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Below, a sampling of fifteen Scarlett Letter blog posts from 2009. These were selected based upon the range of topics and the responses received from readers. Enjoy!

3 **Scarlett Letter #3: Exploring acceptable (?!) pricing strategies when competing for low bid…**

Mark Buckshon writes the Construction Marketing Ideas blog. Recently, he published: Seven Ideas for Construction Marketing Success. His second idea took me by surprise, and yet, I am guessing that he's seen it work again and again, so it must make some sense. Here it is:

2. Great marketing gives you change-order power in conventional price sensitive areas.
As an example, consider the story of a U.S. electrical contractor working in a mid-size Michigan city. The local hospital has lots of work, but everything must be publicly bid, and the lowest price always wins the job. How can the well-established contractor make money and still come in "low"? The key is in the terms of contract which hospital administrators know and understand. The electrical contractor bids low with qualifications indicating that change orders will truly be necessary for a totally satisfactory project. The hospital, knowing the contractor's reputation for reliability and integrity, knows that the change orders are to be expected. The contractor wins the job, legitimately, on price, and equally legitimately, change orders are processed allowing the contractor a reasonable margin for the work. Note this only works if there is a relationship of trust and integrity - low balling with the intention of pushing through change orders regardless of the clients' expectations is simply uncool and will sour any future business relationships.

Similarly, In a workshop that I once delivered, we discussed various strategies. One architectural firm owner indicated that for public clients, his firm will use this strategy: submit a low fee, then make mention of all the scope items (and associated additional fees) that should be added in to meet the client's ultimate expectations. For this firm, the low fee plus additions are intriguing enough that their public clients are willing to talk through it and negotiate to a final agreed-upon (and per this owner, fair) price.

Naturally, as a caveat, I'd like to (and often do) give advice that if you are pitching to clients who only care about price, let the other guy have the work. Instead, concentrate on adding value to the level where price is far less of an issue, and short/long-term savings and hard/soft results become the decision-making criteria. Even so, there will always be the firms that continue to find themselves pursuing market sectors where price is the #1 selection factor. I'm curious to know if any readers have employed either strategy listed above?

8 **Scarlett Letter #8: Part II — When your services are "Nice-to-have" versus "Gotta-have-it-or-else"….**

What 'idea' person hasn't been disappointed at some point when they realized their idea was good (acknowledged as 'good' by others as well), but not 'absolutely necessary'?

I once had an invention that I thought for sure was going to make me a rich woman and an early retiree! Due to the above predicament, this invention was shelved indefinitely. From time to time I think about it, especially when people lament the problem that my invention could potentially solve for them.

One of the first steps might be to: Revisit your positioning of the service/product offering to make absolutely sure you have

1951 North Lincoln Avenue, Suite 2 PH 773.251.8132
Chicago, IL 60614 www.annescarlett.com

covered all angles in which the client might view it as a no-brainer, must-have, low-risk purchase.

Beyond obvious steps like the one above, here are the choices that I felt I had when it came to my own invention. My engineering client in Part I had some of these same options to ponder:

#1. Research any and all options to enhance the product/service so that it becomes more of a necessity to potential buyers.
#2. Be satisfied with a smaller pool of buyers, knowing that the prospect pool itself will be quite large, but the buyers pool within will be small. This will mean lots of extra marketing to locate the minority within the buyer pool that is willing to invest in your service/product.
#3. Re-purpose the service, design, technology, idea, product and apply it to something or someone that really does need it. Must have it.
#4. Reach out to your entire network about the good service/product offering, even beyond your targets. Hold focus groups to see if the idea sparks intrigue from others. Rather than keeping it proprietary, as we tend to want to do with something we have created that we think is amazing, you might as well make it public. Think of it this way; it's already not selling in the current scenario. What do you really have to lose?

Again, I'd really welcome any and all thoughts, insights, comments, ideas from my readers on this topic.

15 Scarlett Letter #15: Part I - AEC team building in tough times

With another round of layoffs recently (and covertly) 'announced' at a few prominent Chicago A/E firms this month, and with 2009's NEOCON festivities dialed down like never before, I empathize with the professionals that have held onto their positions—their morale; career development; and level of belonging and purpose at their firm. Among other things, I suspect they are feeling the sense of loss that we all feel when surviving a downsize.

