



ebook ISBN: 978-9625977-3-2
228 pages
Release Date: 2009
Retail Price \$39.00

**Limited Time Advanced
eBook Sale Price:
only \$29.00!**

www.ProspectandFlouish.com



Keith F. Luscher, is author of the book **Prospect & Flourish**, and four other books. He is a marketing representative with Principal Financial Group®. Prior to joining Principal®, he served professionals in the insurance and financial services industries as a management consultant. In that role, he advised producers on issues related to marketing and prospecting, and developed groundbreaking educational curriculum. In addition, Luscher is also a nationally known author, speaker, and expert in media, interpersonal communication and marketing.

© 2009 Keith F. Luscher.



To Join or Not to Join...?

by Keith F. Luscher
Author, *Prospect & Flourish*

Because personal referrals are so much of what drives business in many professions, “referral groups” or “networking” organizations are very popular. These are typically tightly managed groups of non-competing professionals who meet on a regular basis to share ideas, contacts and referrals for potential business opportunities. Essentially, when you join the group, the group becomes your extended set of eyes and ears in the community, as you become for every other member.

There are several national models for these groups, such as **LeTip**, **AmSpirit**, **BNI**, and **Gold Star Referral Clubs**. For many professionals, there are often two questions that present themselves: whether or not to join a club (it does require a time and financial investment); and if so, why might I use an existing model, and not just create my own group? Greg Leffel is a Director with Gold Star Referral Clubs and hears these kinds of questions all the time. “Essentially, it comes down first to you deciding what you want,” Leffel points out. “Our purpose is to grow business—pure and simple.”

“With Gold Star, we emphasize this sense of community—of truly wanting to help each other grow, not just ourselves. And you will find that to be the case with the most enduring models that are out there,” Leffel continues.

“Secondly, to achieve this purpose, a club must follow a structure,” Leffel says. “It’s like any other organization—when you become a member there are certain criteria that may need to be met, and expectations for what is very much a reciprocal relationship.” All of the successful models like the ones listed earlier have such guidelines, which include fee structures, expectations and requirements for continued membership and participation. Sure there are similarities, but there are differences as well.

“Some groups are stricter in their requirements than others,” Leffel points out. “When making a choice, it’s really up to you to evaluate those criteria and decide for yourself what suits you best. But the choices are out there.”

Leffel adds that among all the differences, there is one trait that most—if not all—have in common: the meeting agenda. “Everything revolves around the meeting,” Leffel states with conviction. “If your meetings are not successful—that is, resulting in productive referrals for your individual members—then your group will not succeed, nor will it grow.” Requirements to run successful meetings include (but are not necessarily limited to):

A good location. Location is very important—it must not only be practical and accessible, but it should reflect the spirit and culture that the group hopes to emulate to the public and to potential members.

An agenda. For productivity and timeliness, an agenda is crucial. It keeps the pace of the meeting on track, and it also ensures that the purpose is served for every member attending. It helps the facilitator make sure that discussion topics stay on track as well.

A positive spirit that makes ALL feel welcome. The small group model of mutual support for a common purpose is biblical in nature—indeed it is what grew the Christian church during a time of persecution. This dynamic is important to furthering a spirit and attitude of brotherly love, personal growth, and abundance for all. When members and visitors feel this spirit and experience the measurable, positive results it creates, they’ll be back and your group will thrive. This leads to the final requirement...

Attendance and participation. Why is this last? Well, if you haven’t gotten these other factors lined up correctly, it becomes a mute point. If your group members are focused on meeting each others’ needs then attendance and participation will not be a problem. Everyone has choices as to how they will invest their time—and if members receive a “payback” for their investment in the group, they will not only return—but they will spread the word!

So this all appears simple enough, one may observe. Why then, might one use a model like Gold Star or AmSpirit? Why not just create a group on your own?

“That’s one of the most commonly asked questions,” Leffel says. “Sure, you can do it yourself—and I’m sure many have in situations where the conditions are right. But it is a process of being part of—if not running—an organization. Adopting a model that is time-tested over 25 years keeps you from reinventing the wheel. You have the guidelines, the step-by-step plans, and the information tools not only to run the organization with minimal work and time, but to bring in new members and help them share responsibilities.”

All of my colleagues who have been actively engaged in referral clubs have said how valuable they can be. That is not to say that it is for everyone—but there is no doubt that for many of us who face the ongoing challenge of prospecting for new clients and seeking referrals to help us grow our business, considering such a group can be a great way to leverage the resources, the time, and the relationships that we have for our benefit and for the benefit of others.

As Leffel tells all his members and fellow directors: “You will grow your business, because that’s what we are all about. But this will happen only as much as you focus your heart on helping others.”