

SuccessNet

An education and information bulletin from Business Network International

February 1999

Founder to launch BNI's Euro 'first'

BNI's Founder Dr Ivan Misner will be guest of honour when the organisation stages its first European Conference this spring, expected to be a sell-out long before the event takes place in late April.

Key dates for this landmark occasion are Thursday, 22nd April when Dr Misner will launch the conference with an evening keynote address at London's prestigious Institute of Education, and Saturday, 24th April when members can enjoy a series of entertaining presentations and valuable workshops at the conference venue – the superb Great Danes Hotel and Country Club, just off the M20 near Maidstone.

Announcing the conference dates, National Director Martin Lawson said: "Anyone who was privileged to hear Dr Misner's first ever UK address at The Commonwealth Institute a year ago will know just how valuable and enjoyable his presentations are.

"BNI has grown over threefold since then, so it is vital for members who wish to attend either event to obtain their tickets well in advance.

"Both the conference's opening session and the Saturday workshops are likely to be heavily over-subscribed long before April."

Following Dr Misner's address in London on Thursday evening, BNI's UK directors will spend a full day receiving further training from experienced American and Canadian directors.

Then on the Saturday, members from around

100 chapters in England, Scotland and Ireland will gather for a programme of stimulating presentations and workshops designed to help them get the most out of BNI and their businesses.

Martin Lawson said: "Saturday morning's session is open to members only and will cover a wide range of important topics.

"As well as having the benefit of presentations from Dr Misner and leading overseas BNI directors, the workshops will be jointly led by some of our own BNI directors who, at recent international BNI conferences, have shown themselves equally capable of developing new ideas and initiatives for chapter members.

"When Dr Misner paid his first visit to the UK a year ago, BNI had only 25 chapters, based mainly around London and the South East.

"By April, there will be 100 chapters covering much of England as well as parts of Scotland and Ireland, so the time is right for our Founder and Chief Executive to return and see the considerable progress we have made on this side of the Atlantic," he added.

"Even more important, the conference will give many more BNI members their first opportunity to learn from one of the world's top networking experts and gain some new perspectives on winning referral business."

Details on how to book are given below, but to be sure of your place(s), please respond quickly.

Places will be allocated strictly in order of application.

Don't miss out on your tickets!

Entry to both Dr Ivan Misner's keynote address and the Saturday morning workshops will be by ticket only.

BNI members can use the same ticket to attend either or both events, but you must clearly indicate your attendance intentions at the time of booking.

All ticket requests and payments must be made through your own Chapter whose leadership team hold the appropriate order forms.

Please do not try to make individual bookings or payments to the Conference Office. Tickets are priced at £15 each but, for bookings made with payment by 31st March, the cost is just £10 per ticket.

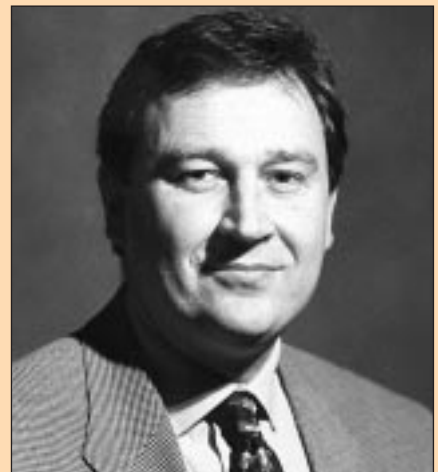
Conference enquiries and completed chapter order forms should be addressed to Gavin Bain, BNI Regional Director, Dean House, 5 Dean Close, Windsor, Berkshire, SL4 4PL. Telephone 01753 621911 or fax 01753 622911.

Accommodation packages at preferential rates have been negotiated with the Great Danes Hotel at Maidstone for Friday and/or Saturday night. To receive further information and make bookings, please call 0800 018 6181, quoting BNI.

The conference hotel is located just a couple of minutes off the M20 motorway at Junction 8, near Maidstone, and the M20 is easily accessible via the M25 (London Orbital) motorway which, early on Saturday morning at least, should be relatively free-flowing.

Delegates will be able to use many of the Hotel's extensive recreational facilities free of charge, on a first-come, first-served basis.

Irish chapters to the rescue



When Roy Kirwan's Dublin factory was burned to the ground it seemed as if the bottom had fallen out of the long-established manufacturing business.

As Roy, pictured above, gazed at the smouldering remains of his once thriving family business, which makes and sells promotional and corporate gifts, he knew it would take weeks before he could even set up a temporary base, let alone re-start manufacturing to meet a busy order book.

But Roy, a member of BNI's Airport Chapter, had reckoned without the spontaneous help of his chapter colleagues, and those from his wife Susanne's neighbouring Fingal Chapter, who rallied to his aid.

Susanne, Fingal's Chapter Director told *SuccessNet*: "The help that my husband and his brother Derek have received from members of our two chapters is nothing short of fantastic.

"By Monday afternoon, barely 24 hours after the fire destroyed almost everything, they'd been given temporary offices, phones and fax machine, and a new computer with all the software needed to restore the business's accounting system.