As a result of this news, I have been thinking about esprit de corps and team building, which is not just isolated to the internal team. It can also be applied to your overall project teams, extending to client, consultants, and contractors.

I bookmarked this article a couple of months ago that may be worth a read:
Harvard Business Publishing - Team Building

The article's premise is that team building is not a luxury; rather, it's a necessity, especially in tough times. Further, while a team building exercise can certainly be 'fun' and off-topic from work issues, those so-called 'fun' exercises can sometimes come across as contrived. It's a fine balance to ensure that the 'fun' activity is legitimate and welcomed by participants. As an alternative, the article proposes conducting team-building exercises that actually exercise the mind, and may have some relevancy to real-life projects/environment.

For the AEC community, here's an idea to build upon this article:

What if? Discussion Group. Perhaps you come up with a brainteaser, or a project scenario what if? Choose something that is not necessarily quantifiable. In other words, something that will require discussion, debate, collaboration…rather than something that could be researched and determined by referring to Sweet's catalog, LEED reference documents, or some other technical source.

As a communicator, I believe facilitating a what if? team building discussion group would serve two key purposes: **1.** Strengthen team rapport and respect by sharing and building upon one another's ideas; **2.** Acknowledge relevant concepts to use in a practical work application.
So, what if:
…. your public client has tipped you off that funding will be available for a new wing within the next year? What strategies will you take to secure that work?
…your client contact is stressed out because he/she might lose their job, and so they are not being as responsive as you'd

like to stay on schedule?

…you, as a team member, are having an ethical issue with one of your subconsultants that was requested/picked by the client?

…and so forth. The what if's are endless, and often, the senior professionals in the firm can dig into their own memory banks to recall challenging situations from their past that would serve as perfect what if's for this discussion group.

Stay tuned for Part II, where I'll propose additional idea(s) on how to team-build in these tough times. In the meantime, send me an email if you have methods you'd like to share.

16 **Scarlett Letter # 16 Part II - AEC team building in tough times: It starts at the top….**

Hopefully, you've given serious consideration to the 'what if's' team building suggestion that I mentioned in Part I. Yet, here's a question: who facilitates those 'what if' dialogues?

Listen, if you are a leader, then you need to be involved with these team building efforts—either as the primary facilitator, or as an active participant during a facilitation led by an expert consultant. Without you, Mr. and Ms. Leaders, any team-building results will be diminished. (Incidentally, while leaders are often at the helm, leadership qualities are demonstrated at virtually every level of the firm, depending on contexts and sub-contexts).

And let's say that, as a leader, you are having trouble keeping up your own spirits in these tough times. You're privy to the numbers, and you know the bleak (or promising!) firm outlook. I've been there; I know that feeling.

How about monitoring your own attitude to fuel positive team building virtually every day? I am not suggesting that you lie or be anything less than transparent regarding what is going on in the company. (Note: transparency could be fodder for a future blog.) What I am suggesting is that you buck up and keep spirits high because people are counting on you to do so. And yep, it starts at the 'top' (even if the 'top' is a middle manager of a team in a specific design studio).

So how about finding an inspiration to keep your mood up? Here's an example: Last week I watched a friend take a beginner's salsa lesson. I've seen many salsa instructors all over the city, and have always been impressed by the energy of this particular instructor, Ricardo–his patience, willingness to entertain all levels, warm smile, slow motion "matrix-like' dance moves, his bursts of applause for the group that would make everyone else applaud too. Even though as an experienced salsera I would rather play it cool, elegant, and 'non-plussed', I couldn't help it…I found myself giving in and applauding too. Ricardo has ability to break through our 'cool factor'. Why does this charm me enough to use it as a supporting example?

Let's look a little deeper. All ages, economic levels, education, and ethnic backgrounds are represented in this salsa class. The camaraderie of this group of strangers is evident, thanks to Ricardo, who manages to create intimacy within the first 15 minutes of the lesson.

If he can do this with such a diverse group, while still making everyone feel 'special', then what is his technique, and how can that be transferred to team building on an every day basis within your own firm? Consider:

1. Energy: But not cheesy, and only if your entire aura/demeanor can get away with it
2. Compassion: Give the lone sheep of the group gentle kindness, without drawing attention to their potential deficiencies.

