

Zen and the Art of Referrals

In the 70s, there was a popular book called Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance. I read it, and then read the book that it was based on called: **Zen and the Art of Archery**.

The latter was a story of an individual who had ventured to Japan to study Zen through the mastery of archery. To achieve his goal, he had to be able to shoot an arrow into the bull's eye from a couple of hundred feet, flawlessly and repetitively. He was even required to do this in complete darkness.



The idea was that the archer would tap into the 'void'. He experienced things in such a way that would guide him to success without thought or conscious interference, and without attachment to the end results.

About 4 years into his studies, he found a "trick" that allowed him to hold the arrow a certain way. The arrow would slip from his fingertips without his knowing when, and it usually hit the bull's eye.

He was excited and decided to demonstrate the technique to the monk that was training him. The monk walked over to him and took his bow. He then walked a few steps away, with his back to the student, and suggested that if he was to rely on trickery to succeed, then he must leave immediately. The student was devastated and begged forgiveness of the monk. The monk relented and agreed to give him one more chance.

After a total of 7 years, the student reached his goal. He got to the point where he could stand in the practice range, and without any attachment to the end results, he could lift his bow and arrow and hit the bull's eye precisely each time. He could do so consistently, without any conscious interference, and he could do it with or without light.

We have a consultant on our team that is that dedicated to our referral process. When I listen to him talk about referrals, he reminds me of Zen and the Art of Archery. His proclamation is that to achieve a steady stream of quality referrals you must have a process that allows you to not be attached to the results--that is getting referrals.

In other words, if you want them too badly, you won't get them. If you don't care about the results, but you follow the process and understand that you are providing a service, referrals will soon follow.

So, consider this statement an advisor might make to a client: "One of the services I offer my best clients is that if they know someone who needs to speak to someone about their financial affairs, for whatever reason, I will speak to that person. It may not be appropriate for them to become a client, or perhaps it will, but regardless I will point them in a direction that is appropriate for them. If they are important to you, they are important to me and I would be pleased to meet with them."

When discussing this with advisors, there is often a jump to the incorrect conclusion that this is some sort of trick. On the other hand, there have been advisors who have had complete sincerity and belief in the power of this approach.

The shared belief is that even if none of these introductions results in a new client, the understanding is that the existing clients are being served better than they ever had before, and that is no small thing in this business.

Not surprisingly, it is the advisors that buy in to the Zen-oriented approach that come back to us and rave about the results they have had. These results point not only to a history of well-served and happy clients, but also to the numerous referrals they have received.

The monk would be pleased I am sure.