

There's Always A Bigger Fish

5 Parallels Between Fly Fishing and Cloud Strategy

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About Cloud Practice Builder

At TD SYNnex, we provide Cloud Practice Builder (CPB) consulting engagements that address key Cloud practice growth challenges. Our service supports partners involved with all the major Cloud vendors (AWS, Microsoft Azure, Google Cloud, HPE GreenLake and soon to be others) for both commercial and public sector segments. There are CPB versions tailored for start-up, early stage, and growth stage Cloud practices. All versions help partners to understand, prioritize and make important decisions across all Cloud practice areas including management, financials, sales, marketing, Cloud strategy, Cloud vendor alignment, professional services, managed services, and vertical focus.

About TD SYNnex

TD SYNnex is the world's leading distributor and solutions aggregator for the IT ecosystem. With over 22,000 co-workers, we unite compelling technology products, services and solutions from 1,500+ best-in-class technology vendors. We are an innovative partner to more than 150,000 customers in 100+ countries that want to maximize the value of technology investments, demonstrate business outcomes and unlock growth opportunities.



A little background

After geeking out with partners on all things Cloud during the week, I take off on the weekends to provide my expertise as a professional fly-fishing guide. Some clients are first-timers, while others are more experienced fly fishers who just want to explore different water or fish in an area where they haven't had much success. I average about 60-70 days a year on the rivers in Colorado and I feel like I know what I'm doing. I even teach a monthly class for a worldwide dating site that encourages in-person interactions, and interestingly, many participants express a keen interest in learning how to fly fish. All my fly-fishing clients seem to be very happy, and they tip me well.

However, I recently did something that may be surprising. I hired a fly-fishing guide in Utah, drove 8 hours, took a few days off, camped on the river, and paid full price to have another guide teach this guide (me) how to fish. Why did I do that? To learn a new fly fishing technique that is relatively new to the US and was initiated by competitive fly fishing. (Yes, you can compete in anything.) In the Fly Fishing World Championships, the Europeans were consistently beating Team USA. Why? The Europeans had evolved their technique to be distinctly different than how we in the USA fly fish. This new technique forced Team USA to begin to rethink how they approached fly fishing. This technique is now all the rage for competitive fly fishers and for people who want to be efficient catching fish.

I had heard about the effectiveness of this technique, and I wanted to learn more. So, I went to YouTube and of course by the end of a binge session, I was an expert! Not really... I did go out and try it and was moderately successful. But I was nowhere near as successful as everyone said this technique would allow you to be. I thought I understood the basics, and thought I was executing well on the water, but I didn't see the success I thought I should see. In fact, there was a period when I was frustrated enough with this technique that I sometimes reverted to the old technique.

I struggled with the basics, like casting. But I really struggled with understanding what was happening in the water. I was confused by what I was seeing, and I wasn't comfortable nor confident in fishing. It was a brand-new motion and thought pattern for me and it was hard to work it out myself.

Finding an expert

I decided to find THE foremost experts in this technique. I was determined to find someone who could not only guide me but ensure my path to success. I reached out to Team USA members, and I was even introduced to a Team South Africa team member through a contact who knew them. I was committed to doing whatever was needed to figure out this technique. I was willing to travel to wherever (even South Africa if necessary), pay whatever was required, and invest the time and energy to learn how to be more effective in my fly fishing.

This research led me to meeting my guide in Utah. First, he was the only person I could Google that ONLY used this technique. He didn't take beginners, he wasn't a guide for all people, he only did this technique. He was the specialist I was looking for. He was very clear what his superpower was and didn't try to be all things to everyone. In fact, in discussion with him, he would often turn down clients who weren't really committed or didn't have enough experience to really work the technique.

I was a bit nervous getting guided by someone I found on the Internet. What if he wasn't as good as he said he was? What if I knew as much as he did? Was the investment in time, money and energy going to be worth it? Would anything really change? All these questions were on my mind as I left to meet him.

Getting trained

As a professional and a specialist, he didn't talk a lot about correcting what I was doing. He talked about principles and approaches. He didn't correct every cast, he gave me the information I needed to begin to formulate what I was doing wrong and figure out for myself how to correct it. I didn't really care about catching fish. What I really cared about was whether I caught the fish using the new technique. Within the first 5 minutes of instruction on the framework of this new form of fly fishing, I caught my first fish.

For the rest of the day, that's how it worked. We walked slowly upstream, approached each section of water, and my guide would talk to me about what we needed to do. What the cast needed to do, what the fly needed to do, and how to target the section correctly. My cast went from non-existent to being able to cast quite far. My strike detection became very quick because I understood what I was trying to see and feel in the water. Through his guiding, I quickly gained confidence in all the things that I was afraid of. He was an excellent consultant. He diagnosed my approach, and then corrected it by advising me on the "best" way to do things. I was guided into self-discovery on how to think about fly fishing and how to correct my errors.