"Fortunately the accounts were backed up on disks kept in a fireproof safe – so the only thing that survived the blaze – so by Monday tea-time, a key part of the business was up and running again," said Susanne.

"That was two weeks ago, since when BNI members have been a tower of strength, searching for new manufacturing premises, trying to generate business to help Roy and Derek through these difficult times and offering lots of moral support. They have made a terrible situation bearable."

Patrick Guiden, BNI's regional director in Dublin said: "I am very pleased for them because it graphically demonstrates what BNI membership and 'Giver's Gain' is all about."



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SuccessNet

Living history in Warwickshire

Members of two South Warwickshire chapters have demonstrated a fine example of teamwork, joining forces to help a group of local schoolchildren create a living history project.

Leamington Chapter photographer, Andrew Sheppard, who runs Avon Studios in Wellesbourne, organised the burying of a 'time-capsule' in the grounds of his former village primary school, with the help of Kenilworth Chapter members, PR consultant Helen Salisbury, who handled media relations for the event, and construction boss Adam Stokes who provided the capsule.

Initially Andrew hit on the time-capsule idea because he wanted to involve local youngsters in testing out the claims of a leading photographic paper manufacturer for a new brand which it claimed would remain in pristine condition for 60 years.

He took photographs of the school-

children and surrounding rural landmarks, while the children also took pictures of each other and their favourite things around school.

"Then I thought it could have a more significant purpose in terms of the local community," he added.

"I have fond memories of my time at the school and felt it would be ideal if the present generation of pupils could create a living history project for their successors.

"So along with the photos, we also put into the time capsule some copies of local newspapers, a parish newsletter, a school prospectus and examples of the children's schoolwork.

"I hope it will provide considerable interest – and perhaps prompt a further history project – when the capsule is dug up by their grandchildren in 2058!

"They'll also be able to assess whether the clarity of the buried photographs are as good as the manufacturers' claims."

● *Andrew is pictured with the time capsule before burying it for the next 60 years.*



Copying the success story

More and more firms are finding membership of BNI so valuable to their businesses that they're placing two or more of their directors or senior staff in different chapters to boost the number of referrals they receive.

Among the latest members to recognise the value of doubling their input to BNI is Medway-based Systems Technology one of whose consultants, Amber Richardson is the Administration Co-ordinator for the Rochester Chapter, while her colleague Richard Hayward has recently joined the neighbouring Thanet Chapter.

Amber said: "As soon as I heard about BNI I thought it was a great idea and within a few months I'd been given referrals to supply around eight of the latest digital photocopying machines to local companies.

"When my firm saw how effective my presence was at Rochester's breakfast meetings, they were keen to see other senior staff get involved."

Meanwhile over in North West London, the husband and wife directors of Mansi's florist and garden centres in Pinner are also reaping the benefit of dual BNI membership.

Nick Mansi is one of the stalwarts of the Northwood Chapter – from which he has picked up numerous referrals – while his wife Julie is a more recent recruit, having joined the Pinner Chapter last year.

National Director Gillian Lawson commented: "We always thought this would happen as BNI expanded across different parts of the country.

"The number of member firms who are represented in two or more chapters is growing all the time."

California dreamin'



REWARDING JOURNEY: Some of BNI's European directors in Long Beach.

What is it that makes 22 busy UK directors pack their bags, pay their own airfares and jet half way around the world to join 150 similar people for three days of discussion?

Why, BNI's directors' conference of course, whose pulling power is so great that every single one of the organisation's European director team were only too happy to swap the November greyness of Britain for the sunshine and warmth of Long Beach, California – venue for one of the organisation's best ever international conventions.

One of the UK contingent, Patrick Guiden from Dublin, was still enthusiastically praising the event two months later when he told *SuccessNet*: "I have been in business for over 30 years and never experienced such collective dynamism or come across so many genuine new business opportunities.

"It opened my eyes to the true meaning of

BNI's 'Giver's Gain' philosophy, and it has also opened a lot of new doors.

"I found it remarkable that highly successful business people were prepared to stand up and give away their business secrets to help less experienced participants at the conference.

"And I was also knocked out by the willingness of BNI colleagues I'd never met before to offer me their personal expertise and practical help – all at their own cost," Patrick added.

Irish executive director Mort Murphy who, with his wife Helen, is rapidly expanding BNI across County Cork, said he liked the businesslike approach to the meeting.

"There were so many workshops and presentations we were spoilt for choice, but there's no doubt that we all learnt a great deal.

"On a personal level, it was invaluable to be able to share the knowledge and experiences of other directors."

Do you want to Yahoo?

BNI has joined the Internet's bandwagon of live chat rooms and bulletin boards to provide members with yet another way to expand their networking skills and business connections around the world!

Starting on Sunday, 28th February at 8.00pm (GMT), members throughout the UK and the rest of Europe can 'meet' once a month with chapter colleagues, directors and BNI's Founder and Chief Executive, Dr Ivan Misner, for an hour-long session in BNI's Yahoo Live Chat Room.

