

# Edition

The newsletter for members of the  
Editors' Association of Canada, Toronto branch

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Program Report

## Editors Get a Kick out of November's Meeting

by Ken Weinberg



Program presenter Diane Davies

**W**hat kind of advice does a veteran career consultant who began her career at the Queen Street Mental Health Centre and has spent the last 15 years on Bay Street have for struggling freelance and in-house editors? Quite a bit it turns out.

When Diane Davies, of Davies & Associates, spoke to our group on November 28 of last year, she readily admitted that she didn't have much experience working with editors. But after doing some research, including interviewing some members of our branch, she obviously had a good picture of our career challenges, including:

- Fluctuating income levels
- Being pigeon-holed into one type of editing
- Difficulty advancing within the company
- Discomfort with marketing and cold-calling

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Any of these four career obstacles, she advised, can be overcome, although it will take some energy—energy that we are already spending worrying about the career obstacles, and that could be better spent on moving forward. We have to overcome the “Yes, but...” disease.

Once we were convinced that all was not hopeless, and that we are capable of effecting improvements, Diane settled into the meat of her presentation by addressing three main areas that must be a part of any plan to kick-start a stalled career:

- Examine your attitude toward selling
- Build relationships
- Deal with market conditions



*“Never meet a customer to discuss business without carefully researching what the customer may object to about your proposal.”*

—Diane Davies

In the first part, we learned that having a sales orientation means being technically competent, knowing people, and being able to persuade. Whatever negative attitudes we may have about “selling,” we need to know that using these three skills is necessary to avoid being overlooked in a competitive environment, whether we are freelance or in-house.

Some of the things successful salespeople do? Well, if the scope of the project creeps, they re-contract—something that’s much easier to do if you establish up front what is expected. This advice would apply to any contractor, but her examples of, “In addition to editing this article, would you please speak to this individual?” and “Could you help me set up this design?” rang true for many members in the room.

She also suggested that we be prepared for objections when we propose our services. Never meet a customer to discuss business without carefully

researching what the customer may object to about your proposal. Did your research discover that the work may involve editing material on sports? Come to the meeting prepared to show that you can handle that subject capably.

Do you wonder why you work so hard for some clients and it doesn’t seem to pay? Categorize your clients into “A” (clients that generate a steady stream of revenue), “B” (clients who have the potential to become “A” clients), and “C” (clients who consume too much time for too little pay).

And in case you thought that riding in elevators was a momentary escape from selling, think again. It’s actually time to deliver your “elevator speech” to that

captive audience standing beside you watching the numbers change. Actually, an elevator speech is the 60-second speech you should make whenever you have the opportunity to describe what you’re doing, what you’re looking for, something distinct about you, and a quick description of three assignments you have done. Some members in the room thought that having something like that prepared would make us sound

too “canned,” but Diane assured us that if we convey confidence, our voice will sound fine, and our message will come through loud and clear.

That’s one of the most significant areas of Diane’s work. Many people don’t project confidence, and if you don’t, it’s a problem. Audit how you project. “Would you buy from you?”

Sometimes an editor can be very focussed on his or her own situation. But clients think, “I don’t really care. I want to know that you can do the job for me.” Diane suggested that we should always be conscious of the partnership relationship. Everything you do should generate a sense of loyalty. Apologizing for overly generalizing, Diane figured that if we are task-oriented, shy, and introverted, like most editors she has dealt with, we could use some professional coaching on how to garner loyalty by learning to tune into clients and building better relationships.

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Finally, the presentation turned to the topic of dealing with market conditions. Her advice: have a business plan. If you're starting out, it may be helpful to have a non-editing job that brings in a steady income, and slowly grow your editing work until it becomes all you do. If you're doing lots of low-paid editing work, transition to the higher-paying jobs via skills development and using a coach. Break out of the pigeonhole by taking atypical work during the slow periods that will build your credibility in other areas. And network as much as you can, but do it effectively. If you think networking

means giving your business card to anyone who will take it, Diane advises not to. This last suggestion was the most controversial of the evening. Several members' comments and questions challenged Diane's suggestion to treat business cards like money (and the controversy even continued on the e-mail forum the next day), some accepted her premise that the best chance of getting work is by building and using relationships to build a network of referral business.

I could tell from the questions posed following Diane's presentation that both the in-house and freelance editors in the room saw

great value in her advice. More marketing and more relationships are key to kick-starting a stalled career, and if doing that seems too difficult, there is always a professional coach who can help.

I've been to career transition workshops in the past, and taken several seminars on effective freelancing from the EAC, so I wasn't expecting much in the way of profound revelations. But when an experienced Bay Street career consultant gives me advice about standing out in a competitive market, I sit up and take notice. **E**