How this relates to Cloud Practice Builder

If you stayed with me till now, you probably know more about fly fishing than you ever wanted. My poor teammates... That's all they ever hear about. But there are a few things we can take away from my experience and apply to Cloud Practice Builder. See how I sneaked in that business aspect?

- 1) **Know your Superpower and declare it!** This guide's superpower was in this modern fishing technique. He didn't try to say that he could guide all kinds of people, he only wanted to guide people that explicitly wanted to learn the modern technique. If you read my article on "Why a Cloud Practice Fails," you will know that I don't think everyone has a good strategic differentiation. This guide was very specific, declared his superpower, and stayed true to "why" he existed.

There is a saying "Riches in Niches." Well, I can tell you that he was booked for 60 days this summer. By the way, you don't get rich fly fishing in case you were curious.

- 2) **Understand the "Why."** What this guide did was explain the "why" before he explained the "how." Why does the fly line follow the tip of the fly rod? Why is it important to understand what the fly does? In Practice Builder, we discuss best practices. We try to focus on "why" you need to know your operating metrics, why you need to have a superpower, why you need to get certifications, etc. Then, our subject matter experts can work with the "how:" "Here are the certifications you need to advance in tiers," and "here is how you differentiate yourself through marketing."

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- 3) **Awkwardness to change.** Many of our partners are transitioning to the Cloud with a different skill set and expertise. Perhaps they have sold hardware for their entire existence and now this Cloud thing or AI/Security concept is so brand new they don't know what to do. They may have the desire to change and adjust but it is hard and frankly awkward.

I know I can catch fish the old way. I just can. What I had to do was be willing to be a fool. No one likes to be the fool, but the only way I was going to get better was to acknowledge that I didn't know what I was doing and that I needed someone to help me. I had to be willing to be "skunked" which means NOT catch any fish for the day. How many VARs out there say, "my salespeople can sell hardware, they can't sell cloud?" The eagerness to change needs to be there because I will submit that no one wants to feel like the fool, but that recognition leads to success.

- 4) **Establishing the Basics.** My guide provided the rod/reel/fly that I used for the day. For someone who has almost two dozen fly rods, why did he recommend I use his gear? The primary reason is because he didn't want the gear to get in the way. The last thing we needed to worry about was how I set up my reel, what flies I was using, etc. Removing the noise from the learning was important. We started at the basics.

In our practice builder sessions, we have some introductory sessions in Financials, Strategic Differentiation, Marketing, and Superpower conversations that we do with everyone. We don't assume that people have grasped everything or understand how successful practices are built. Rather, we start at the basics and then build there.

- 5) **Work at the margins.** According to my new teacher, I was about 90% proficient. Meaning, he wasn't going break every cast down for me, but work with me on the 10%. This 10% was the big difference in me gaining something I very much lacked, confidence.

Many of our partners are 90% there. They have started their journey to Cloud, have been paid for service work and maybe even have been successful in reselling. However, it is that 10% that Cloud Practice Builder provides that helps the partner be confident in the decisions that they are making. Sometimes in Cloud Practice Builder we have to assure our partner that they are doing the right things.

Realizing the value

As we were sitting on the side of the river, it became very clear to me that my day with a guide was worth everything! It was worth the time, energy, and embarrassment (I fell in the water that day) to have someone guide me in my self-discovery. After my day, I had learned why the technique worked, what its key principles were, and how I can modify what I am doing to be successful.

We are constantly evolving Cloud Practice Builder and based on my experience with my guide, I am encouraged with how we work with partners. Being on the receiving end of being guided will help me be a better guide, but also be a better consultant for Cloud Practice Builder. We want every one of our partner engagements to walk away feeling the way I did after my day on the water. I knew “why” I was doing what I was doing, I knew “how” to fix my own mistakes, and I felt confident in that I was basically doing the right things. The adjustments the guide made to me made me better.

Was it worth it? Did I learn anything? I fished on my own 3 days later and caught a dozen fish in an hour and a half with my new technique, setup, and thought process. I went out on my own just to practice the basics but as I focused on the basics, the fish came. When the cast, the drift, the fly selection, the line control all worked, the fishing was easy.

When your superpower, your strategic differentiation, your marketing and vendor alignment all work, you will generate revenue. Fortunately, TD SYNEX has a guide service for partners to guide them to success. And, if anyone needs a fishing guide... you now know a guy.

