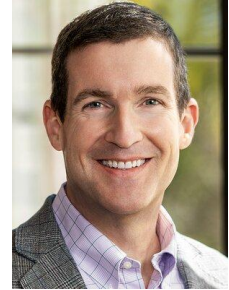


### 3 Business Development Lessons From Mozart's 'Magic Flute'

By **Paul Manuele** (August 6, 2025)

At its heart, Mozart's "Die Zauberflöte" opera — in English, "The Magic Flute" — is a story about self-improvement.

Magic gets top billing, but it plays a supporting role at best. Beneath the spectacle, the opera suggests that personal growth comes through courage and discipline. And, for music-loving lawyers, it offers a useful framework for building relationships and developing new business.



Paul Manuele

Composed in 1791, the final year of Mozart's life,[1] "Die Zauberflöte" reflects the optimism of the Enlightenment[2] — a belief in reason, virtue and progress.[3] In today's social media age, when reason so often takes a backseat to emotion, public discourse is often driven less by deliberation than by outrage and tribalism. In that climate, ideals like virtue and progress can seem naive or quaint.[4]

That's what makes "Die Zauberflöte" so striking today. It takes virtue seriously. Its central character, Tamino, is a young prince on a journey to rescue the princess Pamina. He doesn't just want something, or rather someone; he wants to become someone. Tamino is driven by love, yes, but also by a longing for a life of meaning and moral clarity.

Early in his journey, he's given a magic flute — bestowed by the Queen of the Night — that has the power to calm wild animals, transform anger into peace and provide protection in moments of danger. But what ultimately propels his progress is the way he meets each challenge he faces with discipline, humility and a willingness to grow.[5]

Business development involves a similar quest, and it benefits from a similar approach, though such an approach is often overlooked in favor of more obvious, surface-level sales tactics. In "Die Zauberflöte," Tamino begins by pursuing love, but he ultimately becomes worthy of it by learning to listen, care about others and persevere. His growth is shaped less by the flute than by how he meets each challenge — with curiosity, courage and consistency.

Business development works much the same way. While the initial goal might be new clients or increased revenue, those who commit to developing these same traits often gain something more: stronger relationships, greater confidence and a deeper sense of purpose in their work.

These traits aren't innate; they're built through practice. In "Die Zauberflöte," Tamino is told to "be silent, patient, and steadfast" — a threefold directive that guides him on his path.[6] He makes progress through a series of trials that test and strengthen him. Business development likewise requires small, consistent actions that build skill and confidence over time.

Here are three imperatives inspired by "The Magic Flute" to guide your own business development practice: Be curious, courageous and consistent.[7]

## Three Imperatives

### ***1. Be curious.***

Before Tamino can speak or act, he must listen. His journey begins in silence — observing, absorbing and learning to see clearly.

Most lawyers know, in theory, that business development is about relationships. But in practice, they often approach conversations with a sense of high-stakes urgency — a belief that they need to uncover opportunities, steer the discussion toward "what's keeping you up at night," or showcase their credentials.

This sales-oriented mindset is fairly transparent, and therefore not useful for building relationships. So what is useful? Genuine curiosity.

The next time you're at a lunch, a conference or some other networking event, imagine you're seated next to someone at a wedding rehearsal dinner. You're not there to make a deal. You're there to connect and hopefully have a good time. You ask about their interests. You listen. You share something about yourself that is meaningful to you, something you are excited about.

In other words, aim for a real, human exchange.

Take an interest in the person, not their title, company or docket. Curiosity lays the foundation for a rewarding relationship — one built on genuine rapport rather than sales tactics. And in the legal industry, that kind of rapport is what leads to new business — not overnight, but through trust that builds over time.

### ***2. Be courageous.***

Tamino's trials require patience, but not passivity. He walks into fire and water, unsure of the outcome but steady in his resolve.

Many lawyers resist business development because they fear being rebuffed, ignored or perceived as self-promotional. So, they don't follow up after a conference, or invite the client to lunch, or call the colleague with whom they enjoyed working two years ago.

That's a shame, because most people aren't inundated with invitations to in-person get-togethers these days. More often, they're inundated with social media notifications and pop-up reminders of their next Teams call. It's another lingering effect of the COVID-19 pandemic: Many of us miss in-person interaction, but do very little to make it more likely.

A thoughtful, personal invitation to breakfast, lunch, coffee or a quick drink after work might be more welcome than you think.

Courage in business development doesn't mean being fearless. It means acting in the face of that fear. Still, there are ways to reduce fear. One way we've already mentioned: curiosity. If you're genuinely curious about someone, you're focused on learning about them, not on how you're coming across. That shift in focus lowers the stakes, makes you less self-conscious and makes the interaction feel more natural.

It also shapes how you're being perceived.[8] When your attention is genuinely on the other person, they're less likely to feel like a sales target. The result is a more engaging mutual

exchange, which — much like curiosity — can lay the foundation for a solid, longer-term relationship on which new business is built.

Although you can reduce the fear, you can't eliminate it. But remember: Nothing ventured, nothing gained. So be courageous. Reach out, even if it feels awkward, and make the invitation. Often, they'll be glad you did.

### **3. Be consistent.**

Tamino's tests require steadfastness. His transformation from idealistic youth to someone worthy of love and wisdom comes not from a single act, but from sustained effort.

In the same way, lawyers should commit to small, daily gestures. Once a week isn't enough — not if you're trying to build momentum, strengthen relationships and stay visible in a crowded field.

That doesn't mean you need to spend an hour or even 30 minutes a day on business development. But it does mean you need to do one small thing daily. If you have only 10 minutes on certain days — and you surely have 10 minutes — use it to practice your business development.

