

Denver Business Journal - October 17, 2005

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DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, October 14, 2005

How to convince others to help you gain more referrals

Denver Business Journal - by [Garry Duncan](#)

Ask yourself, "Do I have contacts that could refer me better than they do?"

If the answer is "yes," then you're not realizing the full referral potential of your contacts.

Inspiring others to refer, removing obstacles and calming fears are major skill sets of seasoned professionals. Just as success in selling takes more than closing, generating high-quality and consistent referrals takes more than just asking.

Start by making a list of potential referral sources you think could refer you better than they do now. Avoid doing a random mental scan. Instead, review your contact database. Include clients and potential referral partners.

Referral partners are those who call on the same industry or prospects with non-competing products. For example, an HVAC engineer and building maintenance owner might both call on facility managers. Accountants and insurance agents can service the same client without competing. Referral partners are the easiest place to start developing your referral skills.

After creating a master resource list, take these steps.

Qualify referral sources for their ability and willingness to refer just as you would qualify a sales call. Great referral sources have connections and influence with their contacts. You'll want to invest resources and trade referrals with someone who is well-connected and respected.

Assess potential referral partners for their ability to refer by getting to know them and building a relationship. Gauge potential referral partners' spheres of influence by learning about their past experiences, where else they've been employed, what trade groups and associations they belong to, who they respect and who advises them.

Know who the respected leaders are in your targeted client industries. Listen closely; ask questions about successes, challenges and resources.

Once you're satisfied about their ability to refer, qualify them for their willingness. Ask them how they feel about helping you meet people who should know about what you do, if you represent them well. Advise that you want to do the same for them.

Listen closely for waffling and vagueness. Their willingness is just as important as their ability. Remember, there's a difference between asking for a referral that will buy from you versus someone who should know about you for future reference.

Initially it may be more difficult for referral sources to recognize your prospects, so make it easy for them. Become adept at coaching your referral partner (and others) how to recognize your ideal prospect and the need for what you offer.

Practice describing your ideal prospect succinctly and clearly. Include demographic descriptors such as titles, types of industry, size, geographic areas, and areas of responsibility. Clearly state the types of problems you can solve and relay how others have benefited. Avoid industry jargon and use simple, everyday language, because potential prospects probably will use nontechnical language.

Referral sources should have as many different perspectives as possible of who you best serve. Sources also will refer more quickly if they know you can solve a problem for someone they know.

Sharpen your communication skills and address fears early. Referrals can be a sensitive arena. Most of us don't want strangers tramping around in our private network. It's natural to want to protect relationships that have taken time to develop.

Explain how you handle first calls and ask for insight on the preferences of the referral. Discuss the best way to make contact and ask your referral source to describe their relationship with the referral to assess their level of influence. Ask your referral partner to call in advance of your making contact. Coach them on what to say so that the referral will be anxious to talk with you.

Protect the referral and referrer's relationship by empowering your referral with the choice of next steps. Discussing fears, concerns and approaches up front will foster trust and deepen relationships.

Sometimes people just simply don't want to refer to us. It may be an issue of trust or an issue of perceived value.

Successful business developers convey their vision, goals, values and principles for doing business. They also communicate what they're trying to accomplish in their work with clients. You can hear their passion about their work and the benefits they provide.

Principles, vision and passion inspire others to want to help and will calm their fears. Express your principles for doing business and the contribution your service or product can provide. Ask referral partners what they need to know, see or hear to feel comfortable referring to you. Offer to provide references in the absence of personal experience with you.

Asking people to do a random mental scan of who they know is seldom effective, and you risk looking like a name hustler. The goal is to get referral partners to look more carefully for you.

Suggest they look through contact lists, association memberships, vendor and eventually client lists. After they identify possibilities, discuss each name and possible reasons they should know

about you and your services. Only if there is a good reason should you discuss making contact.

Intent is everything with your contacts. Are you identifying those you can help or just gathering names?

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