



# Effective Networking

*By Kelli C. Holmes*



Is Your Networking...Not Working?

## Introduction

### Is Your Networking Working For You?

You attend all the networking events because you were told you would make contacts that would help you grow your business. You've met many people and even made a few contacts, but as far as growing your business... so far, it's been a bust. What are you doing wrong? Would you like to make it work?

This book is designed to give you proven strategies to grow your business through relationship marketing or EFFECTIVE Networking. I've used this strategy to grow two very different businesses. I speak to thousands, including the members of my networking organization on these methods. I have even built it's meeting formats around some of these concepts.

I only ask you to read this book and *try* the methods it teaches. It will answer so many of your questions and it will help your business GROW.

***~Kelli C. Holmes***

## ***Table of Contents***

### **Chapter One**

How to be an Effective Networker.....1

### **Chapter Two**

Your One Minute Commercial.....5

### **Chapter Three**

How to Develop Slogans and Taglines.....10

### **Chapter Four**

Effective Networking.....15

### **Chapter Five**

Referrals and Power Partners.....19

### **Chapter Six**

Coaching Sessions..... 24

### **Chapter Seven**

Referral Follow-up.....28

### **Chapter Eight**

Giving Presentations.....33

## **Chapter One**

### ***How to be an “Effective Networker”***

The concept of networking has certainly changed over time. To the older generation, “networking” was being part of the “good ol’ boys” at work, a country club or in a community group. Your social prestige or business success was dependent on your standing within that group. To the newest generation, networking is multiple computers connected to each other! To those in between, networking may bring to mind socializing with other business people at the local chamber of commerce, thinking that was somehow supposed to help your business grow, only to be disappointed. None of these perspectives seems to be an appealing or profitable activity to a busy entrepreneur. The challenge is a misunderstanding about networking. It’s really more about “relationship marketing” or “effective networking.”

The Small Business Glossary defines Networking as: developing business contacts, to form business relationships, increase your knowledge, expand your business base and (this is my favorite part) serve the community. That’s a good start, but to be truly *effective networkers* we need to know more about networking and we need to be taught *how* to network. That’s why you’re investing your time and money in this information. To begin, we will give an overview of networking. In the process, you will be provided with a roadmap to successful (or effective) networking.

It is important to know effective networking really has three key elements: contacts, knowledge and referrals. Contacts, of course means meeting people, but specifically it means the right people who can help your business grow by your developing a relationship with them. That doesn’t mean other contacts aren’t important. From a referral perspective, anyone could potentially send you business. But statistically speaking, you get more referrals from the right contacts who can become your *Power Partners*. *Power Partners* are basically business people who either are in the same industry as you or who are in a related field (notice I did not say same *business*, but same industry). When you develop a long-term relationship with them, they send you business referrals and you return the favor.

The second key element is knowledge. The old saying “knowledge is pow-

er” is true! First, it means that you are knowledgeable about your business; your target market; what makes your business different from others in your field and the exact type of clients you’re looking for. You simply can’t get the right referrals unless you know and can educate your Power Partners about what you need. Secondly, it means you know the type of business contacts they need and you’re willing to learn about *their* business in order to send referrals to them. The added benefit of learning about others’ businesses is you become a more well-rounded and smarter person in the process!

The final element of good networking is referrals. Referrals are opportunities to do business. This is **THE** goal of networking. In developing effective business relationships, you are aiming for those rich with opportunity for referrals. Getting more business is how you make money how your business grows!

Networking is not a natural act (especially “Effective” networking). Certainly we meet people and have relationships, but those occasions are more social than business. But in effective networking, your ultimate goal is to grow your business through the right relationships and referrals.

*Effective networking* is an acquired set of skills that becomes more productive when practiced and honed daily. We said networking isn’t natural, but it can certainly become an excellent *habit*. As we explore these skills, you’ll begin to see the step by step pattern from beginning to end of successful networking. These skills can become a way of life! Not that you only think of your business, but rather you recognize the benefits of helping others and having help come back to you. These skills are some of the most powerful techniques you can master to succeed in any endeavor. If you follow through with what is outlined here, you will see your business grow more and more.

Here are a few basic networking essentials: to begin with, you need a *positive* attitude. Who wants to do business with someone who can only find the negative in everything? Who would refer their clients, friends or family to such people? Most of us are attracted to the optimistic, positive person who shows genuine care for others. And most of us want to do business with a ‘can do’ type person, someone who acts like they can get things done. So check yourself, “How’s my attitude?” Take a casual survey from your friends, associates and family members. It may open your eyes. Most

of us don't see ourselves as negative, even when we are.

You also need desire and persistence. Decide what you want from your networking activities, then *work* to achieve it. Some may want to improve their networking skills. Their emphasis isn't on looking for new business, but on increasing their business contacts. Others may want to improve their communication or speaking skills. Most networking organizations provide opportunities on a regular basis for their members to give a full presentation on their business. Most service organizations look for speakers to address their groups. Another reason to network is to be more connected to your community or city. These networkers are looking for ways to participate in making things better. Think about what you want from networking and that will help you know if you're succeeding at it.

The next networking essential is that you have the proper tools. First, you need your own marketing materials and business info so you can refer them properly when the opportunity presents itself. People will remember you for it and they in turn will refer you. Secondly, you need your own marketing materials. They advertise your business and they help people remember your business. Display your marketing materials in a way appropriate to your business - online, in person whatever works. Another important tool is wearing a business badge at networking events which has your name and your business name (not those sticky paper things!).

Your next step is to get out there and network. Just do it. Jump in opportunities abound through your local chambers of commerce, service organizations, business referral networking groups, at church, your kids' sports activities and even at school meetings. You have to remember though, you have to *participate*. You have to invest time and effort into the venture. Your goal is to build relationships. That takes time. It takes even more time to educate your networking partners about your business and how to refer your business. Finally, as you find and cultivate networking partners and especially *Power Partners*, you'll need to invest in the relationship with them as well.

Becoming an effective networker has many advantages. You have taken the first steps. Your reward is building some wonderful new business relationships which will help your business grow and succeed!

