Clients Have One Thing in Common

Idea In Short

Stop blaming clients for not buying. The common denominator across every client engagement is you. Be generous, find willingness to pay, delight your current client, and build one hundred true fans over time.

Consultants Help Executives Succeed

Executives have enterprise-size problems and Fortune 500 budgets. Consultants understand the industry landscape, work cross-functionally, dig through messy data, prioritize recommendations, and help executives succeed. Professional services is a rewarding field most of the time.

The variety of clients is striking. Think about your last five clients. They differ in career lifecycle stage, tenure at employer, life demands, work experience, educational pedigree, mentors, leadership experience, and risk tolerance. Some want constant updates. Others want you to call only when dinner is ready. Consultants vary just as much as clients do.

Why Clients Are Not Buying

There are a dozen people with budget to hire you, yet sales are not coming in. The reasons are numerous and rarely about you directly. They may not realize they have a problem. They may not know you well enough. The pain may not be great enough, or the opportunity not juicy enough. They may be afraid.

Their last consultant team may have disappointed them. They may need to wait until next year. They may be too tactical with insufficient oxygen for strategic thinking. They may be new to the team and still waiting and watching. Or they simply cannot be bothered now. Any of these factors can stall a sale indefinitely.

Clients Do Not Care About Your Problems

People do not care. Your problem with sales, business development, or career path is not their problem. This truth becomes crystal clear with experience. Do not impose your expectations on potential clients. It is not their job to care about the stone in your shoe.

The revelation is liberating once you accept it. Instead of resenting clients for not buying, focus on what you control. The only constant across every client relationship is you.

You Be You

So what do your clients have in common? The answer is you. Your firm, your experience, your teams, your approach, your testimonials, your software, your implementation, your executive presence, your stories, your integrity, your differentiation, and your unfair advantage. Every client engagement reflects your brand and reputation.

This means the path to more sales runs through self-improvement, not client-blaming. Sharpen your differentiation. Deepen your expertise. Refine your approach. The clients who buy from you do so because of who you are and what you deliver, not because you pushed harder.

Be Generous

This principle draws from Seth Godin, Gary Vaynerchuk, Naval Ravikant, and David Maister. Be really good at your job and share advice, counsel, help, analyst reports, LinkedIn referrals, information, insights, and even your worries. Find ways to add value without constantly counting the score. Give a lot.

The zero-based idea is to ask what you are uniquely good at and how you can help. Think in terms of comparative advantage, the economic principle Adam Smith articulated. You need ABC, and you are really good at ABC. Find the intersection between what clients need and what you do better than anyone else, then give freely within that intersection.

Find Willingness to Pay

Talk to buyers. Being generous without expectation is essential, but if you want generosity to convert to sales, this is not randomly casting nets in the ocean. You need to identify who has budget, who cares enough to allocate some of it this year, and whether they lack the skills internally or need hands and legs to execute.

Ask whether the work is confidential and requires discreet treatment. These questions sharpen your targeting and prevent wasted effort on prospects who will never buy. Willingness to Pay (WTP) analysis is a structured approach to quantifying how much different clients would pay, and it helps consultants align pricing with perceived value 1.

Pricing Is an Art

Pricing in professional services is complex. It encompasses strategic positioning, value, competition, substitutes, trade-offs, Return on Investment (ROI), commercial excellence, revenue synergy, cross-selling, needs versus wants, segmentation, targeting, positioning, price discrimination, and market setting versus market taking. The depth is enormous.

Some potential clients will say no. Some will balk at your prices. Some will ask you to lower them, and sometimes you will. The response is to do more work, get more referrals, adjust prices and bill rates, and keep doing more work. One client confided in an authentic, mentor way that while the price was high, the right price usually hurts a little. Deep wisdom.

Good pricing nestles close to willingness to pay. The client gets what they want for slightly less than the maximum they might have refused. The consultant profits, does great work, feels professional, learns, and grows with the client. Customer Lifetime Value (CLV) in professional services is high when both sides feel the exchange is fair 2.

Delight Your Current Client

This is immediately actionable. You can crush your current project and help your client win right now. Your best future client is your current client. The relationship you already have is the most efficient path to new work, referrals, and expanded scope.

The challenge is execution. Sitting at your desk on a Saturday night, you may realize that current clients deserve an update email. Wisdom is taking your own advice. The gap between knowing what to do and actually doing it is where most consulting practices stall.

One Hundred True Fans

Kevin Kelly, futurist and founding editor of Wired magazine, argued that you only need 1,000 true fans to be successful in a connected world 3. A true fan is someone who will purchase anything you produce, drive 200 miles to see you speak, and set a Google alert for your name.

Professional services offers an advantage. The average selling price is high, and customer repeat business, when done correctly, is also high. Consultants do not need to catch a new client every week. This is not banner advertising on social media. This is not an endless series of first dates. Consultants may need only 100 true fans.

You need 100 people who will vouch for you, try your services, refer you to others, endorse your work, and brag about you to their bosses and peers. Two consulting partners can build a huge career and book of business with a few key clients. The mathematics of professional services make this possible.

This Takes Time

The hard part is patience. Consultants deliver results for clients in months, yet building a personal practice takes years. Collaborating with partners and principals, becoming known for two or three niche expertise areas, writing blog posts, creating podcast content, sitting on panels, creating benchmarking surveys, interpreting new legislation, training clients, helping people find jobs, and finding add-on work.

All of this compounds over time. The consultant who invests in generosity, pricing discipline, and client delight for five years will have a fundamentally different practice than one who chases transactions. Client lifetime value rewards those who play the long game.

- 1Umbrex
- 2Beaton Research and Consulting
- 3KK.org

Summary

Your best future client is your current client. Be generous without keeping score, price close to willingness to pay, and delight the work in front of you. Building a book of business takes years, not months. Start now.