

You Need a Pilot to Fly

Why your BNI Chapter needs Leadership Team training.

By Dr. Ivan Misner, Founder & Chairman, BNI

"Why do I need to go to Leadership Team training?" This is a question I've been asked often over the last two decades. The answer to the question starts in 1980, five years before I started BNI.



I was hired by the president of a transportation company in Los Angeles to help turn the company around. My first day on the job, I found out the president was called to Sacramento at the last minute to testify before a state legislative committee on transportation. The HR director met me and gave me a brief tour of the offices, explained the phone system, told me where the bathroom was, and finally said, "The president won't be back for three days. I have no idea what you're supposed to be doing, but good luck!"

And that was it.

I remember sitting in my new office with the big window behind me overlooking the Hollywood sign and being very excited about the job but having no idea what I was supposed to do.

The Guidance Factor

I learned two extremely valuable lessons from this experience. First, I learned the value of creating relationships by meeting people and asking those magic words: "How can I help you?"

I also learned the importance of a thorough orientation and training when taking over any new position. I remember sitting in my office and thinking, *If I ever run my own company, no one will ever come on board without a thorough orientation.*

You cannot expect great results from anyone without providing guidance and training. Later, I learned it was equally important to be introduced to the "traditions" of the organization, because these are the characteristics that create a corporate culture of support and success.

Imagine boarding a large plane, only to find out your pilot was not trained to fly. That would be ridiculous. But think about this: the Leadership Team members of a BNI

Chapter are the pilot and co-pilots of your group! They are the ones responsible for flying the chapter.

Granted, flying a plane is more serious business than running a chapter, but running a chapter is still "business"; that's why we are all part of BNI—for BUSINESS. This is not a social club. It is a business referral organization, and in order for it to fly, the leaders need training.

No Training Is Ever Enough

What about people who have been to training already? We live in an ever-changing environment. I had the opportunity to hear a director of one of the largest competitors to BNI recently say, "We haven't changed anything since we were founded years ago. Not one thing. We follow the same system as it was originally devised."

Well, at BNI we think differently than that. BNI continually revises and updates materials. With nearly every Leadership Team training, our manuals are updated. Our system is constantly being improved. We have more than doubled the content of our manuals in the last six years. Because of this, it is critical that Leadership Teams "brush up" on the things that perhaps they've already learned. All quality professionals get refresher training of some kind, and BNI's Leadership Teams are no different.

Plus, the input from Leadership Team members who have experience doing this can be a valuable resource to other people at the training. That's why we believe it is critical for everyone to attend training before taking over any role on the Leadership Team (even if more than once).

People say hindsight is 20-20. Looking back I'm confident that one of the things BNI got absolutely right when we began was requiring training of our Leadership Teams. No one—and I mean no one—spends as much time as BNI educating people on how to successfully run a networking group. Last year, we spent over 100,000 person hours in Leadership Team training alone! That number doesn't even include Membership Committee training, Visitor Host training, Director training, or any other special training.

Education is one of the core competencies of this organization. It is one of the things that sets BNI aside from other networking organizations. And it is an important element in the success BNI has seen worldwide.

BNI works when people know the system and understand how to implement it. Don't accept anything less! BNI without a trained Leadership Team is "BNI-Light." So, if you ever hear someone in your group who wants to be on the Leadership Team but doesn't want to go through the training—give them this article and tell them you want a "trained" pilot to fly your plane!

Why do I need to go to Leadership Team training?

- *to gain valuable contacts with other members of Leadership Teams whom you can call for info or to bounce ideas off of*
- *to learn the responsibilities of your Leadership Team role*
- *to learn common errors and how to prevent them*
- *to get your specific questions answered*
- *to receive the Leadership Team manual and learn about it in-depth*
- *to learn the "hidden elements" of the meeting - WHY we do what we do*
- *to bond with the other members of your Leadership Team outside the meeting*
- *to learn what other local chapters are doing*
- *to get good ideas about how to "energize" your meetings (i.e. meeting stimulants)*
- *to get to know your Director(s)*
- *to network with other BNI members*
- *to hit the ground running when you take over a leadership role in the chapter*
- *to learn how to handle chapter problems or complaints (skills which help in your own business also!)*
- *to gain access to BNINet (BNI's database system)*
- *to gain access to the Leadership Only section of www.bni.com*
- *to get a nifty Leadership Team ribbon for your name badge!*
- *to help your chapter grow and prosper*
- *to get updates on the organization and changes to the manual*
- *to share your knowledge and experience (especially LT members who've attended before)*
- *to have fun*
- *to cross-train people on the different positions*
- *to make sure your plane has a pilot!*