## **Chapter Two**

### ***Communicating an Effective Message***

Relationship marketing or networking is a wonderful opportunity to meet other business owners and show your business to a broader audience in a relatively inexpensive way. It can also be a great social opportunity where you may develop new friendships. But effective networking is ultimately about growing your business through the right relationships and referrals.

A referral is a recommendation from someone (familiar with you) to someone who is interested in the product or services you offer. It is an opportunity for you to develop new business. However, referrals are not automatic and they don't happen overnight. Others need to be comfortable with you and they need to be confident about you before they will trust you with the most important people they know: their friends, family and clients.

So here you are at a great networking event, surrounded by a lot of people who probably know people who need your products or services. The question is, How to get them to know what you do? How do you communicate an effective message? The first step is educating them on who you are. This is where having an introduction – a great “One Minute Commercial” – comes into play.

You have opportunities everyday to introduce yourself. Whether it's with a potential client, attending a business meeting, going to a mixer, participating in a volunteer organization or having a social outing, you meet dozens of people whom you can tell about your business. Most business related organizations (networking groups, chambers of commerce) have a structured format which provides all attendees time to introduce themselves. Depending on the size of the group or the time constraints involved, your time may be *one minute or less*. Meeting people in a more casual setting also gives you the chance to talk about your business, but manners and common sense may limit how much you say. In either case, you can see the need to use your time *effectively*. You need to tell them who you are and what you do, but in a way that helps them remember that information. That's why, before you attend any networking event it's important to *spend five minutes on your one minute!*

The process of preparing a One Minute Commercial can be broken down into six steps: the opening; setting the stage; location/territory; highlighting one aspect of your business; a call to action and the closing. Let's talk about each step in turn.

### **Step One: The Opening**

Your opening greeting could be as simple as a "good morning" or it could be something like a question designed to cause the audience to think about who needs your business; or to agree with you that your product or service is needed. To help the audience think about those who need your business, you could ask: "Who do you know who needs (fill in with product or service)?" It's an open-ended question demanding more than a yes-or-no response. The audience now has to answer it, mentally of course, but that may open the door for a referral immediately! Some might think, "My neighbor needs that. I'll get her card and give it to them."

The "agreement" type of greeting question would sound something like this: "In California, all drivers need auto insurance, don't they?" By asking that question, the audience agrees with you that your service is needed. The additional benefit is that some in your audience may know someone who needs to buy auto insurance right now, before he's ticketed by the police!

However you decide to open your commercial, follow it with your name and your company name. So you could say, "Good morning. Who do you know who needs a financial plan for future retirement? I'm Jane Smith and my company is Smith Investment Services."

Take some time and develop a few opening greetings which include the open-ended and agreement type questions that fit your business.

### **Step Two: Setting the Stage**

This flows naturally from your opening greeting, because now you're going to tell what your business has to offer. Remember that your time is short, so you have to be concise. Can you think of one or two sentences that briefly describe what your business does? Continuing with the earlier example, Jane Smith may go on to say, "We provide complete financial planning, including insurance for life, health and long-term care, invest-



ment strategies for stocks, bonds, mutual funds, IRA's and annuities as well as complete estate will and trust preparation."

The next part of setting the stage is including what sets your business apart from the others. This is where many business professionals fail to make their introduction the **best** it can be. If Jane Smith stops at simply describing her financial services, she probably won't get many referrals. Why? Because how many financial services companies are out there? Don't they all do pretty much the same thing? Why should *anyone* refer Smith Investment Services over any of the others? It's important you describe a *benefit* of your company that can't be found anywhere else. What makes you different? Understand, that difference may be the way you treat clients, the quality of your service, the guarantee that backs your product or service or any number of other things. All these things make a client or potential client feel a certain way about your company. They may think you will take better care of them, or that you really do look out for their best interests, or they can't lose on your product because of the way you back it up. They may feel that you see them as a real person and not just another customer who has to be sold.

So Jane Smith's commercial continues: "We know your future is important. We will help you evaluate your needs and we will work with you *until you feel completely secure and satisfied.*"

Think about what your business has to offer that is unique and then write a description of it to include in your "one minute commercial".

### **Step Three: Location**

If people are going to use or refer your business, they need to know how to find you and what area or territory you cover. It helps them sort through the people they know by identifying those in your business territory whom you may be able to help. That also means they don't waste your time by referring people you can't really do business with. In today's world of on-line business, it is common to hear "we have a global footprint" my recommendation as to narrow it to where you really want to do business.

So Jane Smith would say, "Smith Investment Services is located at 1700 Main Street in Smallville. We serve all of Metropolis County."

### **Step Four: Highlight One Part of Your Business**

There are probably many things about your business you can highlight.

You could point out a special offer, like a sale or a reduced price for a particular service or a reduced fee when people purchase a particular package of products or services. You could also highlight a particular service or product you offer regularly. For example, Jane Smith's business may offer a free financial summary to all potential clients. That means that her company will do a thorough examination of your financial situation and forecast how it will affect your retirement. There is no cost or obligation. Or she may offer a particularly flexible investment product which allows her clients to shift funds between several options depending on the current market.

Think about your business and be *creative*. What can you highlight about your business that would generate interest and bring in clients? Write down several promotional ideas you could pitch in your one minute commercial.

One more thing about this step: What you highlight in your marketing message should change regularly so you have to keep it current. It will change because you regularly attend the same networking meeting and you want to educate people about the full range of what you offer. Or it might change for other reasons, like you have new products or services, or you offer different specials. It's good to have your message down pat, but don't let it become old and out of date.

### **Step Five: Call to Action**

You've now given your audience (it's always an audience whether its one or one hundred) all kinds of information about your business, now what do you want them to do with it? Let them know you want them to be thinking of you and your business. The purpose of effective networking is not to "sell" to the audience though. This is a very common mistake. Professionals do NOT usually show up to a networking meeting or event to "buy". So stop trying to sell them something. Instead, think about the hundreds of people they have in their life and what the potential referral opportunity there is. Trust me, if they want to buy they will, buy must networkers are not looking to be sold to. Perhaps, someone there may even want to do business with you. Identify the type of client and ask your audience to refer that type of client to you. If you can tie your request to your highlight, all the better.

So Jane Smith now adds, “We’re looking for people who would like to receive a free evaluation of their financial situation and then develop a plan to secure their future retirement. Also, if you know people who would like more investment flexibility in their retirement planning, please refer them to me.”

