



Chapter 6

Plant Referral Seeds Now— Reap Referrals Later

Promoting introductions involves more than merely saying a set of throwaway phrases to our prospects and clients. You first plant a seed with a prospect or client, then you water the relationship with value and service, and then you fertilize it with trust. Sooner or later, the relationship blossoms and bears great fruit.

Basically, three things happen when you plant a referral seed and one thing never happens. First, you will never hurt a relationship by planting seeds (unless you just become plain obnoxious about it). Sometimes when you plant a referral seed, you merely do just that. You plant the seed, and results are produced much later. Sometimes the planting of referral seeds can enable you to gauge the client's feelings toward the referral process. You plant a seed and your client reacts in such a way that you can tell that he or she is not sure or comfortable with the concept. This is good information to know, for it will dictate how and when you ask the client for referrals later (if at all). Finally, if you get in the habit of planting referral seeds,



you'll realize that there are many people out there ready to give you referrals; all you had to do was bring the subject up. Planting seeds can result in immediate referrals.

"DON'T KEEP ME A SECRET"

One of the most popular and most effective ways to promote the referral process with clients is to use the expression "don't keep me a secret." This is a simple phrase that will do several things and *not* do one thing.

First, saying "don't keep me a secret" to your clients will not strain the relationship in any way. They're not going to respond by saying, "I can't believe you said that. I want my check back!"

Here are three things that saying "don't keep me a secret" can do:

1. *It plants the seed for referrals.* You can say "don't keep me a secret" to a client today. Then, some time afterward, the client will be in a conversation with someone who should know you, and will know that you're open to that introduction.
2. *Sometimes planting referral seeds can act as a barometer to how open your client may be to a subsequent outright request for referrals.* If your client responds, "I'll certainly tell others about you," then you know you have someone who may be very willing to provide you with referrals when you ask for them. If, however, the client responds with a cringe or says nothing at all, you know you may need to wait a bit longer in the relationship to bring up referrals.
3. *Not all the time, but more often than you think, saying "don't keep me a secret" can turn into a referral con-*



versation right on the spot—sooner than you thought it might. I get anecdotal evidence of this happening on a regular basis. Here are two concrete, real-life examples.

“I’ll Talk to My Sister”

Larry DeNoia is a financial professional who attended one of the several training sessions I did for his company. He used this expression within a couple of days of our program with great results. I’ll let him tell this to you in his own words.

I had a client in my office on a Friday morning. Near the end of the meeting I said to her, “I wanted you to know that I’m still taking on new clients and would appreciate your not keeping me a secret.” She immediately thought of her sister, who in the past had been happy with her advisor. Something must have changed.

At 6:00 p.m. that same evening, I received a call from her sister. She wanted to meet with me as soon as possible. At 10:30 a.m. that following Monday morning, she made a commitment to invest over one million dollars with me.

This was the fastest turnaround from prospect to client I’ve ever experienced. It clearly pays to say ‘don’t keep me a secret’ to all of your clients!

“My Mother Is About to Sell Her Home”

Brenda Hill is a real estate agent who attended a program I delivered to a group of agents sponsored by a mortgage company. Brenda told me this story to me.

I was attending the closing for a client who I had just helped purchase a new home. As we were walking to our cars, I



asked him if he was happy with the work I did for him. I then said, “Well, then, please don’t keep me a secret.”

He told me about his mother who was thinking of moving to a smaller home. Within about six months of this referral, I helped her sell her \$4.5 million home and purchase a “smaller” \$2 million home. This was a huge commission for me!

Will saying “don’t keep me a secret” always result in immediate and lucrative referrals as it did in these two examples? Of course not. But this simple little technique does work—sometimes right away and many times with a delayed result. If you get nothing else from this book, please take away this phrase. You can add it to handwritten notes as a postscript, use it on your voice mail, or even add it to your e-mail signature line.

“I’M NEVER TOO BUSY”

Here’s a simple way to plant the seed for referrals with just about everybody. Say to them, “I’m never too busy to see if I can help any of your friends, colleagues, or family members.” Of course, you will adjust this statement to fit your selling situation.

I want to point out two things about this statement. First, it is not asking for referrals, as many people mistakenly think it is. It is merely planting a seed. This statement has its place in your referral toolkit and can produce some nice results—over time. However, don’t confuse this statement—or any seed-planting statement—with asking for referrals.

Notice in the statement above that I use the words *to see*. These words allow you to qualify your referrals. Now, if you’re new to your business or don’t care much about qualifying your



prospects, you can leave out “to see” and say, “I’m never too busy to help any of your . . .” Or you can say, “I’m never too busy to meet with . . .”

