

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Sandler Prospecting Principle #27: Generate and Use Referrals

Most salespeople are uncomfortable asking for referrals and introductions. That's because they do it wrong. Most salespeople are so terrified of being turned down that they postpone the discussion, waiting until the last possible moment to address the issue. Typically, that's the end of the meeting or the phone conversation. Then they say something like this: "Hey, by the way, you wouldn't happen to know about anyone who might be able to benefit from working with me, would you?"

Talk about a question that's designed to get you shot down!

Nine times out of 10, the other person just says, "Gee, no, I can't. Sorry." Or, if you're really lucky, "Hmm. . . let me think about it." Both of which translate to nothing. The experience is awkward and sometimes a little humiliating, which explains why

a lot of salespeople don't even make it this far. The result: they get far fewer referrals than they should.

There's a better way to do this, and it starts with understanding what salespeople really do for a living. *We save people's necks.*

As professional salespeople, we bail people out. We are solution providers. We provide tremendous insight to our clients. We change their world! We save the day, just like the cavalry coming over the hillside in those old westerns. We deliver value! So rule number one when it comes to referrals is that you have to be ready to talk about the value you have delivered. . . first! I find that a phone call is a great way to do this, and I think you will, too.

Let's assume you're called in to save the person's neck, bail the person out, solve the problem—and you do that with style.

Then you have a phone discussion (or perhaps an in-person meeting) that sounds like this:

You: So, was this project helpful to you? Did you find what we did here valuable?

Client: Yes, it has definitely helped us a lot. (Or some similar response.)

Then, instead of “by the way,” which puts you in an “inferior” position, you continue with:

You: You know, I'd like to talk to you about something that could have a significant impact, if you have a minute.

(Put all this in your own words.)

Client: Sure.

(Next, you tell a disarmingly honest story. It could sound like the below.)

You: Jim, how long have you and I worked together? Four years? Wow. I've always felt we've got a good relationship, and I've also felt that you've seen value in what we do. Is that a fair statement?

Client: Absolutely.

You: I will tell you, every time I leave here, I kick myself. I keep thinking I'd like to have a conversation with you about people in your circle, who would be open to understanding more about what we do. But I've just never brought it up. In my head, I always thought. . . . I didn't want to come across too "salesy" or look as if I was imposing.

(That's a disarming piece of honesty!)

You: Would it be helpful if I painted a picture of the 3 to 4 kinds of people who typically are a good fit for what we do?

Prospect: Sure.

You: Let's just brainstorm together who you are connected to that fits the profile—then you and I can decide later if it makes sense to make an introduction. Sound okay?

Now, how much more effective is that than, "Hey, by the way, you wouldn't happen to know about anyone who might be able to benefit from working with me, would you?" Way more effective, right?

I'll tell you what's going to happen next. Your client is going to give you the names and phone numbers of one or more people to call and more than likely provide a warm introduction.

GENERATING THE REFERRAL: VOICE MAIL

What's the conversation going to sound like when you do reach out to Joe, the person Jim referred to you? There are a couple of different scenarios to consider. We'll begin by assuming that you're attempting to connect with Joe by phone, which is what I recommend, even if you happen to already have some kind of social media connection to Joe. You might be one of the 500 people following Joe on Twitter, but the odds are pretty good that you have not yet won what the marketing people call "top of mind awareness" with him. For that, you need a conversation.

And the good news about this particular conversation is that, although it has many variations, all of them are built around what we call a "warm introduction," and all of them use that introduction to segue into the basic prospecting conversation I've outlined for you in this book.

Let's take a look at some of the variations you can use. The most common variation is the voice mail message, because these days, it's very unlikely that you'll reach anybody voice to voice on the first call. So here are three more options for leaving initial messages when you have a personal connection with the person you're calling. Notice once again that each message is very short!

