

Chapter 1

The No Normal®

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Being patient until there is a “return to normal” or a “new normal” is like waiting for Godot. It’s a long play with no point. We have to act based on constant change created by a seismic shift in demographics, a historical tectonic change in technology, and constant adjustments in social mores. Besides, “normal” means “average” or “typical.” Is that who you want to be?

Gaining Conceptual Agreement

We often make the mistake of charging ahead looking for a “sale” instead of taking our time and creating *agreement on value*.

Alanism: Don’t try to “increase fees.” If you want higher fees, increase value.

Conceptual agreement is the focus on gaining buy-in—commitment—from an economic buyer by establishing:

Objectives: What business outcomes are to be gained by this relationship? This is never strictly internal, such as:

- Create alignment between departments
- Enhance communications flow
- Raise levels of empathy
- Maintain cordial relationships and avoid confrontation

These are all “HR”¹ kinds of objectives, which serve no business interest. Note that they can all be achieved without any demonstrable improvement in the business, and perhaps with actual declines in performance.

¹ Commonly referred to as “human resources,” I refer to them as “hardly relevant.”

Business-oriented outcomes would include:

- Decrease involuntary attrition
- Increase referral business
- Decrease labor intensity
- Improve cross-selling of products and services

All of those can be measured and can have monetized value attached to them. We'll get to that in a few minutes. For now, understand that something like "improve profit" has copious potential, because if you improve profit you can:

- Increase salaries and bonuses
- Retire debt
- Provide better investor ROI (return on investment)
- Improve facilities
- Make more hires
- Increase technology and automation

You get the idea. True business outcomes leave the business in far better shape if met, and exceeded. The "no normal" means that getting one's "ticket stamped" by attending training programs with no measurable effect on productivity or performance is gone with the dodo birds.

The next step in conceptual agreement is "*metrics*." These are measures of success along the way, and/or at completion. The buyer may have existing devices (turnover reports, monthly income, sales by product, average price or fee, and so forth). The buyer may not have such resources,

and will ask your opinion as to how to measure progress. This is still more value that you're providing (as well as the metrics for your own success).

Finally, we have "value." This is the actual benefit to the buyer. There are qualitative values (I no longer will have to play the role of "referee" for warring teams) and quantitative values (reducing attrition by five percent would save us an average of \$120,000 per person, five percent of 100 is five, times \$120,000 is \$600,000).

Guidelines for conceptual agreement:

1. Must be done with involvement of, and agreement from, the economic buyer.
2. Try to create three items of value for each objective to be met.
3. Try to monetize two-thirds of the total value statements.

Since you'll be assuring the buyer of a 10:1 ROI, you want to make the monetized value as significant as possible, but still conservative. If the buyer says the saving will be \$250,000–\$350,000, or five percent to eight percent, cite the \$250,000 and five percent to demonstrate you've taken the more conservative estimate each time.

Finally, on qualitative objectives, just ask, without a monetization attempt, about the value of getting home at dinner time, or seeing the kids' sports events, or alleviating stress, or better relationships with board members.

Alanism: Behind every professional objective is one or more personal objectives.

The No Normal means not discussing deliverables, or programs, or methodology, *but rather what you create to improve the buyer's position.*

Lean and Mean: Don't Feed the "Chicks"

Counterintuitively, if you want to move toward (and even beyond) seven figures, you want to be careful about *not* adding unnecessary overhead. Since I first began in the early 1990s writing about high-growth consulting strategies it's become apparent that adding staff tends to *decrease* revenues and margins.

Alanism: "Growth" is not the point, PROFITABLE growth is the point.

One of my all-star clients, who eventually sold her boutique consulting firm and is now playing golf, said in one of our small group meetings that she dreaded returning from traveling and finding all the "chicks" in the corporate nest chirping and waiting for her to regurgitate food. That was a visual never lost on anyone who heard it!

Even with the boutique firm owners I've coached, we focused on *reducing staff*, both professionally and personally. I've never known why someone who is making \$250,000 a year requires a \$30,000 virtual assistant! Have they failed to learn how to use a smartphone or a Filofax®? In most cases I've reduced staff for my clients from 30 to under 10, and often to zero.

But what about most of you, who are solo practitioners? How do you keep control of overhead, *which kills small practices?*

Vignette

When I was fired from the presidency of a consulting firm I told my wife I would never work for any moron who could fire me again. She said, "Okay, but you'd better get serious! What's the first thing you're going to do?"

"Rent an office," I said.

"Why?" she asked, "you're going to visit prospects to sell and clients to implement; they're not going to be coming to you. If I'm wrong about that, then we should discuss an office."

Forty years later, I've never had an office. My two kids went through private schools from pre-school through undergraduate.² Those two 17-year experiences cost about \$450,000, in total, which I paid out of cash flow. I calculated that a single office over that period, with rent, insurance, utilities, taxes, a secretary, repairs and so forth, would have cost, wait for it . . . about \$450,000!

