

# Asking Clients to Bring Guests

From Bill Gates, CSP, CPAE

## Clients Inviting Guests to Social Event

Event Marketing and Introduction Events are gaining in popularity. While they have always been a viable way to meet high-level prospects in favorable circumstances, many more professionals are turning to this proven strategy.

If you are interested in meeting more affluent and wealthy prospects, then Introduction Events need to be a part of your tool kit. There are many high-level prospects who don't want their first meeting with you to be a "business meeting" or a "bring-all-their-statements meeting." They know their friend or family member trusts you, but they want to get a feeling of that trust themselves, before they reveal their financial information to you.

### Introduction Events – Not Appreciation Events

I want to make an important distinction. A Referral Event is not the same as a Client-Appreciation Event. The classic mistake financial professionals make is to tell their clients they are having a "client-appreciation" event – and invite them to bring a guest, if they are so inclined. The problem with this way-too-low-key approach is that most clients don't bring guests, and most of the time the guests that do come are either not qualified to work with the advisor or not interested.

If you want to say "thank you" to your clients with a nice event, by all means – do it! These fun events are great for building client loyalty, by building "business friendships." You should have several of these each year. Bring your clients together in a fun atmosphere and celebrate their relationship with you. It really helps cement the loyalty.

On the other hand, if you want your clients to bring guests for the purpose of introducing you to others, make sure that's clear from the very beginning.





## Call – Mail – Call

This is an age-old strategy that usually produces nice results in this situation.

**Step One** – Call the client to alert them to the event (and impending written invitation) and have them save the date. (I’ll give you the script in just a minute.)

A classic mistake advisors make is not making this initial phone call. They just mail invitations hoping that certain people will show up. If you want your event (any event) to be successful, call your clients first.

**Step Two** – Mail a printed invitation. As you stated in the phone call, make sure the printed invitation is clear that the purpose of this event is for them to introduce you to others they care about, in a fun, non-business setting.

**Step Three** – Call the client again to make sure they received the invitation, to see if they will be coming, and who they will be inviting to join them.

I am often asked who should make these two phone calls. I think you – the advisor – should always make Call #1. In most cases you’ll get their voice mail, so it won’t take much time. Also, you want to keep these events small (for better connections and easier logistics) so you won’t have that many calls to make.

While I think it’s also best for you to make the follow-up call, I think that is less critical than you making the initial phone call.

**Word of Warning:** Be prepared for an occasional client to say something like, “The couple I want to invite can’t make that date, but it sounds fun. Do I have to bring a guest?”

You need to be prepared with a response to this question. If you’re hosting a small dinner – like a chef’s table – this could really throw your numbers off. If it’s a wine & cheese party or a chocolate appreciation affair, you might be able to say “you are welcome to come without a guest.” The worst case scenario is that you have 60% clients and 40% guests. This is not a totally bad thing. The guests will see how well you and your clients get along and appreciate each other.



## Your Script for Step One – The Initial Phone Call

Here's a sample conversation. Use this to craft your own "natural" script..

*Good morning George. I'm calling to let you know about a special event we have coming up. You can consider this a "hold-the-date" phone call.*

*Many of our clients like to introduce us to others they think should know about the important work we do. We've found that one of the best ways to do this is with a fun, social event. We don't talk business. We just get to know each other in a social setting. Then, if they are interested, we talk later about our services.*

*To this end, we're having a wine & cheese party at the XYZ Museum of Art on Friday, June 11. It's a great venue for this type of event and the wine selection is going to be incredible. So, I invite you to pencil in the date and then see if there is a person or couple you think would enjoy meeting me and my team at this event.*

*We'll be sending an invitation to you in a few days. I'll also follow up after that to see if you and one or more guests will be able to attend. I hope you can make it.*

## Event Marketing Rules of Thumb

**Rule #1** – What is the purpose of this event? Appreciation? Introductions? Education? Whatever it is, structure the event accordingly and make sure your clients know the purpose too.

**Rule #2** – Make the invitation(s) personal (with a phone call). Then you can follow up with a creative invitation. I recommend a mailed invitation, not an email invitation.

**Rule #3** – You must pay attention to details. Find out what other events may be taking place at the venue at the same time. Pay attention to lighting in parking lots at night. Send a car for elderly clients.

**Rule #4** – Hire an event planner. Event planners bring a level of attention to detail and creativity that you or your staff may not possess. They aren't expensive and worth every penny.

**Rule #5** – Smaller events are easier to plan and host, they produce better connections between you and your clients and guests, and you can usually see a closer link to real results.

**Rule #6** – Follow up with our new prospects within 24 to 48 hours. Otherwise you could be wasting your money. The relationship magic happens at the event, but the results happen when you follow up.