The chat sessions will be informal – although controlled through a moderator – and occasionally, topics of specific interest to BNI members will be scheduled in advance.

Dr Misner and other senior BNI executive directors from different North American states, already hold popular chat room sessions on a weekly basis for the organisation's 20,000 USA members.

The aim is to provide a similar service for members throughout the world.

BNI's Founder said: "This is a great way to meet other BNI members and Directors, as well as giving local chapters a shot in the arm with various ideas and initiatives to stimulate meetings."

The Yahoo site also features a BNI bulletin board where members can post questions and/or comments and can highlight innovative things their chapters are doing.

UK members wanting to participate should log onto the BNI website at www.bni.com and on reaching the site, click on 'Learning Centre'.

From the options then available, click on 'Chat Room', from where the system will take you directly to BNI's Yahoo chat room.

Follow the simple instructions for signing on. To receive more detailed information, you can e-mail BNI Headquarters at roxy@bni.com.

See you in the BNI Chat Room! Then you'll be able to say: "Yes, I do Yahoo!"

Two years old... and growing fast!

After seeing its first British chapters toasting their second anniversary just before Christmas, BNI's UK leadership team welcomed in the new year with a pledge to continue the organisation's record growth – aiming to greet the new millennium with at least 200 chapters and 5,000 European members.

As *SuccessNet* went to press, there were a total of 86 UK chapters – nine of them in Ireland – comprising approximately 2,000 individual businesses.

National Director Gillian Lawson said: "We are very much on target with our chapter development programme and during 1999 we hope to break into further key conurbations such as Merseyside, Yorkshire and Avon, as well as getting a strong foothold in mainland Europe with the opening of our first chapters in Holland and Germany."

She said UK expansion would continue to focus on areas where local business people demonstrated greatest demand for BNI chapters to be established.

"We are in the fortunate position of not having to chase business, but rather respond to business enthusiasm for BNI." Gillian added.

Venturing forth into Holland

The first three BNI chapters in Holland could be up and running before BNI's first European Conference takes place in April, as business people in Amsterdam and Utrecht gradually discover the power of business networking around the breakfast table.

Holland's first BNI regional director, Ronald Bus, says he is getting a positive, pro-active response from business contacts interested in joining the country's first chapters.

"It hasn't been easy, but then I didn't expect it to be," he said.

"BNI probably has greater competition in Holland, with many large companies either having their own successful networking initiatives or forming trade and professional groups to promote their interests.

"I have spent several months spreading the word about the BNI philosophy and everyone I talked to has been very positive," he added.

Ronald, a former economist at the University of Amsterdam and business consultant, is currently developing BNI's first information meetings in Amsterdam and Utrecht and hopes to launch first chapters in each city within the next ten weeks.

Martin Lawson, one of BNI's UK national directors who is responsible for developing BNI in Holland and Germany, said: "This will be BNI's stepping stone into mainland Europe.

"Our aim is to make significant inroads into both the Dutch and German business communities before the end of this year."



The Full Monty – in West One

Sandra Price was determined that when she give her ten minute presentation to colleagues in London's West One Chapter, she would hold their attention – even if it meant undressing several of the group's male members during breakfast!

Which is how, as our photograph shows, three fine specimens of manhood – Harry Wedderburn, Colin Curle and Stuart Mills – came to bare their nearly-all, so that Sandra could demonstrate the human body's mobility (or perhaps lack of it) – and how her skills can work wonders for aches, pains and strains.

As a long respected Harley Street osteopath specialising in cranial and structural osteopathy, Sandra wasn't sure at first whether BNI would be the right environment for promoting her professional services but, after less than a year she happily concedes that joining West One Chapter – which meets at The Cricketers Club in Blandford Street – was

one of the best business decisions she's ever made.

"As well as receiving regular referrals from members of my own chapter, many of whom suffer the usual range of aches and pains that respond to osteopathy, I've been surprised by the number of new business enquiries received through members of other BNI chapters.

"Word seems to have spread very quickly, and the extra clientele I have found through the BNI network has repaid the cost of membership many times over."

Sandra claims to be able to relieve anything from a headache and nervous tension to stiff joints and muscle sprains and with every passing week she has a growing band of grateful BNI members ready to pay testimony to her magic hands.

"I don't normally practice osteopathy in front of a breakfast audience, but it seems to have got the message across," she laughed.

"Any BNI members who think they might need my services can rest assured they'll be treated with complete dignity and professionalism."

Around the Chapters

Thousand leads in six months

A thousand leads in six months – that’s the proud boast of Rochester Chapter Director Andrew Griggs who has just been presented with BNI’s prestige Founders Award in recognition of the fantastic start made by Chapter members.

“We are delighted,” said Andrew. “Members see this as the foundation on which to build even more referrals in the coming months.”

To mark their double whammy, members produced a celebratory cake complete with candles, pictured right.

Meanwhile, two other chapters – Chelmsford and Canterbury – have also received Founders Awards, creating a remarkable hat trick for executive director Robert French, who said: “Since only three per cent of chapters receive the award, this part of BNI’s territory has done superbly well.”



