



Book The Professional Service Firm 50

Fifty Ways to Transform Your "Department" Into a Professional Service Firm Whose Trademarks Are Passion and Innovation!

Tom Peters
Knopf, 1999
First Edition:1999

Recommendation

Tom Peters takes this book’s role in his three-part "Reinventing Work Series" seriously. He urges corporate departments, such as human resources and accounting, to reinvent themselves as professional service firms, and to think of their work as projects and of their companies as clients. He believes this will result in a more energized workforce and higher-quality work that will survive the traumas of the new age. His approach is marked by his now signature "gee whiz" writing style, punctuated by large typefaces, exclamation points, salty slang and remarks like "Amen!" and "WOW!" *BooksInShort.com* recommends this book for its innovative points and no "b.s." attitude, but Peters-bashers will groan at the repetition of ideas and cheerleading expressions. This is a useful, inspiring pep talk, and if it is not exactly *In Search of Excellence* - which seemed to be written for adults who didn’t need quite so much hip-hip hoopla - that was then and this is now.

Take-Aways

- Instead of seeing yourself as a department director, view yourself as the head of a subsidiary Professional Service Firm (PSF).
- There are 50 ways to turn your team, department or company into a PSF. Try 10 of them.
- Develop a PSF approach to be more competitive in today’s global, deregulated economy. Keep renewing your PSF to survive.
- Look on the staff members of your PSF as "Brand You" independent contractors.
- Don’t just follow your clients - lead them. PSFs are in the leadership business.
- Delight your clients, that is, your parent corporation, with cool new projects that add value. Client service is why your PSF exists.
- Make all your projects meaningful. Go for passion, purpose and WOW.
- Focus on the impact and results your PSF can achieve.
- Do it all: politics, design, hiring, training, marketing, sales, research - just like an outside firm - including making a profit.

- Cherish your people. Encourage everyone to be an expert, and a "committed determined professional who wants to make a difference."

Summary

Be a Mini-McKinsey

Despite many management efforts in the nineties, such as "reengineering" and "downsizing," the workplace has not been transformed. Even with the electronic revolution, people still push paper and face huge processing delays. At last, things are about to change. New "enterprise resource planning systems" will reenergize information handling and will lead to greater productivity. To keep pace with these developments, your department should make its work more significant and valuable, and change into a streamlined, processing machine.

“The starting point of all significant change is mind set: shifting from the internally focused, 'task' mindset to a fanatical 'incredible-client-service-through-awesome-projects' mindset.”

Accomplish these goals by transforming your department (or team or company) into a "Professional Service Firm" (PSF). Imagine your department as a company somewhat like McKinsey & Co., providing smart assistance to your client, that is, your parent corporation. As a PSF, you can transform your routine work into sharp, meaningful projects.

“Message (big): Seek out cool clients who (1) define you and (2) help you grow.”

The ongoing work revolution - due to globalization, deregulation and the Internet - forces you to be more competitive. Adopt this new model and turn your department into a "Brand You professional service team," staffed with aces. To bring about this transformation, select 10 of these 50 ideas to pursue first. And then pursue the others:

1. "Think Inc." - Debut "Purchasing Inc." or "Human Resources Inc." Quit thinking of your entity as a department and give birth to your professional service firm. You are the manager of a "wholly owned subsidiary." Of course, this is daunting. Welcome to the world of independent possibilities where you do your absolute best to design and carry out powerful projects for your client, that is, your parent company. Action: Observe a PSF. Create your new firm's "manifesto." See it as cool.
2. "Think...C-L-I-E-N-T" - Think of your company as your client, since this is the essence of PSF's. They - and that means you - must perform to keep clients satisfied, or their clients will go elsewhere. See your client as your partner, your reason for existing. This is quite different than the way a department views its tasks. Action: List your clients within the company. Create a file for each one. Know them fully, so you can deliver high quality results.
3. "Select clients very carefully" - You will become who you work for; your clients will define you. Even in-house, prioritize the clients you like the most. Action: Seek the best clients. Maintain an explicit time log. Invest attention in clients who lead. Trim deadwood from your client list over time.

“Make the work matter! Think about the 'task' you are at work on now. Does it matter? (Be unflinchingly honest. It-is-your-life.)”

