CHAMBERS PIVOT INDUSTRIES
PRESENTS

AMALGAMATE

A MIX OF IDEAS FOR YOUR BUSINESS

WINTER 2015

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EL PRESIDENTE

DEDICATION

To Wilson, my favorite office mate

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Over the summer of 2015, while finishing my first novel, *The Legend of Mad Gringo*, I continued my work in the healthcare, finance, and professional services spaces, and I had the opportunity to attend a marketing convention for personal injury law firms. Fascinating stuff.

Here's what jumped out at me, across each of these areas, the strategies and tactics for growth looked very similar. As a matter of fact, if you had a blanket big enough, it would cover the strategies of publishing, healthcare, finance, consulting, and law firm marketing. Sure, some of the terms are different, but at their highest level, getting more clients to choose your offering over another firm, looks the exact same.

So why all the brain damage around business growth and achieving those strategic visions?

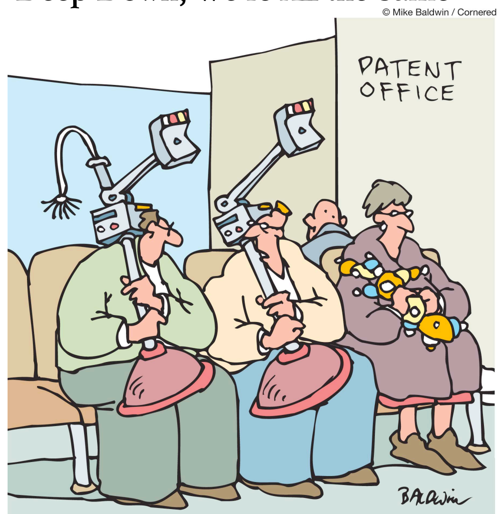
I think it comes down to execution. Getting your people to do those activities and use language they can live with. If they don't like how a tactic fits, they won't act on it. If it doesn't get done, nothing happens.

"A good plan violently executed now is better than a perfect plan executed next week," said General George S. Patton and that pretty much sums it up.

This edition of Amalgamate will focus on the idea of fit. The idea that discovering what your people are willing to do and helping them violently execute on those plans, leads to your unfair advantage.

BUSINESS STRATEGY

Deep Down, We're All the Same



"Mine does the exact same thing – but without the tassel."

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"My industry is different."

I hear this regularly in response to my advice. "That may work for them, but our industry/people/ prospects/offer is different."

That's true. That's why, ultimately, you have to make it work for your people. You have to make it fit.

Here's the thing, despite the rapid advances in technology, despite the increase in the flow of information, we, as human beings, haven't made similar advances in cognition.

My friend, Vince Guerra, is working on a book called *Wisdom Based Selling*. He has convinced me that my favorite sales and marketing practices are rooted in ancient Hebrew Proverbs. Suggesting, that despite advances in technology and information, our underlying human natures have not changed all that much. The Ancient's wisdom is still, stubbornly relevant today.

Decision making is what all business development comes down to. If we're helping our clients make good decisions, we are rewarded. Whether that's helping them solve a problem, helping them make better decisions, or showing them a new and better way for the future.

Let's apply it to the concept of fit. My idea that your people are at their best when they are executing strategies that they can live with, and are a fit for who they are. As the CEO, you provide the strategic vision of the future. From there you work backwards, setting markers for progress to the goal. At that level, strategy is the same.

Where industry differences show up, and where your firm separates from the competition, is deciding which tactics your team employs.

That is where fit shows separation. Where the differences show up. Going back to the first paragraph, it's not the process that's different, it's in your individuals and how they work in your industry.

This is why I fight the "this is how our industry does it" approach. Why I struggle with the "this is from the latest thought leader" tactical adoption. And it's why I hate hearing, "Well, we took a look at what Amazon was doing" in reference to their planning.

All of those approaches are hit or miss. Sometimes they work, and most of the time they don't. The reason? It all comes down to the people on your team doing the work. The best strategy and tactic, if your people don't execute on it, is worthless.

I want you to focus on approaches that your team will actually execute on. I want you to focus on strategies and tactics that feel natural to them.

"Actions give strength to ourselves," to paraphrase Plato. Ancient wisdom that still applies today.

Strategy and Planning are Different

Consider the term Strategic Planning as an oxymoron.

This was presented to me by Alan Weiss, PhD. in his book, *Best Laid Plans*. His point, strategy points you there and planning gets you there.

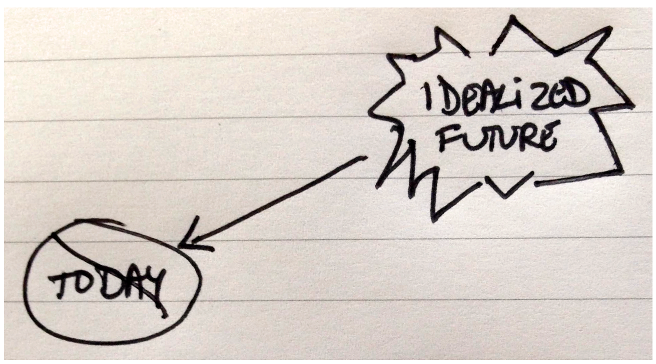
This fall I worked with five firms on strategy and I saw a striking similarity. If you split your strategic meeting from your planning meeting, a clearer action plan results.

