



The Business Referral Exchange ETHOS





Business Referral Exchange (BRX), through its national, regional and local leaderships, commits to carrying out its purpose and achieving its goal on behalf of its members.

BRX Members recognise that the best chance of achieving their own and their Group's success is by committing themselves to a set of principles that guide their behaviour towards their groups.

BRX STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

To enable the growth of business for and by its members through peer to peer personal and business development, mutual trust and commitment, an extensive network of contacts, preferential referral of business, and professional skills.

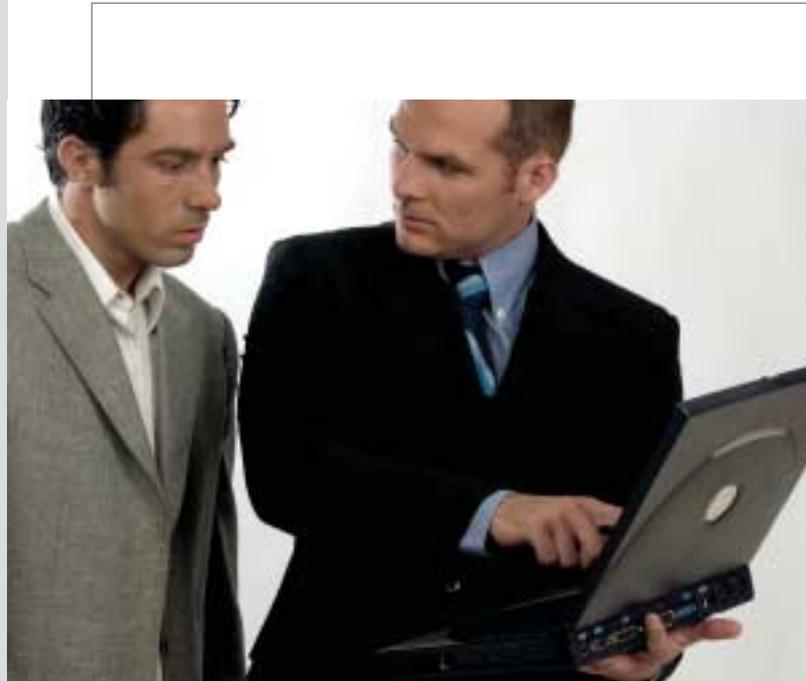
THE BRX GOAL

Every member continuously achieves the level of business that they wanted and expected to achieve when they joined their group

BRX PRINCIPLES

Members commit themselves to

- Be ethical and responsible
- Be committed to their own business
- Be committed to the good of the group
- Be prepared to take time and make the effort to develop professional relationships, credibility and trust
- Regard BRX as an integral part of their marketing strategy
- Treat BRX colleagues and BRX meetings with the same respect and courtesy as clients and client meetings
- Be willing to learn and develop their professional skills
- Be willing to contribute and assist in running their groups
- Be receptive if asked to modify behaviours in the interests of their group
- Accept these principles, and the standards of behaviour they imply



BRX STANDARDS

The Members accept that these principles imply certain standards, and therefore agree to:

- Deliver a High Quality service : i.e. people will refer repeat business and/or give testimonials freely and unbidden
- Pay their subscription fully and on time
- Pay for breakfasts by Standing Order or monthly in advance
- Attend induction training within 2 months of joining
- Undergo the designated development processes within 3 months of joining and review regularly
- Attend weekly, on time
- Arrange a sub when they know they will not be attending (and have lodged or sent a 30/60 second script for the sub to read)
- Send apologies in the case of last minute absence, including a phone call or text before the meeting if unable to attend on the day
- Contribute quality referrals and testimonials



- Promptly follow up every referral and report results to referrer
- Offer to help with / carry out minor tasks if asked
- Hold regular 1:1's with fellow members
- Maintain an up-to-date profile on the Group website
- Not be defensive about potential competition from visitors, but will probe first to see if co-operation will be more beneficial than exclusion
- Refrain from language, behaviour and dress generally accepted as unprofessional or inappropriate in a business setting
- Accept mentoring willingly if behaviours fall below standard

Examples of other desirable behaviours:

- Offer to join the Visitor or House Team
- Take notes and carry their diaries at meetings
- Help / mentor other members where possible and when asked
- Work on and continuously update/refine their 60 seconds

- Regularly attend other BRX's / other networking / business development organisations

Maintaining Standards

The members are convinced that adhering to these principles and standards will not only result in increased business for themselves and the Group, but will further increase the Group's business by attracting and retaining new members who share their ethos.

