

Are You Reference Selling Within Your Organization?

By David Nour, Founder – Relationship Economics

As a mentor of mine often says, “If you’re not tooting your own horn there is no music!” Those whose livelihoods depend on externally focused relationships such as business development professionals, all understand the power of reference selling. In any economy there is an enormous level of comfort in a buyer’s journey when they get unsolicited recommendations from other satisfied buyers – it’s simply called “credibility by association.”

When I work with professional service providers, I often ask about their current or perspective client reference selling efforts. Recently, a consultant at a client complained that although she had extensive industry experience and subject matter expertise, she was seldom tapped into for possible client engagements. So naturally, I asked her “what are you doing to package, market, sale, and proactively reference her value add, within the firm?”

When she gave me a blank stare, I offered what I consider five best practices to reference selling and a way to effectively “toot your own horn.”

The Five Best Practices of How to Most Effectively Reference Sell Within Your Organization:

1. **Document your STAR success:** What was the Scenario you found yourself in that was challenging, what Tactics did you apply, what Actions did you take, and what Results did you create? Keep it poignant and capture this information from the “buyer’s” perspective.
2. **Make it visually appealing:** Although the content is critical, turn raw text into an elegantly designed and visually appealing one-sheet presentation that connects your actions with your audience.
3. **Target your distribution:** Email the electronic version and physically mail professionally printed hard-copies to your most valuable relationships within the firm as well as external to the organization.
4. **Mass appeal:** After you discretely target, send your document out to a broader base for more widespread visibility. Be sure to use discretion with this dissemination, take caution with ensuring you have appropriate permissions. Everyone likes to hear success stories; send it to industry publications, and place in the organizational blog, speak at the local university, present a paper of your findings at a conference. Simply put, repurpose this success into multiple visibility avenues.
5. **Specificity drives credibility:** To the extent possible share how you accomplished the desired results, provide uncommon wisdom, and follow on access to resources. Give them web sites that support your findings or your contact information for them to learn more. Ideally, include a supporting quote from the customers which specifically addresses their experience and recognized results or outcomes from your efforts.

Nour Bonus Tip: Very few people will read reference letters; almost everyone will read reference *snippets* - short one or two sentences which extract the essence or the highlights of the reference letter. “Sam made the impossible possible.”

When done well, internal reference selling will create a stronger personal brand and also appropriately deserved recognition for meritocracy. Most importantly, it will give others the ammunition to engage and invite you to other similar opportunities to deliver exceptional experiences and results for others.

How are you reference selling your core strengths?

David Nour is a social networking strategist and one of the foremost thought leaders on the quantifiable value of business relationships. A native of Iran, David came to the U.S. with a suitcase, \$100 cash, limited family ties and no fluency in English! Fast forward 25 years and he has built an impressive career of entrepreneurial success, both within large corporations and early stage ventures. David is the author of *Relationship Economics* (Wiley, 2008), a senior management advisor, and a featured speaker for corporate, association and academic forums, where he shares his knowledge and experience as a leading change agent and visionary for Relationship Economics® - the art and science of relationships. To learn more, please visit: www.relationshipeconomics.NET or call 1-888-339-1333.

