

SANDLER®

The Contrarian Contractor

The breakthrough process that wins the work you want, removes the stress you don't, and maximizes profitability.



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Sandler



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Read This **First**

Most contractors don't need more jobs.

They need better jobs — the kind where they're brought in early, respected as experts, and paid fairly without having to claw for every dollar.

Unfortunately, the construction world doesn't make that easy.

It rewards the lowest bidder, not the best builder. It teaches you to chase RFPs, underprice just to stay in the game, and hope you "make it up later."

You know how that story ends — and it's not with profit or peace of mind.

This book is for the ones who've had enough.



The ones who believe it's possible to:

- Get upstream in the buying process
- Win work without selling out
- Build a team that operates at the same high standard — even when you're not in the room

If that sounds like you, you're not alone. There's a growing group of construction leaders rejecting the old way of doing business. They're building a new standard — for their clients, for their people, and for themselves.

You don't need to outbid the competition.

You need to out-position them.

This book will show you how.

This book is for the contrarians — the square pegs in round holes, the ones who think differently, the ones who see the world of construction for what it is and what it could be, the ones who believe it's worth the effort to make a change. The ones who are anything but typical.

If you're looking for a way to rise above the traditional industry methods and set a new standard for how business gets done in construction, this book will serve as your guide. But keep in mind, the real test of a contrarian is not how well you know what is already familiar; it's what you can learn, and are willing to implement, that will challenge your own paradigm and the paradigms of others.

By the Numbers

To gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities in business development for the construction industry, we conducted a comprehensive study involving 350 respondents from 300 different companies across the Mid-Atlantic region. The respondents included general contractors, subcontractors, suppliers, architects, engineers, and design consulting professionals. These participants held various roles within their organizations, such as owners, executives, pre-construction teams, project teams, acquisitions, and purchasing teams.

Company sizes varied as well, with 50% of the respondents coming from businesses with 25 to 100 employees, while the other half consisted of an equal split between companies with over 100 employees, companies with 500+ employees, and those with 25 or fewer employees. This range provided us with a broad perspective of the industry, spanning small to large companies.

Trends in Project Size and Bidding Behavior

The average sales figures for these companies were also diverse. Half of the respondents reported average sales below \$500,000, while 33% had an average sale exceeding \$1,000,000, and 11% were involved in projects worth over \$10 million. This data showed a clear stratification in the industry based on project size, which had a direct impact on the business development strategies and challenges each company faced.

When looking at the trends in buying behavior, we discovered that for larger construction projects, two to five bids were generally required. This was critical information, as it reinforced the notion that most contractors are competing against several others, increasing the pressure to differentiate or lower their price to win the work.



Relationship-Driven Buying and Repeat Business

Our study revealed an encouraging trend: 95% of the respondents agreed they would be willing to spend 5-10% more if a contractor had a proven track record of success. Even more notably, nearly 40% said they consistently believe it's worth paying more for quality.

These results show the value of relationship-building and track records in winning work, which is at the core of the approach I'll be sharing with you in this book.

An eye-opening 90% of respondents reported that they regularly buy based on value rather than purely on price. However, despite this tendency, nearly 25% of buyers admitted they sometimes invite contractors to bid who have no real chance of winning the business. This dynamic supports the common frustration contractors face: participating in bids where they are used merely as a comparison or a check bid.

Another standout finding: 53% of buyers have at least one vendor they never put out to bid — they simply work with them due to trust and reliability. This is a result worth emphasizing, as it shows the power of building strong, long-term relationships with clients. Contractors who follow the contrarian process outlined in the pages that follow strive to become that trusted vendor: the one who doesn't need to compete on price every time, but rather wins on reputation and consistent value delivery.



Negotiation and Pricing Pressure

The study also provided valuable insights into negotiation tactics within the industry. When negotiating on price, 42% of respondents said they always attempt to secure a lower price, while 58% said they sometimes negotiate but don't always feel the need to push for reductions. Less than 10% said they rarely negotiate.

The most common negotiation tactic was simply asking for a better price. However, the respondents were split between two different negotiation strategies: aggressive best-and-final-offer tactics (also known as BAFO), and more open-book, collaborative tactics designed to lower the price through mutual cooperation.

A critical finding was that 70% of buyers will negotiate even when they don't need the price reduction, often without disclosing their motivation. In fact, 63% of buyers use negotiation as a strategy to create profit for themselves. This highlights the importance of contractors having strong negotiation skills and knowing how to protect their margins while maintaining good relationships with clients.

The Realities of Hard Bidding

One of the most concerning trends revealed by our study is that 70% of the industry wins work via hard bidding rather than negotiating deals. This process leads to a race to the bottom in terms of pricing and leaves contractors vulnerable to erosion of margins, miscommunication, and unrealistic expectations.

Another key finding: 91% of respondents said they don't receive "last look"—the chance to match a competitor's price or terms before losing the bid. Nearly 40% reported that they almost never receive such an opportunity, even when they have a longstanding relationship with the buyer.



The Burden of Repeat Bidding

Our study revealed that even repeat customers frequently require contractors to hard bid for new projects. Eighty percent of the respondents said that more than half of their repeat customers still make them bid for projects, despite having established relationships and a history of successful work together. This finding shows the lack of loyalty in the traditional contracting model and underscores the need for a contrarian approach that builds lasting partnerships instead of relying solely on price competition.

Performance and Project Issues

Low pricing continues to be the number one issue creating contention in the industry, according to our respondents. When contractors underbid, it leads to a host of problems throughout the project, including strained relationships with subcontractors, rushed timelines, and increased change orders.

The second most common issue cited was failure to engage subcontractors in owner-architect-contractor (OAC) decision-making processes, which often results in confusion, rework, and delays. Other issues included a lack of understanding about how buildings are actually constructed (leading to poorly informed bids), and owners setting unrealistic expectations from the outset by forcing low bids.

The Blame Game: Who's Responsible for Problems?

When problems arise, blame tends to be spread across multiple parties. In our study, 35% of respondents attributed delays to subcontractor underperformance, while 32% blamed poor design, and 25% cited indecisive owners. Notably, only 10% pointed to supplier delays as a significant cause of project issues.

This data highlights the importance of strong relationships between contractors and subcontractors, as well as the need for clear communication and realistic expectations from the outset of the project.

Litigation and the Costs of Disputes

Litigation is another growing concern in the industry, with half of the respondents reporting that they had been involved in litigation over project disputes. The average settlement amount was around \$500,000, but in some cases, the stakes were much higher, with disputes involving \$5 million or more.

The most common reasons for litigation included unrealistic expectations, poor performance, communication breakdowns, payment issues, and contract disputes. These disputes create significant financial risk and can severely damage relationships between contractors, clients, and subcontractors.

The Need for Innovation

Finally, our study revealed that many contractors are unfamiliar with more innovative contracting methods, such as integrated project delivery (IPD) and partnering programs. Only 20% of respondents had been involved in an IPD project, while 40% had no idea what IPD was. Partnering programs had a slightly higher recognition, with about 50% of respondents having participated in one, but 10% still didn't know what partnering meant.

These types of contracting methods promote collaboration, transparency, and shared risk — all key components of the contrarian approach to business development. By embracing these methods, contractors can move away from the contentious, adversarial nature of traditional contracting and toward a more collaborative, win-win model.



Summary of Key Findings



95%

of respondents are willing to pay more for a contractor with a proven track record.



53%

of buyers have at least one vendor they never put out to bid.



70%

of buyers negotiate even when they don't need the price reduction.



80%

of repeat customers still require contractors to hard bid.



50%

of contractors have been involved in litigation, with settlement amounts ranging from \$500,000 to over \$5 million.



What Can You Do?

The business development process this book outlines is designed to address these challenges head-on. It encourages contractors to move upstream in the process, develop stronger relationships with clients, and adopt innovative contracting methods to create better outcomes for all parties involved. By following the seven-step process outlined in this book, you'll be able to differentiate yourself from the competition, win more negotiated work, and increase your profitability.

The Contrarian Contractor is based on the principle that construction companies can thrive if their leaders are willing to *think differently about the entire business development process*. This is a question of mindset, and the mindset I'm talking about is not about bidding more or chasing the wrong clients. The mindset I'm talking about is rooted in an understanding of the fundamentals of complex selling in construction. It's about aligning every role in your company — from business development to project management to senior leadership — around a single unifying goal: **creating a process that wins the work you want and maximizes profitability.**

We've taken proven concepts from the Sandler Selling System and adapted them to the unique needs of the construction industry. Over a long history of consulting with contractors, we've seen how simple shifts in process and thinking can dramatically increase win rates, reduce stress, and create better project outcomes. The strategies in this book are based on Sandler's proven methods, developed and refined, and shown to work time and again in industries around the world.

Again: It's not enough to know these strategies. Success is all about owning them: owning the mindset, the tools, and the process required to lead in this industry, and then implementing that process. If that's what you're willing to do... let's get started.

Chapter One:

The Status Quo



Let's examine the typical contractor process for business development.

Contractors have followed this process for years, largely because it's "how things have always been done" in their world. That's true enough, of course ... but it doesn't mean the process is effective. Take a close look at the typical process now, focusing first on the buyer's side and then on the contractor's side.

The Buyer's Side

- 1 *Mislead about interest:* Buyers often express interest in your services, but this is usually because they need your bid to fulfill internal requirements, not because they intend to work with you.
- 2 *Gather information:* They ask questions—sometimes from a variety of departments or team members—without providing a clear path to a decision-maker or a clear idea of the decision-making process. They're looking to gather as much information as possible to assess the market, often without any intention of hiring.
- 3 *Act enthusiastic but commit to nothing:* You may hear positive feedback without real commitments or timelines, which can create a false sense of progress for the contractor.
- 4 *Hide:* When it comes time to make a decision, buyers often disappear, leaving you to follow up repeatedly. If you weren't their first choice, you might not hear anything at all.



The Contractor's Side

- 1 *Generate interest:* Contractors try to generate interest by attending networking events or responding to requests when bids are announced.
- 2 *Ask questions:* After showing interest, contractors typically ask a few basic questions. However, it's often too late to influence the decision-makers, as the project may already be underway.
- 3 *Quote and bid:* Contractors prepare their bid based on limited information and submit it, hoping they've captured what's important to the buyer.
- 4 *Chase:* Once the bid is submitted, contractors spend time following up, chasing the decision, and hoping for a response. This stage can be draining and often yields little feedback... unless you win on price. In this case, your margins are likely to be razor-thin or nonexistent.

Clearly, this is a dysfunctional process for us. The question is, why does it continue?

