

Troikas

At the end of every TING meeting, each person will be assigned to a “troika”, which is a no-host meeting of 3 or 4 people who will schedule a breakfast, lunch or coffee sometime in the upcoming month. Troikas are purposely small so that people can get to know one another and better understand each other's businesses and how they can best refer clients.

Tips for preparing for a troika

- Bring your calendar to the TING meeting so that you can schedule your troika before you leave. This will help you avoid the hassles of coordinating by email later.
- Exchange cell phone numbers so you can reach one another in the event that you are running late or have to cancel.
- Visit the websites of the individuals you will be meeting with so that you have an idea of what they do and how they present themselves. This will help you to start thinking of possible referrals or questions you may have.
- Bring business cards and any materials that will help others better understand what you do.
- Be prepared to answer the following questions:
 - What is your business about?
 - Who is your target audience or ideal client?
 - What makes you different from others who do what you do?
 - How would I describe what you do in a couple of sentences to a potential client?

Tips for getting the most out of your troika

- Arrive on time. Not only is it considerate, but it also telegraphs that you honor your commitments, which is crucial information for someone who is referring you to a client.
- Listen. Turn off your cell phone. Give this meeting the same respect you give a client meeting. Ask open-ended questions such as, “What did you do before this business?” or “What are the biggest business challenges?” or “Tell me about a project you're working on currently.”
- Ask, “If I were to describe you in a couple sentences to a prospective client, what do you suggest I say?”
- Take notes. If you don't understand an answer, ask for clarification (“tell me more”).
- Make sure everyone has a chance to talk. Be careful not to let any one dominate the conversation. If that happens, say something like, “Let's hear from John now. Tell us what you do.”
- Help others understand what you do by sharing examples of actual work you've done. For instance, “I'm a photographer. I just finished an exciting project for an architecture firm promoting ‘green’ construction. They wanted to make the point that there are aesthetically pleasing materials available so people don't have to compromise the look of their building in order to be environmental. It was a challenge because we needed to reeducate existing and potential clients. I took contrasting photos to help them tell that story.”
- Tell others who your ideal client is. Be as specific as possible so that they can start to think in terms of whom they know who might need your services.
- Observe. What is this person telegraphing (body language, eye contact, appearance, etc.)? Passion? Confidence? Capability? Ability to listen? Successful referrals are about more than skill sets. A crucial element is about the “fit”.

Troika Questions and Prompts

Since successful troikas are about relationship-building, start with some general schmoozing. Look for things you may have in common. Where did people grow up? What brought them to Los Angeles? Kids? Hobbies? Recent vacations? And then start to move your focus to work.

Keeping in mind that this is an opportunity for you to learn about others, what they do, who they do it for and how you can refer to them AND an opportunity for you to share the same critical information so others can refer to you, here are some questions that may be helpful:

- How did you wind up doing what you do?
- What do you like best about your business?
- What is your business philosophy?
- What is the benefit you provide people beyond your product or service? (i.e., peace of mind) Tell me how you do that.
- Lots of people do that. How do you differentiate yourself?
- Tell me about a couple of client projects you've recently finished.
- What are some of the challenges you have to deal with?
- Who is your target audience? Describe your ideal client.
- How would you describe what you do in a couple of sentences (elevator speech) so that I can talk to potential clients and accurately represent you?
- What is your company like? Do you have employees? What's important to you when you select new employees?
- How can we work together?