On the other hand, if you’re concerned about the match of the referral prospect to your business, then the words *to see* will help you with that. When someone suggests a referral, you can then say, “Tell me more about George. Let’s see if it makes sense for me to contact him.” Or, “Let’s see if George and I are a good match for each other. I don’t want to waste any of his time.” Notice how these statements, and just about every statement I give you in this book, will be as “client focused” as possible.

“IF I RAN INTO A GOOD PROSPECT FOR YOUR BUSINESS, HOW WOULD I KNOW IT?”

Be it a prospect, a client, or anyone else, if a person is in sales or marketing, or is a small business owner, you can plant a powerful seed for referrals by saying, “If I ran into a good prospect for your business, how would I know it, and how would you like me to introduce that person to you?” Asking this question shows your willingness to give that person referrals. And it is a great way to get a referral conversation going—sooner or later.

Do you think the other person will be appreciative of your desire to make business connections for him or her? Of course. Will bringing the topic up turn into a referral conversation for you right on the spot? Sometimes. It’s important that this not just be a technique that you are using. You must be genuinely interested in making connections for that other person—when the situation arises.

I used to just say, “If I ran into a good prospect for your business, how would I know it?” Now, asking this question is fine, and it promotes the process, but introductions and con-



nections are what we all really want—not mere referred leads. So I now speak in terms of introductions and connections as much as possible.

Maybe this person sells helicopter parts and you never run into anyone who buys helicopter parts. No matter. Your sincere willingness to connect that person with prospects is what really counts.

“HERE’S HOW I’LL CONTACT YOUR REFERRALS”

One reason people don’t give referrals is that they’re unsure of how their friends or colleagues will be contacted. They wonder if giving out the names of their friends to someone will put their own relationships with them in jeopardy. However, implementing the simple technique below will allay their concerns and plant the seed for referrals at the same time.

This technique is best explained through a sample conversation.

GEORGE: Martha, as we work together, I want to let you know something that might come up and how we’ll handle it.

MARTHA: (curiosity aroused): Okay.

GEORGE: As I work with my clients, they often think of others whom they think should know about the work I do. I just want you to know how we might handle such a situation should it come up for you.

MARTHA: That sounds fine.



GEORGE: I don't like to call people and take them by surprise. I've found it usually works best when the person I'm calling knows who I am and why I'm calling, and is at least open to a brief conversation. So, whomever you identify as people I might be able to assist, I'd ask you to contact them first. It's important for you to know that I'll treat them like royalty and not be aggressive with them. Whether I end up working with them or not, I can assure you that neither party will regret the introduction. Does that sound fair?

MARTHA: Absolutely. In fact, I already have someone in mind. Let me tell you about her.

TEACH PEOPLE HOW TO GET REFERRALS

Here's an interesting phenomenon that produces referrals for many people. First, I'll explain how I learned about it, and then I'll show you how you can do it too. My sole business is teaching sales professionals and small business owners how to get more business through referrals. I even help large companies establish strong referral cultures that reduce their client acquisition costs and boost profitability.

One thing I discovered is that when you teach people how to get referrals, they are quite willing to give referrals to you. I get many of my referrals even before I deliver any value. This phenomenon truly amazes me. Part of it has to do with the fact that I'm usually talking to vice presidents of sales and others who understand the sales process. The other part is that most



of my conversations with them revolve around the referral process. Giving me referrals seems to be a natural thing for them. Sometimes, when I call clients to debrief a speaking engagement, they ask me, “When are you going to ask me for referrals?” They expect me to ask them, and they’re ready to deliver.

Now, how do you create the same phenomenon for yourself? It’s easy. As you learn more and more about how to generate referrals for yourself, teach others what you know. In many cases, you’ll have clients who need to know how to get more referrals for their businesses. What a great way to bring more value to those relationships—and in a way that has nothing to do with what brought you together in the first place. Share this book with others. Heck, buy them their own copies. Go to my Web site www.ReferralCoach.com. Learn all you can there, and share that information with others.

Mike Gorman is a financial professional who attended one of my referral training sessions. Mike’s target clients are executives and top-producing salespeople in car dealerships. Of course, the best car salespeople don’t need the random prospects that walk into the showroom (they call them “ups” because the less successful salespeople take turns being “up” for the next prospect). They work almost completely from repeat and referral business. So Mike bought 20 copies of my book *Get More Referrals Now!* (McGraw-Hill, 2004) to give to some of his clients. He even called our office to have me autograph the books—which I was happy to do.