The best answer to that question is: It shouldn't. The traditional process isn't designed to benefit the contractor. It's designed to help buyers gather the most information, compare contractors, and, all too often, use one contractor's bid as leverage to get a better deal from their preferred provider. Essentially, you've become a check bid, a safety net for the buyer to justify their decision or lower the price.

That's the status quo. If that's not what you want... read on.

Chapter Two:

The Fool's Choice



When contractors engage in the traditional process you just read about, they unknowingly provide *free consulting* to buyers.

They give away valuable information and insights, hoping the buyer will reward them with the project. But as we have all seen too many times, the information they provide is frequently used to get a better deal from another contractor.

This is not where you want to be. This approach to selling not only wastes your time but also erodes your margins. Even when you win the project, it's often simply because you were the lowest bidder, an outcome that leads to tight margins, little to no room for error, and unacceptably high stress levels.

To compensate for the erosion-of-margin problem, a lot of contractors turn to change orders—a formal document used to modify the original scope of work outlined in a construction contract—or they look for other “creative” ways to increase profitability throughout the project. If they don't pursue such options, they risk not making any profit at all. If they do, though, they undermine the relationship with the buyer. A lot of contractors go down the latter path.

Unfortunately, the most popular alternative – the so-called “long-term” approach – is just as risky as the path I've just identified. I'm talking about the low- or no-margin plan that we justify because we think we're doing a “favor” for the client now, hoping to get better treatment or more work in the future. Hope springs eternal in the human breast.

So, which will it be? Change orders and other “creative” ideas for altering the dimensions of the project so you can make something resembling an acceptable margin? Or are you taking a hit today, hoping to be treated better at some point in the future?

This dichotomy is what I refer to as “the fool's choice.” These are not your only two options. You don't have to cut corners either to increase profit or do unpaid “favors” in hopes of future opportunities. There is a better way.

That better way demands something from you. It challenges you to move beyond your comfort zone. I call it the **contrarian solution.**

A contrarian solution moves along a very different path than the one you may be used to traveling. Contrarian solutions mean having hard conversations up front, setting clear expectations, and being willing to walk away from a project when it puts you in a compromising position.

Continuing down the path of eroded margins, change orders, and “creative” stuff that the buyer didn’t agree to up-front only perpetuates the traditional bid-hide-chase cycle. Worse, it leads to an erosion of trust on both sides — with the contractor feeling undervalued and the client viewing the contractor as unreliable.

Everything you are about to read is about contrarian solutions. Everything you are about to read is based on the Sandler Selling System. The creator of that system, David Sandler, was fond of saying, **“If your toe hurts, you’re probably standing on your own foot.”** Please consider thinking of what I’m about to share as the antidote to standing on your own foot.

Full disclosure: This is down to you. Nobody else. Implementing a system that addresses all your business development frustrations as a contractor isn’t a matter of blaming the client, the industry, or anyone else. It’s a matter of overcoming your own resistance to change, seeing a more compelling approach, and making the conscious choice to take a new course of action, one that will make your world better for everyone.



Chapter Three:

The Contrarian Process



Becoming a contrarian contractor means taking control of the sales process, owning your value, and refusing to be part of the chase.

A contrarian contractor follows a structured, seven-step process that puts them in control of the relationship, allows them to add real value, and leads to long-term, profitable work that everyone is proud of.

Let's examine the seven steps to success that define the contrarian approach:

- 1 Understanding Your Market:** A contrarian contractor knows their market inside and out. They understand the key players, upcoming projects, and trends shaping the industry.
- 2 Opportunity Identification:** Instead of waiting for bids to hit the street, contrarian contractors actively seek out opportunities with a superior value proposition, one based on deep knowledge of their ideal client, a value proposition that confirms a strong fit with their own expertise and business goals.
- 3 Teaming:** They collaborate with the right partners — architects, engineers, suppliers, and subcontractors — to position themselves as the best choice for the project.
- 4 Qualification:** Contrarian contractors have a stringent qualification process that ensures they only bid on projects that fit their unique value proposition. If the project doesn't meet their criteria, they walk away.
- 5 Solution Development:** Instead of offering generic bids, they create tailored solutions that align with the client's needs and emphasize their value.

- 6 **Proposing and Advancement:** Every proposal is an opportunity to advance the sale by winning a clear next step for collaboration. Contrarian contractors book meetings from meetings, ensuring continuous communication and minimizing the need for follow-up.
- 7 **Account Management and Expansion:** Contrarian contractors get projects from projects by building strong relationships with clients, ensuring that each project leads to more work in the future.

This methodology requires that you not only deploy the right system but also maintain the right behaviors, attitudes, and techniques to pull it off. This book is designed to introduce you to that process; in the Appendix, you'll find the tools you need to begin implementing it. I've designed this book to be used repeatedly as a resource you and your team can study and implement. Based on their roles and responsibilities, I suggest you assign responsibilities using the **RACI system**.

As you use these tools and collaborate with your team, assign each conversation participant one of the following responsibility tags and clarify each participant's role.

R = Responsible. These are the people who do the actual work necessary to get the job done.

A = Accountable. This is the one person who is ultimately accountable for the completion of the task and who delegates to those responsible.

C = Consulted. These are the people whose counsel is sought and with whom communication flows in both directions during an initiative.

I = Informed. These people are simply kept in the loop on the initiative's progress. Typically, communication with them is only in one direction.

As you assign these roles and your team fulfills them, it's important to have honest conversations and be fully committed to transparency and innovation. Egos, the way things were done in the past, titles, and positions must now be put aside. It's time for adult-to-adult conversations in which the best information wins—not the person with the biggest ego or the person who can yell the loudest.

To make sure that happens, you'll want to create a safe working environment – and you'll want to be prepared to call out unproductive thinking and attitudes. These could include things like having a high need for approval (which would prevent us from disrupting our client's current bidding process) and deep emotional involvement (which often causes us to want to talk and present instead of listening and learning). An illuminating side note is in order here: the average salesperson thinks they're

comfortable with five seconds of silence in a selling situation. When tested, the average time they're *actually comfortable* with silence comes out to about two-thirds of a second. This is a sign of deep emotional involvement in project development.

Other mental/attitude lapses you'll want to watch out for include personal hangups about money (typically dating back to childhood), inadvertently inserting pricing pressure into a relationship, believing we can't ask our clients to set dates with us to discuss the project or get involved in assisting in the pre-con process¹, and what I call "record collection." Basically, record collection is any head trash we have about getting the next project. It's holding on to old negative experiences as though they were precious artifacts and curating them in a big collection of catastrophes that we mentally relive repeatedly, like a box full of treasured vinyl records.

When combined with these dysfunctional thought processes, the traditional sales process leads to pricing pressure, competition we can't expect to win, and indecision. We don't have time or bandwidth for any of that. Why not? Because we're contrarians. That means we are committed to disrupting our unproductive biases, interrupting dysfunctional patterns, committing ourselves to transparency, and doing what we know will benefit everyone in the long run.



¹Pre-construction services provide essential support to project owners, architects, and engineers, aiding their decision-making in the early stages of a construction project. These services are focused on the planning phase, prior to the start of actual construction, and are often referred to simply as "pre-construction" or "pre-con."

Succeeding in today's construction industry means shifting from the traditional contractor mindset to a contrarian mindset. But let's be clear — this isn't easy. **Making this shift requires a complete change in how you approach business development, qualify projects, and interact with clients. That doesn't happen overnight.** It requires sustained effort and, likely, the help of a coach or mentor. But the results are worth it. Contrarian contractors win more negotiated work, have higher margins, and build strong long-term relationships with clients, architects, and subcontractors. They avoid the race to the bottom that comes with bidding wars and consistently deliver projects that meet or exceed client expectations.

Typical Contractor Talk During a Bid Meeting:

"We can be competitive on price, and we'll turn around the RFI in 48 hours."

Contrarian Contractor Talk During a Bid Meeting:

"Let's be clear. If we're being measured on price alone, we may not be the best fit. But if you want us involved early to solve problems others miss, let's talk."

Result

Client delayed bid process to allow deeper design consultation!

What I'm about to share with you is based on the world-famous **Sandler Enterprise Selling program**. It will help you stop chasing after projects and, instead, win the ones that matter — the ones where you get paid well for your expertise, the ones where clients fight to work with you because they know they're getting the best.

As you read the following chapters, let me challenge you to consider the possibility that the big question is not whether you *know* any of these principles but whether you are effectively implementing them. Are your management team, business developers, project managers, and general managers all aligned with this approach? Does your company operate as a cohesive unit, where everyone understands that they're part of the sales process and that every interaction with a client matters?

If you can commit to all that, please move on to Chapter Four.



Chapter Four:

Understanding Your Market

The first critical step in becoming a contrarian contractor is developing a deep understanding of your market.

Construction is a complex sale with many moving parts: owners, contractors, suppliers, architects, engineers, construction managers, insurance agencies, permitting authorities, and more. Each of these stakeholders has their own priorities, challenges, and motivations. Navigating this kind of complexity requires more than just technical knowledge—it requires strategic insight into the market forces driving the industry and the ability to position yourself as a trusted partner who delivers value.

Becoming that kind of partner means more than knowing who your competitors are and what they charge. It means understanding the broader trends shaping the industry and understanding how those trends will likely impact your clients' decision-making processes.

For example, are your clients facing pressure to reduce costs due to economic uncertainty? Are they dealing with new regulations that are increasing their project timelines or costs? Are they struggling with labor shortages that are delaying their projects?

As a contrarian contractor, you will want to learn to anticipate these and other challenges, so you can position your business as the potential solution. This requires staying ahead of the curve—constantly monitoring market trends, understanding your client's pain points, and adjusting your business strategy accordingly.