Follow this model to get there.

In a strategic meeting, limit attendance to no more than three stakeholders. Regardless of how many partners you have, the strategic team needs to be small for this to work. Clarity of vision.

This meeting has one function: to develop a clear picture of where the firm will be in five years. Three years at the least. Sounds simple, but there’s a twist. Don’t consider today in this meeting. Free yourself from the burden of how things are and describe what you want.

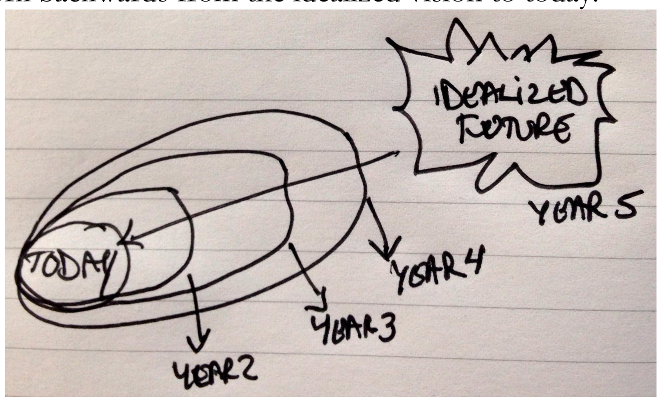
I call it the idealized future.



The facilitator listens for anything that smacks of "today" and sidelines those comments with a "let’s ignore that for now and focus on how it looks, sounds, tastes and smells like when we get there."

The reason for tabling the Present is that it limits growth. Consider sales projections that start with last year, add some for coming year (scaled back "just in case"). That number guides the second year (scaled back) which informs the third year (scaled back). That isn't strategy, that's planning. Get your leadership group to let go of the present and define the future.

Separately, the planning meeting brings all stakeholders together. The objective of this meeting is to work backwards from the idealized vision to today.



This meeting has more players in the room and due to debate, is more chaotic in nature. But one thing is not up for debate: the idealized future. The strategic objective.

The planning group works back from the idealized future. The facilitator focuses the group saying things like "we're not debating the goal. How do we make it happen?"

The facilitator starts at a point near the future and work back to today. “To get to year five, what do we need in place by year four. . .?"

Separate strategic planning meetings into two parts for clearer roles, responsibilities, and projections.

Good stuff.

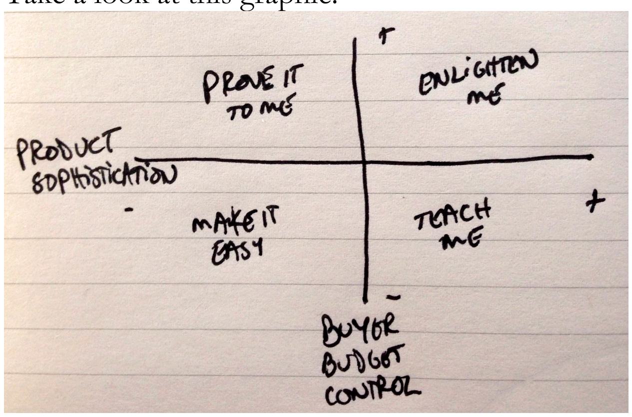
Assumed Knowledge

A wise friend listened to me explain a concept then reached out and stopped me from continuing. "Greg," he said, "after listening to you, I know what my wife means when she says I suffer from assumed knowledge syndrome. I have no idea what you're talking about."

I was reminded of this while attending a conference where I had no idea what people were talking about. Hanging around the vendor displays, each one advertised a special offering that promised to make life easier for a law practice. I listened to their conversations, but I couldn't discern the value, so I asked the lawyers in attendance. To my surprise, four out of the five said the exact same thing. "Greg, I couldn't tell you if I need that or not." (The other one avoided the vendor area.)

Those vendors had the perfect audience, the perfect offering, and yet, connections weren't being made. Why?

Take a look at this graphic.



On the X axis we have Product Sophistication ranging from simple to incredibly complex. On the Y axis we have Buyer Budget Control ranging from a rigid budget to be allocated to a flexible budget that can be prioritized.

That gives us four quadrants. Let's talk about them.

Bottom left is a product simple to implement and a buyer with an inflexible budget to allocate. To work with him, you need to demonstrate one thing, make it easy for him to purchase. Think Amazon, think office supplies.

Bottom right is a complex product but the target buyer is still allocating a rigid budget. To work with her, teach her how the product fills the need. Think of software as a service (SaaS) for bookkeepers. There's a budget, a need, so teach them how your product solves their problem.

Top left buyers can pull budget from anywhere if they think it will help fill a strategic vision. To work with him, you have to demonstrate one thing, that it will work. Think of HR reporting software. Straightforward, but is it enterprise compatible? HIPAA compliant? Satisfying union requirements? It's not about fitting a budget, it's about whether it fits and delivers.