Del Boy’s chapter!

Members of the new Brentwood Chapter in Essex are ready to teach one of television’s most loveable conmen, Del (Boy) Trotter, a few things about running his business more honestly and successfully.

The Chapter meets at The Nag’s Head in Brentwood, headquarters of the ‘Only Fools and Horses Appreciation Society’.

Assistant Director James Cruickshank said: “I’m sure chapter members would welcome a visit from Del Boy, if only to put him straight on the benefits of doing business with commitment and integrity.”

And Brentwood members certainly know a thing or two about commitment.

James added: “In only his second week, one new member got up from his sick bed to deliver a referral to the meeting at 6.30am and went back to bed, blissfully unaware that he’d not only received a referral in return but also won the door prize. With commitment like that, the chapter should go far.”

Relocating with BNI

When builder and property maintenance specialist Richard Jones had finally had enough of London’s noise and pollution, and decided to relocate his longstanding business closer to his East Grinstead home, there was one key problem: how to attract new local customers.

“The trouble was that all our work had historically come from estate agents and surveyors

in London, and the daily commuting and working in the capital’s smog was doing my asthma no good at all,” said Richard.

“I decided to look for new business around Kent and the South Coast, and felt resigned to spending a lot of money advertising my services in local papers and Yellow Pages.”

By a stroke of good timing, Richard was invited to attend a meeting of BNI’s East Grinstead Chapter and suddenly found all his relocation and new business problems solved.

“Not only have I been introduced to many new local businesses and made some wonderful new friends, but I now get most of my new business – up to 90 per cent – from BNI referrals.

“In little more than six months I have received some very substantial contracts, and only last week I picked up nine referrals over breakfast, one of them alone worth £20,000. BNI works brilliantly,” Richard added.

Crawley’s fast start...

Interest in BNI just keeps on growing, with chapter launches attracting more and more visitors. The latest to top the 100-mark was the new Crawley Chapter, in the shadow of Gatwick Airport, whose kick-off in January drew 110 enthusiastic businessmen and women, a significant percentage of whom have immediately signed up.

Robert French, Executive Director for Kent & Sussex said: “In the early days, we thought we were doing well to attract 70 or 80 people to a chapter’s launch, but it won’t be long

before we are doubling this figure as more people learn about BNI’s success and its rapid expansion across the UK.”

His Co-Director Andrew Hall, who looks after other chapters in Brighton, Crowborough, Eastbourne and East Grinstead, said: “It is very pleasing that from the moment we decide to form a new chapter, we are reaching core group status very quickly.

“Typical is our latest group at Haywards Heath where after one week we have seven committed core group members. We expect to launch the chapter during February.”

Corks a popping...

With half a dozen chapters already opened in and around Cork, a seventh about to be launched and the New Year’s kick-off for his first Limerick group already a success, Executive Director Mort Murphy has good reason to celebrate his first year’s progress.

“It’s been a fantastic few months,” he said. “No-one was quite sure how Ireland would react to BNI, but the business communities in and around Cork have taken to referral marketing like ducks to water.

“Every time we’ve started a new chapter, we’ve attracted enquiries from people who are interested in forming another group, somewhere else. We’ve raised our sights, and our target is to have 20 chapters up and running by the end of 1999.”

His other goal is to increase the average chapter membership to 30 members.



If it’s golf, it must be Gordon

If it’s true that the golf course is one of the best places to do business, then perhaps Gordon Wilkie can be forgiven for allegedly spending so much of his time on the greens and fairways of whichever course he happens to be passing.

As Executive Director for London South-West and Surrey, Gordon is a staunch believer in the old maxim ‘work hard and play hard’, which is why after challenging days spent developing his ever-expanding territory, he likes to challenge BNI colleagues to a round or two of golf.

Our photo shows Gordon (right) with Wandsworth Chapter director Philip Bullman at The Ryder Cup venue, Sutton Coldfield’s Belfry Golf Club, just before Christmas where the pair flew the flag for BNI – well at least, they wore the tee-shirts – by finishing joint third in the Sunday Mirror’s regional golf final.

If you missed this particular event, don’t worry, Gordon and company are bound to be appearing shortly at a golf course near you!



Networking – in a field!

Lanarkshire businessmen Ralph Halley and Donald Maclean went back to nature to ensure the successful launch of Scotland's second BNI group, the Milngavie Chapter, just before Christmas.

"We wanted to make the point that you can do business networking almost anywhere," said Donald (pictured right), "even in a field when it's pouring with rain."

While the computer got wet, the exercise didn't dampen anyone's spirits and, with the help of core group members Stewart Cunningham of Great Scot Photography and Louise Prendergast of Firehorse Promotions, the duo attracted significant local media attention and a 100-strong turnout for the launch.

Both Ralph, the proprietor of Halley's Garage, Milngavie, and Donald, a cost management consultant who is also BNI's regional director in North Lanarkshire, are members of the first Scottish chapter, Glasgow Alpha and Donald said: "Word is now beginning to spread among Lanarkshire business communities that BNI is a powerful vehicle for increasing referrals and driving up profitability."