The Market Analysis Tool

Sandler's **Market Analysis Tool** is designed to help you systematically analyze your market and identify the key trends and forces shaping it. Using this tool, you can develop a clearer picture of where your opportunities lie and how to position yourself as a leader in your field. This tool helps you:

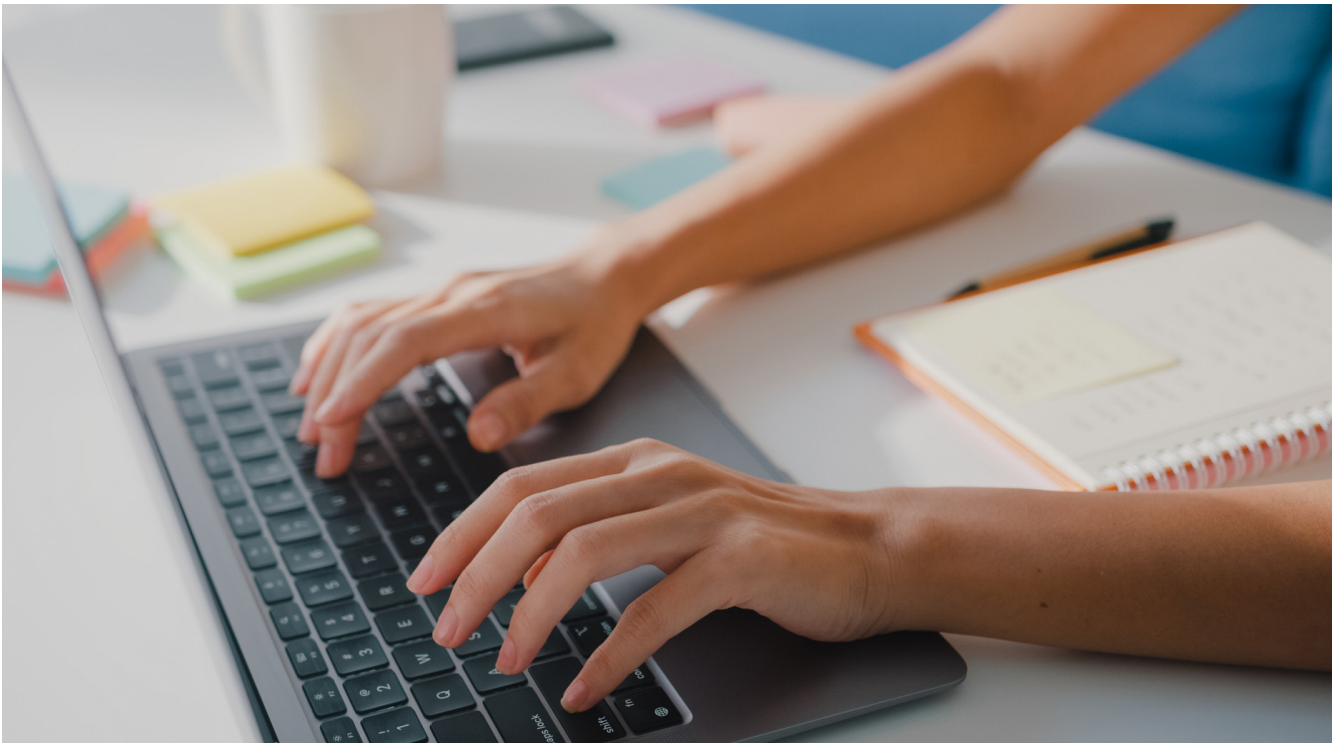
- *Identify emerging trends.* Whether it's new technologies, regulatory changes, or shifts in client priorities, understanding the latest trends is key to staying ahead of your competitors.
- *Understand client needs.* By engaging with clients and asking the right questions, you can better understand what they truly value and how you can deliver that value better than anyone else.
- *Assess the competitive landscape.* Knowing who your competitors are and how they operate is critical to differentiating yourself. The Market Analysis Tool helps you identify where your competitors are strong and vulnerable, allowing you to position your business strategically.

 **Market Analysis**

The Market Analysis tool contains two sections, Market Analysis and Account Base. Begin by completing a market analysis for your broad market and then focus on your account base. Enter what you know and then take time to research and strengthen your business acumen to enhance interactions and approach with your prospective clients.

Market Analysis	Account Base
My Market Definition:	Industry Acumen:
Market Trends:	Industry Trends:
Economic Conditions:	Common Pain:
Political or Global Factors:	Sales Cycles:
Regulations:	Revenue Potential:
Latest News:	Networking and Relationships:
Other:	Technology and Tools:

You can find out how to access this tool in the [Appendix](#).



Sandler's market analysis methodology is designed for contractors who are ready to stop reacting to the market—and start shaping how the market sees them. When used in the right way, this methodology helps you avoid chasing bad-fit projects, say no to low-margin work with confidence, and position your business as the obvious choice—even when your price is higher.

Once you've analyzed the market, there are a set of critical questions you will need to answer to win more of the right work and stop blending in with everyone else. You can't afford to answer these questions generically—and you can't afford for anyone on your team to be unclear about what the answers are.

Below are the key questions we help contractors work through. Taking the time to create your organization's unique answer to each question will shape how you pursue business, how your team sells and delivers, and how clients view your firm.

The first critical step in becoming a contrarian contractor is developing a deep understanding of your market.

It's important to analyze how clients now judge you on key decision factors like price, responsiveness, delivery confidence, risk mitigation, and overall trust.

- **Why it matters:** When you understand what buyers value most and how you're seen today, you can position your firm as the obvious choice—even in a crowded bid or negotiation.



Where are we truly profitable—and where are we just staying busy?

You need to know which projects, scopes, clients, and contract types produce real profit—and which ones drag margins down.

- **Why it matters:** This tells you where to grow, where to protect, and where to stop wasting resources.

Who's the right client for us—meaning, what does a “great-fit” project look like?

Defining your Ideal Client Profile means knowing what project types, buyer personalities, risk tolerances, and delivery models set your team up to succeed.

- **Why it matters:** Identifying the answer to this question lets your business development team focus only on opportunities that are winnable, profitable, and aligned.

Where are we exposed internally—and where can we confidently lead?

A clear understanding of your organization's strengths and weaknesses—alongside outside threats and inside opportunities—helps you lead more intentionally.

- **Why it matters:** If your team isn't aligned on the answer to this question, your strategy will always be inconsistent.
-

Where should we invest energy—on existing relationships or new ones?

Not all clients are created equal. Knowing which ones to protect, grow, or replace helps you build a more predictable pipeline.

- **Why it matters:** Knowing the answer to this question gives your team a focused game plan for growth instead of chasing everything.
-



What's our real value to the client—besides price and reputation?

Being able to clearly and credibly explain the specific results and advantages you bring—especially under pressure—is what sets trusted firms apart.

- **Why it matters:** Knowing the answer to this question changes the conversation from “What’s your number?” to “What’s the value of working with your team — as opposed to anyone else’s?”

Who do we actually compete against—and how do we outperform them?

Understanding how your top competitors position themselves, win jobs, and interact with clients is key to gaining a strategic edge.

- **Why it matters:** The answers to this question show you where to play offense—and how to avoid sounding like everyone else.

Each of these questions can be answered through structured research and hard data—not just opinions. In our work with contractors, we use methods like competitive impact analysis, business snapshots, ideal customer profile design, SWOT, KARE, and value proposition development to get there.



What matters most is getting to clear, tested answers that help you win more of the right jobs and avoid the wrong ones.



Case Study: The Safety-First Contractor (Part One)

One contractor I worked with recognized that safety was the top priority for their clients. This contractor had spent years repairing the exteriors of buildings in a smaller metro area, but realized they needed help to differentiate themselves from their competitors. Close analysis of their strengths and weaknesses in the marketplace revealed that what their clients truly cared about wasn't just the overall quality of the repairs—it was safety and risk mitigation.

By making safety their unique value proposition, they were able to transform their business.

They didn't just pay lip service to safety—they invested heavily in becoming the industry leaders in safety protocols. They wrote a comprehensive safety manual that was widely adopted by other construction companies, establishing themselves as the go-to experts in safety and risk management. This focus on safety allowed them to grow their business from \$30 million in annual revenues to over \$500 million.

This true story illustrates the power of understanding your market and positioning yourself based on what your clients truly value most. The safety-first contractor didn't just compete on price—they differentiated themselves by delivering what they knew their clients cared about most, and over time they earned a reputation as the safest contractor in their region.

Understanding Your Market

At the end of this and each subsequent chapter, you'll find a series of questions to help you assess where you stand in implementing the strategies and principles discussed. Use these questions to guide your self-evaluation and identify areas for improvement. For each question area, give yourself a score between 1 and 10, reflecting where you are right now with this competency. Be brutally honest.

- 1 How well do you understand the market forces affecting your business? How good a job is your organization doing when it comes to staying current on the latest trends, regulations, and technologies shaping your industry?

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

- 2 Do you regularly engage with your clients to learn about their world and develop a deeper understanding of their evolving needs? Are you positioning your business to address its top concerns rather than simply reacting to the moment's demands?

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

- 3 How well do you understand your competitors? Do you research them on at least a monthly basis?

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

- 4 Are you differentiating yourself from the competition in ways that matter to your clients rather than simply trying to compete on price?

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

If you don't actively engage with your market and position yourself strategically, you'll miss out on valuable opportunities. Use the Market Analysis Tool to get a clearer picture of your business's current state... and on areas where you can improve your competitive position.



Chapter Five:

Opportunity Identification

Contrarian contractors don't wait for bids to come out. Instead, they actively identify opportunities before they become public knowledge.

The most successful contractors don't just react to what's already available—they create their own opportunities by engaging with clients early in the process, unearthing and understanding their pain points, and positioning themselves as trusted advisors well before the formal bidding process begins.

The Pitfall of Waiting for Bids

The traditional contractor's approach to opportunity identification is reactive. They wait for a project to be publicly advertised, submit a bid, and hope for the best. But by the time the bid is out, it's usually too late to build meaningful relationships with the key decision makers. At that point, the client has already gathered information from multiple sources. That means your chances of standing out are slim.

Contrarian contractors take a very different approach. They position themselves as the best solution before the competition even knows the project exists.

Sandler® Tool: The Opportunity Identification Process

Sandler’s **Opportunity Identification Process** helps you develop a systematic approach to identifying and engaging with high-value opportunities before they go to bid. This tool facilitates researching potential clients, understanding their business cycles, and initiating conversations early. Here’s how it works:

- *Research:* Identify key entities and decision-makers within your target market and learn about their specific pain points, needs, and upcoming projects.
- *Engage early:* Don’t wait for a project to be publicly advertised. Contact decision-makers early and position yourself as a resource who can help them solve their problems.
- *Stay top-of-mind:* Stay there once you’ve gotten onto the radar screen.

Prospecting Plan Framework				
Build a plan for growing your business. Document behaviors, actions, and results for prospecting new revenue streams, new logo/client acquisition, new departments or lines of business within existing accounts. This tool has a separate section for prospecting through social outreach. Update this tool monthly or quarterly with actual results and recalibrate to drive the outcomes you need.				
General Prospecting				
Activities	KARE Designation	Frequency	Desired Results	Actual Results
CALLS				
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
INTRODUCTIONS AND REFERRALS				
1				
2				

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You can find out how to access this tool in the **Appendix**.



Market Intelligence Resources for Commercial Contractors

Dodge Construction Network

Dodge provides one of the largest and most comprehensive databases of private and public construction projects across North America. Users can access detailed project reports, upcoming bidding opportunities, contractor activity, and long-term forecasting tools that allow companies to track emerging market trends and competitor activity.

