

Fred Diamond

The Heart of the Business

Fresh out of college, Fred Diamond was certain he knew what he wanted to do. He had spent his four years at Emory University solidifying his leadership role at the campus paper, advancing from sports writer to news writer to Editor-in-Chief, and planned to go into writing professionally. He quickly landed a gig at McGraw-Hill Publishing, writing and editing articles for booklets about Information Security. Fred worked in the new products department, which focused on creating and publishing profit-drivers for the company. By chance, the New Products Department was located next to McGraw Hill's Sales Department.

Fred began to take an interest in the operations of the sales team. "These guys impressed me," he recalls. "They were professional, wearing suits and taking meetings. And I realized quickly that sales was the heart of the business, even though it was a publishing company. These guys were keeping the company going. It dawned on me that, even though I was an editor, if those guys weren't successful, it didn't matter what I write. No one was going to care if we didn't get customers."

Some of the other editors were disdainful of the sales team, considering the written word to be a higher calling. But Fred was pragmatic. He understood that the sales team made his work possible, and he was drawn to their gregarious energy and sharp minds. He spent time listening to their calls and took the initiative to market some of the new products his team worked on. After moving to Apple Computer a few years later, he began to transition into what he refers to as "the art and science of sales."

Today, Fred Diamond is the Executive Director and President of the Institute for Excellence in Sales (IES), a professional organization and consulting service he co-founded

in 2011. The IES helps sales professionals and sales teams improve their skills, connects speakers and organizations with each other, and provides invaluable advice to companies seeking to contract out sales work.

IES developed a series of events organized by Fred in his capacity as an independent sales consultant, driven by his vision to expand his practice by offering educational and networking events to local businesses with sales needs. "A partner and I came up with the idea of a

having a series of monthly workshops, bringing authors and thought leaders to the region to speak on sales topics," Fred explains. The workshops took off, and before long, word had spread throughout the business community. Requests for more workshops were pouring in, and as attendees started asking Fred if they could become members if IES, he began to see what the Institute could become.

Then one day, about two years into the IES journey, Fred got three phone calls on the same afternoon, all from companies looking for sales speakers for events they were hosting. Fred was happy to help, and IES's reputation evolved into a tried-and-true source for great speakers and trainers. "I started asking more and more people if they thought there was a need for a sales speaker bureau and a sales training referral service," he says. "I was hearing that it made a lot of sense, so I decided to go for it."

IES operates as a professional association for salespeople, comprised of individual members, corporate members, and sponsors who pay membership fees between \$3,500 and \$15,000 annually. Notable sponsors and members include Learning Tree, Deltek, and Cvent. Corporate members get access to exceptional sales professionals and sales speakers, while individual members can network with sales teams and



businesses, and sponsoring organizations are able to make connections with corporate and individual sales teams. "It's a win/win/win," Fred affirms.

The IES also provides consulting services to sales teams and businesses in need. "We're the only agnostic training referral source to sales leaders," says Fred. The IES fields three or four inquiries per week from entities looking for sales speakers, sales training services, or consulting related to sales—a testament to the trusted brand Fred has built.

IES is the first entity of its kind, and as Fred responds to market demand, he's found that the need is global. With hundreds of members already, he expects the organization to double in size this year, and his long-term plans includes vastly improving the IES' online platform to have a national—and then international—reach. "Because we know the full scope of sales resources out there, we're able to help our members and clients figure out the best solution for them," he says. "If you google 'sales training', a million things come up. It's very stressful to sort through the static, especially when you need to find a solution that fits your unique scenario. If you're a not-for-profit that wants to shift from a reactive to proactive model, and you have people in four different offices around the country, and you need it done in 2 months, not every company can provide that service for you. We've done the work to figure out who will fit your needs, who can make your budget, and who is available."

Fred is proud of IES because the Institute has truly brought something of value to its many members. "I had been an employee for a large part of my career, and that was fine, but I was ready to create something," he says. "I wanted to build something of substance and value—something with more of a legacy. We just signed on to sponsor someone recently who said, 'There's no one else in the world doing something like this.' That's my motivation, and I know we've only just begun to scratch the surface."

Fred's vision and success can be traced back to his upbringing in Philadelphia, where he benefitted from a stable and loving home. "I had a mom and dad who were very involved and always there for us," he says. "Both my sister and I have had happy lives because of them." All four of his grandparents were local, and Fred fondly remembers visiting them on Friday nights, spending time with extended family, and playing

with the neighborhood kids on the street.