Within weeks of handing these books out, Mike began to get calls from clients with referrals. He told me, “I had no idea what the result of this little investment might be. One dealership owner referred me to the owner of another dealership—whom I’d been trying to get take my call for almost a year. He met with me and became a new client on the spot. Many other



new clients resulted from this as well.” So, as you might imagine, Mike maintains a small inventory of my books in his office to give out to people when the times seem right.

BY REFERRAL ONLY

Joe Stumpf (www.ByReferralOnly.com) is one of the leading referral trainers in the real estate industry. His workshops and conferences make a real difference for many real estate agents and other business professionals. One of the things Joe teaches his students is to put the phrase “By Referral Only” on their business cards. I think this touch is brilliant. Think about it for a minute. Over time, the businesses with the most prestige usually work “by referral only.” You have to be introduced to them to get in the door. What a great position to be in.

When I was young, my family used to spend part of our summer at a mountain resort called Capon Springs & Farms in West Virginia. I have very fond memories of our summers there. One thing I remember is that you couldn’t make a reservation unless you were referred by someone who had already stayed there. You had to be “introduced.”

I grew up in a very middle class home. There was nothing prestigious about my life. However, many of the guests at Capon Springs & Farms were members of Congress and other high-level government officials from Washington, D.C. Being part of this group, of course, made me feel important.

Try putting the words “By Referral Only” on your business card—and any other promotional literature you produce. “By Referral Only” lends a certain amount of prestige to you and your business. If prospects see your card, they’ll say, “Do you think she’ll have time for me?” Or “Will you introduce me to her?”

Can you do this even if you don’t work exclusively from referrals? Of course. If anyone says, “Well, I didn’t meet you



through a referral,” you can respond with, “Well, most of my business is from referrals from happy clients. I hope to serve you so well that you’d be inclined to introduce me to others.”

Set your vision for a thriving referral-based business and communicate it to everyone. As you’ve probably already gleaned from this book, there are times to be subtle about this and times not to be subtle. Be creative and find ways to promote your referral-based business in the words you speak as well as on your collateral information (promotional literature and Web site).

Here are a few more phrases you might use:

- The highest compliment you can give me is the introduction to someone else you care about.
- Referrals allow me to serve your better.
- Help us help others.
- Share the experience.
- The company everyone is talking about.
- Spread the word.

In his book *Creating a Million Dollar a Year Sales Income* (John Wiley & Sons, 2007), Paul McCord provides a nice little checklist for you to make sure that you cover all your bases with your referral promoting phrases. I don’t recommend you put something referral related on every single item below. Be a little bit discriminating, or you will come across as too self-serving. Here is Paul’s checklist:

- Office voice mail
- Cell phone voice mail
- Business cards
- E-mail signature
- Flyers
- Brochures



- ___ Web site
- ___ Stationery
- ___ Notepads
- ___ Thank-you cards
- ___ Invoices and/or proposal forms

PLEASE LET ME KNOW WHOM I NEED TO THANK

You can use your outgoing voice mail to stimulate referrals. Here's a simple thing you can say that will help you build your culture of working from referrals and introductions.

Hi, this is Bill Cates with Referral Coach International. Please leave me a message at the tone. If you were introduced to us, please let me know whom I need to thank.

One of your goals is to have the referral process become a part of how you do business and to make sure all your clients know this. When you put this statement on your voice mail, you're letting all your clients know that others are not keeping you a secret.

This particular idea came about one day when I was walking through our offices and overheard my business manager, Karen Hood, speaking to a new prospect on the phone. She said to him, "By the way, how did you hear about us so we know whom to thank?" I thought this touch was brilliant. She thought of this on her own. I guess working in and around our referral system for several years, she started using her own creativity to stimulate referrals for us.

Of course, I immediately started teaching this tactic in my seminars and speeches. One company went so far as to ask all of its salespeople to start using this statement in their respective voice mail messages. It's not only good for the clients to hear, it's also good for the sales reps to do everything they can



to engage in this process. Every little thing adds up to creating that referral culture everyone wants.

Now, don't limit this idea to your voice mail. Take a lesson from Karen. Any time you or a member of your company is speaking with a prospect over the phone, assume that that person came to you through a referral. Say, "By the way, who introduced you to us—so we know whom to thank?" Now, depending on the type of business you have, some prospects may say, "I saw your ad in the phone book" or "I looked up your Web site." No matter, you've still just promoted the concept of referrals and introductions with them. You can even say, "Oh, okay. Many of our clients tend to tell a lot of their friends and colleagues about us, I assumed you were referred to us. No matter, we'll take such great care of you—maybe you'll want to tell others."