Strengths

Industry-leading project database; strong forecasting tools and competitive tracking

Weaknesses

Interface can feel outdated; high cost for full access

ConstructConnect

ConstructConnect consolidates multiple bid opportunity platforms into one system, including BidClerk, iSqFt, and others. It enables contractors to track bidding activity across a wide range of markets, see which contractors are bidding specific jobs, and identify potential partners or competitors. Users can set alerts for new projects and monitor pipeline activity on a daily basis.

Strengths

Comprehensive coverage; integrates formerly separate tools like BidClerk and iSqFt

Weaknesses

High notification volume; may require filtering for quality leads

BuildingConnected (by Autodesk)

BuildingConnected is widely used by general contractors to manage bid invitations, subcontractor communications, and bid package distribution. Subcontractors can see which GCs are actively bidding projects and which subcontractors are being invited. While primarily used for active bid management, it also provides visibility into contractor relationships and project flows.

Strengths

Real-time visibility into which GCs are active and which subs they prefer

Weaknesses

Focuses more on active bids than strategic market trends



AI-Powered Research Using ChatGPT

AI tools like ChatGPT allow contractors to conduct fast, customized market research by generating competitive insights, analyzing customer pain points, and identifying emerging trends in targeted sectors. While this book provides a few simple examples, at Sandler we maintain a much more comprehensive library of AI prompts organized by each stage of the business development and sales process. These proprietary prompt libraries allow clients to gather industry intelligence, improve sales conversations, and guide strategic planning across every phase of contractor growth.



Example Prompts:

What are the top 5 challenges facing commercial building owners in [market] right now?

Summarize current trends in mechanical contracting for healthcare facilities.

Create a list of potential differentiators for a [trade] contractor competing against national firms.



Note, too, that large corporations and government entities often signal their intentions months in advance through small, non-publicized actions that the savvy contractor can learn to identify. For instance, a state or local government entity might make subtle budget reallocations or approvals for a series of small, seemingly unrelated projects in each neighborhood – actions that hint at future large-scale initiatives that will require the help of contractors.

You can also keep an eye on permit filings and environmental impact studies in your region. These documents are often the first sign that a major construction project is in the works. Monitoring these closely will allow you to approach potential clients by tracking them before they officially announce their projects. This is a significant competitive advantage.

Contrarian contractors learn to connect the dots!

Case Study: **The Embassy Contractor (Part One)**

This small, family-owned business had been stagnant for years, and was struggling to grow despite a hard-earned reputation for quality work. A close evaluation of its past projects revealed that the company had a competitive edge that it had not yet taken full advantage of: expertise in embassy projects. These highly specialized projects required a unique blend of security protocols, communication strategies, and logistical expertise that other contractors simply didn't have.

Based on this insight, leadership made a strategic change. Instead of continuing to pursue general construction work, the company focused exclusively on embassy projects. By developing ever-deeper relationships with government agencies and embassy staff, they began identifying embassy construction opportunities before those projects went to bid. And by engaging early, they could shape the project scope and differentiate themselves from the competition before any competitor had a chance to interact with the decision makers.

Within two years, the company doubled its revenue as a direct result of pursuing a business strategy of collaborating on and winning prestigious embassy contracts. Their embassy security and communication expertise made them the go-to contractor in a highly specialized niche. This case study shows how focusing on opportunity identification and specialization can transform a stagnant business into a thriving enterprise.

Sandler® Tool: The Opportunity Identification Process (Continued)

A key of Sandler's **Opportunity Identification Process** is to build relationships with key decision-makers long before a project reaches the bidding phase. You can do this by pursuing the following strategies:

Lead "horizon meetings." As the name suggests, these are meetings about what's on the horizon – not what's happening right now. Start with the contacts who seem most likely to procure the type of work you're passionate about. Schedule horizon meetings with key decision-makers to discuss future projects where you can provide insight. This will help you influence the parameters of projects as they become more formalized.

Work on networking and referral generation: Attend industry events, join associations, and seek introductions from past clients to potential future clients. Here again, the goal is to meet key decision-makers early.

Leverage LinkedIn and other social media platforms: Use online networks like LinkedIn to connect with influencers in your target market. Share relevant content and insights without falling into the “free consulting” trap; strike the balance that will enable you to position yourself as the industry expert you are.

- *Conduct focused research and intelligence gathering:* Use AI tools such as Chat GPT, Anthropic, and Claude to research public records, permit filings, and industry reports to gather background information about upcoming projects before they're publicly announced.

Prospecting Plan Framework – Continued

5--3--1



You can find out how to access this tool in the **Appendix**.

Opportunity Identification

For each question area, give yourself a score between 1 and 10, reflecting where you are right now with this competency. Be brutally honest.

- 1 Are you identifying opportunities early, before they go to bid?

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

- 2 Are you engaging effectively with decision-makers before a project is public?

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

- 3 Are you successfully creating your opportunities by proactively engaging with prospective clients – as opposed to relying on bids and RFPs?

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

- 4 Are you using data and industry intelligence to identify potential projects?

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

You really can master the art of consistently identifying new opportunities early. Use the *Opportunity Identification Process* to become more proactive... and position yourself as a leader in your chosen field.

A photograph of three construction workers on a site. One worker in an orange vest and yellow hard hat stands on the left. Another in a yellow vest and white hard hat stands in the middle, looking at a laptop. A third in a blue vest and blue hard hat stands on the right, also looking at the laptop. They are in a concrete structure under construction.

Chapter Six:

Teaming and Collaboration

Teaming is an all-too-often overlooked prerequisite of success in the construction industry. For some, it's an unfamiliar concept.

Teaming means connecting the members of *our* team with the members of *their* team in a productive way. Every construction project involves collaboration with various stakeholders, including clients, the architectural and engineering community, subcontractors, suppliers, and various internal teams. **The best contractors don't just "manage" these relationships—they excel at designing and supporting cohesive, high-performing teams that work together** to deliver projects on time and at or under budget. This is what Sandler means by "teaming."

Contrarian contractors understand that their success depends on their ability to foster collaboration across all parties involved in a project. Rather than treating subcontractors and suppliers as interchangeable vendors, they build long-term relationships that lead to more efficient, higher-quality projects. Similarly, they invest in training and developing their internal teams, ensuring that everyone from GMs to project managers to business developers understands the company's strategic goals and how best to achieve them.



Building and Supporting the Right Teams


To succeed in construction, you'll need to build and support the right teams—both internally and externally. This means partnering with subcontractors who align with your values, have a track record of delivering quality work, and are committed to maintaining open communication throughout the project. It also means investing in your people, ensuring that your project managers, engineers, and field teams have the skills and the support they need to lead and collaborate effectively.

This brings us to an important point. Many contractors focus far more on developing and supporting their technical teams (such as engineers and tradespeople) than on their business developers and project managers. Project managers and business developers are just as important to your success as your technical staff. These are the people who interact with clients, make decisions on the ground, and ensure that projects run smoothly. If they're not aligned with your overall strategy, you'll face delays, budget overruns, and unhappy clients. So you may want to consider the possibility that there's an imbalance there in terms of personnel support that is worth looking at.

Sandler’s Teaming and Collaboration Tool

The Sandler Teaming and Collaboration Tool helps you build effective project pursuit teams that work together seamlessly, both internally and externally. This tool includes strategies for:

- *Selecting the right subcontractors:* Identify subcontractors who share your values and have a proven track record of delivering high-quality work.
- *Fostering collaboration:* Use communication frameworks and project management tools to ensure that all team members—both internal and external—are aligned on project goals, timelines, and expectations.
- *Developing leadership skills:* Invest in training, coaching, and peer reinforcement for your GMs, project managers, and business developers. Help them to develop the leadership skills they need to manage complex projects and drive collaboration. (For help with this, feel free to visit <http://Sandler.com>.)



Pursuit Summary

As you research a prospect and their company on LinkedIn, use this guide to document important information so you can leverage what you have learned when it is time to engage with the prospect.

Account Name	Client Market		
Industry			
Industry	Client Market		
	Account:		
	KARE Type:		
	Opportunity Name:		
	Sales Stage:		Total Score:
	Sales Lead:		
	Value:		
	Thermometer:		
	Organizational Pain:		
	Close Date:		

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You can find out how to access this tool in the **Appendix**.

How most Contractors Run Their Business

Significant time and resources are spent training and supporting the technical side of the company—foremen, tradespeople, and superintendents. That makes sense: they build the work.

But here's the problem—many contractors underinvest in the people who win the work and manage the jobs once they're sold.

Project managers and business developers are expected to just “get it” — often without structured training, coaching, or alignment to company strategy.

These roles are critical. These people are the ones pricing the work, negotiating terms, making day-to-day decisions, and shaping the client experience. If they're not equipped or aligned, you'll see margins fade, clients get frustrated, and schedules slip—not because of poor workmanship, but because of poor communication and lack of leadership.

If your business depends on project managers and business development staff to drive revenue, manage risk, and protect relationships, why not invest in them, as you invest in your field teams?





Case Study:

The 104-Year-Old Family Business

This extraordinary company's longevity and success can be attributed to its commitment to building and supporting strong teams. Over its 104-year history, the company has repeatedly reevaluated its focus, adapting to market changes and shifting client demands. But one thing has remained constant: its ability to build, support, and lead high-performing teams.

The leadership of this company understands that its success depends on far more than technical expertise. They've consistently invested in developing their people, and in creating a culture of collaboration and accountability. That culture has endured. By fostering strong relationships with both subcontractors and suppliers, they have delivered complex projects on time and within budget, year after year.

Their approach to teaming and collaboration has been a key factor in their ability to stay ahead of the competition and remain profitable in a constantly changing industry.

Teaming and Collaboration

For each question area, give yourself a score between 1 and 10, reflecting where you are right now with this competency. Be brutally honest.

- 1 How well would you say your internal teams collaborate?

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

- 2 Are your project managers, engineers, and business developers aligned on your company's strategic goals? When asked to identify the most important business goal, do they all name the same goals?

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

- 3 Do you invest financially in developing leadership and collaboration skills within your team?

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

- 4 Are the subcontractors and suppliers you select aligned with your values — as opposed to being chosen based on offering the lowest price?

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

- 5 How well does your organization collaborate with external stakeholders?

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

- 6 Would you say you consistently foster and support long-term relationships with clients, subcontractors, and suppliers instead of making these relationships transactional?

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

The ability to build, support, and lead cohesive teams is critical to your success as a contrarian contractor. Use the Teaming and Collaboration Tool to ensure that all internal and external stakeholders are aligned and working together toward the same goals.



Chapter Seven:

Qualification

Many contractors waste precious time and limited resources pursuing every project that comes their way, regardless of whether the opportunity represents a good fit for their business. This scattershot approach leads to wasted effort, low-margin work, and a high failure rate.

