



## Building Your Network... Generosity is Key

By: F. Scott Addis, CPCU, CRA, CBWA

Sam is a 37-year-old producer who is having the time of his life. He never cold calls, has an excellent work/life balance and rarely has outside competition on key accounts. He is actively involved in his community and is viewed as a respected professional advisor. There is rarely a week that goes by that Sam does not get a qualified new business lead from an enthusiastic client or center of influence. He developed \$350,000 of new business revenue last year and expects to produce in excess of \$400,000 this year. Sam is "living the dream" with his family and friends.

I had an opportunity to catch up with Sam last week to better understand his recipe for success. I was curious to learn how Sam has time to coach Little League, serve as a Deacon in his church and sit on two nonprofit boards. When asked the question what fuels his amazing results, Sam sheepishly smiled and gave me a two-word answer, "My network."

When Sam entered the insurance industry in his mid-20s, he quickly learned that it would be impossible to achieve his goals on his own. He understood the benefits of a network comprised of supportive family, friends and clients. "I don't come from money. I was not a rich kid with

loads of contacts. As a youngster, I caddied at the local country club. In carrying the bags for successful business leaders, I came to learn of the power of relationships and connections” stated Sam. “When you help others, they want to return the favor. Reciprocity is one of my guiding principles.”

While Sam utilizes a differentiated customer acquisition process, it is his network of clients, family and friends who continue to shape his life. While the vast majority of producers waste time cold calling to breathe life into old leads, Sam spends his time connecting with old and new relationships. Sam has a goal of developing one new relationship each week. His network continues to grow exponentially. His network allows him to acquire precise and timely information about opportunities and positioning with decision makers.

Learning how to connect is one of the most important skills you will ever learn. Effective networking is not about serving yourself. Rather, finding ways to make other people more successful. Successful producers understand that real networking is about generosity not greed. It is about giving before you receive. Learning how to help others succeed is the key ingredient in Sam’s networking process.

The great myth of networking is that you to reach out to others only at the time of need. This is incorrect. Successful individuals built their network long before they needed anything at all. Creating a community is not a short term solution or one off activity only to be used when necessary. Building a powerful network is a journey not a destination. It begins with a predetermined plan and a strategy to carry it out. The strategy is built upon the constant process of connecting – of offering and asking for help. When you put people in touch with one another and give your time, expertise and share freely, the pie gets bigger for everyone.

It is interesting to note that Sam’s lifestyle is designed around his network. Intense involvement in the community is part of his program. The more he gives, the more he gets. However, he only invests time doing something in which he has a passion. He states that “I care so much about my family – especially my two young children. The majority of my community involvement is focused upon their activities -- coaching, school, church, Boy Scouts to name a few. I have come to learn that common interests are essential building blocks of a relationship. It is amazing how much I can learn about somebody else when we are both doing something we enjoy.”

When asked to share strategies, Sam started with three “don’ts”:

- Don’t get involved in anything unless you have a sincere interest. You must have a passion, otherwise it becomes a chore.
- Don’t be a schmoozer. Nobody likes a schmoozer.
- Don’t go to business card exchanges. Networking events are to be reserved for the desperate and uninformed.

Sam then shared his 10 secret recipes for networking success:

1. Discover your unique abilities and value proposition in the marketplace. Deliver a process to uncover issues to solve other people's problems.
2. Put together a personal board of advisers. Consider experienced business leaders with wisdom and the ability to mentor. Seek out role models with experience, wisdom and a gift of sharing.
3. Be patient. Networks take time to develop.
4. Think of networking as collecting friends who share your passion to serve others.
5. Get involved in activities which interest you. Assume leadership roles when the occasion arises.
6. Figure out who are the super connectors in your community (i.e., CPAs, attorneys, head hunters, etc.)
7. Establish a relationship management system to stay in contact with your network.
8. Take risks. You must be willing to take some risks in connecting. The worst anyone can say is "No."
9. Networking is not a numbers game. It is strategic, thoughtful and deliberate.
10. Generosity is the key. Remember to give before you receive.

A powerful network is not exclusive to insurance agents and brokers. Attorneys, accountants, bankers, investment advisers and other professionals benefit from the process of connecting. Your potential for connecting at this moment is bigger than you ever imagined. All around you are golden opportunities to develop relationships with people you know who know people you don't know. The act of connecting with your circle of clients, family and friends is powerful and exhilarating.

Sam's quality of life reflects the power of a network. It is evidenced by his 80% new business hit ratio, retention and the number of qualified referrals. He refuses to cold call or knock on doors. He doesn't need to. "Why make our business more difficult than it needs to be?" states Sam. "The challenge of cold calling is credibility. An introduction from a member of my network gives me instant credibility and enhances my ability to establish a relationship. The relationship I have with my network is an expression of who I am and what I have to offer. Nothing else compares. A warm relationship combined with my unique process allows me to 'live my dream'."

Step back. Look around you. You have the potential for an amazing network sitting in front of you. Begin by helping others succeed. Your generosity is the key.

About the Author

Scott Addis, CPCU, CRA, CBWA is the CEO of Beyond Insurance and is recognized as an industry leader having been named a Philadelphia finalist for *Inc. Magazine's* "Entrepreneur of the Year" award as well as one of the "25 Most Innovative Agents in America."

Beyond Insurance is a consulting firm that offers leadership training, cultural transformation, and talent and tactical development for enlightened professionals who are looking to take their practice to the next level. Since 2007, the proven and repeatable processes of Beyond Insurance have transformed individuals and organizations as measured by enhanced organic growth, productivity, profitability, and value in the marketplace.