The information in this step also needs to be kept current. It will change for the same reasons your highlights change. So spend time each week reviewing your situation and keeping your presentation fresh.

### **Step Six: Closing**

Your closing sends people off with a vision of your business in their mind. Think about how you want them to remember. Your closing should include your company’s slogan or tagline and a thank you.

Jane Smith might close her introduction this way: “Remember, at Smith Investment Services, we clear the path to secure your future.” Thank you.”

Now, to give you a working example, here’s Jane Smith’s complete introduction: “Good morning. Who do you know who needs a financial plan for future retirement? I’m Jane Smith and my company is Smith Investment Services. Planning for the future is important. There’s the cost of college, vacations and retirement to consider. We will help people evaluate their needs and we will work with them until they feel completely secure and satisfied. Smith Investment Services is located at 1700 Main Street in Smallville. We serve all of Metropolis County. We offer a free financial summary to all our potential clients. That means our company does a thorough examination of the client’s financial situation and forecasts how it will affect ones future. We help people find what they need to do to financially prepare for all the responsibilities and the fun they want to have. There is no cost or obligation. We talk about a flexible investment product which allows our client to shift funds between several options depending on the current market. We will even advise our clients and suggest different alternatives for using this product. We’re always looking for people who would like to receive a free evaluation of their financial situation and then develop a plan to secure their future retirement. So if you know singles or couples with children who really care about their financial future, people who would like more investment flexibility in their retirement planning, please refer them to me. Remember, at Smith Investment Services, we clear the path to secure your future. Thank you.”

The beautiful thing about this “one minute” is it can actually be broken down into 30 seconds, 10 seconds or just a one-liner depending on the type of networking event your are at. And that’s how you develop your GREAT “One Minute Commercial”!

## ***Chapter Three***

### ***How to Develop Slogans and Taglines***

If you've ever listened to the radio or watched television you've heard slogans and taglines. Sometimes it's just one short sentence; sometimes it's a jingle that sticks in your head. Either way, you remember it and associate it with the company that uses it. That's the *power* of a slogan or tagline. Once you have a GREAT "One Minute Business Commercial", adding an effective tagline really makes you shine.

Big corporations hire expensive advertising and marketing firms for branding purposes. These firms develop slogans and taglines to identify the company in the mind of the client or consumer. The good news is you can take advantage of their work by examining their branding messages.

Take a few minutes and write down some taglines that you remember and really appeal to you. Focus on companies whose products or services are similar to yours. Now think for a moment: Why do you like them? What do they emphasize? What makes them effective? This chapter will help you identify what makes a good tagline and help you create one for your business.

We use slogans and taglines interchangeably. Both refer to a memorable phrase or motto which is used to reinforce the memory of a product, service, company or organization. They do this by emphasizing and drawing attention to a particular aspect of the company.

This is important to you both as a business owner and as an effective networker. You want your business to grow. To do that you have to "get the word out" about who you are, what you do and why people should do business with you. Those who could give you referrals need a way to not only remember you, but also a way to advertise you. Taglines help accomplish these goals. A creative tagline can do a lot to promote your business. To be effective, your tagline should have the following characteristics:

**First, figure out the main benefit of using your product or services.** Don't make the same mistake so many other business owners and sales

people do when they think stating benefits means giving the facts about your product or services. A benefit is not a fact. It's a feeling. Specifically, it's the feeling you want your clients to have when they think about your company or product.

You might think talking about feelings is silly. But let's be completely honest for a moment and talk about the real difference between your company and others who do what you do. For example, let's suppose you own a painting business. There are a lot of painting contractors who do what you do. What's the difference? Don't they have access to the same brand of paint as you? Can't they paint the same things as you? Don't they have ladders, paint brushes and rollers, just like you?

You might say you can paint better, or that you work around your client's schedule, and those *facts* are important to some people. But what's the benefit of using your company? In this case, the benefit is your customers will *feel* better if they know your company will take care of their needs better and more efficiently. You may say the facts are the basis of the feelings and that's true. But how will the clients make that connection unless you tell them? You could advertise your company by saying you paint better and on weekends. Potential clients might say that's nice. But wouldn't it be better to say, "If you need a paint job done right and fast, call us. We'll work for you *every* day of the week. *ABC Painting* will get the job done quickly so you can enjoy the beauty of color around you." For clients who dread the mess and the disruption and just want to get it done, to their lives and schedules, you've just told them you understand and that you'll reduce their troubles – and they *feel* good about you!

A good tagline will capture "that *something* you do" which makes your clients feel better about using you. It will also create in the client a desire or need for your product or service. In the above example, the natural result of feeling good about using your painting company is the desire for your services. That means more business for you!

It's important therefore, for you to ask the question: how do you want your clients to feel when they use your business? That feeling needs to be incorporated into your tagline. It is the *benefit* that distinguishes you at sets you apart.

Think about it and write a few sentences that describe the *key benefit* of doing business with you. This is important... so take a little time. To start, write down everything that comes to mind. Don't over analyze it. Don't worry about how it sounds or how long it is. Just write. Later, you'll work with those ideas to shape your business tagline.

**Second, your tagline makes a simple, direct and concise statement about your business.**

Remember, you want something that's memorable. You could write an entire book about the benefits of your business, but how many people are going to read it, much less remember everything you wrote? The sentences you wrote describing *key benefits* say some good things about your business, but how easily can they be remembered? Do you think you could recite them after an hour or so of doing other things?

Now, go back to the taglines you wrote which came from other businesses. How long are they? They're short and to the point, aren't they? That's one of the things that make them easy to remember. That's why the ideal tagline should be between four to ten words. ( I know, I know...Nike has only 3 words. You are not Nike.)

Another aspect is your tagline should apply specifically to your business. An easy test for this is to ask if your tagline could be used by others in your type of business. If it can, then you aren't being specific enough! In other words, it's not describing the benefits of doing business with you. Unless you can spend thousands of dollars on branding, this is an essential point. The car manufacturer, Mazda can get away with using "Zoom! Zoom!" as a tagline because they have the advertising dollars to identify those words specifically with their product. (This also gets into repetition, which is covered later.) But generally, most small business owners don't have that kind of money to use for branding. Make sure your tagline speaks specifically about *your* business, not the industry in general.

