view themselves more like Ambassadors for the company, and see their role as someone whose job it is to develop relationships long before a set of construction documents are even thought of.

The Pure Business Developer Model works like the scout in a wagon train. The Business Development Professional works way ahead of everyone else in the company and mostly alone. Their primary role is to identify opportunities through leads that come from their networking skills.



The Business Development Professional develops a massive networking group including architects, engineers, banks, brokers, and owners to generate leads for potential new work.

Ideally the opportunity is identified long before the owner has even engaged an architect and certainly before the project is publicly announced. Business Development is not a sequential process like Engineering or Project Management. There are no plans, code books or CPM schedules. The Business Development Professional must juggle hundreds of contacts and sources of information, finding opportunities that are aligned with the company's market strategy. They are building relationships long before projects are identified. It takes a special set of skills, training and rigorous management to make this process efficient.

This work is taking place so far in advance that it often goes unrecognized by others in the company who are focused on the more tangible construction of the project.

Other Effective Approaches to Business Development

Though an integrated Seller-Doer / Business Developer model will produce the best results for most growing General Contractors, there are other models that accomplish similar results and may be a better fit for your company at this time.

The Seller-Doer Model Supplemented with Senior Management

In this model, the Senior Management of the company performs all the pure business development activities. There can be many challenges to this approach, starting with Senior Management being able to consistently dedicate the right amount of time to the process. Additional problems include Senior Management having to make cold calls and being able to interact effectively with a full range of people outside of other executives and owners. This model can work effectively if a member of the management team takes on business development as their primary responsibility. Often when a company takes this approach, an assistant or coordinator is hired to take on many of the research and networking responsibilities.

The Seller-Doer as Account Manager

A Project Manager who has established a strong relationship with a growing client through successful completion of a project is promoted into the position of Account Manager. In this role, they no longer have direct project responsibilities and their focus is on building more business with a key client or small group of clients. This is a very unique individual who has traits of both a great Project Manager as well as the traits of a great Business Development Professional.

Leadership Pipeline: Guarantee the development of strong Senior Leadership. Don't make the mistake of promoting based upon a résumé full of project management successes, only to have them fall short in the crucial area of customer development. Many companies promote individuals without testing their business development skills first; because they've underestimated the difference between building relationships with current clients; and building relationships with future clients. If done correctly, the Seller-Doer as Account Manager Model ensures profitable growth, by building a strong pipeline of well-rounded Senior Management.

The best results for a growing General Contractor will be achieved with a hybrid approach:

- **Seller-Doers** leveraged to maintain and deepen relationships with existing key customers.
- **Senior Management** focused on setting the right market strategy, rigorously reviewing opportunities to ensure alignment with that strategy and aggressively closing new business.
- **Business Development Professionals** maximizing everyone's time by opening and building a broad network of relationships that will lead to new opportunities long before anyone else hears about them.

The Ideal Model: Seller-Doer and Business Developer Collaboration

As previously stated, integrating the Seller-Doer and the Business Developer Professional is the ideal path for a General Contractor in growth mode. Picture having your Seller-Doers focused on specific existing clients, while your Business Development Professionals are constantly focused on building new relationships. To embrace this integrated model, the Project Manager and Business Development Professional need to work as a team. Unfortunately, these two types of individuals are usually worlds apart in their thinking processes.

Imagine a Project Manager being able to pass on leads to the Business Development Professional knowing, in full confidence, that they will be thoroughly researched and followed up on. *Imagine* the Business Development Professional consistently networking at social events on behalf of the company. *Imagine* this activity leading up to a project-specific meeting with the right decision makers long before anyone else has even heard about the project. Now, *imagine* a small team from the contractor aligned around the opportunity ultimately leading to new business.

If mutual respect between all parties can be built, this can be a very effective approach for the General Contractor looking to expand. This type of collaboration and relationship building takes consistent effort and dedication from Senior Management.

If men are from Mars and women are from Venus, then Project Managers are from Earth and Business Development Professionals are from another Galaxy!



About Raymond Braswell
Senior Consultant, D. Brown Management

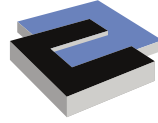
Raymond Braswell began as an architect but moved into the construction side of the industry early in his career. Over a 20 year period he was President of two construction companies. The first was a \$20 million firm which he grew to over \$400 million through securing clients such as Marriott and Disney Development Company. The second firm was a \$60 million firm which he grew to over \$900 million in annual volume, including the construction of a \$285 million casino constructed in 14 months.

He continues to consult Real Estate Developers by interviewing and selecting Architects and Contractors for their projects. In this way, he has an understanding of the needs of an Owner/Developer and how the Contractor needs to position themselves in order to attract new business.

Raymond's unique perspective from his experience in architecture, construction, and development can be an invaluable resource in assisting your company.

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