



I'M NOT A salesperson ...or am I?

Maximizing Your Sales Potential
with the Effective Use of Referrals

EDITORIAL | LENANN MCGOOKEY GARDNER

As a thoracic surgeon, Aaron is used to working on hearts and lungs. He's a gifted surgeon, with a wonderful bedside manner, impeccable skills and true caring for his patients' and their families. But the truth is, his case volume is down and so too is his income. After some reflection, Aaron was surprised to realize that what he in fact has, is a **sales problem**.



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In the medical community that deals with America's epidemic of heart disease, the cardiologist is king. When surgery is indicated, the cardiologist recommends a surgeon, and most patients, firmly bonded to the cardiologist, accept those recommendations. Aaron needed better relationships with cardiologists who could appreciate his skills and special talents. And a program of targeting specific cardiologists and systematically and methodically building relationships with them improved his income.

So what about you?

You may not cut open people's chests for a living — but if you work in any one of a variety of professions that rely on referrals, could you benefit from a sales approach like Aaron's? Here are several tips to help you maximize referrals without compromising your professional image:

Know who you'd like to have sending business your way. A prospect list is not a list of organizations; it's a list of human beings who could send clients to you but are not currently doing so. Do you have such a list? Studies show that writing up a list of those with whom you'd like to be doing business, and reading the list daily, increases the likelihood that you will actually establish those relationships!

Work your prospect list. Don't let a single week go by without completing a minimum of two activities related to your prospect list. Sometimes you can attend a meeting that is likely to put you face-to-face with targeted prospects; failing that, you may have to send an article of interest, and suggest an in-person meeting to discuss matters of mutual concern.

When you speak with your prospects, use the word "you" often, and the word "I" (or "we") seldom. Making the conversation more about your prospect and less about you will make conversations longer — perhaps long enough for trust to develop.

Begin every conversation with a prospect by adopting a "clean heart position" — a sincere desire to see your prospects get what they want, whether or not they get it from you. Try to understand their business and practices and what they're trying to accomplish. Ask questions about their business goals, rather than turning the discussion to a request for referrals. Once you feel you understand their

business objectives, restate their objectives and be sure that the prospect agrees that you understand. If they do agree, then you can introduce the notion that you may be able to assist them in achieving those objectives — but only if you legitimately feel you can.

Focus on your prospects. At all stages of the process of cultivating referrals, be sure you are focused on the prospect, rather than on your objectives, your message, or your agenda. The way to make meaningful connections is to understand what your prospect is trying to achieve, and the extent to which he or she has pain that you may be able to alleviate.

Keep your voice at the same volume level, and speak at the same pace as your prospect does. This helps to build rapport. Research from Dr. Genie Laborde suggests that this may be one of the most powerful things you can do to help others to like you quickly!

Express continued interest in your prospect. Listen as if your prospect could speak for the next eight years, and you would still be there listening attentively (rather than trying to make your point).

When speaking with prospects, make an effort to avoid using words that are rooted in the word "no," such as not, won't, can't, don't or aren't. There's evidence that such negativity will drive prospects away from you. If the conversation gets to the possibility of working together, express enthusiasm for that, without going overboard or losing your professional demeanor.

Don't forget the people who are currently sending you referrals. In addition to conveying your thanks after every referral, have a regular program of touching base with them, and put it into your scheduling program so you're reminded when to make the calls monthly, quarterly, or at minimum, twice a year. And be sure to send business to them whenever you can — the best referral relationships are two-way!

Developing relationships with those who can refer others to you is possible, but it requires thought about whom you'd like to serve as referral sources — and action to cultivate these relationships. Follow these principles, and develop the referral sources who will support your organization's growth for years to come! 