HE'S IN A MEETING WITH A REFERRAL CLIENT

I was delivering a referral training program in New York City one day, and a member of the audience, Ray Monroe, a financial advisor, shared with the group what he did to stimulate referrals and introductions.

First, here's what Ray Monroe said to us:

I was in a meeting with a new client, who had been referred to us. My assistant, Shelly, took a call from a current client who wanted to speak to me. Shelly said, "I'm sorry, Mrs. Gephardt, Ray is currently in a meeting with a referral client." To which the client replied, "What's a referral client?" "Oh, sorry," Shelly said, "A referral client is someone who comes to use recommended by a friend, colleague, or family member. Most of our new clients come to our practice in that way."



About two weeks later, Mrs. Gephardt called Shelly to say, “Hey, Shelly, I think I have a referral client for you.”

Mrs. Gephardt’s referral client did, indeed, turn into a client for our firm. So I thought, “How else can we turn what happened here into a more regular occurrence?” Now, when Shelly or I are scheduling an appointment with someone, the conversation will likely sound like this:

CLIENT: Can I meet with Ray next Wednesday morning?

SHELLY: I’m sorry, Ray has a referral coming into the office that morning. Would just after lunch work for you?

Here is yet another example of how someone has incorporated the referral process into his everyday language. Even if you can’t do exactly what Ray and Shelly do here, think about how you can begin to incorporate similar language into your conversations.

TEACH PEOPLE HOW TO GIVE OUT YOUR BUSINESS CARD

Sometimes our clients ask us for some of our business cards so that they can hand them out to others. We also ask them to carry some of our cards. Here are a few ideas to make this old concept work better.

When you give someone business cards to carry, say something like this to them: “George, I want you to always have my phone number handy. If anything comes up about the work we’ve done that prompts questions, you’ll always have my number with you. Also, here are a couple extra cards. If anyone asks you if you like the work we did for you, you can hand them a card and see if they’re open to my call.”



If, in your business, you deal with account numbers or customer numbers, you can write those special numbers on your card. Now it becomes an important document clients won't want to throw away. If appropriate, you can also handwrite your cell phone number on your card. This is an appreciated personal touch.

Now, let's say a client asks you for some business cards to carry. First, you want to find out why. Say something like, "I'd be happy to give you some cards. Do you have some specific people in mind you'd like to introduce to our work?" Obviously, if the client has some specific people in mind, you'll want to have a conversation about referral, explaining what needs to be said to those people to get them interested in what you have to offer.

In all cases, you want to try to remain proactive. Most of the time, when our clients give out our business cards, nothing comes of it. Nice gesture, no results. So when you give business cards to your clients for them to distribute to others, teach them how best to do so. Here are a couple of examples:

- "George, thanks for your willingness to tell others about us. That's a great compliment. I'd like to tell you what I've seen work best with this sort of thing.
- "Just because you give someone my card and suggest he or she contact me doesn't mean that that person will. I've found that people get busy, forget, or even lose the card. What seems to work best in my line of work is when I can reach out and contact the person—be appropriately proactive. When you give someone my card, do you think you can see if he or she would be open to my call? Let that person know that I won't be pushy. I just want to see if I can be the same resource for him or her as I have been for you."



DON'T CREATE COLLATERAL DAMAGE

Collateral materials is a fancy term for your marketing materials such as brochures, flyers, business cards, and Web sites. One way many of your clients may choose to introduce you is by first passing along some of your promotional materials to others (including sending them to your Web site). If your collateral materials are not up to the level of quality that fits your industry, they will do more damage than good.

If you work for a large firm, I suspect most of your collateral materials are well designed and well printed. However, if you ever develop any of your own collateral materials—because you're independent, branding your individual practice, or otherwise—then you need to make sure your collateral materials are of the highest quality you can afford. This is not an area in which to skimp.

It amazes me how business professionals do everything they can to portray their successful image in their dress, car, office furnishings, and the like, but turn stingy when it comes to their supplemental materials.

How your clients perceive you when they first meet you carries over to their willingness to refer you. Your dazzling personality and high-level knowledge may be able to overcome poor marketing materials, but poor marketing materials may make it tougher for people to refer you—especially your centers of influence. Your clients may love you, but they don't want to feel embarrassed referring you to others if they know your marketing materials aren't first class—or at least at the level necessary for your industry.

In our office, one of our standards is “choose in the direction of higher quality.” We try to apply that to everything we do—including the design and printing of our collateral materials. If the choice is one color versus two color, we almost always



go with two color. If the choice is two color versus full color, we almost always go with full color. We spend freely on high-quality laser and inkjet printers so that everything that leaves our office looks as nice as possible.

