



## Relationships

by Brenda Suteu  
MSN Founding President

OK... so, I take a new job as a regional marketing director and I know that it is going to increase my work load, because now I am concentrating my efforts and knowledge over many different programs, people and facilities. This was a good move for me because I love to multi-task and have variety in my work. I have felt myself growing "professional muscle" and that was exactly what I had hoped for. "Regional" also means you spread your time and presence over a lot more territory. For me that has meant traveling by car for many hours because my buildings are scattered through eleven different cities from Spokane, Washington to Coos Bay, Oregon.

So what have I learned? Well, I have learned that it is lonely and strenuous to travel by car

20 or more hours a week. I have learned that "talking books" help the long drive go faster. McDonald's is the most reliable place to find a clean restroom and everything starts to taste the same in restaurants after awhile. I have learned that Red Lion has the most comfortable beds and if you get the smallest room possible (instead of the cavernous two-bed room) you will feel more at home. I have also learned that in the summer you have to add an hour to every drive anywhere because of road work and accidents. You would think the harder time to travel would be winter, but I long for the gentle rains and grey days alone on the highway with no teenagers rushing off on vacation and no orange vested car stoppers with their stop signs on a pole protecting the road workers, fewer fender benders, and at least 50% less road kill to get grossed out over. I have discovered that you can't stick to your healthy habit of drinking two quarts of water in the car on a drive, unless you are sure you won't get stuck in traffic between Salem and Portland.

I have learned a lot more about marketing since I became a regional marketing director, but what has still stood out as fundamental is that marketing is -- first and foremost -- relationship building no matter where you are. Those who have the relationships



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get the referrals. This goes for internal relationships with the staff in a building as much as with your referral sources, for it will not serve you to be best friends with a discharge planner and have your staff not want to work with you to complete an admission. It doesn't matter if you are in Spokane, Richland or Eugene, everywhere you go the most important thing any professional can do is cultivate and maintain strong relationships inside and outside of your building. That is also the great value of a Professional Organization like Metropolitan Senior Network.

Participation in MSN is a way to cultivate relationships with professionals in the industry that could lead to not only a warm friendship, but possibly more and better referrals. I like to tell the story of when I worked years ago at St. Jude Care Center and had warm professional relationships with the marketing director at St. Andrews and the marketing director at Encore Senior Village. All three of us were the marketing directors of Alzheimer facilities, but we got together and figured out how each was different and how we could cross refer to each other. This was when I developed my strong belief that there should never be hostile competition between marketing professionals and that became a part of the vision that guided the creation of MSN. One tense day when my census was severely low, the marketing director at Encore came to see me for a tour of St. Jude. When we had finished she told me that she had ten referrals for me because of a change in contracts at Encore. That absolutely sent my census through the roof and made my month! Where would she have sent those residents if I had not spent the time getting to know her and earning her respect and trust?

Through this year the addition to my knowledge of marketing best practices has been exciting. And it has confirmed the fundamental importance of relationships.