

Forget About Being Likable

A transcript of an interview of Doug Fletcher, co-author of *How Clients Buy: A Practical Guide to Business Development for Consulting and Professional Services*.

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Introduction

Respect and trust trump likability.

In this fifth of a series of interviews, Andi Baldwin of Profitable Ideas Exchange asked *How Clients Buy* co-author Doug Fletcher how the conventional wisdom regarding winning friends and influencing people is wrong when it comes to selling professional services. Doug's advice is to be yourself. Rather than striving to become more endearing to others, he suggests that we focus on the needs of our clients, delivering value, and being worthy of trust.

At the end of the day, with serious, weighty, real-world problems, we think that clients are going to hire people they respect and they trust more than people they like.

Clients don't need a BFF. They need competence and integrity. You are likable enough.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dave". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and a stylized "B" for "Bayless".

Dave Bayless, Co-founder of Human Scale Business

About the Authors

Tom McMakin and Doug Fletcher are practicing consultants who live the challenges addressed in their book.



Tom is CEO of Profitable Ideas Exchange (PIE), a leading provider of business development services for consulting and professional services firms. Previously, he held leadership positions in private equity and served as the chief operating officer of Great Harvest Bread Co, a multi-unit operator of bread stores. Tom is the author of *Bread and Butter*, a critically-acclaimed book that describes his work at Great Harvest and how he and his team created a nationally recognized corporate learning community and culture of best practices using collaborative networks. He has appeared on the pages of *Fast Company*, *Inc Magazine*, *Newsweek*, *Business Week*, and *The Wall Street Journal* and speaks widely. He is a graduate of Oberlin College and former Peace Corps Volunteer in Cameroon.



Doug currently splits his time between speaking/writing/coaching on the topic of business development in consulting and professional services and teaching at the Jake Jobs College of Business & Entrepreneurship at Montana State University. He also serves on the Board of Directors of The Beacon Group, a growth strategy consulting firm headquartered in Portland, Maine. Prior to that, he was co-founder and CEO of North Star Consulting Group, a technology-enabled consulting firm that specialized in global web-survey projects. Earlier in his professional life, Doug served as a consultant with the management consultancy, A.T. Kearney, and was trained at General Electric in its leadership development program. He is a graduate of Clemson University and has an MBA from the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business Administration.

Transcript

Andi Baldwin: Doug, it's considered common wisdom that clients buy from people they like. But in *How Clients Buy*, you take a different point of view on this. Can you explain to us why you think that the common wisdom is wrong?

Doug Fletcher: I think for forever, you know, 100 years—decades certainly—if we were given any advice as to how to be successful at selling our services, we were always told that clients hire people they like, right? When we wrote this book, we decided to look at it from the client's perspective rather than looking at it from the salesperson's perspective. We decided to look at it through the lens of the client.

What we came to was that, in the end, we don't think that clients actually buy or hire those that they like. They hire those that they respect and trust. At the end of the day, if there were a tie—a two or three-way tie—between equally capable service providers, maybe like is a tiebreaker. Maybe, someone hires someone that they're like, "I would prefer to work with Andi over Tom," or something like that. But, at the end of the day, with serious, weighty, real-world problems, we think that clients are going to hire people they respect and they trust more than people they like.

Andi: So what would you say to those, up-and-coming want-to-be-partners who have always been taught that clients buy from the people that they like?

Doug: First thing I would say is, forget about being likable. Most people are plenty likable, right? Just be yourself. Be human. Be caring. Be professional, but don't focus on being likable. Forget that common wisdom.

I would tell people to, first of all, focus on being the very best they can possibly be at the services they provide, which builds professional respect. Then, secondly, take really good care of your clients, and in every step of the way, because respect and trust trump likability. So, like is a tiebreaker, but we think that's not the number one

most important way in which clients hire.

Andi: So if clients don't, primarily, choose their professional service providers based upon like, how is it that they choose?

Doug: We say three things. Typically, clients—prospective clients—hire those that they know, respect, and trust or that come recommended by someone that they know, respect, and trust. So if you think about that, nowhere in those three is the term likability.

So, if you focus on, "Who do you know, and who you can help?" "What are you doing to build your professional credibility, your respect?" And think about your actions as they relate to having your clients' long-term best interests at heart. I think if you focus on those things, I think, at the end of day, that's how clients choose.



HOW CLIENTS BUY

The Real-World Guide to Selling Professional Services

A survival guide for every service professional, this book helps you up your game by schooling you in the secrets of finding, connecting with, and build lasting professional relationships with the clients you want and deserve.

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