Contrarian contractors take a different approach. They qualify every opportunity before they invest time, effort, and resources in preparing a bid. They ask tough questions early on to determine whether the project matches their expertise, resources, and business goals. If the answer is no, they focus their energy on better opportunities.

Qualification Means More than Money

Qualifying a project involves more than determining whether it has the potential to be profitable. It means ensuring that the project aligns with your company's strengths, values, and long-term goals.

Pursuing projects that don't fit your expertise, working culture, or capacity is a recipe for disaster. You'll find yourself struggling to meet unrealistic deadlines, dealing with budget overruns, and facing unhappy clients who always expect more than you can deliver.

It's not uncommon for a contractor to think that saying "no" to an invitation to develop a bid will damage their relationship with the prospective client. It won't. A contrarian knows that to be a trusted advisor, they have an obligation not to take on projects that aren't in their swing zone. That's non-negotiable. And they know that honoring this obligation, not intermittently but over the long term, is what builds trust with their clients.

Qualification is also about understanding the client's expectations and ensuring that those expectations align with what you can provide. If a client is focused solely on price, for example, and you know that you can't deliver the project at a price that meets their expectations, it's better to walk away than take on a project that will damage your reputation, profitability, or both.



It's worth remembering: The projects you choose to pursue determine the future of your business. If you constantly take on low-margin projects, compete on price, or stretch your resources too thin, you're not setting your business up for success. Contrarian contractors understand that not every project is worth pursuing.

Here's a concise summary of what it means to qualify a construction project properly.

- 1 **Confirm the Client Expectations.** Does the client have realistic expectations? Are they willing to pay for the level of quality and service that you provide? If the client's primary concern is price, and you're not willing to sacrifice quality, this might not be the right project for you.
- 2 **Confirm the Timeline.** Does the project timeline align with your current workload? Many contractors take on too many projects at a time, stretching their teams too thin, leading to missed timelines, frustrated clients, and cost overruns. Understanding whether you can meet a project's deadline before committing is key to maintaining your reputation for reliability.
- 3 **Confirm the Scope of Work.** Is the project's scope clear and within your expertise? Projects with vague or poorly defined scopes often lead to scope creep, where additional work is added without proper compensation. Proper qualification involves asking clarifying questions to ensure that the client knows what they need and that you can deliver.
- 4 **Confirm the Profitability Potential.** Can you realistically expect to make a profit on this project? Many contractors win projects based on the lowest bid, discovering later that they've underpriced the work and are now operating at a loss. Contrarian contractors carefully evaluate the costs and risks involved in each project to ensure that they're not taking on work that will negatively impact their bottom line.
- 5 **Uncover the Decision-Making Process.** Let's assume you want to do the project – it's a perfect match. Who is the ultimate decision-maker? Do you have access to that person? Is there more than one decision-maker? (Very often, there is.) Who would have to sign the contract? Who are the chief influencers? Are you in contact with the right people who are willing and able to move the project forward? Do they want you to do this project? How do you know? Please don't skip this part! One of the biggest mistakes contractors make is investing time in a project without understanding the key decision-makers. If you're not speaking to the right people, you're not truly qualifying for the opportunity.

Sandler® Tool: Opportunity Planner

The Opportunity Planner helps you qualify projects more effectively. This tool guides you through the key questions you need to ask during the qualification process, such as:

- What are the client’s main priorities for the project?
- Who are the key decision-makers, and have you engaged with them?
- What is the project timeline, and does it align with your current workload?
- What is the budget for the project, and does it match the scope of work?
- Are there any red flags that suggest this project may not be a good fit?

By using the **Opportunity Planner**, you can avoid wasting time and resources on projects that don’t align with your expertise or profit goals. This tool ensures that you’re engaging with the right opportunities and that you’re asking the right questions before making any commitments.

Top Six Opportunities			
Document potential opportunities from within an account as they are identified, including the opportunity, the client contact, possible product/services, and possible value. If any of these turn into an opportunity, transition to the Pursuit Navigator Plus Tool.			
Opportunity One			
Opportunity	Client Contact	Product/Service	Value
Opportunity Two			
Opportunity	Client Contact	Product/Service	Value
Opportunity Three			
Opportunity	Client Contact	Product/Service	Value
Opportunity Four			
Opportunity	Client Contact	Product/Service	Value

You can find out how to access this tool in the **Appendix**.

Case Study: Embassy Contractor (Part Two)

Let’s revisit the case of the embassy contractor who successfully doubled revenue by focusing on a carefully chosen niche: embassy projects. One of the main reasons for this company’s success was its rigorous qualification process.

Before committing to any embassy project, leadership asked a series of tough, specific questions about the scope, security requirements, and client expectations in several pre-defined areas.

For example, before actively pursuing a project to build a new embassy in a foreign country, this contractor made sure they fully understood all the complex security protocols involved and the specific communication needs of the country's diplomatic staff. They also verified that they had the internal resources and expertise to meet the client's demands, and confirmed that the project's budget allowed them to deliver a high-quality result without cutting corners. Translation: **They were not chasing bids. They were auditioning governments who wanted to work with them and determining which made the most sense!**

By carefully qualifying their opportunities, they avoided projects that didn't align with their expertise or profitability goals. They could then focus their energy, attention, and resources on high-value projects that they were uniquely qualified to deliver. This careful qualification process helped them build a reputation as the leading contractor for embassy construction.

Self-Assessment:

Qualification

For each question area, give yourself a score between 1 and 10, reflecting where you are right now with this competency. Be brutally honest.

- 1** Do you have a formal process in place for qualifying projects?
- If not, you're likely wasting time on opportunities that won't lead to profitable work.



- 2** Do you consciously avoid taking on projects that stretch your resources or capabilities to the limit – or beyond the limit?
- This kind of work is a sign that you're not properly qualifying opportunities.



- 3** Before committing to a project, are you regularly asking tough questions about client expectations, project timelines, and profitability?
- If you're not, you're putting your business at risk.



- 4** Do you know the key decision-makers and influencers before you commit substantial resources to engaging on a potential project?
- If you're not speaking with the right people, you're not properly qualifying the opportunity.



Chapter Eight:

Solution Development



Once you've qualified for an opportunity and determined it's a good fit for your business, the next step is developing a tailored solution that addresses the client's specific needs. Contrarian contractors don't rely on a one-size-fits-all approach. They take the time to understand each client's unique challenges and then design a solution that sets them apart from the competition.

Customizing Your Solutions

Traditional contractors often take a standardized, "cookie-cutter" approach to project proposals, presenting the same services and pricing structure to every client. While this might save time, it doesn't allow you to differentiate yourself from competitors, especially when the client is shopping for the best value.

Contrarian contractors craft customized solutions for each client. They take the time to understand the client's unique organizational structure, pain points, goals, and concerns. They develop a truly customized solution that addresses all of those issues. This personalized approach sets them apart from competitors and demonstrates that they actually understand the client's business and are fully invested in their success.


Consider the typical project bid. A traditional contractor might simply list the services they'll provide, the timeline for completion, and the price. A contrarian contractor, however, will go much further. They'll identify the unique challenges unearthed during the discovery process (e.g., the need for accelerated timelines arising from one or more unique business challenges they've uncovered, stringent safety requirements, or sustainability goals), and they'll explain how their solution specifically addresses each of those challenges.

This approach positions you as a problem solver (and preventer) — not "just another contractor." Of course, that's what being a trusted advisor is all about: solving and preventing problems, collaboratively.

Sandler's Solution Development Tool

The Sandler **Solution Development Tool** is designed to help you craft tailored solutions that resonate with specific clients. This tool encourages you to:

- *Identify client pain points:* What are the specific challenges this client is facing? Are they dealing with tight deadlines, regulatory hurdles, or budget constraints? What's the top priority problem, the issue that needs solving most? Uncovering the answers to these questions is the first step in developing a customized solution.
- *Differentiate your value:* How does your approach solve the client's problems in a way that your competitors cannot? Clearly articulate your unique value proposition, whether it's your team's expertise, your innovative use of technology, or your track record of delivering on time and under budget.
- *Provide options:* Many clients appreciate having options. Instead of offering a single solution, consider providing tiered options to address the problems you've discussed that allow the client to choose the level of service that best fits their budget and needs.

 **Business Case Developer Tool**

Use this tool to create a customized, succinct summary of the results your buyer will realize from choosing your solution.

Account	
Champion Name	

Business Case Developer Tool	
WHAT IT IS	
WHAT IT DOES	
WHAT IS THE BENEFIT	
HOW IT'S MEASURED	
RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI)	

You can find out how to access this tool in the [Appendix](#).



Case Study: Safety First Contractor (Part Two)

The safety-first contractor we discussed earlier didn't just prioritize safety—they developed customized safety solutions for each client.

For example, one of their clients, a large hospital, had specific safety concerns in two areas: ensuring the safety of contractor and subcontractor employees during construction and minimizing possible disruptions to patient care during construction. Instead of offering a standard “plain vanilla” construction safety plan – something cut-and-pasted from another project – the contractor developed a comprehensive safety protocol that was tailored to the hospital's unique environment. This included specialized training for their workers on how to safely operate in this healthcare setting and a detailed plan for minimizing noise and disruption.

This customized solution directly addressed the client's concerns and demonstrated the contractor's expertise in handling complex, high-risk projects. As a result, they won the contract, even though they weren't the lowest bidder. Their ability to develop a tailored solution set them apart from their competitors and positioned them as the best possible choice for the project.

Solution Development

For each question area, give yourself a score between 1 and 10, reflecting where you are right now with this competency. Be brutally honest.

- 1** Are you taking the time to uncover and understand your client's unique challenges before developing a proposed solution?
- If not, you're missing an opportunity to differentiate yourself from competitors.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

- 2** Do you only present highly tailored solutions that address specific, unique client pain points?
- Offering customized solutions helps you stand out as a problem solver rather than just another contractor.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

- 3** Do you usually win projects based on the value of your solution rather than being the lowest bidder?
- If you're consistently competing on price alone, it's a sign that you must improve how you develop and present your solutions

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

- 4** Do you provide clients with multiple customized options, allowing them to choose the solution that best fits their needs and budget?
- Giving clients options can make them feel more in control of the decision-making process and increase your chances of winning the project.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

A man with a beard, wearing a dark blue button-down shirt and light-colored trousers, stands in a bright, modern office environment. He is gesturing with both hands as if presenting or explaining something. In the foreground, the back of a person's head is visible, looking towards the man. In the background, other people are seated at a long wooden table, and the room has large windows and a clean, professional aesthetic.

Chapter Nine:

Proposing and Advancement

Once you've developed a tailored solution, the next step is to present it in a way that resonates with the client and positions you as their top choice.

This phase involves much more than just submitting a formal proposal. It's all about guiding the client through the decision-making process as a collaborative partners, and ensuring the project moves forward smoothly.