Make sure there is a strong theme of quality in everything you do.

CREATE GOOD CONNECTIONS

One of the best ways to start getting referrals is to start giving referrals. Become a connector of people. Pay attention to products and services that you trust, and refer them to others. Become a resource center for everyone you know—especially your clients.

It amazes me that so many people who want referrals for their own businesses are not willing to give referrals to others. How are you going to create a culture of people giving you referrals if you're not willing to do the same?

When you give referrals to others, make sure that the connections go through. Giving someone a name and phone number of a new resource is a nice gesture, but there is no benefit to either party unless they connect. Call the parties a few days later to make sure the connection has taken place. When you take a little extra time and energy to make good connections happen for others, they'll do the same for you. Voilà! More referrals!

"OUR WORK WILL REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL"

One fear that some clients have about giving referrals is confidentiality. Some clients are concerned that their friends or colleagues may learn about some aspect of their life or business that they'd like to keep mostly private. Take away the fear that



some clients have by emphasizing the confidential nature of your work. You can also teach them who you serve the best at the same time (so they only give you the types of referrals you want.) You can accomplish this in a simple conversation that will place absolutely no pressure on them or on you.

Here's the sample conversation (from the financial services world):

You: George, I wanted to let you know about something. Sometimes my clients like to introduce me to people they think should know about the work we do. If this ever comes up for you, I just wanted you to know a few things.

First, the work we do is, and always will be, completely confidential. No one will ever learn about your situation from me, or vice versa.

Second, our business is geared toward very successful people like yourself who have saved and invested well over the years, but who need someone to handle all the details and keep things balanced. [You will insert your own profile in here]

And finally, I don't like to surprise people when I contact them. Should you ever identify someone you think should know about me, I'd ask you to contact them first and gain permission for me to call them.

I'll keep you in the loop as to how we progress. And, most importantly, I will treat them like gold. I'll never pressure them or do anything to hurt my relationship with you, by hurting your relationship with them.

Does this all make sense?



GEORGE: Sounds good to me.

YOU: Great! Just remember I'm never too busy to see if I can help anyone you care about.

There are a hundred ways you can structure this conversation. Make it natural for you. Take away whatever fear they may be feeling about giving you referrals.

THE LADY WHO LOVES REFERRALS

Diana Borrel is a top producer for her company; and she's done it with referrals. She does it with two main strategies that follow my system to the letter. First, she makes sure she does a great job for her prospects and clients—so she's referable sooner in the relationship. Second, she plants referral seeds like crazy. For instance:

1. Her business cards have the words "I love referrals."
2. Her notes have the words "I love referrals."
3. She tells people, "I love referrals."
4. She uses an audio business card that's titled "Referring to You." (On the tape she says "I love referrals.")
5. She's comfortable bringing up referrals, and she does it all the time.

The results have been nothing short of fantastic. She discovered what I've been teaching for years—just planting the seeds can prompt many prospects and clients to give referrals without your even asking.

Many people love Diana's style, but it may not be *your* style. No matter. Just find a way to keep the referral conversation lively, without becoming obnoxious.



SHARE YOUR VISION FOR YOUR REFERRAL-BASED BUSINESS AND HOW YOUR CLIENTS BENEFIT

Do your clients even know that you are taking on new business and that it is good for you and for them if you can do so by virtue of their introductions? You know, many clients think—erroneously—that if they introduce you to others, you’ll have less time for them. But they’re wrong, aren’t they?

It’s important that all your major clients understand how they benefit from introducing you to others. Like many of the techniques in this book, this one is best illustrated through a sample conversation.

GEORGE: Martha, I wanted to tell you about a decision I’ve made in how I run my business and how that might impact you.

MARTHA: Okay.

GEORGE: As with many businesses, I have to balance my time between serving my current clients and finding new clients to serve. Quite frankly, I’d prefer to spend most of my time serving you and my other clients—instead of making marketing calls, spending money on mailings, and so on. So I’ve made a decision to run my business exclusively from introductions by my current clients. Does that make sense?

MARTHA: Yes, in fact, I almost referred you to one of my colleagues, but I was concerned that if I introduced you to someone else, you might not have enough time to continue to serve me so well.



GEORGE: Actually, that's a fairly common assumption, but fortunately, it's not how this actually works. I think it's good for you to know that when my clients introduce me to others, everyone wins. *You* win because you get a chance to help someone you care about—and in a way that will not take time away from your level of service. *I* win, because I might obtain a new client. And your *colleague* wins, because he gets the benefit of the work I do and can meet me in the most comfortable and trusting way.