

“Giver’s gain”

Members help others with no strings attached, in line of BNI’s concept of “giver’s gain”.

“To get business, you must be willing to give. Basically, this relates to the law of reciprocity. Nevertheless, this cannot be a transactional process; if it becomes that, then it will not work. All that members ask for is that ‘whenever you can, you can refer me’.

“However, big businesses are not willing to do that because the management does not know what to measure and how to manage that



BNI meeting at the Organic Cafe, TTDI, KL.

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process. It is the small businesses which do not have big budgets for advertising that really value this approach of referral or word-of-mouth marketing,” observes Misner.

Social capital

Traditionally, large corporations measure the performance of their sales team through directly quantifiable elements such as the number of business calls or phone calls made per day. On the contrary, these big companies do not ask how many people one has helped today.

“By helping people, you build social capital. It’s more about farming than hunting,” Misner postulates.

Misner draws a parallel between social capital and financial capital – in the latter we invest in a bank to build wealth. Likewise when building social

capital, we invest in relationships and draw upon those relationships.

Using a simple analogy, Misner states, “We all own a ring of keys corresponding to the different doors that we could open with them. We wouldn’t just hand the keys over to anybody. So when we give a referral, we are giving a bit of our reputation away.”

Are there cases when the business model would not work? “Those unwilling to cooperate are merely advocating ‘coin operator networking’ – insert a coin and expect something in return. Such people give networking a bad name. They might end up making a sale but they leave a ‘scorched earth’ in their wake,” Misner stresses.

Universal appeal

One of the fascinating aspects of

BNI is that its philosophy transcends all cultural differences. Though the programme is implemented in 29 different countries, it advocates universal values; in short it is a system that overlays on top of one’s existing culture.

To ensure membership quality, BNI screens members through what Misner describes as four levels of screening: the first level of screening constitutes a personal referral in the form of an invitation by a member to a BNI meeting. The second level involves the completion of an application form outlining one’s credentials while the third constitutes a review by a committee that checks with the references given. Finally, there is a membership committee which is empowered to remove a member if there are problems with that member.

Performance indicators

How is BNI’s success measured? Misner describes the organisation’s internal and external measures. Internally, the key success factors

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