They will therefore continuously encourage each other to maintain these standards through reinforcement of good behaviours and discreet reminders to rectify the occasional lapse, and will expect the Leadership team to support them and to intervene in more serious cases.

This is what keeps the Group 'flying in formation'.



The BRX Ethos **The Foundation of well-functioning Groups and a Truly Trusted Network**

What is it?

The BRX ethos is a statement that defines the organisation's commitment to its members, and the members' reciprocal commitment.

Introduction

BRX's experience from many groups over the country, from individual discussions, and from what people tell us in the development sessions – induction and leadership sessions – is that people join BRX for all sorts of reasons and with all sorts of expectations. Surprisingly, 'developing more business' rarely comes first, although it's always in the list somewhere. With this variety of reasons comes an even wider variation in what 'success' means to people – if they've thought things through that far. If it is simply left there, people will join and leave randomly, often disillusioned and wondering why it didn't work for them.

So Business Referral Exchange's first challenge is whether to encourage this broad church and do its best

to manage it, or to focus on a narrower band of people whose requirements and expectations are more closely aligned with each other's and with what BRX believes they should be.

The organisation's original premise was to generate more, and better, business for its members. In these days of ever more shrill sales messages raining down on us from all sides and in all sorts of media, working with people we trust and like is seen as the only way to develop sustained, rewarding business. It doesn't matter whether we're talking about one-man businesses or multinational corporations: in the end people are doing business with other people. However, with the number of people working for themselves and in tiny groups increasing rapidly, the successful marketing of their services becomes that much more difficult, so the development of mechanisms to connect them to the people who need their products and services becomes ever more imperative.

The fundamental belief is that to generate good sustainable business, it must enable its members to develop credibility and trust in each other, and an extensive network of contacts. It must then organise itself to provide the means for members to make their own requirements known, and to connect each other



This then is the first essential element of the Business Referral Exchange ethos – its commitment to its members, stating clearly what it's for and how it will go about it. If people do not align themselves with this purpose at the outset, they are likely to be at cross purposes from the start.

However, it's a two-way street! Having made its own position clear, it follows that BRX is not going to suit everybody. In addition, while BRX provides the guidance and mechanism for success, ultimately it is the members who will determine how successful they are by how effectively they follow the guidance and use the mechanism. This is similar to a conventional company in that it depends on its employees, but the similarity ends there: the crucial difference is in the relationships. In companies there is an employer-employee contract where the employer rewards the employee for conducting certain defined tasks, and often with a managerial content, i.e. supervising and taking responsibility for the output of others.

Business Referral Exchange operates as a Membership organisation, in which they supply certain facilities, and members are rewarded by how effectively they and their fellow members use these facilities; the reward also comes from any number of third parties, not from BRX

itself. This strong element of interdependence – one's own success relying on both one's own actions and the actions of one's fellow members – is at the very heart of what makes BRX successful and unique. What it takes to practice interdependence successfully is therefore at the very heart of its ethos, and getting people to understand and aspire to it is the challenge of every BRX group leadership.



**We're all responsible adults
We know why we're here
Why do we need it spelled out?**

This is an often-heard cry whenever people start to put any kind of structure and – dare we say it – discipline into proceedings!

Although membership organisations usually have some rules and regulations to govern how they operate, people who join voluntarily tend to follow their own or their own interpretation of them unless they are very clearly spelled out beforehand. Some established “clubs” for example will only accept people who are nominated by existing members, as a means of ensuring they just have ‘people like us’, effectively assuming they will know the rules beforehand even if they are unwritten!