His confidence is borne out by fellow regional director Hugh Lee who, as *SuccessNet* went to press, had just staged BNI's largest ever launch – worldwide – the new Bothwell Chapter in South Lanarkshire, which attracted a massive 190 visitors, nearly 50 more than BNI's previous world record.

"With a very strong core group of 19 people, great things are expected in Bothwell," he said.

Meanwhile, Hugh is also developing new chapters in Paisley and East Kilbride, and he aims to launch a second Glasgow chapter – Southside Victoria – in the early spring.

North Wilts launch

BNI will soon have a presence in south central England with the imminent launch of its first chapter in North Wiltshire.

Regional Director Iain Murray has half a dozen core group members working towards a February kick-off in Swindon, where they meet on Tuesday mornings at The Dunbar Club.

Meanwhile, Iain hopes a second Wiltshire chapter won't be far behind, covering Chippenham, Devizes and Calne from its picturesque base at The Lysley Arms, Pewsham, on the A4 midway between Calne and Chippenham. The embryonic group meets at the pub restaurant on Thursday mornings.

Iain said: "I am confident BNI will establish

a powerful base across Wiltshire once we have the first couple of groups established."

If you know anyone interested in joining either chapter, contact Iain on 01373 826876.

Getting the message

The boss of a North West travel agent has written to the Guinness Book of Records after receiving no less than NINE invitation letters – complete with BNI's traditional lengths of wool – to join the recently formed Bolton Chapter.

Andrew Dickson, Managing Director of St Andrews Travel in Bolton, asked whether his receipt of so many invitations to attend a Visitors' Breakfast of the new chapter constituted a record for the Guinness researchers.

One of the nine original members who contacted him, dentist Mel Rosenthal told *SuccessNet*: "We'd all agreed to write to as many local business as possible and I suppose since St Andrews Travel is such a large and well known company in town, everyone included it on their invitation list."

"I had a letter back from Mr Dickson, telling me that he'd made a rather natty waistcoat with all the pieces of wool!"

James to the rescue

When Stroud Valley Chapter member Carole Barnett received an urgent call from a wealthy client, asking for his polo saddles and bridles to be couriered over to America, she found all the major carriers couldn't deliver in time.

In desperation, Carole (who runs a business support agency) turned to her BNI card holder and found her saviour – in the form of James McGlashan, whose Autoroute Shipping company is based at Staverton Airport near Gloucester. A member of BNI's Cheltenham Chapter, James had met Carole when she visited his chapter a few weeks earlier.

Within hours of her call, James had a van collect three saddles, three bridles and saddle-cloths weighing around 50 kilos, which were packed, crated and shipped to the USA – arriving several days before Carole's polo-playing financier either expected or needed them!

"He was delighted with the service," said Carole. "It is the kind of turnaround that impresses clients. James did a great job."

Lawson's Lore

BNI National Director
MARTIN LAWSON writes...

With just a few short months before we greet the new Millennium, and the even greater pressures it will place on all businesses, it seems appropriate to reflect on the impact of man's technological ingenuity and, in particular, on the human skills and attributes we all need if we are to grasp the challenges that lie ahead.

Few would argue that mankind has made more rapid industrial, political and social progress over the past 50 years than at any time in the last two thousand years.

Yet ironically, few would also question that, when it comes to equipping ourselves as individuals to deal with, and get the most from our emerging high-tech world, we have been much slower to grasp, and adapt to, the endless stream of new opportunities.

Most chapters will have at least one communications specialist in their midst, be they an expert in computer software, the Internet, systems technology or marketing. So I would expect most members to have at least a basic appreciation of the almost limitless business opportunities presented by access to instant global communications.

Whether we love or hate computers, it is vital that all BNI members learn how the communications revolution can, and will, change their businesses for the better.

But there is another, equally important aspect to communicating in the 21st century which applies equally to our business and our private lives.

It concerns the need to ensure that our personal communications skills – often referred to as inter-personal qualities – are adequately developed, and well practised.

The ability to promote your business in a friendly, informative manner; being enthusiastic and confident about the services you offer; and demonstrating your commitment and integrity to potential customers – these are just a few of the personal attributes we will need to stay competitive and profitable.

It is in this latter respect that BNI membership can, and should, play a key role in helping you to develop and hone your personal and inter-personal skills.

Just glancing through some of the articles in this newsletter is evidence enough that the combination of a disciplined business environment, high quality training, constructive criticism and encouragement and, above all, mutual practical help as defined so completely in our 'Giver's Gain' philosophy, offers members an unparalleled package of business and personal support.

There truly is a world of new challenges and opportunities opening up to small businesses and, provided you are able to mix traditional inter-personal attributes with new skills demanded by tomorrow's communications technology, you will not go far wrong.

Martin Lawson

Around the Chapters



MADE TO ORDER: Alan Johnson at work in his Hampstead studio.

Alan comes out of the woodwork

For 20 years, designer craftsman Alan Johnson has made beautiful fine furniture to order.

But, in his own words, for 20 years his business has failed to earn him a proper living wage – because he was interested only in making things, never marketing his skills or running his business.