3. Universal humor: good-natured, not biting or sarcastic
4. Encourage movement: bio energetics (which is an interesting thought for a biz meeting)
5. Genuine concern for all participants

My point: leaders with a good attitude help to build a stronger team naturally. And for those of you leaders that are at the tippy-top, remember, no infighting and backstabbing! That behavior is far more obvious than you realize, especially to your middle managers. If your leadership team is dysfunctional, then you can be certain it will squelch any positive inroads you've made with team building throughout the firm.

Yes, there will be a Part III to Team building in tough times. Always welcome your emails.

17 **Scarlett Letter # 17 Part III - AEC team building in tough times: It also goes side-to-side**

Parts I and II of AEC team building in tough times spoke to **1.** productive, practical team building alternatives; **2**. a leader's attitude to keep team building on the forefront day to day.

This final entry on the topic is about how team building can be solidified side-to-side…meaning: connect your internal teams with one another. Often, we look at strengthening our teams on a micro level, with the folks that work directly with one another on a regular basis. But for big and small firms alike, there's also the bigger 'team' - the entire firm. What do you do to make sure that your teams jive with one another, for the greater good of the firm's vision and mission?
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My favorite 'solution' to intertwining multiple teams and creating empathy along with a solitary all-for-one attitude is a technique that Gilbane, Inc. employs.

Several years ago, I consulted on-site with Gilbane's Chicago office for three months. At that time, I discovered that the firm offers an amazing Gilbane University where continuing education is strongly encouraged for every single staff member. This is not uncommon for larger companies, yet Gilbane's is one of the best (ok, THE best) program that I have ever seen in the AEC industry. By the way, these classes are also offered to the firm's clients and subcontractors. Wow, talk about sticking power with their external relationships!

But there's more. Gilbane also has a process for which they would create empathy, respect, and a keen familiarity between departments. When a new professional is hired (any level: field superintendent, project manager, etc), their training process involves 'living' within the various departments of the firm before commencing with their 'actual' position. So, for example, there was a woman {Julie} who was helping the marketing department for a full time two week period during my consulting engagement. (Incidentally, my role was a unique one; I was responsible for guiding/coaching two brand new marketing coordinators during the Senior Marketing Director's maternity leave. Again, wow! A company that wanted to ensure proper orientation and career development for their marketing staff decides to hire an outside consultant rather than just 'make do').

So Julie helped with all things marketing — from proposal assemblies, to manning a table at an industry conference, to graphics and copy relating to direct mail and presentation pieces. Yes, it was just two weeks, but that's 10 business days of more connection, empathy, and relationship-building than she would have had otherwise with the firm's ever-so-important marketing team. Julie was also exposed/trained for two weeks in accounting, human resources, and IT. Am I allowed to say wow for a third time in this blog entry?

Why not consider something similar (perhaps on a smaller scale, but don't reduce it down to something meaningless) in your own firm? Even if you are a small boutique of just 20 people, there's no reason why you can't have technical folks shadow core-back-of-house roles and vice versa. It's good stuff, and it will indeed serve as a productive team building tool, side-to-side.

34 **Scarlett Letter #34: So how do you know one another? Diagramming your network. Part I of II**

When networking—professionally or socially—everyone always seems interested in knowing specifically how people know one another. And when you get asked the question, *"So, how do you know so-and-so?"* at a gathering, it's possible that your response might be: from….university; childhood; work; neighborhood; health club; recreational sports team; spiritual or religious group; and so on.

Yet, other times, your response might be: *"from another friend or work colleague."* From my personal experience of living in a very active urban community, there are many times when you might gain good friends or successful business connections through a friend of a friend. If you were to diagram the connections, you would likely discover that some of your strongest connections are actually closer to you than those people who connected you in the first place! At some point, our circles mesh, intertwine, unfold, and cross-over–between one another and between professional and personal. Our worlds of face-to-face-frequent-interaction become condensed–even in one of the largest cities in the country.

Why is this relevant to a business blog? Well, it's fun and inspiring for AEC leaders to educate your staff on how and why specific clients were won. {Notice I say client, rather than project, as that is the attitude we should always hold when thinking about new business}. I have a fairly forward-acting client that does exactly that by including 'how we won this client' into the agenda for their all-office quarterly meetings. A partner uses a flipchart to demonstrate in real-time how a specific client was won: who was involved; what was their role (buyer, influencer, informant); timing; and so forth. You can even share the origin of your relationship with the various players involved. For example, maybe one of the players was a vendor source that you've known for years, but never actually did any business with—proving that continuing to nurture contacts in your broader network can pay off in the longest run.

