Addition by Subtraction:
Why less is sometimes more.

Dr. Ivan and Elisabeth Misner

He Said
I recently chatted with a member of a local chapter and asked how things were going. "Great!" she exclaimed. "We're up to 35 members! However, only 25 come each week."

Warning. Warning!! It is important to know that things are not "great" if a group has over 25% of the members missing the meetings every week! Believe it or not, it is time for some pruning.

She Said
Pruning is always a scary thing for me, but I know with roses, it is a necessity. I am usually amazed as I cut away branches, that from the four or five bare canes next year's growth will emerge. It seems counterintuitive; however, it is a fact that the more you prune away, the fuller and healthier the new growth will be in the spring.

Pruning is my chance to reshape the rose bush, cutting those that have served their purpose and are ready to go. If the plant needs to be opened up in the middle, so sunlight can reach the other leaves, or if there are canes that have begun to cross one another, this is the time to rectify that situation in order to make a huge difference for next year's yield.

When I'm tending my roses, I sometimes have to cut blooms away that are fading. They have sent up beautiful shoots with big buds, but now the cycle is going the other way. The flowers are dying, yet the plant is still sending nourishment to those dying roses. It draws away from the energy it can be sending to the new buds. Cutting away blooms that are expended is the way to maintain healthy blooms on the whole plant. In other words, "Addition by subtraction."

We know a chapter president in Southern California who inherited a chapter that looked healthy on paper, but when you went to their meetings, you could see things were not well. There was bickering, bad business being passed to members, and lots of complaining. Thankfully, the president and the membership committee understood the concept of addition by subtraction, and they "pruned" the membership roster and developed a strong, healthy, large chapter.

He Said
In the management book Design, business guru Tom Peters writes about entrepreneur Charles Wang who says, "If a project team is behind schedule, what do you do double assets (people)? No, no, no. You do the opposite. You identify the least productive 25% of the folks on that team... and eliminate them! Wang Rule: No job being done sloppily and slowly by 30 people can't be done better by the best 23 of those people."
OK, the Wang Rule sounds pretty blunt. But consider the potential of the idea. This is why addition by subtraction works when developing a strong and healthy BNI chapter. The members who are not fully behind the success of the chapter make a positive impact on the chapter by leaving.

But this seems hard to do for most groups. Why is that?

You see, one of the strengths (and weaknesses) of BNI is that everyone becomes such good friends. It is difficult to hold friends accountable or open his or her classification; however, there comes a time when the greater good of the chapter has to be considered.

What if you have a membership committee who realizes that there are four or five members who really qualify for having their classification opened (they have missed over the maximum allowable absences, and they have more than one complaint filed against them) yet they fear dropping them?

This membership committee needs to take an honest look at the situation and see that the drag on the chapter is keeping the entire chapter from being what a chapter of five less members with none of this negativity would actually be!

She Said

Remember our friend who inherited the chapter that looked healthy on paper? They cut back to ten core members and rebuilt from there. They are now close to 30 strong, dedicated, and supportive members. Having gone through the pruning phase, they are seeing growth and will continue to see it well into the next season. It took a six month period, but it was well worth the effort.

This new chapter filled with the right members will be a success for years to come, all because they were willing to look down the road and prune where necessary.

We have both experienced this personally time and time again over the last 22 years in BNI. Cutting back can be scary; we don’t deny that. But the growth your chapter will see, as a result of maintaining the BNI system of accountability, will be well worth the pruning. Your Director has been trained in how to do this effectively and has probably guided other chapters through this process. If you see this kind of challenge developing in your group, we urge you to consult him or her and set a positive course of action.

Below, is an article that was published in an old “printed version” of SuccessNet back in 1995. If the above article resonates with you, the following article will be of great assistance to you by providing “hard data” as to why low absences means more referrals.
Low Absences Equal More Referrals (Again and Again)

by Ivan Misner, Ph.D.

Would you like to double the number of referrals your chapter generates in the next six to nine months? If yes, here’s how. In Sept/Oct 1994 issue of SuccessNet I shared a variation on the following table showing how a chapter got "back to basics" and realized some incredible results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Absences per Member</th>
<th># of Members</th>
<th># of Referrals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Qtr. (before)</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Qtr. (after)</td>
<td>1.0 (-52%)</td>
<td>18 (+29%)</td>
<td>269 (+43%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Qtr. (after)</td>
<td>.6 (-71%)</td>
<td>21 (+50%)</td>
<td>305 (+62%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the above table, you can see that "after" the chapter started to adhere to an attendance policy as well as the follow the basic structure of BNI much more closely, they began to see substantial increases in the number of members and particularly the number of referrals. After six months, absences (per member) decreased by 71% and referrals went up by 62%! In response to this article, the Riverside, California chapters sent me a letter that outlined some of the things they have been doing and the great results they have seen.

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<th># of Members</th>
<th># of Referrals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Qtr. (before)</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Qtr. (after)</td>
<td>.9 (-53%)</td>
<td>11 (+9%)</td>
<td>122 (+9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Qtr. (after)</td>
<td>.8 (-58%)</td>
<td>17 (+55%)</td>
<td>208 (+71%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Qtr. (after)</td>
<td>.9 (-53%)</td>
<td>21 (+90%)</td>
<td>322 (+164%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These two tables clearly show that there is a direct and distinct relationship between absences and referrals. As the group decreased its absences, it increased its membership which substantially increased the number of referrals that members received. This chapter sent data for a 4th quarter also which shows that after nine months of effort absences per member went down 53% (even during the Christmas/New Year holidays!) and referrals went up a phenomenal 164% (!!!) attendance. High absenteeism translates into low referrals. Low absenteeism translates into high referrals. The lesson here is that if your chapter is lax on attendance, it will affect your pocketbook.

It is in your best interest to reduce absenteeism in your chapter. This, in conjunction with a concerted effort to get back to the fundamentals of running a good chapter, will, without a doubt, make a participation in Business Network Int'l. more profitable for you. Start a movement in your chapter to get back to basics. Ask a local Director or the BNI Main Office for suggestions on how you can start this process. The fact We are here to help you make this work. Don't forget
that sometimes the best way is not always the easy way. However, with just a little bit of effort, your chapter can realize the benefits that these two chapters have experienced. Help your chapter get back to basics and get on the right track today!