You don't get what you deserve. You get what you negotiate.

I had the good fortune and good sense to attend AIIC's German Region sales workshop in the days prior to the AIIC Private Market Sector meeting in Cologne, Germany in July. With nary a Teutonic anything, save some ancestry, in my quiver, I was curious to see how well I would navigate the waters of ze fazerland.

Dylan Gandalf WESTFELDT.
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The German Region showed such strong - yes, you guessed it - organisation that I found the stay not just pleasant and informative, but also easy. Seamless. This would not be the only instance of the German Region members impressing me with their clean focus and effective drive.

German Region Council Member Angela Keil, member Klaus Ziegler, sales trainer Gunther Schlegel, and an exaltation of volunteer AIIC members and pre-candidates {providing fine, idiomatic German <> English interpretation (with AIIC subsidized booth and technician - ask and ye shall receive)} all joined forces to offer this 1.5 day long sales workshop. Oh, and Markus Kowsky provided a restaurant review that, beyond the valuable content, was a pleasure to read for its clean, charming travel guide language.

The meeting was filled (but not overly so) with instruction, included some role-playing, and offered abundant opportunity for brainstorming. In the end, and especially with participants so rich in talent and experience, the biggest success of a facilitator is and was to do just that: facilitate. The activities and exercises afforded us valuable exchanges that are easy for me to integrate into my interface with clients and colleagues, new and old. An example might best illustrate what magnificent fruit was born of our collective insight and acumen.

In one role-playing session, one group developed dialogues in which a client called an interpreter to inform of its need to cut costs. Egad! In another group, an interpreter called a client to inform of an increase in professional fees.

The business-minded maven of the first group were impressive. In one of their scenarios, the consultant interpreter, faced with the client's need to cut costs by 15%, determined that instead of accepting a drop in professional fees, which is what the client had in mind, the client could get the reduction sought by a combination of merging half-day sessions and providing enough advance notice to allow the consultant interpreter to arrange for cheaper airfare and even search for local interpreters, eliminating some travel expenses and per diems. Client got what they wanted and the consultant interpreter did not have to drop rates. Hats off.
The second group had a number of ideas on how to soften the blow of announcing a price increase to a client. Namely, start the conversation by asking the client for feedback on what went well that year and what could use some polishing, continue by informing the client of some new services that the consultant interpreter can offer (new language combinations, more or new equipment or better deals by volume on equipment, referrals on discount travel services, inter alia), and, if needed, offer a phasing in of the new fees schedule. One interpreter uses yearlong contracts that require year-end review, so the client is not broadsided by the price hike. Another sends a holiday greeting card announcing the price hike and merely goes ahead and bills the new rate, assuming silence to be consent. This interpreter claims to not have had any objection at any time to this technique.

While both scenarios brought to light helpful techniques for tricky situations, it was a merging of these two scenarios that, it occurs to me, reflected the true magic of the seminar's synergy. What would happen if a consultant interpreter brought these cost cutting ideas to the client? Would this not generate strong client loyalty? As for our point of contact at the client's office...they get to go to the boss and explain that, working closely with the consultant interpreter, they found a way to cut costs, they get a raise, or a free massage, and we're their new best friend. So, we've just saved the client 15%. Is this not the ideal time to hit them with a 10% increase in our professional fees? They could hardly say no. You're still saving them 5% and have shown them that you care about their bottom line. A win-win, methinks.

Many of the participants claimed to have signed on to the workshop in order to (further) develop tactics and, most particularly, the reflexes that we need to be nimble and effective in our negotiation. Our clients are given to reduce matters to a rather thin examination of cost. What can we do to address the matter of cost in way that highlights the myriad advantages of our product, and not merely the price tag? Indeed what are those advantages of our product? How do we get across to conference organisers that we are not the best line item in their budget on which to save? That we should perhaps be higher than the procurement of soft drinks on their to-do list? That we are the critical inch? These and others were the questions we sought to answer at the German Region's sales training event. We developed long lists of comparative advantages that we have as experienced members of a respected professional association. We developed "objection workarounds," which clearly have marital and parental applications.

Participants arrived and departed with varying amounts of tricks up their sleeves, but I think all would agree that we have a better understanding of the reflexes needed to negotiate those terms and conditions that allow us to provide the best possible product. We don't get what we deserve. We get what we negotiate.

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