

# Oh By the Way: A Wonderful Way To Sell And Be Sold To

By Brian Buffini

What started out as a project to help people has turned into the largest coaching company in America. Over 600,000 people have attended our seminars. To say I was a little taken aback would be an understatement.

I had come from a culture that was very hospitable. I never experienced cold calling at home in Ireland. Back there no one had ever cold called my house. In all forms of sales there are walk-ins. These are people who come to a sales office seeking service. They actually walk in or call. In the real estate business waiting for them is called floor time. The leads from referrals were always most desirable and highest on the scale. That was very gratifying until I discovered I was spending as much money as I was making, an easy thing to do in the real estate field. I was working seven days a week and the rest of the time I was on call. Although I was wasting a lot of money I was nabbing a lot of income. The best people were easy to deal with; that sixth client would take more of my time than the other five combined. My energy and effort were being wasted on the worst client.

Whom do I want to serve? What kind of clients do I want? What kind of business do I want? What do I want to achieve? And so at the end of that second year I took some time off to consider my business and my future. They asked a single question - can you put your name to that? I see it as a challenge and a necessity to deliver a high level service to people and to do it in such a way that it exceeds their expectations and delights them so they are brimming over to tell their friends about the exceptional service they received and from whom.

People are always looking for someone to trust. It's human nature to search and ask for referrals and we are eager to share our finds. Trust is the key component during business class referral. It takes someone other than yourself to verify your character and competence and create trust with immediate credibility. It's difficult to do that yourself without appearing boastful. I was determined to generate referrals proactively. I believed my most significant career accomplishment was learning to think from the prospective of the long term. It prompted me to view my clients relationally instead of transactionally. People have to have a compelling reason to refer you.

It felt right and good to start by stating my complete commitments to client. Stating the commitment was crucial to starting the process. At the same time I could foresee that it would be rewarding to me I would tell them I was going to entrust my business to them and that I was going to do it by offering them a new cheaper level of service. I had explained my methods simply and completely, state my total commitments doing business exclusively by referral and make them understand their importance to me. I would explain to them how I did business but I had to do a great job for them because if

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I didn't I wouldn't get any referrals and if I don't get any referrals my business would dry up.

My business would depend entirely on my client. After the fact it turned out to be a great comfort to my client. They heard my words as 'Hey, if I don't do a great job for you, I am not going to end up with much business'.

She made a commitment to do the ordinary drills and field practices consistently so that she would become extraordinary. Thus became an outstanding Olympic athlete by never taking her foot off the gas; consistently sticking to her basic plan. I have been greatly influenced by her commitment and drive and I put those same principles to work for myself. Commitment is crucial in my referral system. I want to do business by referral because I believe referrals are the best way to go.

Without planning you do not have a system, without commitment you cannot make a system work. Action to be effective must be directed to clearly conceived ends. As I have stated in regards to service you must provide a controllable, constant, and consistently high level. Therefore your efforts have to be organized, structured, and systematized. When people refer you they validate your working system. From many factors I attempted to build a model of my ideal clients. 'Do what you can with what you have where you are' said Theodore Roosevelt. They became walking talking billboards for us.

"A" people are those who are most willing to send you a referral. B people in your database are those who would refer you if asked and shown how. They are persons in your sphere of influence. C clients are people who are new to your database. They may refer you in the future. D stands for delete. These are people whom you do not want to do business with - the jackasses and jerks that prove to be a waste of your time and energy.

If the initial database is too large to do that send out letters designed to help those people self-select. Ask if you are someone they would refer in the future. If they say absolutely no delete them. I had 440 people in their initial database. Sort and qualify to get your A people. In order to make gold more valuable you refine it. The more you refine gold the more valuable it becomes. You sort out your A people so you know who your best clients are. Multiple referrals called A+, these are your super A's. Make a special effort to find and identify them. When you give to a giver a giver gives back and when you give more to a giver they give back even more. The converse is when you give to a taker they just take. In my system I give to the givers and the takers get deleted.