“By last year I was very dismayed at my failure to turn my woodworking skills into a profitable business.

“With three children to raise and bills to pay, I knew I’d got it all wrong. For all those years, I’d wrongly believed that if I concentrated on producing excellent work with integrity, my future success was assured,” he told *SuccessNet*.

Then a minor miracle occurred. BNI Assistant Director Anan Davis knocked on the door of his Kingsgate Workshops in West Hampstead and told him of plans to open a new BNI chapter just down the road.

“She explained what referral marketing was all about and, when I told her how I’d done nothing to promote my business over the years, she insisted I go along to one of the early meetings.”

Alan not only joined the embryonic West Hampstead group last autumn, but immediately became the first Chapter Director – a double move he says has changed his life.

“BNI has revealed the classic mistakes I was making.

“It has helped and encouraged me in so many ways to understand how to be proactive in developing my business, not least by bringing me out of myself.”

With disarming honesty, Alan added: “The truth is I was unsuccessful in business because I didn’t want to run it properly.

“BNI has breathed much needed new life into the business side of my life and, after just a few months, I am seeing improvements. I am much more focused and positive about what I do.”

Like many entrepreneurs, Alan received no formal training on how to run a business. “I came out of teaching and didn’t have a clue. I just wanted to make beautiful furniture. Now I feel I can do this – and run a profitable business too.”

Throwing down the gauntlet to South London chapters

Cross-chapter referrals are showing a healthy increase, as members recognise that if their own group cannot provide a particular product or service, it’s more than likely that a neighbouring chapter can!

And increasingly, local chapters are getting together for rewarding joint breakfast meetings in the knowledge that combined sessions are not only a lot of fun, but they have proved themselves to generate referrals for members who may not have been among the usual beneficiaries in their own group.

One such joint breakfast in South London, organised by Executive Director Gordon Wilkie, attracted nearly 50 members from four chapters – Wandsworth, Putney, Wimbledon and Clapham – and was so successful in producing new referrals that there are now plans to make it a regular quarterly event.

Gordon said: “It makes obvious sense to hold joint events, since no chapter can possibly provide every service.

“Regional directors increasingly receive calls from individual members asking if we know of another BNI member in a particular profession or industry, because they’ve been unable to pass the referral within their own chapter.

“At our recent combined breakfast in Wandsworth, one member whose video production business had tended not to attract many referrals from her own colleagues, came away with four pieces of prospective business



FORGING LINKS: Cross-chapter networking in South London

and was very excited about the potential for cross-chapter networking.

“Such meetings are also a great way to forge links with local business people you wouldn’t meet through your own group.”

He has now thrown down the gauntlet to all chapters in his South-West London region:

“Whichever group shows the biggest quarterly improvement in the referrals it passes, can host the next joint breakfast.”

The sheer relief that BNI brings!



Okay, I give in... Please treat me gently, and I’ll never be late for another chapter meeting!

In fact, Richard Sexton, pictured lying prostrate on the floor during a recent breakfast meeting of his Rochester Chapter, was pleading for help from fellow networker Theresa Connolly, but only for relief from a severe pain in his lower back.

Richard, who runs a personal development and training company, is 6ft 8in tall and had suffered from recurring back and pelvis problems for many years before discovering that the manipulative skills of Theresa, a qualified chiropractor, keeps him mobile where other medical treatments have failed.

He said: “Finding another chapter member who could ease my other excruciating back pain

was an unexpected bonus of joining BNI. Theresa has helped half a dozen other chapter colleagues with various aches and pains.”

Theresa said that after members of the Rochester group began to spread the word about the effectiveness of her treatment, she received many referrals from other local chapters and third parties.

“I wouldn’t normally provide therapy during a BNI meeting, but on one occasion Richard was in so much agony that I felt obliged to offer help on the spot.”

Which is how intrepid chapter member, photographer and audio-visual specialist Peter Snell, came to capture Theresa’s handy work in camera and persuaded her and Richard to allow the results to be sent to *SuccessNet*.

Focus On... Central London

Laura makes it look so easy

The prospect of getting up at 5am every weekday after just a few hours sleep, giving dynamic breakfast presentations to dozens of strangers (many of whom you will never meet again), putting ten hours into running a fast-growing business, and then hosting more new business meetings in the evening, would have most mere mortals wincing in mental pain as they pulled the bed covers more tightly over their heads.

But, Laura Hurren has been doing all this and more, week in, week out, for the past 18 months and loves every minute.

So much so that, as if managing BNI's highly effective expansion throughout central London was not enough, she recently decided to take on Britain's second city – with the intention of repeating her success in Birmingham, where she will open the first BNI chapters in the spring.

She came into the BNI family after spending the early years of her career in public relations and marketing, before accepting a national sales role with a leading hotel group. "I was enjoying my life and the job," she recalls.

"Then I was invited to a BNI breakfast meeting by a business colleague, Gavin Bain (BNI Executive Director for Berkshire & Oxfordshire), who told me he'd found something I'd like even more. By the end of that first meeting I was sold on the BNI philosophy."