Top right buyers can prioritize budget for your complex and customizable product. To work with her, enlighten her on what can be done. Think of consulting and advisory work. The buyer will find budget if they believe the product or service will get them to their goal. Your job is to enlighten them on a better way.

Going back to my law firm vendors, what was I hearing? I was hearing them sell complex products as simple. I was hearing them skirt the price questions of someone with a set budget. They shoved everyone into one quadrant.

The key to the quadrant idea is this: it's not your people who decide where the buyer belongs. It's the buyer that tells them. Their job is to discover it.

Don't assume knowledge. Let the buyer tell you which quadrant they're in. Find the fit.

BUSINESS PRACTICES THAT FIT

How Strong is Your FIT?

F.I.T. is my shorthand for your company's ability to Focus; its ability to cater to Individuals; and its ability to leverage technology and training Tools to grow.

Take 2 minutes and score yourself on this assessment:

	0 points	1 point	2 points	Score
Size of Leadership Team	No formal team	Four or more members	Two to four members	________
Specific goals and outcomes in place	None in place	Goals are in place	Our team knows goals and measured on progress	________
Management trained in character strengths	None	We test for strengths	We've invested practices and management based on strengths	________
Customer-Product Market Fit	Not formalized	We generate sales so there must be a fit	From customer interviews we know product/market fit	________
CRM, Analytics & Automation tools in place	None in place	We have CRM or Analytics	We have CRM, Analytics, metrics, and automation to leverage individuals	________
			Score	________

Here's an example of how I use it.

A firm calls with this problem, "Our proposal acceptance rate has dropped, can you help with that?"

Before I start, I run through the assessment. How many people are on your strategic leadership team, "All eight partners." That's a 1. I ask if all junior engineers can describe the firms goals and how they're measured. Silence, that's a 0. Do they use a character strengths assessment? No, 0 points. I ask them to describe why a customer chooses them, and I don't hear customer quotes, so I'll give them 1 point. Then I ask how they track early stage opportunities. If I don't hear "CRM", they get 0 points.

That adds up to 2 points total, and it tells me that their business development isn't set up to take advantage of their team's natural strengths. My guess, at this point, is the proposal is coming in too late in the decision making process and that explains the drop. They'll revert back to the mean and win the next series of proposals, but if they want to do better than that, they should work on F.I.T.

That's it. It's a simple and quick way to:

- diagnose a shortfall in results (solve a problem)
- improving daily decisions (framing tool)
- align the team with goals (strategy in daily activity)

Here's what the scoring means:

0-3 = Imprecise FIT. Your team is wearing a pair of shoes that are too small and not made for the outcomes you're after. Learn about FIT and introduce changes.

4-6 = Moderate FIT. Your team has the tools it needs. Focus on pulling everything together. The runway is lit, bring the plane in for a landing.

7-10 = Correct FIT. Sharpen the saw by revisiting areas where you excel and improving areas where there is a gap. FIT will drift if left unattended. Keep the skills up.

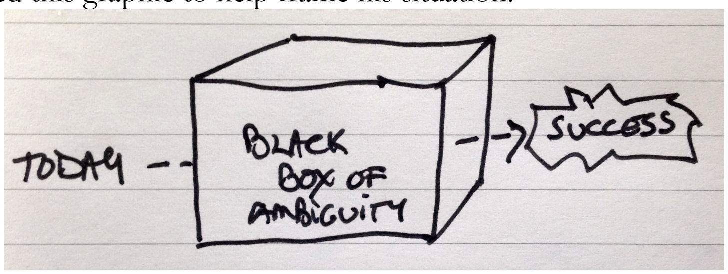
Good stuff.

Dealing with Ambiguity

"Here's what really bugged me about working there," he told me over beers at the tavern, "I needed more leadership. I wanted more from the top."

It's an interesting comment from a talented sales professional. The more I dug in, the more nuanced his comment became. He put it on leadership, but his problem was centered on the ambiguity related to growth.

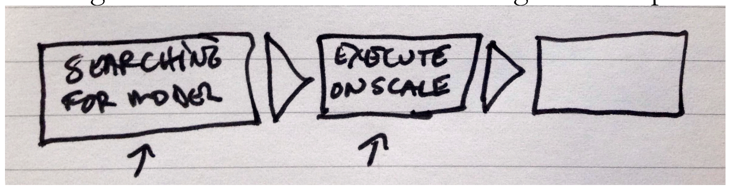
The sad part was this, he's dealing with the same things in his new role, just on a different playing field. I used this graphic to help frame his situation.



When the definition of success is clear, we expect to take the straightest path to get there. Reality is much more chaotic. I find that it helps to give these things a name, so I call it the black box of ambiguity.

The rep seemed satisfied and we moved on with the conversation but something was bothering me about my definition. Then the insight hit me, lack of visibility wasn't the only issue he was dealing with. The other was the stage of business he was in.

Businesses go through distinct stages. One is the startup phase, where a business is searching for a model, and another is the scalable stage, where the business knows the model and works on relentless execution. In the business he was in, there are multiple business units and each one was in a different stage of development even though the overall business was no longer a startup.



