



Keep it real.
**Be a better business developer by honoring the
human-to-human connection.**

By Anne Scarlett, first printed in the *AE Rainmaker - PSMJ*

The best compliment I ever received from a prospect was this: 'I truly enjoyed talking with you; you are so...real!' The timing of the compliment was excellent. Unknowingly, this prospect had shared his sentiment during a networking conference, directly within earshot of my firm's CEO. Shortly thereafter, we converted that prospect into a client-for-life!

Since then, it has been my goal to be deemed as 'real' within all contexts of my professional and personal life. What does 'real' mean, and why is it valuable to prospects, clients, and co-workers?

Let's start with the definition of business development. In its simplest form, it cannot be disputed that business development is, in fact, sales. A softer side of sales - a potentially more strategic and multi-faceted approach - but it is sales nonetheless. The stereotypical sales personality - aggressive, pushy, single-minded - is one that people within our service-based A/E/C industry guard against. Business developers often need to overcome the guarded perspectives by quickly establishing a comfort level and a true human-to-human connection. Otherwise, we are forever faced with the uphill battle of getting others to trust our intentions.

In the context of this article, what constitutes 'realness', and how can we best communicate in a manner that will make us truly connect, human-to-human?

Be accessible: Accessibility involves not just the literal sense of being available and responsive to phone calls, emails, and other outreach. It also means to be accessible in terms of communicating on a similar plane. For example, be selective when using industry jargon. Does your audience really understand what you are saying, or have you overwhelmed or intimidated them in an effort to impress?

Be empathetic: Often times, a client does not want to feel like he is alone. He wants to know that there are others who share problems similar to his own. Within your business development approach, shape your responses to remind clients that while their organization is certainly unique, the crux of their problem is something that you have previously witnessed (and resolved) for other clients.

Be humble: While we wish to be viewed as heroes and heroines to our clients, we are indeed human. Our firms will occasionally make mistakes, and we do what we can to resolve those errors in order to deliver the highest quality of services. Stating that you or your company will 'save the day' rarely communicates the message of 'realness'. Being (selectively) forthcoming will work to your advantage. Note: within your language, you should still emphasize the value that clients glean from your services, while simultaneously remaining down-to-earth.

Be giving: As business developers, we were taught to listen carefully and do only about one-third of the talking during dialogue with prospects. However, that one-third must be meaningful. Sometimes, when prospects are sharing their challenges, it is important to toss out something about you or your company, assuring them that you, too, are sharing information. Preferably, it will be anecdotes (rather than a sales pitch) that go beyond your promotional material. You may

offer advice for free. Don't make prospects feel they are baring their souls and getting nothing in return; upon reflection they may feel vulnerable or regretful for over-sharing.

If you seek to be 'real', then strive to eliminate any pretenses, ego-driven airs, and 'we're-always-right' attitudes. To assist in re-shaping your style, identify a role model that you consider 'real' – someone that is a natural at earning trust, and making others feel comfortable and connected. Study that person carefully. What works for them? What do they say or leave unsaid? What non-verbal cues do they use? What are their character traits and how are they exhibited to prospects and clients? Document your observations, and then use them as inspiration so that you, too, can be that 'real' person that clients seek to build relationships with, and award business to!