Barely 18 months later, Laura has opened a dozen chapters, two of which are in the City, attracting a higher proportion of pin-striped professionals than most groups, but actively promoting their business potential to tradespeople working in and around the Square Mile.

Following her recent appointment of two equally energetic assistant directors, Anan Davis and Claire Malka, she's also spread BNI's net north and south of London's heart, opening groups in St John's Wood, Camden Town, two in Hampstead and now preparing to launch a Victoria chapter.

It would be the stuff of Catherine Cookson novels if Laura was able to stay on top of her growing BNI business without really trying – which is how it looks to the casual observer.

But she is quick to dismiss the myth: "I work hard, but I also play hard," she said.

"The secret is planning and preparation, and good time management. I always make sure I find time for myself, whether it's attending my Tai Chi lessons, going to the gym, trying to keep up with BNI members on the golf course or just relaxing with friends over dinner.

"If you don't get the balance right, you couldn't maintain the work rate."

She makes a comparison with top athletes, adding: "You'd never see them go straight from the changing room into their event without first going through a programme of mental and physical preparation for their performance."

Which is why, Laura admits, she sometimes attracts quizzical looks from London's early morning motorists as she drives to her various breakfast engagements.

"Having prepared my thoughts the previous night, I always sing out loud as I drive to chapter meetings, and I have a few good friends who don't mind my calling them up at six in the morning for a lively chat or a laugh.

"That's how I prepare myself to arrive feeling ready for a stimulating business session."

Although demanding in itself, her daily attendance at chapter breakfasts accounts for little more than a tenth of Laura's work.

"Training lies at the core of BNI's philosophy



Laura Hurren

Laura Hurren is one of those lucky people whose charisma and natural ability will make almost any task look simple.

With a warm, easy-going style, impressive business credentials, quick wit and model looks, she seems to have been blessed with all the attributes needed to forge BNI's presence in the tough Central London territory.

As BNI's only UK female Executive Director she acknowledges that London's business community is still predominantly a man's world but then, with a glint in the eye and a half smile, lets slip that working in a largely male environment has some distinct advantages as she seeks to expand BNI's central London portfolio to 25 chapters by the end of this year.

Currently responsible for a dozen chapters from The City to the West End, Laura works a 90-hour week and yet, whether you meet her over a networking breakfast at 7am or a business dinner at 9pm, she always looks fresh, composed and ready to take on the world. MALCOLM GROSVENOR was intrigued to find out how she does it...

and I spend 80 per cent of my week in training sessions, either for my own self-development and knowledge, training new chapter leadership teams or teaching members how to get the best out of their BNI membership.

"My key goal this year is to raise members' expectations about what they can achieve through BNI, improving the quality and quantity of referrals passed."

The other key element in Laura's typical week is arranging gatherings of local businessmen and women to introduce them to BNI.

Traditionally, these meetings have been held over early morning breakfast but, recognising that much of London's business community commutes long distances to work, Laura moved her sessions to the evening, enabling people to attend straight from work.

It seems to have worked. After six months, the Clerkenwell Chapter attracted over 100

would-be members to an evening session, and recently, a similar event to increase the membership of West One Chapter produced 80 visitors, nearly 15 per cent of whom joined.

"It's all about getting the right mix of people around the breakfast table," she added.

"People join BNI with different experiences and expectations, but the vast majority are entrepreneurial types who want to do better business and that helps to keep me going.

"What have I got to complain about when I'm surrounded by positive, energetic business people who, while gaining from membership, also give a lot back.

"I have learnt so much about so many businesses over the past 18 months. Of course I'm enthusiastic – I'm having a fantastic time!?"

Let's hope the good business folk of Birmingham are ready for her...

Gold Card at first meeting

While most BNI members may wait months or even years before they've qualified to receive their coveted Gold Club member award, there was no such delay for one member of the recently formed Bolton Chapter.

Manchester-based insurance broker David Williams may just have broken BNI's UK record by receiving his gold award at only his second chapter meeting, having introduced six visitors who all joined the group.

David joined Bolton's core group after meeting newly-appointed regional director Rod Sloane at a business-to-business meeting in the town and he is now part of an already thriving chapter whose 24 members include an optician, dentist, private detective, banker and stockbroker.

Rod Sloane commented: "The Bolton

group got off to a tremendous start and when I visit them now it's hard to believe they've been going for just a few weeks. David's commitment is typical in the group and I expected it to go on to great things." The chapter meets at Bolton's renowned Lostock Park Golf Club every Friday morning.

Meanwhile Rod's Manchester Chapter is gradually increasing its membership, despite difficulties in finding a suitable permanent home. Initially it met every Thursday at a cafe in the city's Albert Square but the leadership team is currently negotiating to move to a more prestigious sporting venue.

"Manchester has 14 members, but once the chapter is settled in a new home, I think it will emulate Bolton's progress," Rod Sloane added.

What are the most important personal qualities you want to see demonstrated by your BNI colleagues around the breakfast table? And what attributes are more likely to make you want to give your referrals to a particular individual?