**Third, good taglines are *often* witty.**

Often, but not always. Your tagline doesn't *have to be* witty. It's not an ironclad rule. If you survey some of the current popular advertising taglines, you'll discover many are not. Part of that has to do with the type of business and the image they want to portray to the marketplace.

Having said that, some pretty "serious" businesses have used humor effectively. For example, insurance is 12 one most would say was a serious

business but look at Geico and the numerous humorous taglines they have used over the years to get their message out.

The point is if you can make a play on words or images and/or make people smile when they hear or read your tagline, it will be more memorable.

**Fourth, your taglines should give a credible impression of your business.**

This point and the last balance each other. Using humor effectively is one thing. Making your business look ridiculous is another. If you decide to use a witty tagline, make sure it's witty for the right reasons. The end result should be your business looks better in the eyes of the market, not that the public doesn't take you seriously.

The bottom line is your tagline should indicate you can *do* business and do it better. If you can say that with humor, so much the better for your potential clients' memory.

**And last, your tagline should be hard to forget.**

Of course, if you successfully used all the other characteristics, you probably have an unforgettable tagline already. But this is a reminder that you're looking for that special expression which makes your business memorable. Successful taglines are funny, clever or inspire confidence – or have all those characteristics. Don't settle for something cheesy or common. Put some effort into creating your tagline and come up with an expression that sets you apart from everyone else.

The other side of this is that you want a tagline that can be repeated over and over. Repetition helps the memory. And that's exactly what you're going to do: repeat your funny, clever or inspiring tagline over and over so that your clients – and those who can give you referrals – will easily remember it.

Now go back again to those sentences you wrote about your *key benefits*. Is there something which comes up over and over? That's the very benefit you need to focus on. (If no one thing pops out, it generally indicates you haven't written enough!)

Identify that benefit. (Remember, it must be specific to *your* business, not

the industry in general.) Take all you wrote on that particular benefit and start paring down those sentences to the bare essentials. Your aim is a sentence four to ten words in length. Play with the wording. Again, don't worry about how it sounds. Try everything. You will eventually come up with a few lines you really like, perhaps even one which particularly stands out.

Now work with those few remaining lines to improve and sharpen them. Attempt to be simple and clear with your message. Narrow those lines down to no more than three, preferably only one.

After you have your one to three possible taglines, test them with your friends, family and business associates. Do they like it? What do they dislike about it? Does it help them understand your business? Can they think of a way to reword it or improve it? Is it memorable?

Don't be afraid to go back to the drawing board if necessary. Remember, your goal is to find the tagline which identifies your business, separates you and can last. When you find the right one, the return on the time spent will be more than worth the effort!

Here are some great examples of memorable taglines:

The ultimate driving machine - BMW

When it absolutely, positively has to be there overnight - FedEx

Just Do It - Nike



## **Chapter Four**

### **Effective Networking**

Picture being the new kid at school. It can be intimidating. You don't know the routine or the teachers. You don't know any of the other kids, and you feel very much alone. That's pretty much the same feelings new networkers have when they arrive at their first networking event. "What am I supposed to do? How do I meet people?" "Why am I here?"

The good news is you can survive being the new kid at school. You go on to make friends. And that's exactly what will happen at networking events, especially when you learn some basic effective networking skills.

The first skill is learning to introduce yourself. Hearing that probably doesn't calm your fears. And there are at least two other reasons why you hesitate at the idea of introducing yourself. The first one is that you would be introducing yourself to strangers. We don't generally walk up to someone we don't know and just introduce our self. As a matter of fact, our parents, school teachers and any police we met growing up taught us not to talk to strangers; it's dangerous! The second reason you hesitate is that you were taught it was impolite. The proper thing is waiting to be introduced. Under normal social circumstances, those objections would be perfectly acceptable. But networking events are not the *normal* social gatherings.

People who network aren't strangers in the usual sense of the word. It's true; initially they may not know each other. But you have to remember that they gathered for the same purpose: to meet others who can help their business grow. By attending the meeting, they have implicitly agreed to letting you introduce yourself. And since there is usually a crowd gathered, you need to introduce yourself or you will be left out. Just look around the room. The good networkers are out there meeting people.

How do you do it? The process is simple. Find someone not talking to someone else, walk up to him or her, extend your hand and say, "Hi. My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I'm with (your company name here)." Make sure you smile and you have a good handshake. Do you know what will happen? The other person will say, "My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I'm with

(his or her company name here).” Congratulations! You just started down the path to becoming a good networker!

Before we look at what you’re supposed to do next, let’s talk about your handshake. Handshakes are important if for no other reason than if you give a poor one, it makes an immediate bad impression. The right handshake is web to web, firm (but not aggressive or crushing) and sincere. If you make a mistake giving a handshake, say “Oops! Let’s try that again”, because a good handshake is that important. The key is firm, not crushing or limp.

Okay, you’ve successfully shaken hands and introduced yourself, now what? The next step is to focus the conversation on the other person by asking open-ended questions. Why talk about the other person and not yourself? Because frankly at this point, he or she does not really care about you or your business. And that’s to your advantage. When the other person talks about what he or she does care about – his or her business – you learn how you can help, either through offering your own services or through making referrals. So ask how long he or she has been doing their business, and then ask how he or she got started. Let the other person tell their story and you ask questions about the things that interest you.

As noted above, while you’re having this conversation, keep your ‘referral radar’ on. Have the mentality that you want to connect people who can help each other. When people talk about their business, they usually mention their wants or needs. If they don’t, ask them. Help them identify their specific needs. This presents an opportunity for you. You might immediately know someone who can help. Imagine how your credibility will rise if you can provide a referral to them or a solution to their problem. This will be true even if you call them later with a contact. The fact that you remembered them and then sought to help will have a very positive impact on your budding business relationship. As you keep networking, you will find opportunities to connect people with key referral sources. That brings up an important point to remember: ask them if you may refer them to others. They will be flattered and it helps you in the future as you meet more people.

Another reason to keep your ‘referral radar’ working is that you may find a potential *Power Partner*, a business person you can team with to share

referrals. These are long-term and mutually beneficial relationships. We will go into more detail about them later.