Diagramming contact connections as they relate to your client wins is a simple, yet motivational format to demonstrate the true value of connections to your staff. Stay tuned for Part II, which will discuss ideas to encourage staff to explore their personal networks for the benefit of your firm.

42 Scarlett Letter #42: Pecha Kucha–innovative presentation format for AEC professionals

Last week, I had the pleasure of talking with industry colleague Lira Luis at Chicago's 2009 Twestival. As we discussed the oral communications challenges of fellow professionals in the AEC industry, Lira shared with me her positive experiences involved with Pecha Kucha night.

In short, *Pecha Kucha* is Japanese for chit-chat and is a new way to present using PowerPoint. Presenters are allowed to use 20 slides, which are shown on screen for 20 seconds each. It equals a 6 minute, 40 second presentation. If you've ever sat through a boring presentation led by a rambling presenter who opts to read EXACTLY what is already on the screen, then you will find this format appealing. In particular, architects and other creatives who have a lot of imagery to share can greatly benefit from this limited, concise approach.

Just two weeks prior to my conversation with Lira, I had also spoken with another industry colleague, Christopher Parsons, the founder of KA Architecture. Dedicated to knowledge management in the AEC industry, Chris plans to launch his first KA Connect Conference in Chicago, March 2010. In part, his conference will be modeled after TED — a nonprofit devoted to "Ideas Worth Spreading" that started in 1984 as a conference bringing together people from three worlds: Technology, Education, and Design (TED). TED's agenda has included such prestigious speakers as Al Gore and Jane Goodall. Further, TED uses the Pecha Kucha approach as part of it's presentation format.

Let's face it. Many universities focusing on built environment and related-degree tracks continue to overlook the value of communications and business skills for our up-and-coming technical professionals. It's a shame, really, that something so valuable as presentation skills training is only an elective, at best, within even the most prestigious of U.S. design and engineering schools.

As such, our industry is in special need of honing and refining our skills in those areas…no matter what our age or level of experience. It's no wonder that savvy professionals like Chris and Lira are gravitating towards Pecha Kucha as a great tool in which to improve the quality and 'sticking power' of presentations.

44 Scarlett Letter #44: Behavioral interviewing technique—great application for sales/marketing, Part II

In the Scarlett Letter #43, I shared the merits of *behavioral interviewing*, along with the STAR technique for responding. To refresh your memory, 'behavioral interviewing' techniques follow the notion that 'past behaviors will predict future behaviors'. Therefore, depending upon how you have responded (or learned from) a situation in the past, it will most certainly paint a good picture of how you'll behave within similar situations in the future.

The beauty of behavioral interviewing is that responses within the STAR format (situation/task; action; result) are highly applicable to many scenarios beyond interviewing for a new professional position.

My clients prepare anecdotes in the STAR format that they can use during team interviews for actual projects. Think about it; when delivering a presentation, what most 'sticks' in the minds of the audience are the stories told. Ideally, your stories will be on-topic and in support of your important messages.

Think about how these claims work as stand-alones*: "Our firm considers your project to be the most important one in our office."* Or*, "We assure you that the team you see here will be the team that you will work with throughout the course of the project."* Or, *"Our quality control process and checks and balances in house are second-to-none."* Or, *"Our relationships with local government entities are solid and will make a positive impact on how this project fares from a schedule standpoint."*

Now, think about those same exact claims—which sound (in my opinion) empty and potentially careless—with an accompanying anecdote/story. Something concise, something where, hmm, perhaps you learn the situation, the task you were charged with, how you and your firm handled it , and the final result. Even if, mind you, the result was a learning experience as to what NOT to do next time!

Yet, when on the spot in a project interview, team members tend to let nerves take over, and even during the questions/answers section, they are not always able to recollect stories that would most support their claims.