Lean and mean is the way to go, *right into and through seven figures in revenue*. That's how you create *profitable* growth.

Here are some items and resources you don't need or should have on a "pay for play" (outsourced) basis:

- Bookkeeper paid by the hour
- Tax accountants paid by the hour
- Legal help paid by the hour

²My wife and I are public school graduates through undergraduate school, but conditions have certainly changed today.

- Answering service rather than part-time assistants
- Use American Express as your travel agent
- Use a franchise printer who prints on demand
- Use AI or a student to create your art work
- Use automated schedulers
- Keep your software and hardware simple—you don't need three cameras and seven lights for Zoom
- Don't chase shiny objects; you don't need every new iPhone

Don't allow your ego to determine your overhead. One mistake I made was to call my legal structure "Summit Consulting Group, Inc." with the intent of demonstrating "heft." When people asked how many were in the "group," I tap danced inanely talking about subcontractors and part-timers, which is like telling GM you know the auto business because you drive a car.

Don't rationalize growth with numbers of people. What really matters is your *brand power*, which we'll talk about later.

Vignette

I had a client named Phil who had four employees whom he strived to keep busy delivering projects. Phil traveled 80 percent of the time, often on weekends. He was the rain-maker for the implementers, and taking far less out of his company for his family than he should have.

At one point I hadn't heard from him in a month, so I called, and his wife told me that he had died of a heart attack alone in a Marriott Hotel in another city.

You won't get rich working for someone else and you won't get rich with people working for you.

Alanism: True wealth is discretionary time.

Scalability

One of the most significant advantages of the internet and AI is the ability to quickly scale your operation, *without* resorting to more people and expense. For our purposes, let's define "scalability" as the capacity to leverage more contacts with more buyers.

For most of you reading this, your key marketing challenge isn't lack of market need, or competence, or passion, which are illustrated in Figure 1.1:

Market Need: Our ability to identify or, even better, *create* need and not merely satisfy "wants" for clients and prospects.

Competence: Our ability to meet those needs and fulfill client expectations.

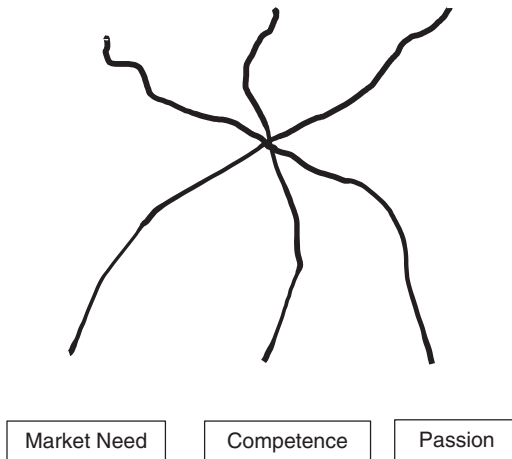


Figure 1.1 Three Dynamics in Marketing

Passion: Our deep belief in our “calling” and our satisfaction in helping clients.

Our brand occurs where those three dynamics intersect.

Alanism: A brand is how people think about you when you're not around.

If you have market need and passion, but not much competence, the competition will beat you.

If you have passion and competence, but no market need, no one wants to hear your story.

And if you have market need and competence, but no passion, you have a nine-to-five job.

Alanism: A lot of you left the corporate world to go out on your own, and now you have a worse boss.

But most of you know this and are pretty damn good at it. (This isn't the typical “self-help” book that assumes the readers are somehow “damaged”!)

However, what you do lack is a marketing list! Most of you, no matter how long in the business, don't have a sufficient number of people to contact in your particular “public square.”

When I refer to your public square, I mean the places, real and virtual, where your ideal buyers can be found. That may involve where they hang out, what they attend, what they read, what they hear, and who their peers are, among other factors.

Consequently, to economically and effectively scale your business you must use others to leverage your presence in your particular “public square.”³

³For reference, most people who don't know me won't have heard of me. But if you're in consulting, it's impossible *not* to know who I am because my brand is so strong and I reach people globally in the profession in all media.

You need to have at least 10,000 names on your mailing list. Followers on social media really don't matter because there's no intimate connection, some people merely "collect" followers, and you can't pay the mortgage with numbers of "likes."

So:

1. Find people who have huge lists and make their acquaintance. Offer to promote their services, or new book, or next workshop on your lists and with your social media contacts. Create some obligation and possibility of reciprocity.
2. If you're promoting products and services to make money, *be generous* in your royalties or commissions. Offer them 50 percent for themselves or a 50 percent discount for their referral customers. (Don't offer both!) After all, you would have zero business otherwise, so half of something is better than all of nothing.
3. Meticulously build your lists as you meet people *but triage your lists*. That triage should be:
 - a. Probable buyers and/or recommenders
 - b. Uncertain; requires further investigation
 - c. Definitely neither buyers nor recommenders

People often ask me what I consider to be my biggest professional mistake, and it was undoubtedly not keeping enough names of people whom I met. Even before computers, I certainly could have kept the names in my notebooks.

