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civil + structural ENGINEER

OF THE WORLD AROUND US

NEW VIEW OF AN ALASKAN ICON

2018 BEST TALL BUILDINGS
POSITIONING SMALL FIRMS FOR GROWTH
RAIL GRADE SEPARATION SYSTEM
LANDSCAPE RENOVATION AT THE ST. LOUIS ARCH





BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT IS FOR EVERYONE?

ENGINEERS THRIVE ON IDENTIFYING ISSUES
AND SOLVING THEM.

I AM FLYING BACK from Washington, D.C., where our team and I spent a week together in business development meetings. It was intense. My schedule was jam-packed every waking minute meeting with international development banks, federal agencies, architects, and engineering contractors.

At an international development bank, we met an officer who oversees establishment of global investment standards that include sustainability, resiliency, social and environmental impacts to human rights, and much more. It's an incredibly complex program that applies to all countries within the bank's global portfolio.

The deadline of the program is within one year. It is a big task. The officer is under so much time pressure that our meeting was scheduled for 15 minutes, and he speaks rapidly. I asked him what his biggest challenge is, and how we might help to solve it. He and his team are responsible for a huge range of issues, but obviously they are not experts on all of these issues. We quickly identified and articulated issues and potential solutions in our area of expertise: resiliency. We don't speak to what we don't know about but focus on our specific specialty.

As we discussed it, I saw his face light up — “light bulb moments.” He immediately gave us his team's contact information to continue the discussion in more detail. Will we get a contract for this activity? I have no idea, but one thing I know is that he was glad to hear our perspective and we were able to help him.

Soon after, we received an email from another D.C. client who we met over a lunch during our last trip here. A while back, we bid on a critical resiliency project together in Bangladesh, so we decided to get together for a lunch and a couple drinks to get to know each other better. We discovered that we complement each other well and learned about one another's values and ways of working, and what we each can bring to the table to serve our clients.

The email notified us that our team ranked No. 1 for a multiyear disaster risk reduction and resilience consultation program in Bangladesh! Because we got to know each other better, we have a good foundation to work together, even if remotely, to launch this exciting work. Relationship building matters.

Some say that engineers are too boring and not good at marketing. I disagree. To me, marketing/business development is to articulate a client's issues and try to solve them. And engineers are good at problem solving! The key is developing personal relationships and sometimes even a deeper friendship. It is fun. Here are my thoughts:

Frequency matters — You need to be at the right place at the right time with the right people. You can't really time this, so you need to be out there often.

Involve many — Engineers thrive on identifying issues and solving them and this is the basis of business development/marketing. Even young engineers can market to their counterparts in client organizations. Market within your comfort zone. This should not fall to just the principals. Frequency matters.

I love business development/marketing. I feel I am helping others by identifying issues and finding solutions. At the same time, I get to build a relationship and possibly a lasting friendship. Isn't it great?

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