See where I'm going with this? My suggestion (further elaborated in my article ***Nailing the Q&A Portion of the Interview***, published in ZweigWhite's AE Marketing Letter) is to prepare a some STARS far in advance of a formal project interview. Develop them as a firm, as a discipline, as a department, as a studio….and even advise individuals prepare a handful for themselves to help validate and describe their role on the project with solid 'proof/support'. This goes for the mid-level designer that may be partaking in the interview, to the project manager, and even up to the principal-in-charge. Your concise anecdotes, told in the STAR format, will stick, and will be far more credible and convincing for your prospect to select your firm for the next project!

In addition to using these to inspire succinct anecdotes during Q&A, you can also weave the stories into your formally prepared presentation as illustrations. Take a look at those behavioral interview questions again. Which of them might be concerns in your own clients' minds? Which ones could actually be re-framed to apply to a firm/team rather than an individual interviewing for a job? Use those questions as inspiration when preparing your arsenal of STARS.

Finally, keep in mind that once your firm's STARS are documented, they may also serve as ideal stories to include within your written marketing literature. One thing is certain, that format will keep your writing style tight, and might be a nice juxtaposition between the bulleted data and say, a project description.

50 Scarlett Letter #50: The Marketing Value to Low Staff Turnover, Part II

In Part I (Scarlett Letter #49), I placed an emphasis on why low turnover is a valuable marketing asset for any professional services firm. Now, as promised, I'll present some of Nagle Hartray's secrets to staff retention success over all of these years. I checked in with Joe Hirsch, Business Development Director; Don McKay, Principal; and Kristin Baker, Marketing. This is what they shared:

Nagle Hartray's Secrets to Low Turnover:

- Discipline to pursue only projects that staff would enjoy working on
- Cross pollination of design ideas, non-studio environment (e.g.: Healthcare, Education)

- Open and honest rapport across all levels of the organization
- Staff's communal desire (shared values) to 1) achieve design excellence and 2) consistently exceed client expectations-Cultural balance - between taking work very seriously and maintaining a loose office environment; enhanced by a multi-generational staff comprised of Silents, Boomers, X'ers and Millennials
- Co-worker respect among one another
- Better than average compensation package
- Atmosphere that promotes creativity
- Constant, but low-key mentoring
- Collaborative environment

Just because there is an excellent turnover rate does not mean that a firm does not also experience ups and downs. But here, in this example, something is going right at Nagle Hartray. Could it be that staff retention is what keeps them solid—surviving the various economic storms and world events during all these years?

It makes you wonder, doesn't it? Perhaps it makes you want to take another look at the turnover rate in your own firm. Is there something you could be doing better, for the sake of the individuals, the marketing efforts, and the firm's overall health?

52 **Scarlett Letter #52: Effective question to ask when networking**

I'm sure all of my readers have developed at least one (or more) elevator speeches over their career, yes? That said, the questions become **1.** how effective are they? **2.** how often are they used? **3.** how comfortable are you with using your elevator speech(es)? **4**. how must customizing are you able to do, spot-on, to suit the 'audience'/environment?

There are several schools of thought regarding the proper structure of an elevator speech. If requested, I will describe my favorites in a future post. But in the meantime, I recently heard a key question that I know would be perfect when exchanging elevator speeches and networking with new contacts in general.

My friend and AEC colleague Justin Roy does it again. This is not the first—and certainly won't be the last—time that I've mentioned him as a source of brilliance.

This time, I was involved in a networking situation where my contacts were getting to know one another for the first time. After some introductions and conversation, Justin asked a prudent, pointed question of his newfound contact: "What pain points might I hear people say that should make me think of your firm?" Or, he may have said it more like this: "When I'm out networking, what might I hear from others that should make me think to suggest your firm?"

However it's worded, its a great question for so many reasons.

There are times when we encounter someone in a networking situation. We like that person, but we have nothing to do with their industry, nor do we fully understand what their firm offers (even after it's explained to us). But, if we were to

recognize key expressions, words, pain points, bellyaches, etc. that should trigger the thought of another contact, then by all means it would be a great opportunity to connect good people with good people.

For example, if any of you were to hear the statement: *"Our firm really needs outside expert business development and marketing advice"* —-especially from an owner, principal, marketing/BD director, technical staff member, etc within an architectural, engineering, or construction firm, then obviously I hope you would think to suggest Scarlett Consulting.