It's as "easy" as that: The quality of your message, the power of your help, the passion you possess *are all undermined when too few people receive your message and know what you're offering and can evaluate how you can help them.*

4. The final scalability source is, wait for it . . . *evangelism*. The first viral marketer was St. Paul. He traveled to Corinth, Antioch, Rome, Galatia, Macedonia, and so forth, and in each place told a hundred people to go find ten others and spread the Word. This is how Christianity grew from 12 Disciples to tens of millions in a relatively short time.

Today, *you must hold live and remote events that introduce your clients and prospects to one another. There is nothing as positive for marketing and scalability as a delighted client talking to a peer who is your prospect.*

Vignette

I once ran Consulting Conventions that drew about 150 people and generated about \$90,000 in revenue. However, paying for the venue, guest speakers, audio/video crews, meals, and so forth used most of that revenue. I made about \$90,000 in profit, however, from the spin-off business of my current clients convincing non-clients in the halls, at meals, and over drinks about how much I could do for them. And you can create such opportunities without spending much at all on an ongoing basis if you simply focus on doing so.

Thus, if you want to grow your business and scale dramatically, don't increase offerings or staff—*increase scale*.

The Remote (Seven-Figure) Consultant

Since my earlier books (even most recent books) one of the greatest changes in reaching seven figures is to embrace remote work. When I (and some of you) began in this profession we had a telephone answering service and maybe voicemail, and we flew all over the place. At this writing I have 4,100,000 air miles, many of which were on airlines that are long gone. From 1994 to 1997, I averaged about 170,000 miles a year in the air. In 2024, I flew 24,000, including vacations.

Let me say before I go further that I still favor getting on a plane or into a car and seeing a buyer in person if:

- They promise one hour of their time, because (as I'll explain later on) I can close on a proposal being created and considered within one hour.
- I've *guaranteed* this is a buyer, by asking if they can approve a project in excess of \$100,000 and by looking them up on the internet.
- I can do some homework about their business, industry/profession, and marketplace.

The advantages of remote work are obvious, in terms of less “wear and tear,” more flexible meeting times, far less money invested, and easy rescheduling. However,

while I'm advocating remote sales and implementation, I need to stress some negatives:

- You are in 2D and not 3D and you're not easily observing the environment, non-verbal behavior, and if other people are present.
- You cannot share a meal or even coffee, nor can you change positions or walk around the office.
- You can't observe others.

Vignette

I once met with an insurance vice president who showed me around the entire floor of his claims division. I found people looking at me oddly. When we reached his office and he excused himself to return an urgent call, I asked his secretary why people were staring at me.

"Oh, it's not you," she said, "it's him. They never see him outside of his office."

- You can't work easily with small teams from the larger group; Zoom's "rooms" notwithstanding.
- Technical problems can derail what was once a promising meeting.

With those caveats, here is how remote work can best lend itself to your marketing remotely:

- Preliminary sales meetings. I would always want to meet any major buyer in person for a project or advisory work discussion (as opposed to a speech or

workshop), but as a preliminary tool to qualify the buyer and “break the ice” Zoom is ideal.⁴

- Follow up on actual live meetings to find out about acceptance of a proposal, or next steps, and so forth.
- Interviewing stakeholders who will be involved in the project, especially if they are geographically disbursed.
- Periodic contact with the participants and, most importantly, the buyer.
- For coaching and advisory work, unrestricted access (within the bounds of time zone changes and so forth).
- Gaining referrals from the buyer, and others.
- Passive income in terms of books, manuals, individual coaching, videos, audio, newsletters, and so forth.
- Passive income via platforms of courses, purchased by a company or by individuals, which require no participation after creation from you. (My passive platforms and my AI platform are purchased and accessed daily, currently by people from more than 60 countries. And while my books are in 15 languages, my AI: Alan Intelligence® platform can answer questions in more than 100 languages.)

My suggestion is to always bear in mind John Naisbitt’s “high tech/high touch” admonition.⁵ Use remote and passive platforms when high touch isn’t needed, AI when

⁴When I say “Zoom” I mean any platform like it that may succeed it. A lot of people can’t even remember Skype.

⁵Warner Books, 1982.

higher touch is needed, and live interaction when you need to maximize high touch—gain referrals, expand the existing business, deal with project problems, and see things for yourself, first-hand, not filtered through clients' eyes.

We've discussed in this first chapter the No Normal I promised. The techniques are like flotation devices or oxygen masks, designed to keep you afloat and/or breathing no matter how high or volatile the surroundings. And just like those airplane safety warnings, put on your own mask first before you try to help others. Helping yourself will allow you to better help clients.