When I went back to their offices a few weeks later, I viewed it through a new lens. It was like a light switch had been flipped. The advice I was giving to the business as a whole did not fit with the story that each business unit being in a different stage of growth. So we set out re-framing how we approached each unit's growth plans.

For my friend's old business unit, we re-approached it as a startup. Labeling our imagined customer interactions as guesses to be tested, and looking for areas that will lead to the repetition we're looking for. Most importantly, we recognized that the metrics around sales and marketing effectiveness that we used for the organization as a whole were nearly worthless in this new environment. Startups, by their nature, require more business development investment than when the business is at scale.

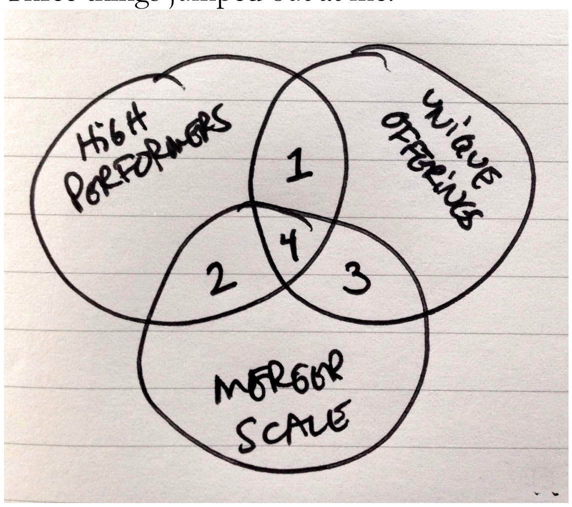
The results were immediate. In addition to better customer interactions, once the new idea spread within the organization, activities became clearer and budget frustrations evaporated. We still struggled with how we will make the future happen, but since our vision of the units maturity was clearer, we are more effective.

My main takeaway is this: What stage is your business in? Is it searching for a model? Or are you maximizing scale? Answer that and you'll power through the black box of ambiguity like a rocket.

Shooting Stars

I'm fascinated with why independent businesses merge or join forces with other businesses. The post-deal justifications of "more support, buying power, brand recognition, and training" don't always hold water. In my study of fit, I spent time discussing this with a friend in commercial real estate and a firm that owes its growth to mergers to learn about where that decision originates.

Three things jumped out at me:



The first is what I'll label High Performers. That describes both the idea that you want to work with high performing people, and the ability to attract future high performers to the company.

The second is what I'll call Merger Scale. That describes the idea of an accelerated value placed on firms of a certain size. Like my time in the apparel world. If the company was under $10MM in revenues, prices were in the 1X revenue range. However, if they were north of $50MM in revenue, the value of the company would jump to 2 or 3X revenues. Instant equity appreciation.

The third is what I'll call Unique Offerings. The alpha firm's attractiveness was attributed to their new and unique products. These could be internal, like systems or capital for growth, or external, like unique products that stand out in the marketplace.

For those firms that are looking to become the alpha firm and attract like minded organizations into your fold, you need all of these elements working together.

If you have High Performers and Unique Offerings, but are missing Merger Scale, you're what an At Risk firm. You attract and develop great people and provide your unique offerings, but since you don't have size and scale, instead of joining you, other firms copy your offers, steal your people, and leave you struggling.

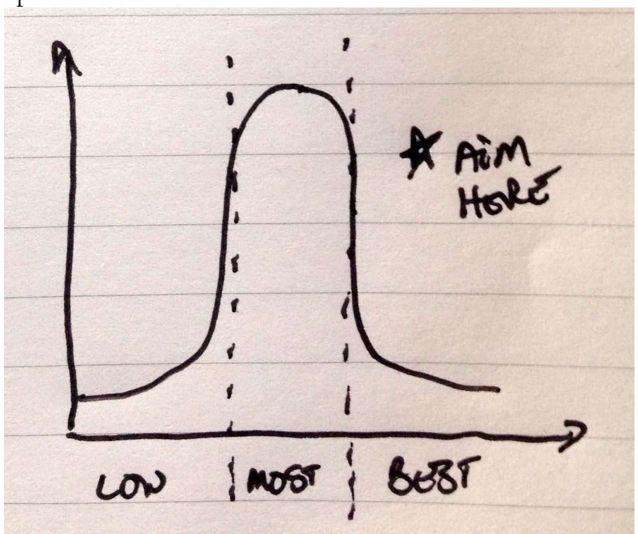
If you have High Performers and Merger Scale, but you're missing Unique Offerings, you're a Commodity. Firms that may want to join you will say, "Sure, they're big and they have great people, but they're doing the same thing we are," and they go it alone.

If you have Merger Scale and Unique Offerings, but you're missing High Performers, then you're short on bench strength. This is the most common scenario. It's hard to attract and retain the best and brightest. Without them, there's diminished exit potential because you rely too heavily on current staff. You're handcuffed.

It's only when you have all three areas working together that you become the Alpha fit. You attract excellent firms at a premium. Conversely, if you're looking to join a new firm or franchise that fits, evaluate them on these three areas before taking the plunge. Firms that excel in every facet are rare. Like a shooting star.