The Role of Proposals in the Contrarian Approach

In the traditional construction-industry approach, proposals are often treated as a formality. Contractors spend hours creating detailed proposals and listing out services, pricing, and timelines, while at the same time failing to engage the decision maker(s) in any meaningful way. The result? Decision makers see these proposals as interchangeable documents, choosing the lowest bidder without fully understanding the value each contractor brings to the table.

For contrarian contractors, the proposal is not just a document—it's a conversation. It's a chance to advance the opportunity by reinforcing unique value and directly addressing any concerns the client may have. Instead of treating the proposal as the end of the sales process, contrarian contractors view it as a critical step in supporting an ongoing dialogue, one that not only secures the deal, but also sets the stage for a new beginning: a successful long-term partnership.



Advancing the Opportunity

Once you've had a conversation about your proposal with the right people, it's important to *keep* advancing the opportunity. Too many contractors submit their proposals and then wait passively for the client to respond. This approach leads to delays, confusion, and lost opportunities in today's hyper-fast-paced world. A better approach is staying engaged and proactive in guiding the client through decision-making.

Here are a few contrarian strategies that can help you advance the opportunity.

- 1 Schedule Follow-Ups While You're Face-to-Face.** I constantly reinforce the concept of "booking a meeting from a meeting" (or BAMFAM) with our clients. Contrarians believe that it is impolite – and, in cases where we know we can solve the problem, unethical – to leave a meeting without scheduling the next conversation. It's important to remember that one of the major complaints in this industry is the lack of effective communication. By booking a meeting from a meeting with your clients, you are directly addressing an age-old Industry challenge. Instead of sending generic follow-up emails with headings like, "Just checking in," take the opportunity to provide value. Ask the client if they need further clarification on any part of the proposal or if additional information is required. Show that you're genuinely invested in helping them make the best decision possible. Follow up purposefully, offering additional value and addressing key concerns with each new conversation.
- 2 Address Objections Head-On.** Contrarians reject the mindset I call "I can get you answers on anything, anytime." This is an information provider mentality. Your clients must trust that you will guide them away from any issues or decisions that don't support attaining their major goals. That means the proper mindset here is that of the disruptor. A disruptor believes it's their job to look at the project objectively, to think critically about what will work and what will not work, and to make their client aware of anything that might get in the way of a successful outcome. This includes any objections or challenges from the client side that could negatively impact the project. In other words: Don't be afraid to address potential objections directly. For example, if you know the client is concerned about the project's budget or timeline, take the time to discuss, in-depth, how your proposal addresses those concerns. Raise these issues first! This builds trust and reduces the likelihood of surprises later in the process.

- 3 **Set Clear Next Steps.** Ensure that every meeting or conversation with the client ends with a clear understanding of what will happen next. This goes back to the BAMFAM concept. Make it clear *at the beginning of the meeting* that your expectation is that if all goes well, you'll set another meeting after this one. Whether you're scheduling the next discussion, agreeing on a decision timeline, or accomplishing anything else of consequence, setting expectations collaboratively helps keep the relationship strong and the project moving forward.

Sandler's Proposal Advancement Tool

The Sandler Proposal Advancement Tool, also known as the Positioning Tool, is designed to help you confidently navigate the proposal process.

This tool helps you:

- *Clarify the client's decision-making process.* Who is involved in the decision, and what factors are most important to them?
- *Address potential objections.* Use this tool to identify and overcome objections before they derail the process proactively.
- *Set clear expectations.* The Proposal Advancement Tool ensures that you and the client are aligned on the next steps, timeline, and decision-making criteria.

Positioning Tool - Continued

Pursuit Navigator Stakeholder Map

Close Date:	Close Date:	Advocacy Score	Relationship Score	Level of Influence	DISC	Pain	Priorities

Key

Advocacy Score +2= Champion, +1=Supporter, 0=Neutral, -1=Detractor, -2=Blocker

Relationship Score +2=Strong, Positive relationship, +1=weak, positive relationship, 0=Neutral, -1= Weak, negative relationship, -2=Strong, negative relationship

Level of Influence How much influence does this person have over the decision to buy? (High, Medium, Low)

DISC Dominant, Influential, Steady, Compliant

Sales Team Members

Name/Title	RACI	DISC Style	Key Traits

You can find out how to access this tool in the [Appendix](#).



Case Study: The Embassy Contractor (Part Two)

Let's look once again at the contractor who made the strategic decision to focus exclusively on embassy projects. One of the key factors in their success was their approach to proposing and advancing opportunities. Instead of simply submitting proposals and waiting for the client's response, they used each proposal as a platform for deeper and deeper engagement. They scheduled a series of meetings with different embassy staff to walk them through the proposal, explaining how their unique expertise in security and communication protocols made them the best choice for the project.

In one case, the embassy staff was concerned about potential disruptions during construction. The contractor proactively addressed this concern by including a detailed plan in the proposal for minimizing disruptions, including specific strategies for managing noise and traffic on the embassy grounds. By addressing the client's concerns head-on and providing a clear path forward, the contractor was able to win the project, even though (you guessed it) they weren't the lowest bidder.

Mastering the Psychology of Proposals and Decisions

One important aspect of the proposing phase is understanding the psychology of decision-making.

Most prospective clients – indeed, most humans – are not purely logical. They're profoundly influenced by emotions, perceived but unquantified risks, and the quality and depth of the relationship they've developed with you during the discovery process. This simple, profound reality brings us into the realm of psychology, where the contrarian contractor shines.

Building trust early in the relationship can reduce the client's perceived risk and create a sense of safety and security around the choice to work with us as the contractor.

Clients often worry about whether the project will be completed on time, whether it will stay within budget, and whether they'll respond effectively to unexpected issues that arise along the way. Contrarian contractors use the proposal phase to reassure clients emotionally – not just at an analytical level – by sharing real-world narratives demonstrating their expertise, reliability, and commitment in each area of concern. This approach builds confidence, and makes it easier to create mutual clarity about the next steps. This approach makes it much easier for someone to decide to move forward with you as the contractor.



Proposing and Advancement

For each question area, give yourself a score between 1 and 10, reflecting where you are right now with this competency. Be brutally honest.

- 1** Are you treating the proposal as an ongoing conversation with the client rather than a completed document?
- If you're not actively engaging the client during the proposal phase, you're missing an opportunity to advance the project.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

- 2** Do you BAMFAM?
- Booking a meeting from another meeting is a critical practice of the contrarian contractor.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

- 3** Do you follow up with purpose, offering additional value and addressing concerns with each new conversation?
- Passive follow-ups lead to stalled projects. Proactive follow-ups keep the momentum going.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

- 4** Are you setting clear next steps and ensuring you and the client are aligned on the decision-making process?
- A lack of clarity can lead to delays and misunderstandings. Set expectations early and often.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

- 5** How effectively would you say you are at identifying and addressing objections during the proposal process?
- The proposal phase is the time to address concerns and reduce the client's perceived risk.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10



Chapter Ten:

Account Management and Expansion

Winning a project is just the beginning.

The true value of a client relationship lies in what happens after the project is completed. Contrarian contractors understand that account management and expansion are critical to building long-term success. Instead of treating each project as a one-time transaction, they focus on building relationships that lead to repeat business and new opportunities.

The Importance of Account Management


Traditional contractors focus solely on winning the next project, neglecting the clients they've already worked with. This short-sighted approach leaves money on the table and forces them to constantly chase new business. Contrarian contractors, conversely, understand that maintaining strong relationships with existing clients is the key to sustainable growth.

Account management involves staying engaged with clients throughout the project and after the project is completed, ensuring their satisfaction with each stage of the work, and identifying new opportunities to add value. Whether providing ongoing maintenance services, offering solutions for future projects, or simply staying in touch to check how the project is performing, account management keeps you top-of-mind when the client is ready for their next project.

Sandler’s Account Management and Expansion Tool

This tool helps you develop a systematic approach to managing client relationships after completing a project. It includes strategies for:

- *Conducting quarterly value reviews:* Regularly check in with clients to assess the project’s performance and identify areas where you can provide additional value.
- *Identifying expansion opportunities:* Staying engaged with the client and understanding their long-term goals allows you to offer solutions for future projects.
- *Building trust and loyalty:* By maintaining open lines of communication and continuing to provide value, you build trust with the client and position yourself as their go-to contractor for future work.

 Account Summary

Enter the following information on your account to provide a snapshot of the account for your own planning as well as for transition or updates to your implementation and account management teams.

Account Name	Five-Year Account Revenue Span					
		Actual Revenue Two Years Ago	Actual Revenue Last Year	Forecast Revenue Current Year	Projected Revenue Next Year	Projected Revenue Two Years from Now
Industry	REVENUE					
Size						
Client Market						
Trends		News		Initiatives		
Client Divisions and Current Sales Activity						
Divisions/Subdivisions			Products/Services for divisions we are currently implementing Solutions:			
Pipeline activity where we are actively working to grow			YTD Sales			

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You can find out how to access this tool in the [Appendix](#).

Case Study: The 104-Year-Old Family Business (Part Two)

The family business we discussed previously has remained successful for as long as it has because of (among other factors) its ongoing commitment to effective account management by supporting long-term relationships. After completing each project, they conduct a thorough debrief with the client, identifying areas where they can improve and discussing potential future projects.

One of their key strategies is conducting **quarterly value reviews** with their major clients. During these reviews, they assess how the completed project performs and offer solutions for any new challenges the client faces. This proactive approach has led to numerous repeat contracts and long-term partnerships, allowing the company to grow steadily even in challenging economic conditions.

This contractor's approach to account management has allowed them to weather major market fluctuations. Instead of relying solely on new clients for growth, they've built a base of loyal customers who consistently return to them for new projects. Taking a long-term focus is the cornerstone of their success.



The Value of Repeat Business

One of the key principles that separates contrarian contractors from traditional contractors is their focus on repeat business.

Many contractors constantly chase new opportunities, thinking that the next project will be the one that changes everything. The truth is that **sustainable success doesn't come from winning one-off projects. It comes from building long-term relationships that generate repeat business.**

Contrarian contractors understand that a client's lifetime value extends far beyond the first project. They know that delivering an excellent experience on one project is just the beginning of what could be a multi-year, or even multi-decade, relationship. The real value lies in the ongoing projects after that first one—projects that don't require the same level of competition or pricing pressure because the client already trusts you and knows the value you bring.



Let's take a closer look at the best ways for you to build and support relationships that lead to repeat business.