Now, at some point you will be asked about your business. That's where your one minute commercial comes into play. So give part of it, but then shift the conversation back to the other person. Just by being a genuine listener, the other person will think you're a great conversationalist and have a good impression of you. (People love to talk about themselves!)

Before you move on to meet others, make sure you exchange information. There is no excuse for not having enough business cards at a networking event. You know you're going, so be prepared. Having the other person's card will help you remember him or her and will provide the information you need to make a referral.

When you're networking, look for ways you can help other people. Go and introduce yourself. Find out what they do and then take them with you as you circulate through the room. Introduce yourself and then your new friends and be sure to say what they do. In the process, you will be amazed how many people you meet and how much you will enjoy yourself. Even more important is the good impression you leave with others. And *that* sets the foundation for future relationships and referrals, which is why you're networking!

After the event, it's important to have a tracking system in place to record everyone you met, your notes about them and what they do. Your system can be as simple as Outlook or Excel or as sophisticated as a robust CRM system. Whatever you use, keep it organized and up to date. Having this information readily available gives you a referral advantage. Using it allows you to easily connect business people to those who can help them.

Finally, as with any other activity, understand you will get better at networking the more you do it. Just by taking that first step of introducing yourself you will open doors of opportunity that otherwise would forever be closed. You will learn which networking events are best for your business and how to recognize potential "*Power Partners*." And you will increase your opportunity of making long-term business relationships that can help your business grow through the right relationships and referrals.

## **Chapter Five**

### ***Referrals and Power Partners***

OK, Spot check...You have your One Minute Commercial down pat. Your tagline rings in people's ears. You're beginning to network and get referrals. Now what?

First, you need to determine the true *value* of referrals to your business. Are they important? For your success, what percentage of your business do you want to come from referrals? Do you know what percentage of your business already comes from referrals? What is the source: clients? friends? contacts? What do you base getting referrals on: your reputation? credibility? quality of your products? service? How are you developing referrals for your business? Be honest with yourself. Are you really doing what you need to be doing to increase the amount of referrals you want to receive?

The second thing to think about is how *professionally visible* you are. Notice the question isn't how *professional* you are, or if you are an expert in your field... the question is about your "visibility". To get referrals, other business owners need to 'see' you, and remember you. They need to know you like you and trust you in order to refer you. So answer these questions about yourself: How visible am I in my community? Is my impression the best it can be? How do people react when I present information about my products or services: Do they view me as a credible source? Do they seek me out for my expertise? Are my current networking activities producing these positive results?

You can see that growing your business through referrals is a matter of *building relationships* and not just showing up at networking events. Others aren't going to send potential business your direction if they don't now who you are or how well you do what you do, or if they don't trust you. Getting referrals takes time. It takes time to build relationships, to educate people about yourself and your business and especially about the types of referrals you want.

By the way, referral opportunities are everywhere! The trick to capturing

referrals for yourself or for others is to be a *good listener*. As you meet people networking become a good listener (I'm sure you have nobody like that in your life!). It has been said that good business is about finding a problem and then supplying the solution. The same is true about good relationship marketing. When people complain, help them specifically identify what they need to cure the problem. Then ask yourself if you already know someone who works in that particular area. If you do, make the referral! Being a good listener tunes you into the fact that referrals are available everywhere!

To encourage your new networking partners to refer you, consider an incentive program to give people a reason to refer your business. With this program they receive a direct reward for sending referrals to you. You choose what the incentive will be: a gift or gift certificate, recognition, a discount on their next purchase, or a cash payment, for example. Of course, you'll need to consider in advance the potential cost of the program and then plan accordingly. Also you'll need to decide what exactly you're rewarding. Will you reward all referrals or only those that result in business? If you get business from a referral, does the amount have to exceed a certain dollar value? Or, would you offer a tiered program offering different rewards for: a referral; a referral that results in business; and business that exceeds a certain dollar amount?

Always follow-up after receiving a referral. Let the person who referred you know what happened and what you plan to do next. That way they know that you are taking care of those they referred to you. That builds confidence for future referrals. All these steps will build the business relationship and encourage more referrals. Jim Rohn says the fortune is in the follow up.

As you network, you will meet a lot of people, and that's good. You never know who can send business your way. Sometimes, someone you might think of as the most unlikely referral source actually knows someone who could give you business. (INSERT BYRON'S REFERRAL STORY) The ideal situation however is that you have had a way of identifying those specific professionals who could send referrals your way almost immediately? The good news is, there is a way, and that's what this lesson is about.

What you're looking for are "*Power Partners*". This is one of the most important activities you can do to grow your business. *Power Partners* are business professionals with whom you can develop a *mutually beneficial* relationship, sharing referrals, ideas, clients and information. They can be in the same industry as you are, or be your "Power Team" – those in the same general business category as you are, but not a competitor.

But wait...even those in the same business can refer each other! Why would someone in the same business give you referrals? There are a number of reasons. It could be their demand outweighs their ability to meet it. It could be they don't service a particular territory but they know you do. It could be that you specialize in a particular product or service. The bottom line is, they like you, and want to meet their clients' needs. If you could benefit your clients by referring them to other businesses that could take care of them, wouldn't you do it? Odds are you already have. It happens all the time. A client comes in to you searching for something unique to your industry. You don't have it or you don't do it, so you send them to another business that you know who has what they need. Without knowing it, you made a referral. More than likely some clients have been sent your way for the same reason. Wouldn't it be great if you knew others who would deliberately share referrals with you? So who do you know in the same business who could become a "*Power Partner*"?

Let's expand your referral pool to include your "Power Team." For example, let's suppose your business falls into the general category of Real Estate. What professions are connected to this category? Mortgage lenders, property insurance agents, real estate agents, real estate attorneys, property managers, contractors, escrow, title insurance and those who handle pest control. You can probably name others as well. Why are these professions "*Power Team*"? Because they are all dealing with the same *client base*. People who buy homes, invest in real estate or buy business property are going to use people in all these other specific businesses. That means people in those specific businesses can refer each other a lot of business!

