

Long-Term Networking: Mastering the One-to-One
How to start a conversation and keep it going

The Reluctant Networker, LLC

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Speaker: Greg Peters

Going to a networking event expecting to walk out with a sale is like walking into a singles bar expecting to get a wedding ring. It ain't gonna happen.

Networking isn't about handing out business cards, or trying to sell people on your product or service. It's about building rewarding long-term relationships to find out what we can do together to succeed.

Greg Peters was "The Reluctant Networker," the nerdy guy you've see on the fringes of an event – the one who believes starting a conversation with strangers is only slightly preferable to root canal.

Have you ever met a Greg Peters? If you're one of those super networkers who works a room in 30 minutes or less, hands out at least 10 business cards, and makes promises to have coffee with at least three of those 10 contacts – sometime – you probably didn't notice Greg.

Folks – you missed an opportunity to meet Greg – someone who can unlock doors for you. Help you get customers, and make meaningful connections.

The truth is super networkers – at least 95 percent of you won't even follow-up with the 10 people you met, their business cards are on your desk collecting dust, and coffee? Well forget about it – a week has passed, and those 10 people, even the three you promised to meet for coffee, don't remember you.

Networking is serious business. So serious that Greg Peters makes it his business to teach people how to network by building connections with confidence.

"I am a nerd, a computer programmer and mathematician and proud of it," said Peters during a workshop presented Jan. 25 at the Sandler Training Center in Ann Arbor. In the not so distant past, Peters compared networking to walking into your first junior high dance.

One day something clicked – he met a woman at a networking event who was in the process of finding someone to design her company Web site. "She's in my target market, and has money, she's a prospect," said Peters. He began telling her why she should hire him to design her Web site, instead of the gal she told him about. Looking back, Peters

confesses – it was a monologue not a conversation. “I arrived on the never answer list – avoid him and his calls at all costs list.”

Now people call Peters back, and apologize for not returning his call in 24 hours or less. “I went from the never answer his calls list to the – always answer his calls list. People find opportunities for me,” he said.

What changed?

“The goal of networking is to connect on a personal level,” said Peters. “You can chat with someone for five minutes and decide if you want to continue the conversation or not. If you don’t click – what’s the likelihood you’ll do business together?”

It takes time to build friendships, but the payoff is enormous. When people know you, they’re more likely to do business with you. What do you value more – your car or your reputation? Giving someone a referral is like lending someone your reputation,” said Peters. “Why would someone lend you their reputation after talking to you for five minutes?”

Networking is an art, a science, something that can be learned. You need tools to do it right. What’s the important thing in the toolbox? If you answered “business cards,” you’re wrong. It’s your schedule.

“Have it with you,” said Peters. “It’s easier to follow-up with someone who is still standing in front of you. Compare schedules and agree on a time to meet. It makes following up less stressful.”

If you’ve got a pile of business cards from networking events on your desk – throw them out. If the card is older than a week the person isn’t likely to remember who you are.

So what’s the magic formula – how do you make connections that lead to longer conversations and mutual success?

You’ve got to “Infer” to gain information and connect on a personal level:

1). Interests – Take an interest in the person you just met. What do they do for fun when they’re not working or selling widgets? Do you have any shared interests? People tend to talk passionately about things they enjoy. Discovering shared interests is an opportunity to help someone.

2). Network – Where do they go to find success? What other groups do they belong to? What events do they attend? You might discover that you belong to a group the other person is interested in. Invite them to attend a meeting, as your guest, and you’ll be their super hero.

3). Forward Focus – If you want to have a future with someone ask where they’re trying to go. What are their dreams and challenges this year – professional and personal? “It doesn’t have to be creepy,” said Peters. “You can ask what they’re doing over the weekend. The idea is to establish a connection to continue the conversation.”

4). Evolution – Epic Journey – Find out why do they do what they do? How did they get there? How can you recommend someone if you don't know their story?

5). Relationships – Who are their family and friends? Do you have friends in common? “If you can help people nurture or protect their family – you become part of their family,” said Peters. “When you get there – it's powerful.”

If you haven't “inferred” already – networking is about creating and strengthening connections so the conversation flows both ways.

Do the people you establish a relationship with go away? No – the network brings things to you. Keep the focus on the other person – not on what you want to sell or get. Make the contact – start the conversation, keep it going – and success will follow.