Aim Above the Mark

Consider this standard deviation representation of your prospects and clients.



In the middle, the bulk of the curve, you have most of your prospects and clients. On the right are the VIPs of your business, the best fit and highest fees, and on the left are the clients that you'd rather do without.

I use this standard deviation to illustrate a couple of points when it comes to branding and messaging. First, the market forms a gravitational force that is pulling your distribution to the left. What worked for your best clients yesterday, becomes the expectations for tomorrow.

Second, your marketing and sales efforts are more effective when you aim to the right of the bell. Let's dig into that a bit.

Your bell curve probably represents a snapshot of your current customers, but it doesn't represent any demographic or psychographic unity among prospects. When using customer profiles, there are rarely neat and tidy boxes to put customers in, so we paint with broad strokes. Our ten best customers generally share revenue and labor inputs, but they don't all look the same. For every best customer, there are hundreds, if not thousands of lookalikes spread throughout your database.

That reason is why I advise you to aim your messaging to the right of the curve. In what I call the Aspirational Zone.

Your messaging shouldn't reflect your prospects current state, but rather, their desired state. It's how you combat the gravitational pull of the market and your competition.

My clients usually respond with, "but Greg, my prospects are like X, and do Y, and want Z." I get it. I'm asking you to consider what you want for your best customers to look like, to do, and to want. That's the message you take to market.

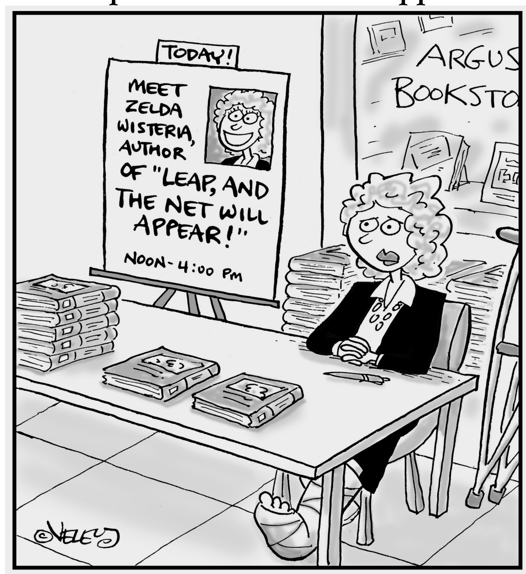
It's not going to turn all of your prospects into your best customers, but it is going to do something important. It's going to give them something to shoot for. You see, even your worst customers have desired outcomes. They aren't the worst customers for everyone. It's hard to believe, but your worst customer may be someone's best customer.

My point is that you should talk to that customer about the way life could be. Give them something to shoot for. If all you offer is a shined up version of what the market is already providing, what good are you?

Start describing your ideal customer and their ideal outcomes to everyone your team talks to. Fight the effects of market gravity. *Aim above the mark, to his the mark*, as Emerson says.

BUSINESS TACTICS

Leap and the Net Shall Appear



I deal with companies of all sizes, and it's easy to see that division heads in big companies find it easier to spend money than owners of small to mid-sized businesses (SMBs). Knowing this, some of my clients have moved away from SMB prospects, citing lack of revenues or lack of commitment as their reasons for doing so.

The problem isn't in the resources or commitment section of the SMB's brain, the problem is in the nature of their safety nets compared to division heads..

When I was buried deep inside a corporation I made a trade off with that company where they gave me a safety net and in return, I gave them value commensurate with my salary. That safety net muted the risk of my decisions.

Contrast that to my life as an entrepreneur. I struck out on my own to take a greater share of the value I generate in the economy. The flip side is that my safety net was now gone. If I fail to produce value, I fail to eat. Right or wrong, that's how it feels for SMBs.

Use this knowledge with your prospects and reframe their worst case scenario. Show them a new safety net.

Here's an example: One of my clients struggled with this objection, "I'm interested, but there's no guarantee it will work." To overcome this, my client created a smaller, introductory package but prospects still weren't buying.

I sat through presentations and had this insight. The prospect was on the same page when it came to understanding success, but they were miles apart on the worst case scenario. The difference between his SMB prospects and his corporate clients was the safety net.

We went to work on language that reframed the decision. We started talking about the worst case scenario. You see, the worst case in the prospect's mind was not only a loss investment, but a loss time, an unknowable loss of revenue, and somewhere in their brain was the loss of the business or other terrible things.

Logically, prospects know it's not likely, but since it's not addressed, that fear distorted their desire to a point where the best decision was a no decision.

Now we frame the safety net. What is the worst case if they say yes? What is the worst case if they say no?

Generally, the worst case is that twelve months from now, the prospect is in the same place as today. It's not an unrecoverable loss of revenue, or lost opportunity. If they wait to implement, they are going to be another year away from their desired outcomes.

If your SMB prospects buy into the upside of working with you, take time to explore what happens if they don't engage. In my client's case, that extra discussion point has increased close rates and improved his staff utilization. In other words, it went straight to his bottom line.

