Dear Colleagues:

One crucial trait for a project manager to have is the ability to see the final goal and relentlessly impel the project towards it. In a word, a good PM must demonstrate a sense of urgency. He or she must see the bigger picture, so that setbacks, rather than hampering a project, become just curves in the road.

A project manager must own the project. A strong PM needs an entrepreneurial spirit, and an ethos of service. He or she must understand what drives the client and develop a passion for the client's long-term business vision. More than anything else, that passion will fuel a PM's sense of urgency.

A second key trait for a good project manager is a built-in sense of organization. When you walk into a PM's office, you want to feel that person has a plan and is working it, that he or she has things under control. You want to see well-managed to-do lists, meeting schedules, and file systems. You want to feel the PM not only can deal with a crisis, but knows how to stay out of one.

Urgency and organization: in this economic climate, they are what you need to deliver projects on time, and on the money. If you can find someone with these traits, you've likely found a good project manager.

But where will you find these traits? The problem is, you can't train them. They have to come naturally—so look for the signs. When recruiting, seek prospects who have competed—in sports, on debating teams, even in bands. And find people who have served—in their communities, churches, or schools. Project managers serve their clients' needs and dreams. Make sure they fit the role.

Ask a prospect to show you how he or she plans a project. Does the person have experience in planning communications, risk management, personnel roles, and schedules? Will he or she be able to tell you if the project is on budget? How?

In truth, a project is nothing but one series of crises after another. You want an organized, motivated, inspired PM to answer the call.

Talk to you soon,

Frank A. Stasiowski, FAIA
Branching Out to Clients: How to get that stick out of the mud!

Want to get “unstuck” in your marketing approach and get your firm’s backlog booming? Consider the advice of Suzanne Lowe of Expertise Marketing (www.expertisemarketing.com). “To succeed,” says Lowe in the conclusion to her recent study “Becoming More Market Driven,” “professional service firm leaders must guide their firms to think about things differently from the status quo.”

The study, which found that AEC, environmental, consulting, and other firms were largely unwilling to take chances in building client relationships, contends that bold, creative marketing is as essential to your firm’s success as is your design service. The risk invested in such marketing, says the study, could bring measurable rewards. Conversely, the real danger is in not taking a chance. “Not pursuing new approaches to get closer to clients is itself an unacceptable risk,” the study says.

The study offers four marketing approaches for beating the competition:

1. **Look out.** Understand your clients and what makes them tick. This means research. What are your clients’ goals, values, and priorities? What makes them want to choose your firm? Says Lowe, “This will require firms to research more deeply and broadly the perceptions held about them, the attributes that clients and prospects find attractive, the decision criteria prospects use to select a professional service provider, and much more.”

   The study also suggests talking to clients about your competition. Ask your clients:
   - What are competitors saying about us?
   - How do their services compare to ours?
   - How does their service delivery compare to ours?
   - Ask the same questions of organizations for whom you have never worked. Compare the two sets of answers, then mine the results. “Use the information to develop new ways to uniquely market and sell your services, and to serve your clients differently,” the study recommends.

2. **Dig Deeper.** Use your databases for data mining. Lowe comments that “today’s database applications are most likely being underutilized as vehicles for capturing and sorting critical client or prospect information.” So beyond logging simple client contact data, develop online profiles that paint three-dimensional portraits of your clients. Gather knowledge about their businesses, their preferences, their likes and dislikes. Learn about legislative issues affecting their industries. Then, says Lowe, you can orient your service delivery to maximize the likes and minimize the dislikes. And you can develop new services that will answer their greater business needs. “Even though the term ‘data mining’ may sound unfamiliar,” says Lowe, “it can help firms dig deeper—beyond a simple contacts database—towards a more meaningful view of clients and their businesses.”

3. **Get cultured.** Look for ways to modify your firm’s culture to embrace more venturesome marketing methods. No need to stop using the methods that fit your current culture; but if you are to build a practice that clearly cares about its clients, tries to walk in their shoes, and reaps the rewards for doing so, then you might want to do a little “soul stretching”—for one thing by bringing in people who tend to take greater risks in building client relationships. Says Lowe, “Could your firm’s culture evolve into one that encourages more personal risk-taking, enjoys more personal accountability, and rewards people who successfully implement market driven methods? These are the cultures that our respondents told us are more effective in getting closer to the marketplace.”

4. **Break old habits.** If you want to get closer to clients, start doing things that will help you do that—and stop the things that don’t. In the words of a jazz sage, “Change the way you strut your stuff.”

   “We found too many firms implementing the well-known, less complex and, yes, less risky activities to get closer to clients,” says Lowe. “This simple stuff can indeed be habit-forming, but dangerous, especially if your competitors catch your firm asleep at the wheel.”

   As examples, the study suggests that adapting new performance measures could help you gauge how well your staff members build client relationships. Likewise, a change of location could bring your firm closer to its clients. Says Lowe, “Just the possibility of fostering new perspectives between itself and its clients should be enough for a firm to...break out of a less-than-client-sensitive habit.”