

What Motivates You?

By Andrew Sobel

During the last ten years I have interviewed hundreds of highly successful professional advisors. These are individuals who have performed at the highest possible level as trusted advisors to their clients. One common denominator of nearly all of these extraordinary professionals is that they pursued their careers with a well-developed sense of mission and purpose. If you have some time for reflection during August, you might want to consider how you would describe your own professional purpose. We all need to pay the bills, but I doubt that “making money” is number one on your list—so what is?

In my three books on client relationships I have written about a number of famous advisors in history. They all had clear missions—for example:

- Sir Thomas More, chief advisor to King Henry VIII: fulfilling God’s work in this life.
- Niccolò Machiavelli, author of the famous guidebook for rulers, *The Prince*: Creating a stable, unified Italian state that could survive the political turmoil of 16th-century Europe.
- The famous financier J. P. Morgan: establishing an orderly financial system in the absence of regulatory agencies and to deal with frequent economic crises.
- Gertrude Bell, an Englishwoman who was one of the world’s leading experts on the Middle East during the early 20th century and also chief advisor to King Faisal of Iraq: To promulgate an understanding of the Arab world among Westerners and ensure peaceful cohabitation of the Iraqis and the British.
- General George Marshall, Army chief of staff during World War II and later secretary of state: Create a professional, respected U.S. Army founded on principles of excellence, efficiency, compassion, and hard work; later, his mission became no less than ensuring that the U.S. kept the world safe for democracy.

For most of us, our personal missions are perhaps more down-to-earth but no less sincere, sacred, and important to us. When I ask great professionals what drives them in their careers, they respond with phrases such as “making a difference to my clients’ business,” “enriching management practice through my ideas,” “being a teacher—teaching and explaining the importance of people’s rights,” “educating managers so they lead more successful, effective lives,” or simply, “practicing excellence in everything I do.”

Fred Brown, who descends from the famed Brown Brothers Harriman banking family, is an example of an extraordinary advisor who has a clear mission that drives his daily behavior. A highly successful personal financial consultant, Brown has authored several books on financial management. For years he has written a weekly newspaper column entitled “Money and Spirit,” and he has a waiting list of clients. He could well afford a trophy house and late-model luxury cars, but his small, modest home and his utilitarian Subaru suit him just fine—he prefers to live his values of moderation and balance rather than flaunt his achievements through flashy possessions. Using a powerful, unique approach to financial management that blends cutting-edge financial expertise with a deep understanding of each client’s personal, familial, professional, and spiritual life, Brown has developed an intensely loyal following of individuals and families who come back to him year after year.

Brown charges an hourly rate that is a fraction of what the market could bear—but this is a conscious choice he has made that is consistent with his mission of helping people lead better lives through improved financial management. “By charging what I do,” Brown tells us, “I am able to serve a very broad clientele—I get the millionaires but also people who are scraping by and desperately need help just to survive.”

The opposite of a mission orientation is the strictly material orientation. Your main focus becomes money, title, promotion, or publicity. When a professional has no sense of mission, he or she risks becoming a mercenary—someone that Machiavelli cautioned against five hundred years ago when he wrote, “Mercenaries are disunited, thirsty for power, undisciplined, and disloyal.” Machiavelli urged the creation of national militias—citizens’ armies with an overriding purpose and an intense loyalty to their home state—a revolutionary concept at the time but now the accepted norm.

The author Victor Frankl, who survived the Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz during World War II, wrote that “Nothing is more likely to help a person overcome or endure troubles than the consciousness of having a task in life.” A mission orientation not only helps you overcome difficulties, but it will give you great strength in practicing the trusted advisor attributes. It will be easier for you to be an empathetic listener; your conviction will intensify; your integrity will be strengthened; and it will be far easier to practice selfless independence.

Andrew Sobel is the leading authority on client relationships and the skills and strategies required to earn enduring client loyalty. The most widely published author in the world on business relationships, he is a consultant and educator to major services firms worldwide. Andrew is the author of the newly-released *All for One: 10 Strategies for Building Trusted Client Partnerships* (John Wiley & Sons, 2009) as well as the business bestsellers *Clients for Life* and *Making Rain*. He was a Senior Vice President and Country Managing Director for Gemini Consulting, and for the last 13 years he has led his own consulting firm, Andrew Sobel Advisors, Inc. He can be reached at www.andrewsobel.com (Tel: 505.982.0211).