Business “clubs” are not usually in this position, and in today’s competitive environment are more keen to attract subscribing members than they are to ensure they are joining for the right reasons! Only after a while will they find that unless there is uniform acceptance and understanding of what the group is there for, what success means, and what the common values and standards are, the group will not progress. At best people will just do their own thing as it suits them, at worst outright dissension will break out. Either way, it’s no way to run a railway!



The behaviour of people, whether in companies, membership organisations, or in society generally, is neatly summarised by Stephen Covey, the author of '7 habits of highly effective people' and 'Principle-Centred Leadership', when he described the three stages of personal development:

A **Dependent** stage, where external rules and regulations govern people's actions;

An **Independent** stage, where people acknowledge and respect the rules but they have developed personal norms and standards, are now thinking for themselves, and acting in what they consider to be their own best interest

An **Interdependent** stage, where they align their own interests and standards with those of the team or group, or in a social context, with society at large.

BRX groups tend to consist of independently minded people who are attracted by the ability of groups to generate business for their members. People may visit a couple of times and on the strength of what happens and what they see, they decide they would like to be a part of it, but they remain first and foremost independent, focused on their own business and living to their own norms and standards.

It is therefore essential that anyone thinking of joining should be aware at the outset not just how things are done, but more fundamentally by what principles and to what standards the group operates. We cannot assume that everyone thinks or interprets the principles the same way, so if there is to be no misunderstanding, it does mean spelling out what the principles are, and what this means in terms of the behaviours expected towards fellow members and the group.

Promoting ownership – the key to maintaining standards

As any leader worth their salt is aware, simply dictating the rules and demanding that everyone obeys them doesn't cut it. Things do not really start to happen until people take ownership, in other words, the principles and standards are felt – understood, accepted and almost unconsciously applied. Achieving this happy state is every BRX Chair's dream, since then everyone supports the principles and standards of the group and encourages everyone else to do the same. Unfortunately this takes time, energy, persistence and commitment, none of which are in plentiful supply, even for the most dedicated of leaders!



BRX believes the answer is two-fold; getting people to understand the benefits and logic; and having discreet encouragement and reinforcement at work all the time.

As stated already, our members tend to be independent and intelligent; they are adept at promoting benefit in their own businesses and are quick to recognise benefit from the actions and activities espoused by BRX. It is therefore worth setting out the benefits both for the members at large and for those who take on the mantle of leadership within groups.

Good leaders know the crucial value of continuous reinforcement of good behaviour, and the effectiveness of a prompt, constructive, non-threatening approach when standards slip. When someone's contribution is publicly acknowledged, everyone feels good about it; if someone doesn't show up for a meeting, the chair's calling later in the day to see if anything is the matter sends a double message: 'we were worried in case something was wrong when we didn't hear from you', and 'you were missed'. The individual has been reminded both of his importance to the group and of his commitment, and via a genuine expression of concern, not a challenge that creates a defensive posture.

Ultimately, we are members of Business Referral Exchange because we believe it enables us to grow

our business. We know that this is not by selling to each other, but by entrusting our precious contacts to our group colleagues, confident that they will not only reciprocate, but also treat our contacts with the same respect as we do ourselves.

This is how trusted networks form, and this is much more likely (and much faster) when we know that everybody shares the same purpose and values. Such people will instinctively work for each other's success, convinced that what benefits the group will benefit each individual.

Many of us visit other BRX groups both in our own localities and further afield. How much easier and re-assuring it is, to know that we are among people who share the same basic purpose and values!

Recruitment and retention of members

The benefits begin right at the start, with the recruitment and retention of people who fully understand what they're getting into, and embrace it whole-heartedly. Such people will find it much easier to become fully fledged contributing members, knowing exactly what they can expect and what is expected of them. It also means time and energy is not wasted on unsuitable people, who would act as a drag anchor on the group, impeding its progress and draining it of energy.



