

TRAINER

BUSINESS By Diane Y. Chapman

Maximize Referrals

Give people something to talk about, and you'll never need to advertise.

Businesses throughout history have recognized the gold mines of opportunity that lie in cultivating referrals. It is not unusual for an excellent service to derive at least 80 percent of its income from referrals. Successful personal fitness trainers repeatedly affirm that referrals are their major—or exclusive—source of new clients.

Referral business means more potential clients inquiring about your services and signing on the dotted line. It is widely accepted that the "closure rate" with referrals is much higher than the closure rate with "cold" inquiries. Consequently, it makes sense to concentrate on developing the "warmer" kind of business that referrals represent.

Referrals are generated by the cheapest yet best kind of advertising: word of mouth.

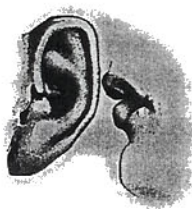
There are three distinct developmental areas for you to consider when you decide to cultivate referral success:

1. creating the "receptive yet reciprocal" image that will attract referrals from others
2. soliciting referrals through a plan of action that includes networking, asking direct questions of your current clients and following the etiquette of gracious follow-up
3. successfully "closing" with the referrals, turning them into regular clients who will, in turn, refer others to you

DEVELOPMENTAL FOCUS #1 BROADCAST A "RECEPTIVE YET RECIPROCAL" IMAGE

The first step toward capitalizing on the potential for referral success is to scrutinize your public persona and image. You communicate your energy and intentions through your demeanor, through

your honest enthusiasm for helping others improve their lifestyles and reach their fitness goals, and through the activities you pursue to develop yourself personally and professionally. When people meet you, they should feel your competence, enthusiasm and values. Don't be



afraid to exude positive energy and openness. These qualities stimulate the referral process. Your clients, acquaintances, associates and professional contacts will sense your dedication to creating prosperity for everyone around you.

REACH OUT TO YOUR TARGET GROUPS

Is all networking conducive to referral building? Not necessarily. Your best bet is to concentrate your time and effort on professional associations that draw those most likely to be in your target market.

Potential Clients. What types of individuals do you specialize in training? Professional men and women? New mothers? Future bodybuilding competitors? Answer this question and then decide where to find these people. Go there and network.

Professional Groups. Network at meetings held through your local chamber

of commerce or through "leads" groups. Go a step further and become actively involved in professional group committees. This is something many of you may already be doing by assisting with fundraisers, such as Race for the Cure and Toys for Tots.

Cultural events, fitness fairs and community celebrations offer opportunities.

Medical/Fitness Professionals. Fellow trainers, club owners, trade magazine editors, conference directors, physical education teachers and continuing education providers are excellent sources for referrals.

Medical doctors, chiropractors and physical therapists are all ripe for collateral business.

The more visible you are within the groups, the more likely it is that you will be perceived as receptive and reciprocal. When you attend conferences, meetings and networking events, don't be afraid to stand out. Make vocal contributions to the discussions. Project an image of politeness, constructive discourse and interest in what others say or feel. This will draw others to you like a magnet during the free moments the event offers.

FOLLOW THROUGH ON RECIPROCITY

In return for referrals, give polite and effective service. Be honest and genuine in your business dealings. Be willing to refer clients to more specialized professionals when necessary. For example, if you feel your clients would benefit from the assistance of a dietitian, refer them to an excellent associate who will work in tandem with you. Letting go of that aspect of the service will only enhance your image. And you will be fulfilling the reciprocity aspect of the referral cycle: a willingness to promote others through your own referrals, maintaining the belief that there is enough business for everyone! ▶

NETWORK

INTERVALS

HELP CLIENTS WITH HEART DISEASE