I spend my days only with good folks; people I was happy to talk to. The average American knows approximately 285 people. That means each of your A client knows around 285 people. Each actual referral was pre-qualified for me. I achieved critical math with 300 A people including 18 A+ clients and it was extremely satisfying and rewarding.

My next task was to find a way to appropriately express my appreciation to clients. It would have to be personal and/or professional in nature with interesting value

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for the recipient. I came up with items of value -- a varied menu of possible gifts, entertainment, information and economies. I called it my client appreciation program -- personal items to communicate my character and professional items to convey my competence. I mixed and matched and alternated the items to achieve a consistent balance between character and confidence. Like when I sent flowers for Mother's Day to the preferred people in my database or arrange a get together for my clients, I would run an entire movie theater for mid-week performance at a bargain group rate. Valentine's night I held a sweetheart banquet. After dinner we picked couples' names to play our version of newlywed game. I would buy tickets for front row seats to the skit show such as River Dance family opera and hold a raffle for my A people. With this month's item of value we would announce the raffle and tell them to check next month's item of values for the winners. People really got into this.

Each month I took the time to think of an inventive, practical items to value that benefited my clients. Every month an item of value went out to my 300 clients to express my appreciation of them and to remind them that they were my first class passengers, uppermost in my consideration and concern. It set up a wonderful opportunity for me to get on the phone with them.

I found that following up the item of value each month with a personal phone call was crucial to maximize the effect of the items. They welcome my calls. I made the commitment to myself to make 15 phone calls to my database each and every workday and the monthly item was generally my entrée. I would keep the conversation social and non-threatening. Applied in a consistent program the items of value build an interest and worth. The items of value provided an excellent means of access to client. They open doors and phones and make clients receptive. Before I finish the conversation and hang up the phone I say something that has made me a fortune and helped create success for tens to thousands business professionals I have trained.

"Oh! By the way, if you know of anyone who is thinking of buying or selling a home who would appreciate the same level of service, just give me a call with their name and number. I will be happy to follow up with them for you." And you say this every time you get the opportunity. Colombo, one of my favorite detective show, it was his signature line -- 'Oh! By the way'. It served as an excellent transition as it lowers barriers and overcomes initial resistance. A key phrase is who would appreciate the same level of service. Most people won't think of referring you unless you ask. Can I be of any help? If I can help you in any way don't hesitate to call. I want you to know the value you represent to me as a client.

Oh! By the way. I had it printed on the bottom of every item of value I sent out. I closed every letter with the dialogue as a final paragraph. It worked wonderfully well and it was fun. My clients enjoyed the entire plan and really got into it. They chuckle and beat me to it. By the way, Brain, don't forget to say 'oh, by the way, ha, ha, ha' and it became almost a game for them and set the clients timeout for marvelous exchanges between us. Eventually after getting used to this system they would ask me 'How's business?'

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Handwritten personal notes comprised the next element of my system. George Bush, Sr. in the late 1980s he was watching an interview. The interviewer asked him what was the number one thing he had done that had gotten him into the White House. His answer was immediate. So immediate that I knew he placed extreme importance on it. The answer was handwritten personal notes. President Bush said that every morning at 6:30 a.m. in the Oval Office and for years prior to that his first activity was to sit down and write 10 personal notes for people who had come to mind the day before.

Out of the corner of my eye I spied the 10 unwritten notes for that day. I sighed and sat down and wrote them and I am glad I did. I am going to share with you that over the course of my career those notes have been far more valuable than the six transactions I had done that day because they were beginnings of my adherence to the system. It's a good life. A note that doesn't have to be lengthy but it does have to be hand written and pertinent. Every day I walked into the office and wrote 10 personal notes. I put my business card in, addressed the envelope and put a stamp on it. My secretary puts 10 blank notes and envelopes on my desk every morning; 10 notes a day, 5 days a week.

I joke about it and I groan about it but I promise you that nothing in my business career ever took less time, effort, or money and produced as big as a result. In my opinion hand written personal notes are the greatest catalysts with a compounding effect of the referral system. To this day I still stick to the regimen of note writing. Thank you President Bush for bringing home to me the importance of the personal touch.