Recruiting Into A Bigger Bubble

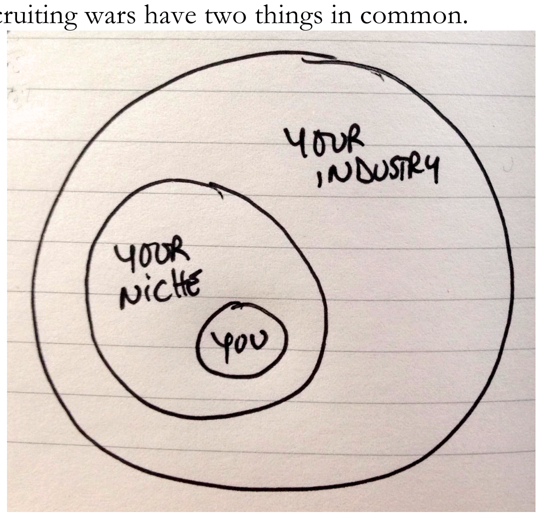
"When it came right down to it, I had the choice between [big name firm], and a boutique firm. The money was better at the boutique, but I decided my best bet is with [big name] because they offer status and prestige for the future."

How can I compete with that? He asked. I'd like to get them before they're brainwashed, but it's easier to wait and grab them a few years in, once the big wheel grinds them down and they find out the big firms aren't for them.

He paused for a minute. Greg, I know you have a few firms that recruit in the same space, how do they do it?

It's a great question. How does a small firm compete with the big firms for talent? How do they compete with the prestige, the development, the future employability?

From my point of view, the boutique firms that win the recruiting wars have two things in common.



First, they recruit into a space larger than their company.

Second, they sell the idea of polymath versus specialist.

Let's cover the first point. Recruiting into a space larger than the four walls of their company is the idea that you aren't just recruiting talent into your company, you're also recruiting them into your industry. That's what this graphic represents.

New graduates don't know what they don't know, so your job is to help them frame the decision. When they choose your small firm over a larger firm, they are joining more than a fast moving, boutique firm. They are going to be exposed to a greater percentage of the industry than they'll see at a bigger firm.

That ties into the second point. These winning boutique firms take time to sell the concept of polymath versus specialist. The nature of working for a big name firm is that the new graduate is going to be slugging it out on the lower rungs of the organization where the work is very specialized. It's fun to say "I worked on the Amazon deal," but when that included another two hundred and thirty of your co-workers, the truth is closer to "I'm pretty sure a monkey could have done what I did for 14 hours a day." That's specialist work. My successful recruiters are great at contrasting that with the work at their firms. They are on small teams and involved in more than running valuation research, right? It's the work of a generalist.

Does the future reward a specialist better than a generalist? That's the question to frame in the mind of your recruits.

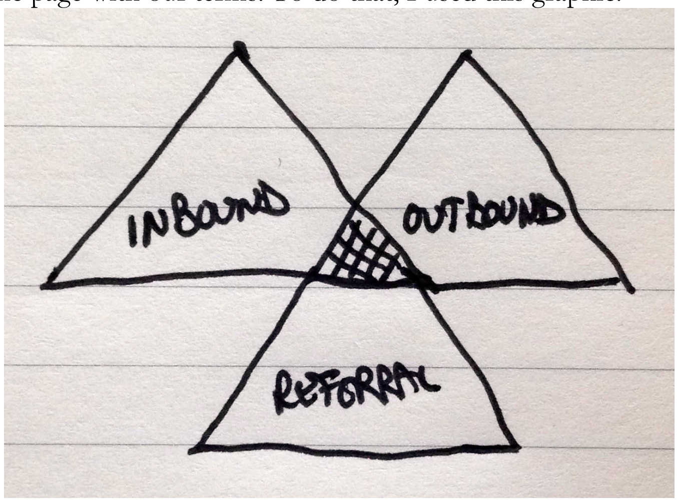
Working for a big firm out of the gate, doing your "two years" before getting into the good stuff, that has a limited downside today, but you can argue that specialists are more vulnerable to change in the future. Working in a boutique firm has higher risk up front because there's nowhere to hide, but after two years they will know enough about the industry to adapt to changes in the environment. Specialists are vulnerable, generalists are survivors.

Sell your best and brightest recruits on their future. A future that rewards a broader view of their chosen industry and development of a wide range of skills and experiences. Your firm is uniquely positioned for them to excel, if they're willing.

Lead Generation Expanded

When he called and asked if I could help his team with lead generation activities, I asked what prompted the call. He said they needed more leads because they were expanding and lead generation was something they always wanted to do more of. Wasn't that the kind of work I did?

It is, but my aim is to employ sales and marketing solutions that fit an organization, so the first thing to do was get on the same page with our terms. To do that, I used this graphic.



When my clients experience explosive growth, it comes from the combined improvement in lead generation from the three zones detailed in this graphic. Let's walk through them.

Inbound leads are when prospects call into your company inquiring about solutions. For most of us, being known well enough for warm prospects to reach out to us directly is akin to winning a small lottery. Especially in complex sales. Know that it happens in every industry and it's worth investigating.