You: Hey, Joe. John Rosso. Listen, I had a real good conversation with Jim Smith yesterday. We had a chance to talk a little bit about you and your business. He thought it might be important that you and I speak. I'm at (555)-555-5555.

Or:

You: Hey, Joe. I had a conversation with Jim Smith yesterday, and he talked to me a little bit about you and your

business. He thought it might be important that you and I speak briefly. I promised him I would reach out to you. I'm at (555)-555-5555.

Or even, if you want to add a little humor:

You: Hey, Joe. I talked recently to Jim Smith. If he's still someone you'd even consider admitting that you know publicly, then you should also know that he and I had a very good conversation about you and your business yesterday. He thought it might be important that you and I speak briefly. I promised him I would reach out to you. I'm at (555)-555-5555. Give me a call.

GENERATING THE REFERRAL: VOICE TO VOICE

When Joe calls us back, or if we get Joe on the phone voice to voice the first time we call, we're not going to say what we normally would say if we were initiating contact with someone who has no referral-network connection to us. The dynamic is a little different here. This time we're going to say something like this:

You: Hey, Joe. John Rosso.

Then, believe it or not, right after we say our name, we're going to let a precious second or two go by: tick, tick, tick. No words come out for those first two seconds or so of the call. Now, I realize that that may feel counterintuitive because we salespeople have a tendency to want to fill every available empty space during our conversations. But watch what happens right after this little pause.

You: Is that name at all familiar to you?

Prospect: Nope.

You: OK, I was hoping it would be. Hey, I had a nice conversation with Jim Smith the other day about your business.

A couple of things can happen at this point. The prospect might say, “Jim Smith, sure, go on” or any variation that translates as, “Keep talking,” in which case we’re off to the races, ready to have an exchange about why Jim felt it made sense for us to have a discussion.

Or the prospect can say nothing or can say, “Jim who?” or can say anything else that translates as “I don’t know what the heck you’re talking about.” If that happens, don’t panic. This is our way forward:

You: Hmm, it doesn’t sound like you and he talked recently.

Prospect: (Any response.)

You: Listen, not a problem. Let me share with you the conversation Jim and I had, why he thought it might be important that you and I speak, and then you can tell me whether or not it makes sense for the two of us to sit down together. Fair?

And from there on in the call is the same as a standard prospecting call.

Did you notice that there is no point in this call at which we use the word “referral” to the prospect? Let me tell you why that is. Words are funny things; if you use the wrong one, even innocently, you can set off all kinds of alarm bells within the other person’s defense systems. A prospect might think, “*Referral*? Somebody *referred* me? That means I’m eventually supposed to buy something, right? Abort! Abort!” (Or even worse—“I got your name from...”)

Somewhere along the way, the word “referral” picked up a lot of baggage. It reminds people of pushy insurance agents and pushy

lead generation programs from years gone by. Nobody can blame people for feeling hesitant about taking part in anything that seems even vaguely like it's part of someone's "referral generation" process. Most of us have just had too many bad experiences with that.

True story: There's a major insurance company that has its agents fill out their customers' applications side by side with them. As part of the completion of the application, the salesperson is supposed to ask the new customer for the names of "three friends or family members I can call" and then keep staring at the application form, with pen to paper, until the new customer supplies the names! The form literally says, "Put your pen to the paper, and do not look up until the customer speaks!"

Can you imagine the discomfort and the awkwardness of that moment. . . for both sides? I guess you're supposed to be peeking up through your eyelashes to see if the customer is moving or not.

That's horrible. That kind of selling—if you can even call it selling—is the reason why there's a crazy dysfunctional culture out there between seller and buyer. So if you're like me, if you think that there's got to be a better way to do this, an adult-to-adult way to get equal business stature, protect everyone's dignity, and still generate good leads. . . well, you're right. There is. And I've just shared it with you. That's what *Prospect the Sandler Way* is all about: how to sell without selling your dignity.

**In the next chapter, you will set
up your prospecting plan.**