- 1 Provide Unmatched Value.** The best way to secure repeat business is to exceed your client's expectations — consistently. This means delivering projects on time, within budget, and with the level of quality that your client expects. It also means proactively identifying potential issues before they become problems and offering solutions that save your client time and money.
- 2 Stay Engaged.** One mistake traditional contractors make is disappearing after completing the project. Once the final invoice is paid, they assume the relationship is over. But contrarian contractors stay engaged with their clients, even after the project is done. They check in regularly to see how the project is performing, offer ongoing maintenance or support, and keep the lines of communication open for future opportunities.
- 3 Offer Continuous Value.** Repeat business comes from continuously providing value to your clients. This doesn't just mean delivering great projects—it means being a valuable resource even when no project is on the horizon. Contrarian contractors stay in touch with clients through value-driven conversations, industry insights, and helpful advice, positioning themselves as trusted partners who are always ready to help.

The Power of Referrals

Referrals from satisfied clients remain one of the most overlooked sources of growth in the construction industry. Yet most contractors have no structured approach to generating them. When the subject does come up, it often feels awkward or uncomfortable—like you're asking for a favor or putting the client on the spot.

Why Referrals Feel Uncomfortable (and Why They Don't Have To)

Contractors often avoid asking for referrals for one of three reasons:

- Doing so feels desperate or needy
- They don't want to put their clients in an uncomfortable position
- They assume that if the client wanted to refer them, they already would have

That last mindset is understandable—but it's also a limiting belief. The truth is, referrals are far more effective and far less awkward for both sides when approached with professionalism and structure.



Five Tips for Generating Better Introductions

1 Ask at the Right Moment

The best time to ask is right after a win—when a client compliments your team, a project finishes ahead of schedule, or a difficult situation is resolved well. When a client expresses appreciation, that's your cue to ask if they know others who would benefit from working with a contractor like you.

2 Start with a Qualifying Question

Before asking for an introduction, be sure the relationship is strong enough to warrant it. One simple phrase can save you a lot of time:

"How well do you know [person or company]?"

This helps avoid lukewarm, low-value introductions and focuses your efforts on genuine relationships.

3 Be Specific

Instead of asking, "Do you know anyone who needs a contractor?" consider trying this:

"We're looking to work with more developers doing interiors in the \$3–10 million range. Do you know anyone like that you'd feel comfortable connecting us with?"

The more specific you are, the easier it is for your client to help.

4 Be a Giver First

If you want to receive more referrals, start by giving them! Be known as a connector. Introduce your clients to valuable contacts, helpful resources, or complementary service providers. People naturally reciprocate when they feel you're invested in their success.

5 Follow Through with Precision

When someone refers you, treat the new relationship like the high-stakes opportunity it is. Respond promptly, professionally, and keep your referrer in the loop. This shows that you respect their reputation—and it increases the chances they'll refer you again.

Most contractors are sitting on a goldmine and don't realize it. Their next major project isn't sitting on a job board or in a cold lead list—it's sitting within the contact list of someone who already trusts them. They just haven't yet built a system for tapping into that source.

At Sandler, we help contractors do exactly that by reframing referral conversations, qualifying introductions, and unlocking new opportunities — without sounding salesy or desperate.

The key here is a Sandler process called **Client²**, which has helped uncover countless millions of dollars in overlooked opportunities by helping contractors identify the relationships their best clients already have. This process isn't about cold leads or wishful thinking—it's about smart, strategic introductions from people who already trust you.

Client² in 3 Steps

Step 1

List three clients who trust and respect your work.

Step 2

Think through their network—who do they know that might benefit from working with a contractor like you?

Step 3

At your next meeting, ask:

"How well do you know [person or company]?"

If they don't know the person/company well – stop the conversation there, as you're not talking to a source who can introduce you credibly. If they do know the person well, ask, "Is this a person I should get to know?" Your contact knows what to do from there.

No pressure. Just a structured way to turn relationships into revenue.

Case Study:

The Embassy Contractor (Part Four)

As you recall, the embassy contractor I worked with built a reputation in the highly specialized field of embassy construction. Perhaps you've noticed that governments maintain more than one embassy? This client did, too.

It should come as no surprise, then, that they didn't stop at winning individual projects. They developed a comprehensive account management strategy that kept them top-of-mind with their clients, leading to numerous repeat projects.

After completing each embassy project, the contractor didn't simply move on to the next job. Instead, they maintained regular contact with embassy staff, conducting quarterly reviews to ensure that the building was functioning as expected and that the staff was satisfied with the results. They also provided ongoing support for any issues post-construction, such as security updates or facility modifications.

This level of engagement ensured that the embassies remained satisfied with the contractor's work and positioned the contractor as the go-to firm for future embassy projects. As new embassy projects came up, the contractor was often awarded the work without having to compete in a formal bidding process because the client already trusted them and knew they could deliver.

Through consistent engagement, proactive account management, and a commitment to long-term relationships, the contractor steadily and profitably expanded its business. This case study highlights the importance of focusing on account management and expansion as key drivers of growth in the construction industry.





Self-Assessment:

Account Management and Expansion

For each question area, give yourself a score between 1 and 10, reflecting where you are right now with this competency. Be brutally honest.

- 1** Do you maintain regular contact with clients after completing a project?
- If not, you miss opportunities to build long-term relationships and secure repeat business.

① — ② — ③ — ④ — ⑤ — ⑥ — ⑦ — ⑧ — ⑨ — ⑩

- 2** How often do you conduct scheduled value reviews with your clients to assess the project's performance and identify new opportunities?
- Value reviews help you stay engaged with the client and offer solutions for future work.

① — ② — ③ — ④ — ⑤ — ⑥ — ⑦ — ⑧ — ⑨ — ⑩

- 3** Are you focused on building long-term trust and loyalty with your clients instead of treating each project as a one-time transaction?
- Building trust and loyalty is key to long-term success.

① — ② — ③ — ④ — ⑤ — ⑥ — ⑦ — ⑧ — ⑨ — ⑩

- 4** How often do your clients return to you for future projects?
– If your repeat business rate is low, that’s a sign that you need to improve your account management practices.



- 5** Are you proactively offering additional services or solutions based on the client’s ongoing needs?
– A proactive approach positions you as a long-term partner, not just a one-time contractor.



- 6** How often do you reach out to clients to ask them for introductions to others in their network?
– If you’re not actively asking for introductions, you leave valuable business on the table.



- 7** How often do you reach out to clients to ask them for introductions to others in their network?
– If you’re not actively asking for introductions, you leave valuable business on the table.



A woman and a man, both wearing blue hard hats and high-visibility yellow safety vests, are shaking hands on a construction site. The woman is on the left, smiling, and the man is on the right, holding a clipboard. In the background, there is a large construction crane and the skeletal structure of a building under construction, with a bright sun creating a lens flare effect on the right side of the image.

Epilogue:

From Knowing to Owning

If you've made it this far, you're already on your way to becoming a contrarian contractor. The journey you began by reading this book will want to continue long after you complete this final chapter. It's a journey that will fundamentally change how you think about your business, clients, and whole approach to the construction industry.

By now, you know that being a contrarian contractor isn't about doing things the traditional way—it's about challenging the status quo, thinking differently, and building a business that thrives on relationships, not just transactions.

Following the Process, Implementing the Process

If you follow the process outlined in this book, you will be well on your way toward becoming a contrarian contractor.

As I've already mentioned, the process I've shared on these pages is based on the Sandler Enterprise Selling program. It is built on years of experience, a suite of proven Sandler tools, and the collective knowledge of contractors who have used those tools to transform their businesses by adopting a contrarian mindset. You now know, in broad strokes, what they know. However, knowing that the process is only half the battle. Now it's time to implement it consistently in your business.

The principles and strategies I've shared have provided you with actionable steps and tools to guide you through the seven critical aspects of being a contrarian contractor.

- *Understanding Your Market:* Gaining deep insights into the market dynamics that impact your clients and your business.
- *Opportunity Identification:* Engaging early with clients and creating opportunities before they go to bid.
- *Teaming:* Building and supporting strong, collaborative teams that deliver exceptional results.
- *Qualification:* Properly qualifying projects to ensure they align with your expertise and profitability goals.
- *Solution Development:* Crafting tailored solutions that address your client's specific needs.
- *Proposing and Advancement:* Advancing opportunities by engaging with clients throughout the proposal process.
- *Account Management and Expansion:* Building long-term relationships that lead to repeat business and new opportunities.

Let me share one more important point with you before I close this book. **To truly thrive as a contrarian contractor, you will want to go beyond the basics and invest in the development of your people and your business.**



Developing Your People

Your success depends on your team's ability to interact effectively with clients, manage projects precisely, and communicate clearly across all levels of the organization. Sandler offers training specifically designed to help your people install and live by a repeatable business development system... and develop the skills they need to succeed as they implement it.

The best contractors understand that the construction industry is about more than just technical skills—people skills. Your team, at both the individual level and as a well-oiled collaborative machine, needs to be able to:

– *Build Trust Early in the Relationship:* Trust is the foundation of any successful project. Your team needs to know how to establish trust from the very first interaction with the client.

Set Clear Expectations: Misaligned expectations are one of the biggest sources of conflict in construction projects. Your team needs to be able to set clear expectations with clients, subcontractors, and suppliers to avoid misunderstandings.

– Understand Personal Motivations: Every decision-maker and every influencer has goals and concerns. Your team must know how to uncover these motivations and tailor their communication accordingly.

– Uncover Budgetary Considerations: Time, money, and energy are critical factors in any construction project. Your team needs to be able to guide clients through discussions about budgets, timelines, and resource allocation.

Guide the Decision-making Process: When faced with multiple options, clients often struggle to make decisions. Your team needs to be able to guide clients through the process, asking the right questions to clarify the who, what, when, where, and how.

Present with Impact: Whether it's during a sales meeting, a proposal presentation, or a project update, your team needs to present information in a way that resonates with the client, closes the deal, and drives action.

Follow Through on Commitments: Your team must be known for doing what they say they'll do. If your team consistently delivers on its promises, you'll build a reputation as a trustworthy contractor for any project.

Sandler's training programs provide your team with the skills and techniques needed to excel in these areas. The combination of disarming honesty, equal business stature, and clear communication will ensure that your team builds trust with clients, keeps projects on track, and identifies new growth opportunities.

The Power of People Skills in Construction

In complex sales environments like construction, the way your team communicates, builds relationships, and navigates the decision-making process can make the difference between winning and losing a project.

Consider a scenario where two contractors are bidding on the same project. Both contractors have the technical expertise to complete the project to the client's specifications. However, Contractor A focuses solely on their technical capabilities. At the same time, Contractor B takes the time to build a relationship with the client, provides thought leadership, asks insightful questions about their concerns, and presents solutions tailored to the client's specific challenges. Which contractor do you think is more likely to win the project?





