**Building Relationships with Benefits**

I recall the first major conference I attended as part of The Rainmaker Companies 13 years ago. It was in Las Vegas at the lavish Wynn Hotel (I was spoiled from the beginning), and I entered the main hall where hundreds of people were gathered for breakfast. Taking in the scene I could see people interacting as if they were old friends, some who looked like they were holding court, surrounded by people hanging on their every word, and still others, like me, were there for the first time, anxious, and not sure who to approach.

It seemed like it would be a real effort over the next few days trying to meet people, and it was. The next year at the same event was better and then year after year the number of friendly faces grew, along with familiar conversations as I had been connecting with many of them since that initial meeting. It was truly a process moving from the unknown, to the familiar, and then to friendship. To this day there are people I met that are still in my network that I connect with regularly.

Building relationships with other professionals can be done randomly or intentionally. Both can have a positive impact; however, a random network of people will very likely produce more scattered results Whereas, intentionally developing relationships with professionals, which takes effort and focus, will more likely produce the type of results you need. People do business with people they like and trust and building intimate relationships that are beneficial to your practice rarely comes through chance meetings that have no follow up or follow through.

Professionally, one popular method for developing relationships with benefits is through industry specialization. When a group of professionals share a common bond that aligns with the type of work they all do, everyone in that group benefits from the shared knowledge and insights of the collective members. For example, if everyone in a group are all focused on working in the real estate or construction industry, then members of the group, have an opportunity to regularly connect and share ideas and resources, innovate, and collaborate with their colleagues. Over time, fellow members become key allies in the effort to remain relevant and knowledgeable to clients and key stakeholders in the real estate and construction industries.

Investing is such a group provides tangible proof to clients and the overall market that you are investing time and money to know and understand industry issues, challenges, and profit drivers. This depth of expertise enables you to move toward the top of the value ladder where you are clearly having organizational impact. Fewer firms are comfortable at this height which makes differentiation much easier to explain and pricing discussions far less contentious and even nonexistent.

Clients want to know that no issue is too big for you to handle and their confidence grows when they understand the scope of resources you can deliver to them. You are not limited to the resources of your firm when serving clients when you have relationships with other professionals who can expand the scope of what is possible. As a member of an industry group you have access to a powerful network of subject matter experts, services, information, and other resources.

Instead of spending hours researching issues and client questions. An alternative is to tap into the alliance, ask questions of members, and get immediate responses.