His most impactful childhood passion, however, was baseball: playing it, watching it, memorizing stats, and attending Phillies game with his dad. "Baseball was a really big part of me growing up," he recalls. "I would wait for the newspaper to arrive on Sunday mornings, and I would just scour the box scores. My dad would come home from work in a suit and pitch to me. I really looked forward to that, spending time with my dad."

Fred's father was an accountant who worked long hours. Although Fred thinks his father never particularly loved the profession, he maintained excellent relationships with his clients, and his approach to business and professionalism made a lasting impression on young Fred when he accompanied his father on client calls. "I could see that people were really appreciative of him," Fred recounts. "He would show up to do their tax return, and they were happy to see him. That struck me because I always viewed my mother as the social one."

Fred's mother was a homemaker throughout his early childhood, always busy with household responsibilities and social commitments before she started working fulltime when he reached his early teens. His parents were always invited somewhere on Saturday nights, and even today, his mother fills their schedule with activities and social engagements. "They live in Florida half of the year now, and they have something planned, breakfast, lunch and dinner," Fred laughs. "And I know my dad ain't planning it!"

It was perhaps this remarkable organizational talent that led to his mother's sudden career successes later in life. She had left Temple University after two years and never completed college, but after a great deal of volunteering for multiple charities, she was offered a job as an Executive Assistant at an orphanage. Several years later, she was promoted directly from Executive Assistant to Executive Director. "My mom is a remarkable person and an organizational genius," says Fred. "It's rare, going from a secretarial type position to the Executive Director. She always encouraged me to make friends, spend time with people, get out of the house, and schedule my days—keys to success that helped later in life."

As middle school came to a close, Fred's focus on organized sports, and particularly

baseball, gave way to his participation in his local Jewish youth organization. He still enjoyed his family's season tickets to the Phillies, but he didn't play on the competitive high school team. He got his first job delivering newspapers, but it came to an abrupt end when he broke his ankle a few short months into his tenure. "It actually worked out pretty well," he laughs. "Since I was on crutches, I was allowed to get out of class early."

In high school, Fred began to earn a reputation as a writer and a comedian. He wrote and published newsletters that were passed around school, which included a satirical questionnaire called "The Quiz." A friend of his parents who worked as an editor advised him to pursue his writing at Emory, though he discouraged Fred from getting a journalism degree. "His advice was that I didn't need to learn how to write," Fred recalls. "He told me to learn about something and become an expert, so I decided to become a history major."

Most of Fred's time at Emory, however, was spent on the newspaper, where he became editor-in-chief as a junior. His newsroom acquired a bit of public reputation after a controversial editorial took aim at former President Jimmy Carter, who visited the university while his Presidential Library was being constructed on campus. Because the library was somewhat remote, a new road was being built to provide easier access for tourists. The road was being referred to as an "expressway," and local residents were livid, concerned about traffic and the impact on property values. The editorial challenged Carter to address these concerns, calling him a coward until he did.

Fred was surprised to receive a call to meet with the former President, and face-to-face Carter explained the plans in more detail. "He was very kind," says Fred. "He told me that it wasn't going to be I-95, just a four-lane road. It was cool to be hanging out with Jimmy Carter! So we wrote an article about his perspective, and it spread. People sent us cakes, and neighbors came by our office to thank us for standing up for them."

After graduating from Emory, Fred returned to Philadelphia and started at McGraw-Hill, where he first developed his interest in sales and immediately caught the attention of higher-ups. "I was assigned to this book, *DataPro Reports on Information Security*, and I wrote an article about the data encryption standard," he recounts. "I

remember the day our company president came back from a trip to Russia and stopped by my cube because everyone was talking about my article," Fred says. "He told me that everyone wanted to know, 'who is this Mr. Diamond?'" At that moment I got more serious about the impact I was having."

Fred took initiative in his role at McGraw-Hill, and on a trip to visit a friend on the west coast, he asked permission to also visit clients in San Francisco. "My boss said, we've never done that before, but sure," says Fred. "It was one of the defining moments of my career. And I knew that I was invested in more than just the product—I was becoming invested in its sale, too."