If you take a moment, you can very quickly think of several *Power Partner* pairs. Who is the one person a real estate agent needs when a client wants to buy a home? A mortgage lender! A financial advisor needs a

CPA. A florist could certainly expand his business by working with a caterer. An interior designer wouldn't get much accomplished without a contractor. A photographer could work well with a videographer. A graphic designer needs a printer. A personal trainer could help his clients by working with a nutritionist.

Are you getting the idea? Now, apply this to your own business. What other businesses could you work well with and both of you would benefit? Those are potential *Power Partners* for you.

Begin making a list of businesses on your "Power Team" and those in your industry. You might start by looking in your own contact manager. You've probably been collecting business cards for years. Who in those stacks could become a *Power Partner*? Sort through them and look for connections. Then follow your own money: whom do you give your business to? They are benefiting from you, shouldn't you be benefiting from them as well? If any of the businesses you give your business to are on your "Power Team" that's another potential *Power Partner*. After you've listed everyone you can think of, ask others – referral group members, chamber of commerce members, those on a charity board or other service groups you volunteer for, at your church, from the PTA, members of a trade or social group – to provide business owners they may know.

Now that you have a list of contacts, it's time to get busy! All your work to this point will be almost worthless if you don't take the next step. *Reach out to them*. Invite them to coffee or lunch. Visit them at their workplace (call before you go). Tell them what you want to do as a *Power Partner* and explain how mutually beneficial sharing referrals, ideas, information and resources can be. Start building a relationship with them so there is mutual trust and both of you feel confident sending referrals to each other. If things don't work out with one person, keep reaching out to others. Whatever you do, don't stop trying. We will have more details and instructions about what to do during your *Power Partners* meetings when we talk about "Coaching Sessions" later. But these directions will get you started.

Your purpose in all of this, of course is to grow your business and help others grow theirs with referrals. But for this to work, you have to first be prepared to give these things. Send your *Power Partners* business. Share

## Chapter Six

### Coaching Sessions

Now that you have your list of *Power Partners* and you're ready to reach out to them, how will you develop a "referral relationship" with them? Let's look at this realistically. After all, just because you see *Power Partnering* as a great opportunity doesn't mean that other business owners will share your enthusiasm. He or she will probably be cautious and wonder what the catch is. He or she may be thinking the idea of generating new business is great, but how much is it going to cost? Haven't you felt that way when you've been approached with a new business idea? That initial skepticism is the obstacle you have to overcome.

Before your *Power Partners* will refer business to you, it is essential they know and trust you. And they need to fully understand what your business has to offer. In the same way, for you to give them referrals you need to know and trust them and understand their business. The way that happens is what we call "Coaching Sessions."

They're called "Coaching Sessions" because during the time you and your *Power Partner* are in one, you will be "coaching" each other how to help your business. Plan on meeting with a different "*Power Partner*" at least once a week over coffee, or whatever is convenient. You both will use this time to collect information on each other that will be useful for giving the kind of referrals you are looking for. Set goals (*in writing*) as to what you want to share with your *Power Partner* and **take notes** from what your partner shares with you. To make it easier here are some questions to ask and answer in order to use your time effectively.

The first question is, "What does your business offer?" If you're a plumber, don't say "we do plumbing." In case you haven't noticed, there are hundreds of other plumbers in the market who "do plumbing." We're back to the same question that you answer for your *One Minute Commercial*: what make you different from others in your business? Why should someone do business with you and not the plumber down the street? Yes, your *Power Partner* does need to know the different services you can do. How else to know what a good referral is for you? So list those things as well, and be specific. Your *Power Partner* needs to know why you're different so they can



share with others why they should do business with you.

Share all of your marketing materials (digital and collateral) with your *Power Partners*. It is something they can read and show others. Also give them a handful of your business cards. While they're out doing business or networking, they'll have something to hand out when appropriate.

Now you need to get the same information from your *Power Partner*. What makes his or her business different? What specific services are offered? Is there a brochure or other information about their business you can have? Do you have their business cards?

As you can see, it's a good idea to talk about the marketing materials beforehand. That way both of you can have it ready for your "Coaching Session."

The second question is, "Who are your clients or what is your target market?" Saying, "Anyone could be a potential customer for me", is not a good answer. Successful businesses meet a particular need, and then they market to those who have that need. If you're not doing that, be ready for some really S-L-O-W business days. Not only that, if you don't know the kind of client you want, your *Power Partner* won't have a *clue* who to refer to you and certainly won't have a desire to simply give your information to everyone!

What need were you trying to meet when you opened your business? *That's* the kind of client you want. And, that's what you should tell your *Power Partner*! Also if you offer any specials or sales, give your *Power Partner* the details. Again, that is powerful information which broadens his or her ability to give you referrals.

Now ask the same specificity from your potential *Power Partner*. If they don't know their target market, help them narrow it down. You not only will be helping them, but you'll be helping yourself to find referrals for them as well.

Next ask, "What is your background? Education? Training? This relates to the issue of credibility. Are you qualified to do what you do? How qualified you need to be most often depends on your profession. If you are asking people to entrust their life savings and their future to you then be sure they

will want assurance that you are capable to safeguard their money. On the other hand, if you own a lawn care service, most people aren't going to ask you what your college degree is in. It's simply a matter of qualifications necessary to do the job well.

Explain to your *Power Partner* how you got involved with the business you're in. Tell them about your education, training, any recognition and experience as it relates to doing your work. Give him or her reason to trust your abilities and skills. Now have your *Power Partner* give you the same kind of information.

The fourth question is, "What about your family life, hobbies and interests?" While there are occasions where this type of information can open a business door, this question and, to some extent the next, has more to do with building the relationship between you and your *Power Partner*. As your relationship grows, this information will become more detailed and deep, but in the beginning expect only the basics.

Successful networkers know a long-term business relationship is more than just business. No matter how big the companies, we all still do business with *people*. When we know and trust someone who can meet a particular need, we don't go to a stranger. We don't do price comparisons or shop around (unless we have a good reason to do so). We call the person we know and trust. The same thing is true in a *Power Partner* relationship. When your *Power Partner* has a relationship with you, they will readily and enthusiastically refer you!