As with retirement savings, small, consistent actions compound over time. But there's no auto-invest feature in business development. That's why the real value of daily practice, at least initially, is that it builds a habit. Mozart and his librettist understood this as well as any Enlightenment thinker: Transformation doesn't come from occasional bursts of activity, but from what we do consistently.[9]

The key to developing a business development habit is to start small. Here are some ideas:

- Send a short personal note to someone with whom you've lost touch to see how they're doing
- Forward an article with a quick note saying "thought of you," if you really did think of them when you read it. When someone comes to mind, act on it.
- Drop by the office of a new lateral hire to welcome them to the firm.
- Like and comment on someone's LinkedIn post if you did like it, especially if you want the author to feel your support.

These may seem like acts of business development, and they can be, but they also can be acts of relationship development. In business development, as in law, intent changes the nature of the act. Business development depends on trust, and trust takes time. All else being equal, clients hire lawyers they know, respect and feel comfortable turning to in a moment of need.

What matters most isn't how much you do at once, but how consistently you practice building and maintaining relationships. Think of it like practicing an instrument. At first, it's effortful, even awkward. But with time, you stop thinking about the mechanics and become freer to participate more fully in the music.

That's what happens when business development becomes a habit. You find a rhythm. The

movements feel more natural. And the relationships become more rewarding — in every sense of the word.[10]

### **Conclusion: Character Matters**

At the end of "Die Zauberflöte," Tamino and Pamina enter the Temple of Wisdom while the chorus sings, "Triumph! Triumph! Thou Noble pair!"[11] They have achieved their goal, wisdom and love,[12] and in the process transformed themselves. In other words, they have become virtuous, and it is their virtue that enables them.

In his 2020 biography of Mozart, Jan Swafford sums up the ending this way: "The couple is elevated to a transcendent nobility. ... Their love is Wisdom enthroned, herald of a new age: the Reign of Love."[13]

Their transformation is made possible not by a grandiose scheme, heroic action or even magic — well, maybe a little magic — but by their strength of character, their willingness to change and to work at self-improvement steadily, with humility and without shortcuts.

The same dynamic applies to business development. You earn new business less by filling your sales pipeline, chasing prospects or perfecting pitches, and more by becoming the kind of person others want to work with. In the end, it comes down to virtue — an unfashionable concept, perhaps, but one that still matters.

Virtue is both the path and the destination. A self-improvement project that cultivates curiosity, courage and consistency not only builds character, it also draws people in; earns their trust; and, over time, leads to loyal clients, valuable referrals and a thriving practice.

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*Paul R. Manuele is the managing director at PR Manuele Consulting.*

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[1] Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart died Dec. 5, 1791, at age 35, a little more than two months after the premier, which he conducted.

[2] That optimism was still largely intact in 1791, but the French Revolution, which had erupted two years earlier, would soon descend into chaos. By 1804, Napoleon Bonaparte had declared himself Emperor, dashing Enlightenment hopes for a stable, democratic order grounded in reason and the rule of law. History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes. Today, as democratic institutions face pressure around the world, the Enlightenment ideal of progress faces one of its greatest tests in the modern era.

[3] Mozart and his librettist Emanuel Schikaneder were both Freemasons, and Die Zauberflöte reflects the Masonic ideal of moral progress through reason and discipline. Freemasonry places symbolic weight on the number three, reflected in its three degrees of initiation (Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason) and the ritual three knocks of a Fellow Craft Mason requesting entry into the lodge. The opera mirrors this structure musically and dramatically: it opens with three bold chords in E-flat major (a key with three flats), and features three trials, three guides, and three temples (Reason, Nature, and

Wisdom). I drew much of this interpretation from Jan Swafford's excellent Mozart: The Reign of Love (HarperCollins, 2020, pp. 676–710).

[4] Jonathan Haidt, in *The Righteous Mind* (2012), argues that reason often serves as a post hoc justification for our intuitions and desires—a perspective that reflects the modern prioritization of emotion over logic in shaping human behavior. This inversion isn't new. Enlightenment philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) claimed that reason is "the slave of the passions." (See Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book II, Part III, Section III.).

[5] In *Die Zauberflöte*, the magic flute helps Tamino, but it doesn't carry him through his tests. Magic supports transformation, but it doesn't replace the need for courage and discipline. Likewise, in business development, BD coaches play a supporting role. They offer structure, tools, and encouragement, but the real change depends on what the lawyer is willing to do.

[6] Swafford, p. 694.

[7] Curiosity, courage, and consistency echo Enlightenment ideals embedded in *Die Zauberflöte*. Curiosity reflects the Enlightenment's faith in reason and the pursuit of understanding. Courage reflects the moral bravery required to act on one's convictions despite uncertainty. Consistency aligns with the belief that growth and virtue are earned through steady, deliberate effort.

[8] As opposed to your perception of how you're being perceived.

[9] Many Enlightenment ideals can be traced back to Aristotle, whose concept of human flourishing (*eudaimonia*) emphasized reason, social connection, and the development of virtue through habit. For more on building a business development habit, see my April 28 Law360 Expert Analysis article, "The 10-Minute Rule for Building a Business Development Habit."

[10] Whether you're picking up a musical instrument for the first time, or returning to one, or making a new or renewed commitment to business development, you will make more progress if you keep a practice journal — at least at the outset. The purpose is not to measure ROI, but to use your time wisely and stay honest with yourself. Do this for one year, after which time you can decide for yourself how to organize your practice.

[11] Swafford, p. 709.

[12] Earlier, in response to a Priest's ritual question, whether he is prepared to face death, Tamino provides a ritual response: "Wisdom is my goal, the fair maid Pamina, my reward." (Swafford, p. 699.).

[13] Swafford, p. 710.