Personal contact is the final element of this system. Get out and see people face to face. The face-to-face visit is still the best way to ferment a relationship and build rapport. I found that my popbys were welcome by the A people in my database. I would call them a day or so before to let them know I would be in their area between such and such a time and that I was just going to pop by their office and say hello. I made it a point to hold these visits to 15 minutes. On every popby I made sure I have it my hand as I came through the door. Just popping by to say hello. Make popby's a regular part of your business week, arrange a lunch appointment. Sit down and talk and laugh over a good meal and a cup of coffee. Learn to help people with more than just their job. Help them with their lives. The most awesome benefit of this referral system is the compounding counting effect it has on your business.

I tell all my audiences that it is not an easy thing to do. Consider the coaching, talk to the coach. A providence coach can deal with the members, establish goals and create action step, focus on accountability provide empathy, encouragement, and championing. Celebrate achievement, set new goals. First we help you identify your strength and ability. Together create a step-by-step plan to achieve optimum balance results. The average club member experiences a 70% increase in net income and a 100% increase in time off.

Watch your path for the best that has happened and forget the rest. Set vibrant, realistic, personal goals and work to achieve them. Write your goals down. It will articulate and facilitate accomplishment. Expand your comfort zone as we did through daily training by affirmation and association with positive people headed in the same direction you are. Give yourself a finish line that tests and strengthens your ability. The

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first 4000 people we had come through our coaching their average increase in net income has been 70%.

You don't have to be great to start but you do have to start to be great. Begin with an idea and a model of what your ideal client looks like, sort and qualify your database. Go deeper in your database not wider. Color code by types. If you are interested in being part of my first class club, if you are interested in being on my client appreciation program and receiving monthly items of value, please respond. Are you somebody they would refer in the future and if they say no you know what to do - delete. Price is not important, quality is. The object is to derive an A+ list within broader A list with a focus on quality and get rid of the client's you don't want. Say bye-bye nicely. Don't be afraid to delete if necessary. Think of it as pruning a tree or weeding the garden. Create a client appreciation program whereby you send items of value to these people on a consistent basis. Tell them I really enjoyed serving you during our last transaction but I must admit that I haven't stated in as close contact as I would have liked. I recently made a commitment in my business to work exclusively by referral and I am going to send you items of value regularly. I would like to get you back on board. Let them know that you will be raising your level of service to them. Introduce your client appreciation program to them. You need to tell them this is a new day. You are one of my first class clients and these items of value are my way of demonstrating my appreciation. You ought to let them know that. Educate your clients, articulate how you work, outline the benefits of working exclusively by referral. Come up with the items of value that you send out each month, personal and professional. Personal communicates your character, professional communicates your competence. Personal items can be pumped in towards a get together dinner, party, game, movie, house warming, and bag of popcorn. Professionals should connect with your industry. Send the items in balance to demonstrate character one time and competence the next. Follow up the items of value with a telephone call to each client sometimes during the month. The follow up phone call sets up an appropriate opportunity for you to ask the person to reciprocate.

Practice it until it is most natural speech you have ever said. It is that important. The most vital thing you can do is learn to ask for referral. If you have staff, teach them how to ask for referrals. Oh by the way a part of your everyday lingo. Client satisfaction comes through consideration manifested by communication with consistency. To properly ask for referral use my big three dialogues. Can I be of any help to you or your business in any way? If I can, don't hesitate to call me. I want to make sure you know how much I value you as a client serving you.

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In combination with the personal hand-written notes you sent you will constantly build more and more referrals. They will begin as a trickling, stream and then a flowing river. Choose the number of personal notes and cards you will send out everyday and stick to it. The key is to adhere to the daily discipline. Turn it from a discipline into a habit. At the end of a phone conversation pick up a pen and immediately write a personal note for that person. It will pay huge dividend. The secret of success is constancy of purpose. Nothing beats the personal concept. Give it out in slices it comes back as loaves. The three major benefits of doing business by referral are more compatible people to work with, more enthusiasm for your work, the better your relationship with clients the more you will enjoy what you do. This in turn will make you more enthusiastic. It is a funny thing the more enthusiastic you become the more people will want to work with you, more profitable business.

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