The final question is, "What other organizations or associations do you belong to?" Again, this information reveals some things about yourself and helps *build* the relationship. You may find more common ground and even find ways to have your organization work with your *Power Partner* organizations to accomplish a shared goal. This also opens the door for business referrals. You may not have thought about it, but the organizations and associations you belong to could be a potential goldmine for your *Power Partners*. They may well be a good place to start when you start looking for referrals to give. List those organization and associations, and give a brief description of each. Have your *Power Partner* do the same. See what comes up and look for ways to help each other.

## **Chapter Seven**

### ***Referral Follow-up***

If you are putting into practice what you've been reading then your "Relationship Marketing" efforts should be bringing in referrals. And, now that you have referrals from your networking partners, you need to *follow-up*. Following up on referrals is where all your efforts to this point, begin to pay off. The advantages you have are many. The person you're contacting knows about you from one of your networking partners, which gives you *credibility*, the person knows you're going to contact them, and is expecting the contact, and finally this person has already expressed a need for your product or service! Do you know how many business owners and sales people would love to be in your shoes at this point?!

Unfortunately, even with all these advantages and even with all the work done to arrive at this point, this is where many people drop the ball and don't help their business grow. It is amazing how many excuses and delay tactics are used to not make contact with a potential client. You may second guess the value of the referral..."I'm not sure this is a good referral" or, "This person's business has nothing to do with mine. Why would my *"Power Partner"* think this is a good referral?" You may say you're too busy right now to make a call. You might even tell yourself you'll call *tomorrow* when you have more time. Do you want to know what the real problem is? Potentially, the real problem is that you're afraid. Specifically, you're afraid of being rejected.

No one likes to be rejected. And honestly, rejection is a possibility. But you need to think carefully before you let this fear stop you. First of all, be rational about the situation. Remember: the person you're about to call knows about you and you have credibility because you were referred. The person is expecting you to contact them. The person has already expressed in what your business offers. Now what have you got to lose by calling? The worse thing that can happen is you'll be told no. It may be surprising and a little uncomfortable, but you will survive. You survived being told no before, haven't you? It's only as big a deal as you make it.

The second thing is to remember this referral is what you've been working

for. A referral is “an opportunity to do business”. Your job now is to take advantage of the opportunity. If you don’t make contact with the referral, you’ve just told opportunity to “take a hike”. This referral is your chance to grow your business, so treat it that way and do your very best.

What do you say? Here’s a quick script, “Hello, <referral’s name>, my name is <your name & business>. <Name of person who referral you> referred you to me saying you were in need of <product or service they want>. How can I help you?

That’s it? Yes, that’s it! The conversation will go from there, and more than likely you will get a date and time to meet your referral and then do business. And don’t worry. The more contacts you make the more confidence you’ll gain each time and that, too, will help your business grow!

The second part of following up is to get back to the person who referred you and talk about the referral. This is very important. Tell them about the initial contact and meeting, and then give them a detailed account of what happened. If it was a good referral (meaning you got business), your Networking Partner needs to be thanked for doing a great job! There are few things that motivate people to keep trying and working on your behalf than being appreciated. Conversely, if it was a referral that did not work out, that needs to be talked about too. Why didn’t it work out? Was it a poor match, meaning the person didn’t need your type of products or services? Was the problem with the contact person? Did it just not go well? All that information needs to be part of the story. Share all of the information with the person who referred you. Remember to do this in a positive and professional manner. It may be that you need to be more specific about the types of referrals you want, or you may need to re-emphasize what you’ve already said. Use this time as an opportunity to improve both your relationship and the types of referrals they will be giving you.

In the same way, when your “*Power Partner*” reports back to you, be a good listener. Ask good questions to draw out more information. If your *Network Partner* received business from the referral, congratulate them on doing a good job. If it was not a good referral, find out why and get specifics. Let them know you want to do a good job and that you will work on better referrals in the future.

After you contacted a referral and made your business offer, whether it was accepted or not, there are some things you still need to do. They will leave a good impression of you and, in the case where the referral didn't work out, help keep the door open for future business consideration.

First of all, send a thank you. Thank them for taking the time to meet with you. If you gained some business from the meeting, say thank you for that too. If you didn't gain business, include in your thank you that you understand the current situation and hope that you can do business together in the future. Try to make it personal. If you learned something about the referral's family, hobbies or general interests, find a way to weave that into your thank you. Remember, people prefer doing business with *people*, not with a business.

By the way, it's a good idea to send the person who referred you a thank you as well. Thank them for wanting to help your business and tell them that you appreciate their efforts. If appropriate include a gift card for something your "*Networking Partner*" enjoys. Mark Twain once said, "I can live for two months on a good compliment." Sincere appreciation is a great motivator.

An important follow-up to the thank you is a phone call. In the case where you didn't get business, tell him or her how you appreciate the time given to explain your business and that you hope you can be of service in the future. Don't drag out the conversation and don't try again to sell your business. If there are questions, answer them. Let the person you called determine how long to stay on the phone. You want to be informal and friendly. Most of what you talk about should be the referral's business or interests, not yours. If you did get business, thank him or her for both the time given and for the opportunity!

Another thing you can do is send a unique email or letter which arrives a few days after the original thank you. 'Unique' means that it's not a form letter, but personalized and business related. Also remember that in today's world a letter is warmer and rarer than an email. The fact that you took the extra time to craft a letter will be appreciated by the receiver. While this email or letter is more formal than the thank you, you still want to include something personal. Modify your comments to fit the results of your initial meeting with this referral. In the body of your message, mention

the specific benefits to that person of doing business with you. But be careful here. You're not selling, so stay away from the sales tactics. You are informing or reminding the reader how you can help. And close with an expression of your desire to work with the reader in the future. The advantages of doing this are that it keeps your business in front of the receiver and it's another step in "*building a relationship*".

Now let's talk specifically about getting business out of referral. Remember, this is what you've been working for, so take care of it. Both your reputation and the person who referred you is on the line, as well as any future referrals you may get from the person you were referred to. It's important to do everything you said you would do, do it well and follow-up on any questions or challenges that occur.

Finally, a month or so after job completion, call back to find out if he or she is still satisfied with your work. If not, find out what's wrong and do your best to make it right. And keep following-up until you get a 'completely satisfied' response. Let them know you would love the opportunity to help anyone they know who may need you now or in the future.

