

## How to be a Substitute

### What is a Networking Group?

If you have never been to a Business Networking Group (BNG) before, it can be a little daunting. You have no idea what to expect or what is going on. That is that this leaflet is designed to help you with. BNGs are groups of like-minded business people who come together on a regular basis to help each other develop stronger businesses by finding work for each other using Word of Mouth referrals and other support systems.



### Why do They Need Substitutes?

Groups expect members to be present/represented at meetings. Which means if they can't be there themselves they need to send a substitute, this is where you come in. By attending the meeting for the person who has asked you, you will be helping them to represent their business in the group.

### How Do I Prepare?

You don't need to prepare too much as the member who has asked you to substitute will give you what they would like you to say about their company (if they haven't ask them to). However, a few things to remember are

- **Venue:** Research the venue, so you know where it is and how long it will take you to get there.
- **Traffic:** As most meetings occur in the morning, it does take less time to travel with lighter traffic, but don't cut it too fine.
- **Website:** If the group has a website, look at it, there may be people you already know as members.
- **Your Own Business Cards:** Take 50 business cards with you, you will normally get a chance to pass them out at the meeting.
- **The Speech:** Read the information that the person you are representing send you in advance so you can deliver their message with confidence.
- **Your Speech:** Most groups thank substitutes by allowing them to do a one-minute presentation about their own company (if they wish). You need to prepare a short presentation (one minute) about yourself and your business (see below). Prepare what you are going to say about yourself in advance, again to allow you to be confident in your delivery.

The person you are representing should already have taken care of any meeting fees, but it is best to take some cash just in case. Additionally, many groups have nominal fine systems for infraction of rules (mostly made up on the spot and for the sake of fun), so take some pocket change to allow you to join in fully. All the fine money goes to either the chapter funds or is given to charity.

### What Happens at a meeting?

BNG agendas may vary. However, the typical format for a BNG is

1. **Opening Networking** – here people stand around and get to know each other and generally talk about business.
2. **Formal Meeting** – Usually a sit-down meeting with a meal (generally Breakfast)
  - a. **Members Do their Presentations** -This is when you will stand and talk about the person you are substituting for.
  - b. **Visitors / Substitutes Presentations** – This is when you will get the chance to talk about yourself to the group.
3. **Referrals and Raps** – this is when the 'paperwork' of passing referrals between members is done, or they tell the group about exceptional service another member has provided to themselves or their contacts.
4. **Other Stuff** – The meeting will have other Sections that cover group administration or announcements.

## Talking About Yourself

After the members have completed their presentations, you will be introduced and have a chance to speak. One of two things happens at this point. Either you will be so overcome by nerves you will stand up, mumble your name and company, say how good you think the meeting is, and sit down in a matter of seconds. Or, you will stand up and overpowered by nervous energy launch into a long and boring sales pitch which will run over the allowed time, resulting in you being “belled” and having to sit down before finishing all the important things you wanted to say.

All I can say is ‘Don’t Panic’. There is a third way, and that is to prepare, breathe and relax. Listed below are the five things you need to say:

1. State your name and company
2. State in one sentence what your company does
3. Say how long you have been in business
4. Say where you operate
5. Restate your name and company



If you just deliver the five points above in a clear confident way, you will make a good impression and stand the chance of being remembered.

For example:

*Good morning, my name is Tony Allwood (1) and I run W3 Website Angels (1). We are a website design (2) and marketing Company that provide a wide range of services to small businesses in the Waikato (4). Based in Hamilton, we do have customers all over New Zealand. W3 has been trading for fourteen years (3), and has over 800 live websites. So, if you want to know how your business can use the web to make more money, then please call me, Tony Allwood of W3 Website Angels (5).*

Keep it short and sweet, and make sure you speak with confidence. Presenting your business to the group is a chance to potentially get business from the members.

## Should You Pass Referrals?

At the end of the meeting, if you have a genuine need for the goods or services of one of the members then pass a referral, otherwise, if you have enjoyed the experience, thank the group for their hospitality and try to focus on one aspect of the meeting you found particularly enjoyable.

If you have any doubts, please talk to the person you are going to represent, they should be able to put your mind at rest and allow you to be an effective substitute for them, after all, it is them you are helping.