



Making Yourself Irreplaceable: The Power and Magic of the Reality- Check Conversation

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The greatest obstacle to discovery is not ignorance—it is the illusion of knowledge.

– Daniel J. Boorstin





My underlying assumptions

**Build your business around clients who NEED,
VALUE and can PAY WELL for your services**

ATTRACT clients; don't chase after them

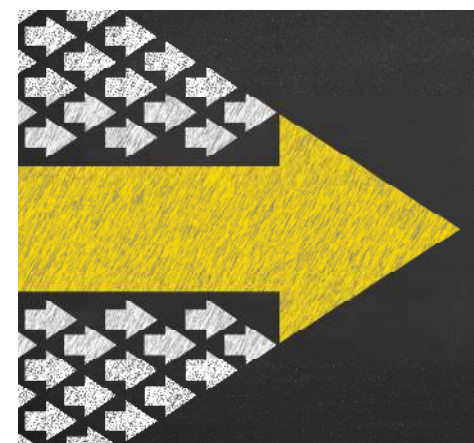
Clients pay you for OUTCOME, not ACTIVITY



Operational thinking (WHAT and HOW)

VS.

Customer-outcome thinking (WHY)





Reality-check conversation *myths*

This is a sales call. Impossible! You don't know what you're selling yet.

This can be an email interview. Nope! You discover the good stuff in a conversation.

One or two of these will be fine. Wrong! You need at least six conversations for a full market perspective.



How reality-check conversations work

Your goals:

To learn what you don't know about your market

To find out what they need, value and will pay well for

To understand their desired outcomes

Bonus: To find out where they'd hear about you



Your mission is to discover how people who expect to pay \$100+/hour for professional services describe their needs.



How reality-check conversations work

Your approach:

Open-ended questions, invitations to tell stories

Look for opportunities to be surprised

Challenge / validate your assumptions



How reality-check conversations work

ALWAYS find out the general size of their project budgets

So roughly what would you spend on this kind of project?

If they ask you about your business, deflect!

The reason I'm talking with people like you is to find out where I can make the most impact for my clients.



**"In the beginner's mind
there are many possibilities;
in the expert's mind
there are few."**

Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind



Who to have reality-check conversations with

People who represent your client base

At least 2 degrees of separation—not friends, former co-workers

Someone you meet at a networking event

Industry thought leader

Leader in your clients' professional association

LinkedIn connections

AND who you believe can pay you \$100+/hour



How do you set up these conversations?

ID what you have in common with each person

Send email [or LI InMail or voice mail—know your audience!] asking for 10-minute conversation

If no response, move on

If no response from 5 people, reevaluate your outreach



Hi, Robin:

I was intrigued by your service on the board of ASTC **{i.e., something you saw in that person's LinkedIn profile}**, which prompted me to reach out to you as someone who really understands this field.

I am in the beginning phase of a new business, and I am learning about what jury consultants **{i.e., people like this person}** are most concerned about. I value your perspective, and would really appreciate it if I could schedule a 10-minute conversation with you in the next few weeks to get your thoughts on the biggest concerns of jury consultants right now. Please let me know if there's a convenient time for me to give you a call.

I look forward to chatting with you.

Warm regards,

Mary Ellen

{my email and phone numbers, links to my LinkedIn profile and web site}



Conducting your reality-check conversations

Promise to only take 10-15 minutes, thank them for their time and insights

Have open-ended questions ready

What's your biggest goal for the next 6 months?

What's keeping you from that goal? What's frustrating you the most?

What would you pay someone to help you achieve that goal?



Reality-check conversations

Allow moments of silence

Use encouragers: "Can you say more about that?"

Ask the scary questions – "Roughly how much budget would you throw at that?"



Reality-check conversations

At the end of 15 minutes:

Thank them for their insights

"I've so enjoyed talking with you! *Who else do you know who I should talk with?*"

Write a thank-you note



After each conversation

Write down your ah-ha's and surprises, the budget

**Write down what the person NEEDS, VALUES and
WILL PAY YOU WELL for**

Move on to the next conversation

Conduct at least 6 successful conversations



REALITY-CHECK CONVERSATION Worksheet

Name of contact: _____

Job title, organization: _____

Date: _____

Initial questions:

Summary:

How does this person describe their biggest need that I can address?

How does this person describe the best outcome/deliverable?

What is the approximate budget range for this kind of outcome/deliverable?



WRAP UP

Questions about any aspects of reality-check conversations?

**What's one thing you're worried about at this point?
What will keep you from getting your reality-check conversations done?**



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Want to follow up with some individual coaching?

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[More at Reluctant-Entrepreneur.com](http://Reluctant-Entrepreneur.com)