Revolutionary Projects

4. "Turn every 'task' into a project" - Focus your time on specific projects. The essence of a PSF is: "cool people doing cool projects with cool clients." These projects are your signature identity. Action: Restructure your department's tasks into client-focused projects that matter. Be sure your direct reports all do the same.
5. "Become a catalyst for revolution" - Seize new accomplishments. Action: Consider changing your title. One man chose "Chief Evangelist for Really Neat Stuff."
6. "Visit every client" - Stand up and go talk to your clients. Launch a conversation. Explain that you are here to serve and ask if you are doing it well. Action: Ask clients to rate you. To get honest feedback, bring a third party to listen.
7. "Create an immodest current projects list" - Everyone in your PSF should understand all your current projects. Action: Weed out the dogs. Make sure everyone has a list. Keep track of each project; score each one quantitatively on how important it is.

8. "You are a venture capitalist" - Examine your project list like a portfolio. Action: List your PSF's capacities, tasks and audience. Be sure some of your projects are guaranteed to succeed.
9. "Conduct a weekly...formal current projects review" - Evaluate what is snazzy and what is dull. Action: Assess where you are on each project. Set priorities. Mesh with your client; mutually dissect your projects. Each project should spark excitement.

Generating WOW Repercussions

Use these tips to make even more of an impact with your projects:

10. "Turn every job into a WOW project" - Make every project intense. Action: Measure the zing. Punch up your projects.
11. "Never compromise your identity" - Have a clear picture of what your professional service firm represents. Action: Know who your PSF is. What's your creed?
12. "Pursue...passion" - Increase your passion about your projects. Action: Please discuss.
13. "Measure: Did we make an impact?" - Spend a day with one or two critical customers. Action: Determine if your projects made a lasting impression on them.
14. Be both "thoroughly professional" and "provocative" - Make your work "far out." Go beyond professional. Be nuts, rise to these weird times and leave your comfort zone. Action: Brainstorm a transformational future.
15. "Lead your client" - Turn your department into a cadre of original thinkers stirring a cauldron of enticing ideas. Action: Host a new age seminar. Push your client ahead.
16. "Politics" - Be ready to play politics to get results. It's the only way. Action: Spend time working the system. Evaluate your PSF's implementation skills.
17. "The fine art of balance" - All of life is basically a circus show, balancing your work, family, dreams and goals. Action: Balance being "cool" and getting things done. Hire both radical people and rational people (almost no one is both).
18. "Accounting (etc.) is a performing art" - See your work as a performance; trust your talent. Action: Have fun. Fill the walls with intriguing posters. Perform great work.
19. "Remember the bottom line" - The purpose of business is profit. Action: Know where your money is. Earn your profits.
20. "Got any quirky projects?" - If you don't take chances, you won't accomplish anything that isn't ordinary. Action: Measure the risk in your tasks. At least a quarter of them should be "freaky." Take on tough projects.
21. "Think legacy" - What is lasting about your work? Action: Be daring and memorable.
22. "Pitch in...or bail out" - What you are doing is critical, right? But your PSF has to be built on the idea that you would drop any task to help a colleague out of a bind. Action: View projects as urgent. Lionize people who go the extra "two miles" to help. Marry consumed, focused people to each task. No wandering. One marriage at a time.
23. "PSFs need vision statements" - Envision being the best, attracting great compatible talent, provoking originality, having a joyful environment, making a profit, helping people, conquering details and more. Action: Review some vision statements and craft one for your PSF. Have employees each write their own.

“Explicitly concentrate your efforts on a (very?) few cool clients. ...: Schedule regular meetings to share bold ideas with those clients. Meticulously chart joint progress. (Keep stretching. Together.)”

Client Connections

24. "Make clients an integral part of every project team" - Embrace your clients. Care about them. Action: Be sure clients delegate their best talent to your PSF. Be visible to clients. Call them and live with them. Solve problems together. Share expertise and risks. Plan together, even if some elements of the plan remain unknown for a while.
25. "Insist that clients submit a formal evaluation...at the end of each project" - You want defined feedback. Action: Really hear the message. Make it matter.
26. "Client-centric" - Focus on your client. Action: Push, prod, shake up, inform and enthuse your client.
27. "Bring in wild and woolly outsiders" - Even pros need professional advice. Action: Gather experts, even wild ones. Call in quirky advisors.

“There are no small tasks; only small imaginations.”