Fred was also earning some extra cash on the weekends by moonlighting as a DJ. "I probably learned more about human nature as a DJ," he laughs, "I did weddings, bar mitzvahs, and everything else. I worked a few black tie weddings, but the best ones were the ones catered by Wawa with a keg in the back! Those people were appreciative." Fred did around 300 parties in a four-year period, but eventually got to the point that the work felt monotonous and mundane.

Three years after beginning at McGraw-Hill, in 1987, an Apple Computer recruiter contacted Fred about a job in Virginia, and although he had been successful in his role as editor, he was running himself ragged making ends meet with his weekend work. Apple was an exciting opportunity to move up and in the direction of sales, so he made the plunge, accepting a support role. He doggedly followed salespeople on calls, to appointments, and even into their meetings, until finally his persistence was rewarded. He moved into a marketing role and never looked back.

Apple was a great place to work, but in 1993, Fred's whole department was laid off as part of a downsizing and restructuring. He moved on to Compaq Computer, where he worked for the emerging public sector group. There, he learned about the importance of a focused and efficient sales operation from his mentor, a retired Rear Admiral named Don. "He would always ask us why we were spending money on advertising," Fred says. "I had to confront the fact that sometimes the easy way to sell—buying ads—isn't necessarily the most effective way to sell. He shifted me from being a 'just-generally-gotta-advertise' guy to a very focused, succinct, 'what's the best and smartest way to go to market?' guy."

How does marketing support the sales process more effectively? That mindset eventually led to the creation of the Institute."

Fred's years at Compaq were transformative, but his then-wife was insistent on moving to Detroit, her hometown. Fred found a job there with Compuware, a large software company, in 1996. He didn't love Detroit, but working in International Product Marketing afforded him the opportunity to travel all across Europe meeting clients. For three years, Fred did sales seminars and filmed testimonials from product users like Pepsi in exotic locales like Stockholm, Oslo, Sydney, Amsterdam, Frankfurt, and Budapest.

But Detroit was too far from the tech boom action, so in 2000, Fred returned to Virginia to work for a start-up called OneSoft. "It was a classic pre-IPO," says Fred. "They raised \$80 million and went out of business in the middle of the night, leaving a lot of unhappy people in their wake." After that, Fred tried his luck at an A-round funded data-storage company called Network Storage Solutions (NSS). But as the tech bubble burst, NSS too went out of business.

Tired of being an employee, Fred decided to go out on his own as a consultant. "I wanted to finally create this thing on my own," he says. "I put out a shingle and threw myself into figuring it out. There have been bumps along the way, but you have to hustle for yourself."

Consulting provided much-needed freedom, and as he expanded his sales events, Fred saw a real future. "It got to the point where I'd have 200 people in the room for a speaker, and the energy was just ebullient," he says. "Then I'd go back to consulting, which at that point meant sitting in a cube, working on an e-mail that no one was ever going to read. I thought, 'this is ridiculous.' I knew I could create more, so I did."

As a leader, Fred is focused most on value and engagement. "I want people to get real, substantive value out of IES," he says. "I'm always working to gauge what people want out of it, whether they're participating in the Institute, or coming to us as a customer, or serving as one of our speakers. What are they hoping to achieve and how can I help them succeed? It's about win/win/wins. We're creating this entity so everyone gets what they need out of it."

To young people entering the working

world today, Fred points to relationships as a critical ingredient for success. "Build a list of people you could have lifelong professional engagement with," he advises. "When I look at people who've had long, successful careers, a lot of them have contacts they've worked with for decades. Many sales leaders we recognize have a whole legacy of successful people who are now leading sales teams of their own. So I always say, especially if you want to work for yourself, write a list of people you could see yourself working with as a partner in the future. Then build that core of people that you're going to stay in touch with."

Relationships are often at the heart of sales, and as Fred often points out, sales are the heart of any business. "Sales is truly the most important part of a company," he says. "If things don't get sold, there's no company. So I see IES's mission as building the heart of business, advancing business development and educating sales professionals around the globe so they can lead happier, more productive careers, and so companies can be more successful."

That legacy is coming to life here in the Northern Virginia area with every handshake that takes place at each IES event. "Nowadays, I'll go to the Tower Club and see two people I know sitting next to each other and I'll ask, 'How do you two know each other?'" Fred explains. "They say, 'Oh, we met at the Institute.' At the end of the day, those connections are my biggest achievement."

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