As part of the research and preparatory work for 'Masters of Networking' (our third major book on marketing soon to be published), we recently conducted a survey of over 2,000 members across the United States, Canada, the UK and Australia, asking participants to rank various qualities in order of perceived importance.

Two reassuring points emerged from this comprehensive survey.

Firstly, it is clear members support our fundamental belief that networking is more about farming than it is about hunting.

And secondly, although we sampled the views of people in several different countries around the world, their ranking of the top qualities were virtually identical!

Take a look at some of the most frequently mentioned traits, and the chances are you'd include some or most probably, all of them in your own 'top ten' list of important human qualities for doing business:

1 FOLLOW UP ON REFERRALS: It is hardly surprising that if you give referrals to someone who consistently does little or nothing to follow them up, you will soon cease to give leads to that person. Following up on referrals was ranked as the single most important quality of successful networkers!

The qualities of a top networker

by
IVAN R. MISNER, Ph.D.,
BNI Founder and CEO
and
ELISABETH MISNER,
Special Projects Director

2 HAVE A POSITIVE ATTITUDE: Not too long ago, we added this value to BNI's code of ethics and made it a pre-requisite for joining a chapter's Leadership Team. It was good to see most business people agree that this is a very important trait.

3 BE ENTHUSIASTIC AND MOTIVATED: Our experience with successful networkers bears this out as a strong factor in successful networking. Look at your own chapters. Isn't it usually the most enthusiastic and motivated members who give (and

receive) the majority of the referrals?

4 BE TRUSTWORTHY: You'll also find strong references to this quality in BNI's Code of Ethics. That's how important we feel it is. After all, this organisation was founded on an unwritten oath of loyalty: "I will refer you to my contacts, if you will refer me to yours." You are not going to refer potential business to someone, unless you believe they are trustworthy!

5 SHOW GOOD LISTENING SKILLS: We all have two ears and one mouth and good networkers use them proportionately! The more we learn about and from each other, the better our networking skills become. It is usually better to listen first.

These survey results can help point all of us in the right direction for developing strong, effective networking skills. Use the resources available to you to assess and improve your own networking abilities, and you'll soon find that your BNI chapter enjoys even greater collective success.

Thank you to everyone who participated in our survey. Happy networking in 1999!

A toast to absent friends? Not likely!

Continuing surveys of breakfast attendances carried out by BNI's headquarters have confirmed that chapters which work hard to keep absenteeism to a minimum generate far more business referrals than those which take a relaxed view about members' absences.

In one California chapter where average absences per member had crept up to almost two per quarter, the leadership team decided to get tough on absent friends.

After three months, the absenteeism rate had been more than halved, after six months membership had increased by 55 per cent and after nine months, the chapter's membership had nearly doubled - while the number of referrals had risen by a staggering 164 per cent, up from 122 per quarter to 322 (see table alongside).

Comparable studies involving other US and UK chapters indicate a very similar pattern, with business referrals soaring quickly among chapters which have successfully reduced absenteeism to a minimum.

BNI's Founder Dr Ivan Misner told *SuccessNet*: "There is a direct and distinct relationship between absences, membership and leads. As a group decreases its absences, it increases its membership and substantially

increases the number of leads that members receive.

"High absenteeism translates into low referrals, while low absenteeism translates into high numbers of referrals, so the message not only for chapter leadership teams but also for each and every member, is that if they allow regular attendances to slip, they can expect to do considerably less business."

He said that even the best run chapters sometimes forgot to maintain the basic fundamentals of running their group and added: "It is really very simple.

"We join a chapter to enhance our business profitability, so we should all be concerned if, because certain colleagues are not taking their responsibilities seriously enough, the number of referrals passed over the breakfast table starts to decline."

Martin Lawson, BNI's UK National Director said it was reassuring to note that absenteeism was not a significant problem among most of the UK's 80-plus chapters, because membership committees understood the importance of their role in encouraging members to find a suitable substitute if they knew they would be unable to attend a particular meeting.



It's midnight at the Brands Hatch Hotel in Kent and all is quiet... or is it? While lesser mortals slept soundly in their beds, who else would you expect to find still doing business, BNI-style, but national directors Martin and Gillian Lawson, who couldn't resist selling Rochester Chapter member Peter Snell (left) a copy of the latest book written by BNI Founder Dr Ivan Misner. SuccessNet understands that Martin and Gillian finally got to bed by 2am, in plenty of time for their customary short night's sleep before heading off for another breakfast meeting!

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| California study of relationship between chapter absenteeism and number of referrals | | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| | Absences per member (per quarter) | Average number of members (per meeting) | Total number of referrals (per quarter) |
| 1st quarter (before initiative to reduce member absenteeism) | 1.9 | 11 | 122 |
| 2nd quarter (after initiative) | 0.9 (-53%) | 12 (+9%) | 133 (+9%) |
| 3rd quarter (after initiative) | 0.8 (-58%) | 17 (+55%) | 208 (+71%) |
| 4th quarter (after initiative) | 0.9 (-53%) | 21 (+90%) | 322 (+164%) |