But people rarely make blatant, direct statements as to the expertise they need. Instead, they are far more likely to be sharing goals, visions, concerns, challenges, obstacles, etc. relating to their firm.
So let's say that you hear someone say: *"We're looking to position ourselves for the economic upturn", or "Our firm wants to create a plan/approach for growth"*, or *"We've recently fallen short in our project interviews; something needs to*

improve", or *"We need to be more organized with our relationship-building/selling process and information sharing for team-selling"*….all of those comments are excellent opportunities for you to say: *"Hey, if you need some professional assistance, I'd like to connect you with Scarlett Consulting."*

So, that said, think about the things that your prospective clients might share with their colleagues/network. What comments might they make that are clearly opportunities for your firm to help? Write them down and keep them handy.

And equally important, in the spirit of helping others, make sure that you ask the same question of them. Whether they are in your business or not, this is a great way for you to log in your memory bank things to listen for on their behalf in the future.

56 **Scarlett Letter #56: When your firm has something 'new' and different…**

We are well into Q4 2009. Now is the time that most of you are (or should be!) developing your strategic plans for 2010. No doubt you are taking a hard look at your business to determine what you can do to be better, brighter, faster, more profitable.

Let's face it. It's exciting when your firm hits upon something new and different. Maybe it's a new service offering, or a new project approach, or a new technology that will offer great benefit to your clients.

Whatever the case, it's sometimes hard to discipline ourselves with the understanding that 'one size does not fit all'. Just because your firm offers something to one market (we'll use research facilities, as an example) does not mean that the same offerings and solutions will be even remotely relevant to another market (say, multi-family residential)—no matter what lengths you try to stretch the relevancy. (And believe me, we marketing types are pretty good at stretching!)

And yet, as business development professionals and firm leaders, we are jazzed when our company makes a strategic move to offer something new (and presumably better) to our clients. We want to be able to talk about it to pique the interest of others, and truly stick within their minds. And we know that we have to self-monitor to assure the proper message matches the proper audience.

I've written an article around this topic for December's issue of AE Rainmaker published by PSMJ: Give 'em something to talk about: Identifying value propositions so they will listen, and buy!

Excerpted from that article, these are the steps one should take when in this situation:

Direct pursuits of the new selling point:
1. Identify the ultimate, 'perfectly suited' client for the new service, approach, discipline, etc. Discuss if the selling point is more germane to a particular client type (industry) or a building type. This will help narrow and fine tune the field of prospects.

2. Identify the 'almost suited' clients using the same approach.

Indirect applications of the new selling point:
1. Examine your firm's current market focuses beyond those identified above. For each, what are their decision-making criteria when selecting a service provider? Verify your assumptions of their criteria with trusted clients in those markets.
2. Based on those criteria, are there elements of your new selling point that could be modified, borrowed, or otherwise have a positive impact on other clients and prospects?
3. If so, might your firm be willing to do some lower cost 'trial runs' with favorite clients to see if they see benefit. If so, you'll surely get testimonials to support any future claims that the new selling point is valuable, even if that particular client opts to buy a different service/approach/etc. from your firm.

As you come up with your brilliance for 2010 (which, let's hope goes beyond mere 'survival' for all of us), take care to match those ‘new’ offerings with the ‘right’ audience for successful buying results.

58 **Scarlett Letter #58: Help your network to help you! Request precise, simple steps.**

In this tough economy, our professional acquaintances sincerely want to help one another---more than ever! Whether your business is struggling for new business, or you are now unemployed, your professional friends (and personal friends too) really do want to help.

Simultaneously, those same individuals are making their own way during this economy. This means they are preoccupied about their own ability to survive and thrive.

Have you looked at your network and thought to yourself, "Gosh, I know so many good people. They say they want to help, but yet I don't see them acting on their intentions." If yes, then please understand that there is a reason for this. You need to help them to help you!

You have two options when you reach out to your network for lead-generation assistance:

1. You remind them of what you do--your value proposition, your target market (or target employers), your goals, your skill sets.

2.You tell them exactly what you'd like for them to do to help you. Example: "I know that you are on the Board of Directors of X&Z Association with Mr. ABC. I'd love the chance to work at ABC's company and it would be very helpful to meet him in person. Since you have offered to help, I would greatly appreciate if you would forward my resume to him, copying me, which will give him the heads up that I'd like to connect. Then I'll take it from there."

