

Daily Herald

Kendall on Small Business: Saying 'Thanks'

Lillian Bjorseth thinks we should say "thank you" more often.

Sounds like Mom, except Bjorseth's mind-your-manners advice can be an effective way to keep referrals and therefore new business coming. Put another way, saying "thank you" can be good for your bottom line.

"What blows my mind," Bjorseth e-mailed her clients and contacts, "is that with the immediacy of e-mail, texting, LinkedIn and, yes, the telephone, I don't hear back from ... the people I connect."

To Bjorseth, that's a near insult. President of Duoforce Enterprises Inc., of Lisle, and a consummate networker, Bjorseth teaches people how to connect. She's the referral source we all wish we had which means we should take note when Bjorseth says she knows that people who, for example, recommend your blue widgets to a blue widget buyer would like to know how things went.

"I want to know if my referral led to a meeting," Bjorseth explained recently when we talked. "If it did, then I've done my job. But if I don't get a note, then I don't know whether my efforts were successful."

More to the point, if Bjorseth has referred your blue widget company to a buyer and you don't let her know what happened, "I may not make a second referral. I don't know if the first one worked."

In short, if you want referrals, you should thank the individuals who put a piece of their reputation on the line by recommending your business even if the referral doesn't work out.

Handwritten thank-yous are the best, Bjorseth says. "They show you've taken the time to think. The phone is a good idea, too, because so few people make thank-you phone calls."

It's the message, however, not the medium, that matters most. Here, from Bjorseth, are some thank you guidelines:

Immediately follow up with a short thank-you note when you receive a sales lead or any other referral that eliminates a step in the six degrees of separation, Bjorseth says.

After your first meeting, send another note, telling the person who made the referral that you connected.

"Absolutely, unequivocally tell the person who gave you the lead when you make the sale," Bjorseth continues. If the sale is substantial, send the referrer a small gift: Flowers, a restaurant gift certificate, something that matches the referrer's interest. If you know the person well enough, suggest breakfast or lunch.

If the sales process stretches out, inform the person making the referral of your progress. That individual, Bjorseth says, "may be just the right one to intervene and get the wheels moving again."

Even if the referral doesn't pan out, Bjorseth suggests a polite note that "nothing conclusive happened."

By the way: Thanks for reading my column.

-- Jim Kendall's Small Business column appears in the Daily Herald. Send comments, questions to JKendall@121MarketingResources.com.