You can see how integrated each part of the referral process is. From finding potential *Power Partners* to working with them for referrals, to following-up on referrals, to doing good work and following up again, to finally expanding your pool of *Power Partners* – each step leads to an expanding center of influence and more business. And that's the goal and *power of effective networking*.

## ***Chapter Eight***

### ***Giving Presentations***

It is well known that people's number one fear in people is public speaking. Not death, not flying, not snakes: "public speaking!" Yet, seeking opportunities to speak is a wonderful way to promote your business and to get more referrals. That's why it's important to overcome your fears, prepare a great presentation and get in front of people.

Opportunities for public speaking abound. Most networking organizations, and chambers of commerce provide a format for members to give a prolonged business presentation. Also, most service clubs, trade associations and professional development groups look for speakers to address their groups. A good way to be invited is to let your networking partners know you consider speaking offers a good referral.

To get started you need to prepare a *great* and *complete* presentation. First of all, prepare your own introduction. Having the right introduction sets the tone and atmosphere for your presentation. Most people assigned to introduce you don't know how to do it properly, so you begin your talk with having to overcome a clumsy start. At a minimum, provide a short biography which includes your qualifications, experience and a brief description of your topic. But the best option is writing a complete one - two minute introduction and ask the introducer to read it exactly as written. This gives the most control over this important preview of who you are and what you'll be speaking about. It gives you credibility to your audience. Most introducers will be happy to use it because it makes their job so much easier. Those who want to ad-lib will at least have material to work from.

The next step is to plan your presentation by first answering some basic questions about yourself and your business. These will help you organize your material and develop an outline of your presentation.

The third step is deciding whether to write out your presentation or to speak from an outline. The advantages to writing out everything you want to say is just that: you have everything you want to say written as you want

to say it. For the beginner, that can be the lifeline during those stage-fright jitters. The disadvantage is that unless you're a good reader it will sound

like you're reading. It takes a lot of rehearsal, almost to the point of memorization to make reading a presentation sound natural and spontaneous.

Outlining, on the other hand, lets you record the key points and frees your delivery and mind from the written page. You speak more naturally and spontaneously, most of it coming from your own knowledge and experience, and using your outline only as a guide. The disadvantages are that you might speak too long on one point, or you might realize afterwards you left out something you wanted to say. Also, new speakers tend to be self-conscious and unsure about their ability to speak in front of a group. Making even a small mistake can throw them off, and without everything written out they can have a hard time recovering.

Whichever method you choose, understand that you will improve with experience. Remember, no one learning a new skill is good at it in the beginning. Don't be discouraged because your first presentations don't work out the way you want. Good speakers are developed by *practice* and *experience*.

As you prepare, focus on the *features* and *benefits* of your business. This is an opportunity to educate your audience and to set your business apart from others. Tell your audience how you got into the business. Tell them how long you've been doing it and about any special training you received to do your business. Inform them about what you can do for them. Describe your services or products. Tell them about your special offers. Also, let them know the territory or area you cover. But most importantly, tell them "why" the way you do your business is *beneficial* to them. Remember, lots of people are in the same business as you. Let them know what makes you *different*. This will help potential clients and referral sources appreciate your business and be open to referring you.

Consider using props when doing a presentation. These can include product samples (or pictures of samples), a PowerPoint presentation, using a whiteboard or an easel pad, handouts or doing anything you can think of that will help the audience "see" your business. A demonstration gets the audience involved either directly through volunteers or by wanting to see if what you do works and how well. Be creative. Try to find something *fun* and something *memorable* so your audience can easily identify you.



Toward the end of your presentation let them know what kind of referrals you're looking for. Don't expect your audience to figure it out just because you described your business and services. Help them put it all together by being specific about the clients you want. You should know your target market. Describe those types of clients.

Finally, close by repeating your name, your business name, your slogan and tagline and how to best contact you. This is important because your audience will be thinking of people they know who need your services. Then, thank them for their time.

Some meetings also allow time for questions. This is actually another opportunity for you to gain more credibility. Most questions will be clarification about something you've already said. It's seldom that you'll be asked a difficult question, but if you are, don't be afraid to say "I don't know" if you don't. Let them know that you'll find out and get back to them- and be sure you do.

After you've prepared your presentation, practice it until you feel comfortable with it and you feel like you've smoothed over any rough spots. Time yourself and make sure you have enough material to fill your allotted time and *no more*. That sounds difficult in the beginning, but after you make a few presentations you'll have to ask yourself which parts to cut out. If possible, have someone you trust hear your presentation and give you honest feedback. If you listen and learn from the critique, you will improve that much sooner!



**Kelli C. Holmes**, CEO and Founder of TEAM Referral Network and TEAM Franchise Corporation has worked with thousands of businesses over the last 20+ years. Her focus is to teach business professionals how to develop a successful business based on “Relationship” Marketing. She specializes in educating and supporting professionals on how to GROW their business with relationships and the right referrals for their business. Kelli believes you can do better, smarter business through Relationship Marketing.

The motto of her organization TEAM Referral Network is from the acronym TEAM... Together Everyone Achieves More. TEAM is a professional referral organization that turns success oriented business people into a strong team of networking professionals who work together to build their businesses by referral. TEAM has thousands of members and has opened over 250 chapters in the U.S. and currently expanding nationally and internationally. TEAM is launching in Australia in TEAM Taiwan in 2014. TEAM Franchise Corporation was named one of the 98 Brave new Franchises by Entrepreneur Magazine (Sept. 11' issue) and has been on their TOP 500 Franchises list for 2012, 2013 and 2014. TEAM also has an extraordinary “Community Outreach” program that benefits non-profit organizations. Many thousands of dollars for these non-profit members of TEAM has been generated by this program.

Kelli is the author of “EFFECTIVE Networking – Is Your Networking Not Working?”, is a frequent featured keynote speaker at many business conferences, is formally a consultant for the SBDC (Small Business Development Center), a member of the National Speakers Association and has served on many Boards for children’s charities. She is a regular radio and webcast guest and has done many workshops on the topic of “Networking” and “Relationship Marketing”.

TEAM Referral Network is located in La Verne, California, the same city in which she has been a life - long resident and has been a business owner there for over 25 years. Currently she and her husband reside there with daughters Riley (13) and Charlotte (11).

Together Everyone Achieves More

# **TEAM**

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