Leadership

Leadership in membership organisations is never easy, and Business Referral Exchange is no exception. How often have we heard of leaders of sports clubs, social clubs, or youth groups, grumbling that members 'just want to turn up' and enjoy the benefits without contributing to the running of the group? Too often, our chairmen are there by default, because 'no-one else will do it, and it's only for 6 months anyway'. They hope that nothing controversial or threatening will arise that needs real management skill and leadership to resolve, or just ignore it if it does.

A BRX group needs to behave in a business-like fashion, and with some business-like disciplines, yet exists purely by the will of its members, some of whom may not wish to be subject to those disciplines! Our Ethos sets out not just what members can expect from the group, but also what the group expects of them. Since everybody has accepted this and signed up to it, it now acts as a guide for everyone in the group – not just the chairman and the leadership team – as to how the group will operate, thus making the task of the leadership vastly more straight forward.

Group discipline

This is a sensitive subject. Visitors often comment that Business referral Exchange groups are relaxed and friendly, are not proscriptive, and conduct themselves with a light touch. However, this is not the same as being undisciplined! On the contrary, such groups exert a degree of self-discipline which comes from a shared purpose, set of values, and standards. In addition, they will have a mechanism to keep its members operating within accepted boundaries, without compromising the very reason good people join them. It is therefore vital that we don't leave this to chance and just assume that everyone shares our own ideals.

So how does one handle people, who are there by their own free will, when they overstep the line? Especially if the line is fuzzy or not defined, the leadership may find the duty of approaching someone just too much, and let it go. Not only is the unacceptable behaviour allowed to continue, but the whole group gets the message that it is tolerated and they can do it too.



The key is not to allow things to get that far. For the most part, members know that maintaining the group's values and standards, as set out in the ethos statement, is vital to the group and their own success. They will therefore generally encourage and help each other in a variety of ways, and if there is an occasional lapse, will have no problem in bringing the member gently back into line, or at least supporting the leadership when they do so.

Experience has shown that when members who are not committed drop out of the group, the behaviour of the rest improves and the group is strengthened as a result. It doesn't take a revolution, just quiet but continuous reminders what the standards are, and not being phased if someone threatens to leave!

Difficult Decisions

Discipline is often the most awkward matter that groups have to deal with but there are others; for example, renewing the membership of an unpopular but well-connected member. In such cases, the Ethos statement can really come to the group's rescue.

In 1982, a number of people in the Chicago area died after someone injected cyanide into bottles of Tylenol, a leading brand of analgesic in the USA. Johnson and Johnson, the parent company of the manufacturer, had to decide how to respond : clear shelves in the Chicago area, or the Mid-West, or the entire country, with costs rising accordingly from a few million dollars to over one hundred million dollars. Later, when asked how long it took to decide to clear shelves in the entire USA, the CEO replied: "6 seconds – as long as it took me to re-read our Credo. The first line states: We believe our first responsibility is to the doctors, nurses, patients, mothers and fathers, and all others who use our products and services. What other decision could I have made?"

Their immediate and unequivocal response, despite the enormous cost, is still quoted today as an example of exemplary corporate behaviour and crisis management. It happened because J&J had not only publicly articulated their corporate responsibility, but also believed it and acted on it, whatever the apparent cost. In their minds, the cost of not living to their Credo was infinitely higher than anything a deranged maniac in Chicago could do. The Credo made an otherwise almost impossible decision about as straight forward as the date of the next board meeting.





Conclusion

By articulating the Business Referral Exchange ethos, we are making our organisation's purpose, objectives and principles very clear, with the single goal of providing the very best platform for our members to succeed. We believe it encapsulates everything necessary for the success of our endeavours, but like all such statements it cannot be static or cast in stone. We are therefore open to any suggestion or challenge that will improve on it and make it even more valuable to our members.



Business Referral Exchange Ltd.
18 Pine Grove
Brookmans Park
Herts
AL9 7BS
UK

Tel: 01707 644 822
Fax: 01707 663 847
Email: enquiries@brxnet.co.uk
Web: www.brxnet.co.uk

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Written by Matthew Chuck BRX Worcester