

# DIARY OF A CONSULTANT



In last month's entry, David pondered the wisdom of expanding the business through hiring employees, creating alliances with other consulting firms, or partnering with like providers. This month, David's feeling thankful for the people who have contributed to the success of his and Jeff's new company.

By David Zahn

2000

December 11

*Another delayed flight* taking off from LaGuardia on its way to O'Hare or Dallas/Fort Worth, or is it Miami International this week? I have to check my itinerary to be sure of what client we're going to see and what project we're working on. Flying each week to deliver training or meet with a prospective client is simultaneously great and horrible. It's great we're busy; it's horrible we're on the road so much.

Nearly every week, Jeff and I jump in the car and head for the airport hoping to outrun the commuters, other business

travelers, and tourists out for a leisurely drive. When Jeff drives, he avoids making eye contact with other drivers lest he acknowledge their existence, therefore giving them the advantage of knowing he's aware of them and will be inclined to watch out for their moves. If eye contact is never established, other drivers aren't likely to chance a risky maneuver. (This driving method was never taught in Driver's Ed.)

Checking the monitor listing flight departures, Jeff and I find we have an hour to wait. Neither of us is inclined to go to the bars, and there are few places to spread out and work. Anyway, you never

know when a competitor might be lurking about, looking over your shoulder at confidential, proprietary material. So, we decide to grab two chairs in the gate area and do a quick status check of where we are versus where we expected to be by this time. We also need to confirm that he and I are still in sync, that the business is providing what we need, and that we're giving it what it needs. Sitting on molded plastic chairs, we assess what we've accomplished and what we still need to do. I organize our thoughts into categories:

**Roles, complementary skills.** Just as we hoped, Jeff and I found our own interests, abilities, and strengths, so we have just the right amount of overlap where needed (selling) and enough

out there but need to do more. We still wonder which of the marketing items really makes a difference or whether it's a cumulative effect of everything working in unison.

**Family.** We become silent for a moment as we consider what the last few months have meant for the people who are always there with us, though not always near. Attorneys and accountants warned us not to bring family into the business, that it would complicate things. We received a lot of good advice when we launched CZA, but that particular counsel was 180 degrees off base. Neither Stacey (my wife) nor Bev (Jeff's wife) are partners in Clow Zahn Associates LLC, and none of our children has a formal voting interest, but

18-year-old son Chase were discussing "opportunity costs, cash flow, and accounts receivables" and known Jeff wasn't helping Chase with Economics 101. I've seen Bev's eyes when she has hoped there's a check in the mail I drop off so she can visit her family in Iowa. So, the business *is* our lives.

As the gate agent calls for boarding, Jeff and I look at each other as if we can read each other's minds. Maybe we can since we spend more time with each other lately than our families. We both get the same idea: to have a holiday party to recognize and acknowledge the efforts of the people who have contributed to our success. No vendors or clients, and no talk about training, travel, or anything to do with business. This party will be a celebration of the best support system a company can have—family.

Neither Stacey nor Bev are **partners**,  
but to say they **aren't in the business** is to  
say the moon has nothing to do with the tides.

unique coverage (operations) not to compete with each other.

**Revenue targets.** We congratulate ourselves on a job well done in bringing in the amount of business to date, though we suffer a bit from the sell-do cycle. When we're on projects, there's less time for selling. Then when a project winds down, a light bulb goes off over our heads that it's time to refill the pipeline. That can lead to uneven cash flow (rags to riches and back to rags) if not monitored closely. As we watch snow fall on the runway, we feel appreciative that we haven't had to dip into our credit lines and have been profitable from the first month.

**Marketing.** Going through our mental checklist of promotional materials, we think we've done a lot to keep our name

to say that they aren't in the business with us is to say that the moon has nothing to do with the tides.

I see the look on my first-grader Michael's face when I pack for another trip and hear him ask, though not aloud, "Is this trip more important than being home with me?" I feel the especially tight hug my fourth-grader Brian gives me when I return home and he asks, "How long are you home for this time?" I don't tell Stacey nearly enough how much I appreciate her ability to be both mother and father in my absences and maintain her own interests. As I'm about to board a plane for a city I've been to numerous times but have rarely seen, I wonder whether I'm fooling myself when I say, "I do this for them."

I've been at Jeff's house when he and his

December 15

*I'm not a lover of eggnog*, but I make a toast and express my gratitude to the people who have been solidly in our corner and unwavering in their belief in us: (alphabetically) Ben, Bev, Bonnie, Brian, Brooke, Chase, Kristen, Michael, Stacey, Tracy, and Travis.

I say, "You've trusted us and never questioned if this was the right thing. Your confidence is inspiring and motivating. Your smiles, inquiries, exhortations, and pep talks are appreciated. We love you and appreciate how much a part of this business you are."

I think of the song "We Are Family": *Living life is fun, and we've just begun to get our share of the world's delights. High hopes we have for the future, and our goal's in sight. No, we don't get depressed. Here's what we call our golden rule: Have faith in you and the things you do, you won't go wrong.*

To contact David for further information about his evolution or to share your thoughts with him, call 203.221.2789 or email [davidzahn@clowzahn.com](mailto:davidzahn@clowzahn.com).