

NETWORKING DO'S AND DON'TS FOR ASSOCIATE

Building Better Relationships with Builders

The principal reason most associate members join the home builders association is to get business from the builder members. However, it is not always easy and it is never automatic. Membership does not give an associate member the *right* to a builder's business. What it does, rather, is give him the *opportunity* to seek business from builders. Many builders in turn will try to do business with an associate member, provided there is a favorable balance to him in price, service, and quality. Consider some of these basic principles in building your relationships with builder members:

DO:

- Visit the builder regularly with good reason -- do not waste his time. Do not underestimate his interest in new products.
- Keep his literature current. The builder needs current information if he is going to use your product, not only to show his customers, but for other suppliers or subcontractors that may be involved in installing your products.
- Keep the builder informed if there are pricing or product changes. There has never been a builder who liked price increases, but they dislike surprises even more. Timely notice will allow him to adjust his budget.
- Let him know immediately if a product is discontinued or going to be discontinued, and what his replacement options are.
- Tell him immediately if a product or service is going to be delivered late. Stay in touch with him so you know when you and/or your product are needed. Remember that other suppliers and subcontractors may be affected when you are late.
- Sell quality products and do not compromise your reputation with inferior products or services.
- Be honest with the builder about what features or benefits he may gain by paying a little more. If your offering has deficiencies, tell him in advance so he can make adjustments.
- Do not waste the builder's time -- take care of his needs quickly. When you make an appointment, be on time or call to say you will be late. He has to deal with a lot of suppliers and subs.
- Be knowledgeable. Try to understand his business. Is he building luxury homes or affordable housing? Take Certified Graduate Associate (CGA) classes to stay informed of trends in the building industry and be a source of information to him. Find answers to his questions. Reliable information will keep him coming back to you.
- Get actively involved in the home builders association. Just as the builder makes his living from the building industry, so, too, do you. Getting involved not only benefits the industry as a whole, but also gets you the recognition you need from builder members. Regular meeting attendance will give you additional visibility. Devote some of your advertising budget to placing ads in the association's newsletter.

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- Encourage pride and service throughout your company. You are judged by the attitude of everyone who works for you. Polite secretaries, accounting staff, and delivery people are greatly appreciated.

However, **DO NOT**:

- Do not speak negatively about your competitor or his product or services. He may be a personal friend of the builder or even a fellow member of the home builders association. We all have to prove ourselves to be accepted. You will not succeed by speaking negatively about your competition. Also, the builder may have been using your competitor's product or service. By speaking negatively, you are saying that the builder was not very smart for using it. In either case, you are going to make the builder defensive. Instead, focus on making positive statements about your products or service. Give him references of other builders who have been satisfied with your product, service, quality, and price.
- Do not misrepresent the facts, or, to put it bluntly, don't lie. Whether it's about a delivery, what you or your product can do, or about price, never become an untrustworthy businessperson. Do not tell the builder you are giving him the best price in town when you may have given someone else a better price. Prices can vary based on quantity, delivery, and a variety of other factors, and builders know that. They do not want to be lied to any more than you do.

Bottom line, selling to builders takes a lot of common sense and courtesy. Your membership in the home builders association is a tremendous asset to your business. By applying these basic rules to your sales strategies and actively participating in the association, you can greatly enrich your builder relationships, increase your sales opportunities, and grow as a consummate professional.