Outbound leads meet a predetermined criteria and your sales and marketing team reach out to them. The adage, nothing happens until somebody sells something, works well in this space. Outbound leads drive most complex sales.

Referral leads come from existing prospects and customers. They are in-between the Inbound leads and Outbound leads because they are opportunities where we reach out to the prospect and leverage their relationship to our advantage.

The goal is to get these systems to work together and produce explosive growth. Let's see what happens if the systems are out of balance.

If your inbound and your outbound systems are working, but your referral leads are weak, you suffer from a high cost of sales. I say that because you're getting calls, you're making calls, but you're not taking advantage of the goodwill that your work is producing.

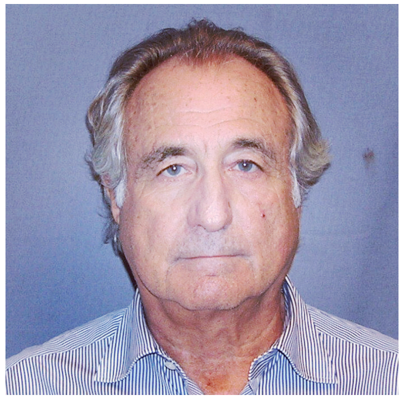
What if it's your outbound and your referral systems that are providing leads, but your inbound system is non-existent? At that point, I'd call your a best kept secret. Your work is outstanding but no one knows enough about it to pick up the phone and call.

Conversely, if you have an inbound engine and are getting referral leads but don't work on lists of prospects that share the traits of your best customers, you're suffering from what I call a low market penetration. There is business out there waiting for your solutions but you have to call them first.

It's only when you have all three of these systems working together, that you're set up for a series of explosive growth years that will strain your operation. That's a good problem to have.

Let's go back to my friend that asked for lead generation. Once we got on the same page with the different lead sources, it became clear that he was not penetrating his market in the manner he expected. We went to work on customer profiling and tapped his customer base to help us find the easiest prospects to start with. It was the best fit for him, because he didn't have anyone on the team ready to make calls into a cold market. By focusing on the activities his team was willing to do, sales momentum was instant and his growth continues.

The Power of Referrals



(U.S. Department of Justice photograph, 2009)

In business development, we value the power of referrals. The story of Bernie Madoff serves as a reminder of just how powerful they are.

In his 2009 Vanity Fair article, Mark Seal recounts how Carmen Dell'Orefice came to know Mr. Madoff.

> "On Valentine's Day 1994, after four months of dating, (Norman) Levy made what Carmen called his 'grandstand play' for her affection. He instructed her to meet him at the office of Bernard L. Madoff Investment Securities, in the Lipstick Building, the oval red-granite monolith at 53rd Street and Third Avenue designed by Philip Johnson and John Burgee. 'Bring your checkbook,' he said.
>
> …
>
> 'This is very special, what I am doing for you,' Levy told Carmen, indicating what an honor it was to be admitted into Bernie's exclusive fund, which, while usually not as high as other funds in an up market, never lost in a down market. Its 10 and 12 percent annual returns were totally dependable."

In this story, Madoff says little. Levy makes the sale.

> "'Bernie was quiet, not a storyteller, not a

conversationalist,' said Carmen. 'I often thought he was perhaps bored. He was just Bernie, pleasant and polite.'"
The power of referrals comes in Mark Seal's admission.

> "Sitting there in Carmen Dell'Orefice's Park Avenue bedroom, listening to this elegant, charming woman speak about the Bernie Madoff she had known before his Waterloo, I realized that her remembrance of him as a generally quiet, caring, devoted little man was the most damning testimony I had heard yet. I thought to myself, If a son could loot the fortune of his father, what would he do to a stranger?
>
> *In truth, I had been trying for months to invest money with Madoff.* (emphasis mine) As the stock market fell precipitously in the fall of 2008, I would hear my friends … gloat about the kindly Jewish uncle, the financial genius, who didn't just keep their money safe but paid dividends, while everyone else's portfolio plummeted by 40 percent. 'Bernie's gone to cash,' one said. 'Bernie's in Treasury bills,' said another. 'Thank God for Bernie!' said a third.
>
> "In November, I invited a friend and longtime Madoff investor to dinner and literally begged him to get me in. He listened politely, then shook his head slowly. 'Forget it,' he said. Bernie was closed; Bernie had a multi-million-dollar minimum; Bernie didn't need my money. His discouraging response only made me want Bernie all the more."

There is no more powerful call to action than someone you respect telling you to work with a particular partner.

I'm not suggesting you to use this power for evil, like Mr. Madoff so expertly did, but understand the power that third party endorsements from clients to prospects have on your business. That is the power of referrals.

What Has Happened, Will Happen

I was invited to sit in on an investment presentation, and found myself in a lavish boardroom at a table that could comfortably hold eighteen. The chairs were leather and chrome and on the far wall was a giant picture window of stained glass depicting a depression era agriculture scene, strong men and women doing backbreaking work for the benefit of others.