With *Option 1*, you might get lucky. Someone in your network may have full clarity around what you offer, and they may have you top-of-mind during their various daily activities. If so, then yes, they may devise ways to help you. But that's a tall order, when they have many other things on their mind, including their own livelihood.

With *Option 2*, you are not relying on the other person to 'create' or 'design' ways to help you. You are doing your own homework to figure out how they might truly be able to help, then you are giving them specific, likely benign steps. As a result, those people are able to help you, without a lot of extra effort. And that's perfect! Everyone is happy. Anything that those same people are able to do beyond that point to offer additional help can be considered a wonderful icing on the cake.

Think about the last time someone asked you for help. And how you truly did want to help them, but couldn't find the time to actually apply brainpower as to how you could help them. Option 2 is the solution; put it to work for better results!

59 **Scarlett Letter #59: Are you satisfied with your online reputation?**

When is the last time you did a vanity search to monitor your online reputation? {In short, vanity search means you search for your own name (or as more of a stretch, your company name) on the internet to see what pops up, and in what order.}

(Online) reputation management has become a true-blue industry. This comes in other similar iterations, such as Search Engine Reputation Management (SERM).

While firms in the AEC industry may have little to worry about at this juncture, all signs point to the fact that there will come a time when companies in our industry will also be highly (and I mean, highly) visible through electronic media.

But in the meantime, your personal brand is—and always will be—important to manage from the getgo.For some industries, it’s endearing to have a bit of personal life intertwined with business life. This makes you a human being–someone that people want to do business with, or buy from. It’s something that makes social media, well, social.

So first, acknowledge that it's ok to blur those lines to whatever degree you feel most comfortable. Next, make sure that you conduct yourself in such a way that—regardless of whether you are doing something personal or professional—you will not later regret your behavior/action, should you discover it's been recorded or mentioned online for all to see. Then, do regular monitoring of your online reputation. Put it in your calendar for a quarterly (or even monthly) review.

Finally, what to do if you are dissatisfied with how you or your firm are being represented? It depends upon the reason you are dissatisfied:

1. You are nowhere to be found—even when you type in your own name (and even when you go steps further to add in other facts such as where you reside and/or your company name).

In this case, you have to get yourself highly active and visible online by your own accord. See these articles for ideas and inspiration: *DEMYSTIFYING SOCIAL MEDIA, PART 1.What is it, and what makes sense for the AEC industry?* and *DEMYSTIFYING SOCIAL MEDIA, PART 2. The intent is simple: give value, get visibility.*

2. You are personally shown in a compromising light, or your firm has been bad-mouthed—and you wish that you could somehow erase the information, link, video, etc.

Unfortunately, it seems impossible to erase negative information that is posted to the internet. Google and other search engines index links/posts for infinity, as far as I am aware. So even if something has been 'deleted', it's still possible to view some or all of it in a cached version. So at that point, you need to take an approach to do damage control, if necessary, to counteract or overcome the impact of the negative online activity about you or your firm.

Online reputations. They're not just for kids anymore. It's real, and apparently, it's fairly permanent.

60 Scarlett Letter #60: Organizational involvement—What "grade" do you deserve?

There are three general buckets of organizations to which you can get involved:

Professional: Organizations where you gain continuing education, plus the opportunity to network with peer groups and potential business partners. In the AEC industry, these organizations are plentiful, including AIA, ACEC, SMPS, IFMA, BOMA, SDA, NSPE, ASCE, ALA, IIDA, SAME, AGC, SWE, ULI, CMAA, ICMPA, RIBA , NAIOP, DBIA, USGBC, CREW ….the list goes on and ON.

Non-profit: Organizations span the gamut—from cultural institutions, to philanthropic entities, to everything in between.

Some of these give you an opportunity to give back to the community or to people-in-need. Others give you exposure to like-minded people who have passions similar to your own (ie fine art; botany; symphony; opera; theater).

Social: Organizations where the primary purpose is centered around social connections and expanding one's personal life…though most certainly, these groups are also fantastic ways to do business networking as a secondary endeavor.

We all recognize that we gain benefits from these organizations based upon the level of attention that we are willing to dedicate to them. We know that it's best to join these groups at a board, committee, or special project level. Once we are active in a role, we are able to prove our own abilities in a myriad of ways: organizational skills, leadership traits, interpersonal relations, creativity, strategic thinking, etc.

