

Cut 'Em Off At The Impasse

Winning Against an Equal Opponent

Picture this.

A narrow foot bridge across a great chasm, wide enough for only one person at a time to pass.

Two men of equal size meet in the middle, each intending to get to the other side.

"Let me pass," says one. "I'm very strong, and I'll smite you."

"I'm very strong, too," says the other. "I can smite you harder."

"I have a club and a knife," says one.

"I have a club and a knife as well," says the other.

"I have a sword."

"I have a sword, too,"

"I have gun."

"I, too, have a gun."

Impasse. Both equal in might, both equally armed. Who, then, wins? Why, the cleverer of the two. Perhaps the one who says, "Look over there," or, "Let's toss a coin." Or the one who is the more accomplished and artful swordsman.

The point is that in the professions, we are now like the two men on the bridge. We are all equally armed, with the same professional skills (or an inability to project superior professional skill), and most significantly, with the same marketing tools. The seminars. The articles. The brochures. The networking. The web site. The press release. Who wins the competitive battle, then?

- The one who best understands the market. The one who says, "I have a portion of my clientele in declining industries, a portion in static industries, a portion in emerging industries. I'll focus on getting clients in the emerging industries, and find ways to keep those in the other two."

- The one who understands the changing nature of the professions. The breakdown in the barriers between accounting and law. The expansion of professional services from accounting to consulting, from legal services to financing and business consulting, and so forth. The changing nature of the commercial world, and its new demands on the professions. The new technology, and what it really means. The emerging freedom from the billable hour, and the non-competitive fee.
- The one who understands positioning, and that it comes not from within the firm, but from the needs of the market, and that the firm exists to meet those needs.
- The one who really has the better professional skills, and keeps them honed, and can demonstrate them consistently.
- The one who is capable of understanding that traditional professional firm managing skills are no longer sufficient, because more is required of the professional firm manager than just collegiality, or longevity. Who understands that work must flow, and people must be motivated, and that productivity counts. Who understands that running a business is more than just accumulating fees at a greater rate than the fees are spent.
- The one who's marketing skills are better honed, better understood, more thoughtfully and imaginatively used.

In a world in which everybody has the same weapons and tools, this is the individual who is going to prevail. Make it a checklist.

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