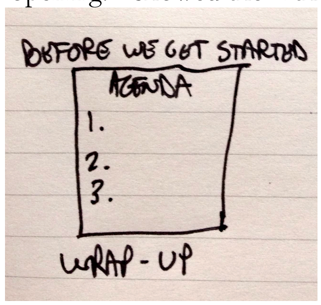
There were five of us in the meeting, the two fund managers, my client, her assistant and myself. The room dwarfed our needs and when the prospects entered twenty minutes late, they took up refuge in the middle of the table. It was uncomfortable. Brief introductions and small talk ensued. Ten minutes on common contacts and ten minutes on gentle sports. Then it was time for the meticulously prepared presentation folders. By page three, the tension was building because the hour time limit was approaching. A fund manager interrupted with questions, we flipped to the back of the folder and then it was time to go. Pleasantries and promises to follow up were exchanged and suddenly we were back out on the marble steps in front of the building.

Does that happen often, I ask. Was that a typical meeting?

That was worse than most, but yes, that happens a lot. I just wanted you to see what I'm dealing with. It's hard to raise money, and harder because I'm a woman.

I see, I said. Well, let's start somewhere and make sure the next one goes a little better because, like you said, it probably won't get much easier by itself.

Let's start with this thought, what has happened, will happen. History repeats itself, so let's use it to our advantage. Let's change one thing from this meeting to the next meeting - the opening. I showed them this small graphic.



Is that supposed to be an outline? She asked.

Yes, it's a simple memory device to help you get more from your meetings, even if they take up two-thirds of your time by being late and talking about the weather.

Your introduction and your closing are the keys. The introduction happens right when they walk in the room. You know why they're there, they know why you're there, acknowledge it and frame the meeting so everyone understands what's going to happen. It will sound like, "In the next forty minutes we're going to do x, y and z." If you have a printed agenda, it will help reinforce your objectives.

What about small talk? I don't want to be an android.

Good question, since you have the agenda, you can start with a prompt like, "So, before we get started. . ." to sound human., but small talk doesn't have to take twenty minutes.

If everyone knows what has to be covered, the small talk moves quickly and they want to get into the main points. Most people want to see lists completed. This is no different. Show them what you want to accomplish up front, frame it so there's time to talk, and then get to work.

Is that it, she asked?

Yes, it's what fits right now. It's a natural fit.

Chambers Pivot Industries Services

Small to mid-sized businesses hire me to help them create more revenue. I do that in a very particular way. I help them design sales and marketing practices they can live with. Practices that fit. That are a natural fit for who they are.

See, the problem most businesses that size have with growing revenue is this: They're using growth strategies that just don't consistently work for them, based on their size and goals and disposition.

Why don't their strategies work well? I've been doing this for many years, and I see at least three reasons:

One reason is that they're hemmed in by doing the same things that everyone else in their industry is doing, whether or not it fits them, and they can't break free. They do it like they've always done it but it's not giving them separation.

A second reason is the opposite of that, they are trying a new and shiny approach that is popular in the press. Like Fast Company or Inc. magazine. The challenge there is many shiny, new tactics are great for selling books, but aren't vetted in the real world.

The last reason is that they try to emulate what the big successful companies have done, without understanding that giant organizations are fundamentally different. Compared to a growing SMB, those companies have unlimited time and resources. They can make any approach work.

All three of those problems are examples of what I consider a "bad fit" – like wearing the wrong size shoes, it's un-natural and it may work, but it's keeping them from reaching their potential. Instead, I encourage companies to consider who they really are: humans, real people with strengths and weaknesses. I help them design practices that are a natural fit for them. I help them figure out what works best.

If your company's sales and marketing effort would benefit from learning about FIT, get in touch with me at http://www.chamberspivot.com

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REFERENCE MATERIAL

I encourage you to learn more from the authors and consultants referred to in this booklet.

Alan Weiss Ph.D can be found at
http://www.alanweiss.com

Vince Guerra's work can be found at
http://www.guerrastrategy.com

Mark Levy has been indispensible in helping me clarify my thinking and sharpening my writing. Find him at
http://www.levyinnovation.com

My website is http://www.chamberspivot.com and I keep a blog there that is updated each week. My new newsletter on FIT will be launching in early 2016.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Greg Chambers is the founder of the sales-and-marketing consultancy, Chambers Pivot Industries LLC.

He helps entrepreneurial companies create sales-and-marketing practices they can get excited about and are a perfect fit for their cultures.

Greg began his consultancy in 2012, and has worked with clients in nine industries, including ecommerce, finance, and healthcare. He coaches clients on how to build revenue through practices like online-and-offline lead generation, new market penetration, database marketing, and referral training.

Before opening his firm, Greg was a serial entrepreneur. He led the expansion of the cult apparel company, Mad Gringo, co-founded the lead generation company, GoLeads, and opened the Omaha and Lincoln Nebraska training centers for New Horizons Computer Learning Centers.

Greg is also a novelist. His thriller, *"The Legend of Mad Gringo,"* follows a Hawaiian shirt-wearing protagonist who quits his corporate job and is forced to do battle with "The System" and "The Syndicate."

Greg lives in Omaha with his wife, three children, two cats, and a dog.