

The Art of Rainmaking: or how to attract more (and better) clients

Dr Clifford J Ferguson

<http://www.rainmakers.uk.com/>

David Mellor

Tell me a little about Rainmakers and how it came into being.

Dr Clifford J Ferguson

Many years ago when I first started working with Professional Service firms I noticed a small group who were exceedingly good at generating business or appeared to be exceptional leaders. The Americans called them Rainmakers. I started to study them and eventually this turned in serious research, which became the basis on my PhD. Strangely enough these people were very happy to share what they did and after I finished the research, we developed it into a programme for identifying rainmaker potential and the necessary mentoring and coaching required to develop this.

So in 2004 we started Rainmakers UK, helping individuals and firms to develop Rainmaker levels of business development and/or leadership in the people who had the potential.

David Mellor

What are the best Rainmakers good at, and what sets them apart from others?

Dr Clifford J Ferguson

In a nutshell they have huge amounts of 'awareness' or to use the shorthand Emotional Intelligence. They all have developed very active listening skills, they are also naturally curious, very systematic and methodical. They build relationships and become trusted advisors. What ultimately sets them apart is discipline - the discipline to follow-up.

David Mellor

Do you think the concept of "Trusted Advisor" is still valid in today's market?

Dr Clifford J Ferguson

Absolutely! I think the trusted advisor role is even more important today. In a recession everyone becomes more conservative, worried about the short-term and ensuring they do not make any mistakes which could cost them their jobs. Therefore people revert to doing business with people who they can trust to give them good advice and counselling rather than simply chasing for more work/fees.

David Mellor

I heard you say recently that customer satisfaction is now dead as an objective – can you explain why?

Dr Clifford J Ferguson

Yes, - it does help to get people's attention. My belief, as a consumer and through more research, is that people expect to be satisfied. Therefore we only notice bad service (and there is still plenty of that around) and exceptional service - we call this 'Client Delight'. Strangely enough, this does not have to be grand or expensive - it is often 'personal'. Let me give you a personal example. Unfortunately over the past couple of years I have had to have 5 procedures on my spine necessitating stays in hospital and general anaesthetics. Every time I get out of hospital my GP phones me to see how I am - that's creates (for me) Client Delight. Small action, very personal, but very effective and memorable.

David Mellor

How do you move from selling to people to making them want to buy from you?

Dr Clifford J Ferguson

It's all about building the relationship and being reliable, consistent and aware of the client's situation and issues. Building any relationship takes time and can only develop at the speed that BOTH parties are comfortable with. The Trusted Advisor never PUSHES the relationships building but helps the client make the right decisions for them. They also ensures that the client really understand the 'situation', problem and possible consequences before offering solutions.

David Mellor

Is there anything you would do differently if you were starting again?

Dr Clifford J Ferguson

Yes, I originally trained as a sports coach. When I first started out in business, I dropped those techniques and 'converted' to the recognised business coaching tools and techniques. Starting again, I would have adapted my sports coaching techniques for the business environment. Sports coaching is predominantly 'accentuating the positive' - (a technique we call feedforward) but a lot of business coaching techniques can be critical and may be negative feedback.

David Mellor

What are the "schoolboy howlers" you still see out there?

Dr Clifford J Ferguson

I think there are a couple:

1. Often when people are busy they concentrate almost exclusively on 'delivery' (getting the work done) and let their relationship building stall or decline by ignoring the client. When they 'surface' they expect the relationship to be where it was before.
2. When people have no work or fees they start to rush around 'selling' to anyone who will listen to them. Unfortunately this is normally quite transparent to the client and often looks extremely unattractive.

David Mellor

What are the three biggest lessons you have learned since you established Rainmakers?

Dr Clifford J Ferguson

1. You have to work extremely hard at seeing everything from the client viewpoint/perspective - things always look different from the opposite side of the desk.
2. We must always ensure that the client fully appreciates the problem before we offer any solutions.
3. Listening - real 'active listening' is critical. Listen for the 'message' as much or if not more than the 'words'.

David Mellor

What are your three top tips for those who are listening?

Dr Clifford J Ferguson

1. Work tirelessly at developing and maintaining your listening skills.
2. Develop a replicable approach (or process) for building relationships.
3. Never undertake any activity without having a follow-up action (or actions) already planned and in place.

David Mellor

And finally, a thought for the day?

Dr Clifford J Ferguson

You only need to be 1% better than your competition to get 100% of a deal! It's constantly adding the 1%'s that makes the difference.