

How Do You Spell REFERRAL?

by Steve Klitsch

When remodelers talk about marketing — finding new leads and turning them into signed jobs — most agree that new business comes from referrals. That's true of my business as well, which I have owned and operated for the past ten years in a suburb of Washington, D.C. I find my market to be extremely competitive — several award-winning remodeling firms are located in my area — so to maintain my share of the work, I have learned to network my referrals in a serious, sincere way that resulted in 100% referral work in 1997.

It's something of a gimmick, but I've come to think of the word "referral" itself as an acronym for eight critical elements that must be present if marketing to past clients is to have any chance of succeeding.

Respect

I know I won't get a referral unless I've gained the respect of my client. That goes for everyone in my company — on site or off, employee or sub, even delivery people. It also applies to all types of communication, whether by phone, written word, or in person. Consequently, I require the highest level of professional behavior at all times. I treat clients well, including their property and the work site itself.

Enthusiasm

My clients can tell right away how I feel about working on their house. I make it a point to arrive on the job each

day excited about the tasks at hand, and my enthusiasm flows to my staff and from them to the client. I also keep my clients informed about what they can expect to see accomplished each day. Enthusiasm not only signals to your clients that you appreciate their business, but it comes in handy when problems arise.

Forgiveness

Very few people will remember how well a wall was framed or who shingled

pletely successful, but only after you've done everything you can to keep the site clean will you be forgiven for whatever dust remains.

Excellence

Excellent workmanship is not what *you* think it should be — it's what your clients recognize. "Quality" is hard to define, but we all know it when we see it. I make it a point during my sales presentation to look around the house and make some notes on the quality of the

workmanship. I deliberately comment on some of the aspects of the existing house that I like, then I listen carefully to the homeowner's response. What they say can reveal a lot about their expectations for the job we are discussing. Finally, I ask myself whether or not my company can meet or exceed the homeowners' expectations for quality. If the answer is "Yes," I close the sale. If not, I turn down the job or hire some

new staff who can meet or exceed those expectations.

Relationship

Just like a house, a professional business relationship needs maintenance. Keeping in touch a few times each year by mail or telephone is essential to perpetuating a relationship. I don't keep this strategy a secret from my clients, either: When I finish a project successfully, I simply tell the homeowners that I would like to be able to contact them periodically to see how things are with the improvements we have made.

Respect for me and my staff
Enthusiasm about my company
Forgiveness for the dirt and dust
Excellence in workmanship that they can recognize
Relationship that is both professional & perpetual
Rave reviews to friends and neighbors
Absolute quality service
Loyalty to me and my firm exclusively

the roof, but they will never forget how dusty and dirty their house was during the work. We've all heard it before: "You did a great job, but it was so dirty during demolition, we're still cleaning dust from the bookshelves." It's also important to control debris — even the way you store new materials makes an impression on your clients. If the job doesn't warrant a dumpster, at least store debris in a neat, out-of-the-way pile.

The mantra of the remodeling business is "clean up, clean up, clean up." It won't be easy and you may not be com-

Instead of being annoyed at the prospect, I find that homeowners are reassured that I'm not going to take the final payment and leave town.


Rave Reviews

If your clients aren't proud of your work, they aren't going to tell anyone else good things about you. In fact, if they're less than satisfied, you're in for some negative publicity. On the other hand, if you've met or exceeded their expectations, they'll show off your work at every opportunity. Don't be afraid to encourage them to talk you up to their friends and neighbors. If you've built a strong relationship, they'll consider it part of the deal.

**Your clients won't
remember how well the
walls were framed, but
they'll never forget how
dusty and dirty your
work left their house**

Absolute Quality Service

It's essential that everyone who participates on a job, subs and suppliers included, follow through with every promise and contractual agreement.

That's what your clients agreed to pay for, and nothing less will do. If you hold up your end of the bargain, you'll distinguish yourself from all those other remodelers who never quite keep all their promises. 

Loyalty

All of the preceding ingredients lead to loyalty. Follow these rules and your clients won't have a reason to even consider another company for their next project.

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