Contrarian contractors know that sustainable success comes from more than being technically proficient. It comes from understanding the client's needs on a deeper level and presenting solutions that resonate with their goals. This is why developing your people's communication and relationship-building skills is critical. By investing in their personal development, you'll position your company as a leader in the industry, capable of winning complex projects and building long-term client relationships. For more information on how to work with Sandler to bring your team to the next level, visit <https://Sandler.com>.

I believe that the shift from knowledge to ownership that I've outlined in this book can set you and your entire team apart in the construction industry. Many contractors know that they should engage with clients early, qualify projects carefully, and develop tailored solutions. But few take the time to fully own these practices and integrate them into every aspect of their business. Ownership means that these principles become second nature to you and your team, guiding every decision you make and every interaction you have with clients.

Steve Jobs famously said: "Here's to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. They're not fond of rules. And they have no respect for the status quo. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them. But the only thing you can't do is ignore them. Because they change things."

This quote perfectly captures the mindset of the contrarian contractor. As a contrarian, you're not content with the status quo. You see the potential for the construction industry to be better, more collaborative, transparent, and profitable for everyone involved. You're willing to challenge the traditional way of doing things and take the bold steps necessary to create lasting change in your business.

Being a contrarian means that you're not afraid to stand out. You're willing to be a disruptor, take risks, ask hard questions, and push back against clients who want to commoditize your services. You're committed to building a business that delivers true value to your clients rather than competing in a race to the bottom based on price alone.

At the end of the day, I believe this book isn't just about helping you win more projects or make more money. I believe it's about building a better construction industry, one where contractors, clients, suppliers, and subcontractors work together with transparency, trust, and mutual respect. One where projects are delivered on time, on budget, and to the highest quality standards.



As a contrarian contractor, you have the power to lead this change. You can set a new standard for business in the construction industry—prioritizing relationships, collaboration, and long-term success over short-term gains. By adopting the principles outlined in this book, you’ll build a more profitable business and help create a better industry for everyone.

The journey to becoming a contrarian contractor doesn’t end with this book—it’s a continuous process of growth, learning, and improvement that impacts not just one individual, but the entire organization. And the good news is, you don’t have to go it alone. A growing community of like-minded contractors is committed to challenging the status quo and building better businesses.

At my company, we’ve worked with contractors for two decades to help them implement these principles and transform their businesses. We’ve partnered with organizations like ABC (Associated Builders and Contractors) to provide training, resources, and support to contractors who want to take their businesses to the next level.

If you’re ready to join the community of contrarian contractors, plenty of resources are available to help you and your team get started. Whether it’s through Sandler’s training programs, ABC’s network of industry professionals, members of your association who are like-minded, or other resources, you’ll have access to the tools, support, and mentorship you need to succeed.

You can visit <https://www.sandler.com/programs/enterprise-selling> for more information on the tools and resources available to help you help your people grow and thrive over time.

Are You Ready to Become a Contrarian Contractor?

Below, you will find the final self-assessment. Please take a moment to reflect on everything you've learned and ask yourself the following questions: grade your response on a scale from one to ten to describe where you're at.

- 1** Have you shifted your mindset away from bidding and hoping and toward building long-term relationships with clients? - Contrarian contractors focus on creating value for their clients rather than competing on price alone.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

- 2** Are you actively engaging with clients early in the process, positioning yourself as a trusted advisor? - Waiting for the RFP to drop is a reactive strategy. Engaging early puts you in control of the sales process.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

- 3** Do you have a clear qualification process to evaluate opportunities before submitting a bid? - Proper qualification ensures that you only pursue projects aligning with your expertise and profitability goals.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

- 4** Are you leveraging Sandler's tools to craft tailored solutions that address your client's needs? - Customized solutions demonstrate your expertise and differentiate you from competitors who rely on one-size-fits-all approaches.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

- 5** Are you focused on building long-term client relationships through effective account management and expansion? Are you staying engaged with clients and offering continuous value? - The key to long-term success is repeat business.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

- 6** Are you investing in your people, ensuring they have the skills to communicate effectively, build trust, and guide clients through decision-making? - Your team's ability to build relationships and communicate is critical to your success as a contrarian contractor.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

The Road Ahead

Becoming a contrarian contractor isn't easy—it requires discipline, focus, and a commitment to change. But the rewards are worth the effort. By adopting the principles and processes outlined in this book, you'll be well on your way to building a business that consistently wins high-value projects, delivers exceptional results, and creates long-term client relationships.

This journey isn't for everyone. There will always be contractors who are content with the status quo—those who prefer to compete on price, take shortcuts, and hope for the best. But I believe that you're not one of those contractors if you're reading these words. It's because you see the potential for something greater, meaningful, and rewarding – and you're willing to work to achieve it.

The construction industry is changing, and those who are willing to challenge the old ways of doing things will be the ones who succeed. As a contrarian contractor, you can lead that change and create a better future for yourself, your team, and your clients.

Are you ready to go from knowing to owning? If so, you know that the journey begins right now. This book has outlined the roadmap, but it's up to you to take the first step. Surround yourself with the right people, continuously develop your skills, and follow the process outlined here. With dedication, focus, and a commitment to excellence, you can build a business that thrives on relationships, innovation, and long-term success.

Here's to the crazy ones—the contrarian contractors who will shape the construction industry's future. Here's to you.



Appendix

To learn more about the Sandler Enterprise Selling system, and how to get direct access to the tools you see here, visit us [Sandler.com](https://sandler.com).

Market Analysis Tool



Market Analysis

The Market Analysis tool contains two sections, Market Analysis and Account Base. Begin by completing a market analysis for your broad market and then focus on your account base. Enter what you know and then take time to research and strengthen your business acumen to enhance interactions and approach with your prospective clients.

Market Analysis	Account Base
My Market Definition:	Industry Acumen:
Market Trends:	Industry Trends:
Economic Conditions:	Common Pain:
Political or Global Factors:	Sales Cycles:
Regulations:	Revenue Potential:
Latest News:	Networking and Relationships:
Other:	Technology and Tools:

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Prospecting Plan Framework Tool

Prospecting Plan Framework

Build a plan for growing your business. Document behaviors, actions, and results for prospecting new revenue streams, new logo/client acquisition, new departments or lines of business within existing accounts. This tool has a separate section for prospecting through social outreach. Update this tool monthly or quarterly with actual results and recalibrate to drive the outcomes you need.

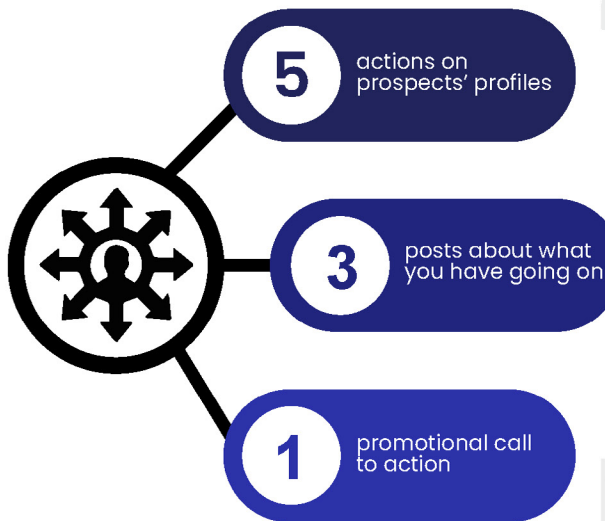
General Prospecting

Activities	KARE Designation	Frequency	Desired Results	Actual Results
CALLS				
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
INTRODUCTIONS AND REFERRALS				
1				
2				



Prospecting Plan Framework – Continued

5--3--1



5) actions on prospects' profiles. (like, comment, share on 5 different prospects' posts)

1
2
3
4
5

3) posts about what you have going on (industry awards, thought-leadership, any events or news-worthy items)

1
2
3

1) promotional call to action (download this white paper, attend our event, ask me about this, or \ whatever the lowest top-of-the-funnel ask is for your funnel)

1

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 Pursuit Summary

Account Name	Client Market		
Industry			
Industry	Client Market		
	Account:		
	KARE Type:		
	Opportunity Name:		
	Sales Stage:		Total Score:
	Sales Lead:		
	Value:		
	Thermometer:		
	Organizational Pain:		
	Close Date:		



No-Pressure Conversation Framework

Prepare a diagnostic chat with a prospect that is free of pressure to discover whether additional conversation is warranted and desired. Elements of a no-pressure conversation are Pattern Interrupt, Mini Up-front Contract, 30-second Commercial, Mini Pain Funnel, and Call to Action.

Account

Date

Buyer Name

Role

Industry

PATTERN INTERRUPTS

1

2

3

MINI UP-FRONT CONTRACT

PAIN STATEMENTS

1



Business Case Developer Tool

Use this tool to create a customized, succinct summary of the results your buyer will realize from choosing your solution.

Account	
Champion Name	

Business Case Developer Tool	
WHAT IT IS	
WHAT IT DOES	
WHAT IS THE BENEFIT	
HOW IT'S MEASURED	
RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI)	

Positioning Tool



Positioning Tool Continued

Pursuit Navigator Stakeholder Map

Close Date:	Close Date:	Advocacy Score	Relationship Score	Level of Influence	DISC	Pain	Priorities

Key

Advocacy Score +2= Champion, +1=Supporter, 0=Neutral, -1=Detractor, -2=Blocker

Relationship Score +2=Strong, Positive relationship, +1=weak, positive relationship, 0=Neutral, -1= Weak, negative relationship, -2=Strong, negative relationship

Level of Influence How much influence does this person have over the decision to buy (High, Medium, Low)

DISC Dominant, Influential, Steady, Compliant

Sales Team Members

Name/Title	RACI	DISC Style	Key Traits

Account Summary Tool

Account Summary

Enter the following information on your account to provide a snapshot of the account for your own planning as well as for transition or updates to your implementation and account management teams.

Account Name	Five-Year Account Revenue Span					
		Actual Revenue Two Years Ago	Actual Revenue Last Year	Forecast Revenue Current Year	Projected Revenue Next Year	Projected Revenue Two Years from Now
Industry	REVENUE					
Size						
Client Market						
Trends		News		Initiatives		
Client Divisions and Current Sales Activity						
Divisions/Subdivisions				Products/Services for divisions we are currently implementing Solutions:		
Pipeline activity where we are actively working to grow				YTD Sales		

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To learn more about how to get access to these tools, visit
<https://sandler.com/programs/enterprise-selling/>



About Sandler

Sandler is the worldwide leader in sales, management, and customer service training. We partner with organizations of all sizes, across all industries, to help them improve their revenue performance. Sandler not only provides the initial and advanced strategies and tactics needed to excel, but we also empower your team to develop the attitudes and implement the behavior necessary to reach the highest levels of success.

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