

# The Referral Institute Helps Entrepreneurs Master Networking Skills, which a Recent Survey Proves is Crucial

*A recent survey of entrepreneurs indicates that networking is a crucial skill to cultivate, but as BNI West Central Florida Executive Director Tom Fleming points out, that is among the skills you typically don't learn in business school.*

**(Tampa, Fla., July 11, 2012)** – Networking is one of the most important skills to develop before starting a business, according to more than 5,000 entrepreneurs polled in the “Are You An Entrepreneur?” survey, which was adapted from a Kauffman FastTrac questionnaire(1). This does not surprise Tom Fleming, the Executive Director for [BNI in West Central Florida](#) and the [Referral Institute](#).

Networking, persuasiveness, market awareness, business knowledge and self-discipline are the top five attributes to hone before launching a business, according to survey respondents. Networking was the top answer leading the list at 19 percent. Fleming, who started a distribution company and a vending business earlier in his career, admits that he had to learn several of these skills on his own, outside of business school – in the “real world”.

“I received tens of thousands of dollars in education, but there are a multitude of skills I had to learn on my own to survive, never mind thrive as an entrepreneur,” said Fleming; who earned an MBA from Babson College and a Bachelor’s Degree in business from Boston University. “Cold calling, speaking in front of groups, interpersonal skills, networking skills, referral-based marketing strategies and the art of selling are among the abilities I had to cultivate on my own when I entered the world of ‘solopreneurship’.”

Fleming also discovered early that:

- Banks don’t lend money to companies that don’t have collateral
- Some entrepreneurs have no choice but to tap into life savings, retirement accounts and credit cards with high interest rates to fund a start-up business
- Money spent on advertising and direct mail does not always generate the anticipated immediate results that a startup firm requires. This can burn through valuable start up cash quickly.

Fleming goes on to state, “In six years of business school, not once did we ever study a pure start-up company with zero revenues and zero marketing budget and what could be done to get the company off the ground. In business text books, the concept of networking was rarely mentioned and certainly a class on the power of networking or referral-based marketing was never offered” Fleming said. “Yet these are critical subjects to understand when building a business.”

This is why Fleming is so passionate about the offerings of the Referral Institute, which is designed to provide the training and tools to help business professionals gain financial success through relationship-based referral marketing. The conversation of how to market and grow a business is an entirely separate conversation and the teachings of the Referral Institute fill this gaping need in supporting business professionals grow their business and accomplish their goals.

Two programs offered in The Referral Institute include the "Certified Networker Program" and "Room Full of Referrals".

The Certified Networker Program is a 12 Module College Level Curriculum that teaches a structured approach to building your business through word of mouth referrals. The Certified Networker is a complete training program covering all of the strategy and knowledge one needs to build and execute a solid referral based marketing strategy towards success, beyond limits perceived in the past. Recent graduates expect \$10,000-\$50,000 in incremental profits / commissions in the following year as a result of what they have learned.

Room Full of Referrals is a 2.5 hours, one session course. The class is based on the fact that four primary behavioral styles exist among humans and that, by understanding our natural behavioral styles and being more conscious of the behavioral styles of others, business professionals can increase their profitability by increasing their relatability. Sometimes, personalities and chemistry can interfere with a potentially productive and profitable relationship, Fleming explained.

The Referral Institute strives to help entrepreneurs create Referrals For Life®.

The old adage, "It's not what you know, but who you know," is appropriate for entrepreneurs. Networking plays a major role in growing a powerful business, and it also paves the way for a happy, fulfilling and secure life, Fleming states.

"You can have the best product or service out there, but if no one knows about it, you can't expect your business to grow on its own," Fleming added. "That's why it is so important for any business to strategically develop and maintain a strong network of professionals who can help spread the word."

### **About Tom Fleming and BNI:**

Tom Fleming is the Executive Director for BNI in West Central Florida and the Referral Institute. When Tom acquired the region, BNI WCF had one chapter with 13 members. The region now has over 43 chapters with 1,800 members passing \$75 million in business to each other in the past year alone. Tom is sought out as a local, national and international speaker on the subjects of marketing businesses by referral and organizational development. He is also a contributing author in two best-selling books on referral based marketing and has been recorded on many educational CD's produced from his speaking engagements. Prior to beginning his career as an entrepreneur, Tom worked for various Fortune 500 firms, earned an

MBA from Babson College and a Bachelor's Degree in business from Boston University. Visit BNI West Central Florida at [www.bniwcf.com](http://www.bniwcf.com) and ReferralInstituteTampa.com.

(1) Forbes.com, "What Drives Would-Be Entrepreneurs? The Results Are In" June 27, 2012, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/kauffman/2012/06/27/what-drives-would-be-entrepreneurs-the-results-are-in/>

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