Here's the cool thing. When you are actively involved, you are demonstrating (literally proving, rather than just stating an empty claim about your skill sets and value offerings) your talents in a subtle, but oh-so-powerful, way. You are showing people what you are made of (much like how people sometimes think that playing a round of golf will give you a feel for the person's sportsmanship and overall personality).

If people see your talents in an outside-of-work, extracurricular context, they are likely to:

1. Both respect and like you, period.

2. Want to do business with you.

3. Think of you before they think of others (top-of-mind).

4. Refer to you others with pleasure.

I have several personal success stories (plus the stories of colleagues) where scoring an 'A' in extracurricular involvement garnered highly fruitful professional rewards.

So my question for you, dear readers, is this: *What grade do you deserve for your extra curricular organizational involvement?* And second, *if you are dissatisfied with your self-grade, what are you going to do to improve it?*

64 **Scarlett Letter #64: Leaving voicemail can help when prospecting.**

Can voicemails actually help in the prospecting/selling process? In a word: absolutely.

So often people tell me that when they are trying to reach someone they've never met, they will hang up if they reach the person's voicemail. They then proceed to place repeated calls until finally a live person answers.

But voicemail does not have to be the enemy. There are workable options. In my experience, it's almost more effective if the first contact attempt involves voicemail. Why? When executed properly, voicemail is a great way to give someone the heads up regarding your name and your purpose. You could consider it a tiny form of 'branding'.

Think about it. The reasons AEC firms invest in visibility, strengthening name recognition, and emphasizing brand messages all revolves around one ultimate intention: to sell services. So, when calling a prospective client, it's so much easier if they already know something about your firm. But what if they don't? Well, a properly-executed voicemail can actually help out in that department.

Author and speaker Keith Ferrazi offers this quick tip relating to effective voicemail. He does omit one key aspect: 'pre-call planning'. By planning out what you will say and how you will say it—whether you reach someone on voicemail or live—

you're going to sound confident, sincere, and worthy of a call back. For the voicemail, say it out loud. Script it out if you'd like (provided you read it with proper conversational tone and inflection).

Here's an example of a core voicemail that I might leave this time of year: *"Good afternoon, {NAME}. My name is Anne Scarlett, president of Scarlett Consulting. We specialize in the AEC industry—by providing selling and marketing consulting services to help firms grow their businesses. As 2010 approaches, it's essential to position your firm for an imminent economic upturn. Is {NAME of FIRM} ready? Please return my call at your earliest convenience to discuss strategic planning options for your firm in Q1 2010. My number is 773.251.8132. Look forward to talking further by phone…or if it makes sense, in person."*

Now, I call this a 'core' voicemail because obviously if I had any contact to the person and/or if I could insert some content that reflects specific knowledge of the prospect or his company, then I would customize accordingly. Here, I've shared my name/role and my company's purpose (consulting services to help them grow their business). I've begun to create a sense of urgency (doing something in Q1–which is definitive, but still broad in the sense that it's a three-month window). I've suggested alternatives for a next step. Often I will set a phone appointment, with an official start/end time, along with phone meeting 'goals' that I send in advance by email. Naturally, it would be even more effective to meet in person, but perhaps it's in the best interest of all parties to 'meet' by phone first. As well, proposing both options allows the prospect to feel less pressure, and may make them more amenable to engaging in some level of conversation.

Because I am a female (studies have shown that females get more callbacks than males) and I have a decent phone voice, I do get some callbacks from my voicemails. But, If I do not get a callback after my first attempt, I call again within three to five business days. On the second attempt, I mention that I'm following up on the first attempt, and I name the date of that first voicemail message. If I still do not receive a return call, then I might call 1-3 more times without leaving a voicemail to see if I can catch the person live. Finally, I will make one final voicemail attempt (#3) in which I state that I'd really enjoy the chance to learn more about where their firm is in their strategic marketing planning efforts and to at least make a new industry contact. I let them know that it is my third and final attempt to reach out. (To assure them that I'm not a stalker and I respect their time). Often, if the voicemails were executed with sincerity, professionalism, clarity, and remained reasonably brief, then the prospect feels bad about all the attempts, and returns the call.

Give this a try, or feel free to send in your own ideas. Happy calling!

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