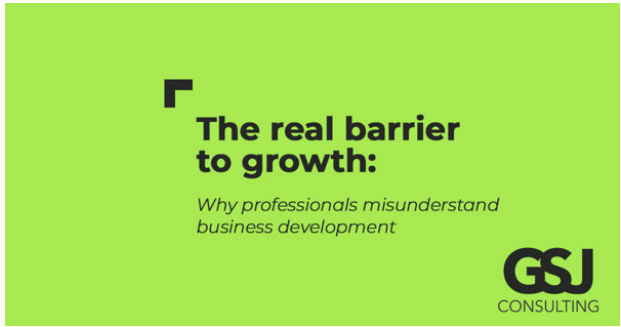




The real barrier to growth: why professionals misunderstand business development

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Almost every professional that I've met is very knowledgeable at what they do. But the truth is, most of them will never build a meaningful and sustainable practice.

The good news is that their growth struggles are typically not down to their expertise. Where they do struggle is in understanding where, and how, business development fits into the equation of running a successful practice.

The common definition of business development - and why is it wrong

Ask a room full of professionals what business development means to them and the answers are predictable:

Networking events

Pitching

Capability Statements

Newsletters

Coffee Meetings

While of all of these are valid activities; they are fundamentally misplaced in your [business development strategy](#).

Where growth actually happens

The truth about business development is this:

Work is rarely “won” at the proposal stage. It’s positioned long before it gets there.

Clients don’t suddenly decide who to trust when they issue an RFP or pick up the phone. They’ve already formed a view. They already know:

Who they’re comfortable working with.

Who understands their business.

Who has been visible, relevant and helpful over time.

Any proposal simply formalises a decision that has largely been made. Which means if your first meaningful interaction is at pitch stage, you’re already behind the 8-ball!

Business development starts before the opportunity exists

Real business development happens before there is anything to sell. It happens in the in-between moments:

When there is no immediate matter.

No active procurement process.

No defined scope of work.

This is where most professionals disengage and where the highest-value growth occurs.

Because, this is where you can build three things that will ultimately drive all future work:

Consistency: showing up regularly, not just when you need something.

Visibility: staying front of mind in a crowded and distracted market.

Relevance: demonstrating that you understand what matters to the client now and what will matter next.

Without these, you're invisible until it's too late.

The shift: from winning work to being chosen

Rainmakers who grow consistently operate from a different mindset. They don't focus on "winning" work. They focus on being the obvious choice before the work exists. That changes how they spend their time.

They:

Invest in relationships without an agenda.

Share insight before it's requested.

Stay close to clients' evolving challenges.

Create value in conversations, not just in delivery.

As a result, when an issue arises they are already in the frame.

In a nutshell

Most professionals focus their energy at the point where work is visible. But growth is decided much earlier: in the unseen moments where trust, familiarity and relevance are built.

That's the real barrier. Not a lack of effort. Nor a lack of skill. But a misunderstanding of where business development happens. Fix that, and everything downstream becomes easier. Ignore it, and growth will always feel harder than it should.

GSJ Consulting helps professional services firms build business development strategies around where growth is actually won. Get in touch to see what that could look like for your firm.

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