SALES COACH

Flock Together

Make the most of the relationships you have with trusted centers of influence

STORY BY **DAN STALP** | PHOTO BY **KENNY JOHNSON**

CONNECT

Have a question for Dan?

- askthesalescoach@anthempublishing.com
- linkedin.com/in/danstalp
- 913-451-1760, x101

Q: *I have been meeting with centers of influence on a regular basis about giving and receiving referrals. What advice do you have on making the most of those meetings?*

—Rich Cornell, president, Cornell Benefit Solutions

A: First, congratulations on meeting with centers of influence, in addition to clients, for referrals. There are many salespeople who believe they can only get referrals from satisfied clients.

By definition, a center of influence is someone who knows many people, is held in high regard, calls on people or companies similar to you and knows and likes you. In essence, you become ambassadors for one another.

The good centers of influence tend to be known as "trusted advisers." So their clients and friends ask their opinion about things they know they don't do. The reasoning is birds of a feather flock together. Fantastic, honest people tend to know other fantastic, honest people. So here a few suggestions for you:

1. Be very clear about what types of clients you really want. Use discipline to not list the ones you can work with or even have worked with because it's more comfortable. The best sales professionals continue to elevate the size and types of clients they work with. They also tend to have niches or specialties.

2. If you are both on LinkedIn, review each other's connections and put together a short list of people you would like to be introduced to. Be sure to ask each other: "Why is that person/company/industry a good fit for you?" Often, this allows each of you to think of other connections you are not linked to.

3. Call the person they want to meet on their behalf and share with them why you think they should take a phone call from your center of influence. Do not attempt to sell their product or service—you'll likely mess it up for them.

4. Do not commit to contacting more than three people (at a time) on behalf of each other. When the number is larger than three, people tend not to call any of them. They feel like they never have enough time. Three or fewer phone calls is more manageable.

Q: *We have expanded our product offering, requiring a more consultative approach to selling rather than transactional. When we leave these introductory meetings, our prospects are genuinely excited about our new offering. When it's time to get the needed information from them for the next meeting, things tend to stall. How can I change that?*

—Matt Haggerty, senior account manager, Lasercycle

A: Typically with the scenario of a larger, more consultative selling situation, once you leave the first meeting there is some homework the prospect needs to complete before you come back for the next meeting.

Depending on how much homework we are talking about, there are a couple possibilities. It could be overwhelming to them, or they are not 100 percent sure where to get the information.

I would suggest starting with a timetable. Let's say you schedule the next meeting three weeks from today. You determine three business days is needed for you to work their "homework" into your part of the next meeting.

You might want to ask them, specifically, where this information is located. Are there others who need to pull or research this information? What about vacations and travel schedules—how does that impact the timetable?

Based on the above timetable, I would suggest having mutually agreed upon specific dates for specific pieces of information. Knowing these dates up front allows you to talk about what will happen should you not have the necessary information from them by those dates. It reminds me of the Sandler rule: Never make a move without a commitment.

When prospects genuinely see what's in it for them to purchase your product or service, they will be more motivated to do their homework than you are! **KCB**