Earn Money While Celebrating Excitement

28. "Create a 'sense of urgency'" - Have a "rockin' adventure." Action: WOW every project.
29. "Hot teams thrive in hot spaces" - Snag a snazzy studio for work and brainstorming. Action: Examine your workspace. Does it generate attention? Study chic spaces.
30. "Celebrate any success" - Use spur-of-the-moment inspiration or plan ahead. Action: Create more ways to praise your people. Great gigs can be "bumpy," with good days and bad days. Take breaks. Balance your emotions. Send in a clown.
31. "Love thy 'support staff'" - Hire good support staffers; compensate them well. Action: Examine your staff structure. Be sure everyone shares the triumphs.
32. "A rabid scheduler is a must" - Live by deadlines. Action: Put a strong, realistic boss in charge of schedules and deadlines. Punish missed deadlines; reward made deadlines.
33. "We're in this for the money" - Bill enough to earn a profit. Action: Learn the outside value of your work. Charge the right amount. Follow an agreed-upon approach to solving problems.
34. "Embrace marketing" - Sell your service, reputation, skills and past successes. Action: Trumpet your product. Make a sales kit.

“We all must learn the ways of these exceptional institutions, and thence create mini-PSFs in every setting we inhabit.”

Your PSFs Core Assets: Knowledge and Talent

35. "Become a research and development evangelist" - Your PSF should be known for its "intellectual capital." Protect your staffers' jobs by having them learning constantly. Action: Make "mastery" your mission. Allocate a lion's share of resources to building information. Be intense about managing individual and collective knowledge.
36. "Turn your...projects into a research and development...gold mine" - Add an information-gathering component to every task. Action: Involve clients, staffers and outside experts in building your knowledge base.
37. "Think design" - Every project can be elegant. Beauty always matters. Action: Build good design into everything you do.
38. "Evaluate...competitive advantage" - Understand your best competitive assets, and your weak areas. Action: Become distinct through your hiring, training, problem-solving, client relationships, knowledge, organization, research and listening skills.
39. "Become a connoisseur of talent" - Hiring determines your future. Action: Take your time. Recruit selectively, creatively and strategically. "Tolerate genius." Create a workplace where the people you want are eager to spend their time.
40. "Cherish instability" - Let turnover happen to renew your staff. Action: Diversify. Blend different kinds of people. Fight stagnation. Use performance review to teach people to be independent contractors.
41. "Demand that every PSF member be known for...something" - As independent contractors, your staffers must all grow and improve. Action: Build a squad of experts.
42. "Champion passion. Champion perfection" - Attend to details. Action: Emphasize both imagination and standards. Make sure the project counts and the T's are crossed.
43. "Create stories (and) mythology around 'project winners'" - Romance matters. Devise legends that inspire. Action: Tell tales. Communicate. Write a newsletter.
44. "Teach the 'professional service firm basics' ... with a vengeance" - Never stop training. Action: Teach your full agenda, from WOW projects to ongoing research.
45. "Provide 'project management-leadership' opportunities ...ASAP" - To increase staffers' abilities, give each team member a chance to lead. Action: Offer opportunity. Foster a "growth-through-increasingly-cool-projects mentality."
46. "Cherish great listening skills" - To gain insight, just listen. Often your quietest team member is learning the most. Action: Hire (or train) great listeners. Communicate.
47. Love your "geeks - the antisocial, masterful diggers-of-obscure-facts" - Though often unappreciated, geeks can dig for data treasure and find it. Action: For real out-side-the-norm solutions, promote a geek.
48. "Challenge. Demand the impossible" - Push people to excel. Action: Demand "cool."
49. "WOW! Beauty! Impact! Distinction!" - This is the standard you aspire to achieve. Action: Evaluate every accomplishment against this list. "Think ...dream ...act."

“Dilbert is hilarious (i.e., on the money). And there's the rub. Dilbert stands not only for cynicism (an emotion I appreciate) but for the de facto acceptance of power-less-ness. And that is where I draw the line!”

"We own this place" - Your professional service firm rules. Action: You did it.

About the Author

Tom Peters is the co-author of *In Search for Excellence* (with Robert H. Waterman, Jr.) and *A Passion for Excellence* (with Nancy Austin), and the author of *Thriving on Chaos*, *Liberation Management*, *The Tom Peters Seminar*, *The Pursuit of WOW!*, *The Circle of Innovation* and *The Reinventing Work* series, which includes this book, *The Projects 50* and *The Brand You 50*. He is the founder of the Tom Peters Co., with offices in Palo Alto, Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati and London.
