

Don DeRosa's

Real Estate Investing for The Real World



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Creating Collective Genius Through Networking

We should not only use the brains we have, but all that we can borrow.
Thomas Woodrow Wilson

As I write this, I am attempting to recover from an exhausting, exhilarating five-day boot camp which was hugely successful, despite many “challenges.” (I’m referring to the Investor Bonanza boot camp that Pete Youngs and I put on every six months.)

As is pretty typical, some things went wrong, but a lot went right. I got sick and lost my voice – not the best timing when you’re speaking for five days to a ballroom full of investors with detailed questions and deals to go through!

The sound system didn’t work right initially, but a local investor with much better sound system (from Production Resources Unlimited) saved us! And the buses for our bus trip were late because they went to the wrong hotel. But finally everyone got to see the houses and suggested renovations Pete and I made.

So, despite the obstacles, I came out of the boot camp feeling I had experienced something *really special*. Judging by the evaluations, our attendees agreed. Was it because we put on a great boot camp? Well, yeah! But I’m not here to plug the boot camp. I’m here to plug the other reason it worked so well: the networking we all did together.

I know what you’re saying. *I hate networking*. Many of us do. There’s something so artificial about it. “Hi! My name’s Don. Here’s my card. Let’s be friends!” Ugh.

But there are almost as many ways to network as there are networkers. If you’re creative – which you’d better be, if you want to make money in this business – you can find ways to network that are comfortable for you.

I’m not talking right now about the kind of networking you do to find business (although that’s certainly important, too). I’m talking about the kind of networking where you pick the brains of other people, and you let them pick yours. It’s all about good conversation.

The benefit of this type of networking is enormous. By brainstorming, we create collective genius that we can all use.

Don't believe me? Well, then, let me demonstrate with some of the great tips I picked up from students during the boot camp. Remember, these are from the attendees, not the speakers themselves.

- If you want to sell your house fast, offer free maid service for a year as an incentive.
- Put marble flooring in the foyer or doorway of a home. The area is small so it's cheap – and you can advertise that the house has a marble entryway.
- If you're renovating a historic home and you need doorknobs that fit the period, look on eBay. You'll find beautiful old porcelain or brass doorknobs and you'll pay a lot less than going to an architectural antique store.
- If a seller is behind in payments but wants to keep the house, teach them what to say to the bank to negotiate. Then tell them they can still call you if it doesn't work out. Yes, occasionally the seller will work it out with the bank and you'll lose the sale. But if it doesn't work out, who do you think the seller will call? You, who tried to help them save their home, or some stranger they see as predatory?

It's amazing what you can learn just by listening.

But remember, it goes both ways: you need to share, too. Yes, you could just listen and not contribute, out of fear that you'll help your competition. I might even have the same fear if all real estate investors were wildly successful. But the fact is, many investors *aren't* wildly successful, mostly because they don't follow directions or don't follow through with hard work.

Trust me: there's plenty of profit for everybody who's willing to do the footwork. In fact, you could share *all* your secrets and still do just fine. (Look at me – I teach people in my own backyard exactly how I buy and sell houses!) So speak up, and let others learn from you!

Where are the best places for this kind of networking? Here are some ideas:

Seminars, classes, and boot camps. Every time investors get together, it's an occasion to talk.

Your Local REIA. Okay, I'm vice president of Georgia REIA here in Atlanta and maybe I'm a little bit biased, but it really is a great place to share information.

Come to the monthly meetings if you don't believe me. Get to know some people. Listen and share. Join a sub group that interests you. You may find groups that discuss property management, marketing, wholesaling, buying and selling notes, short sales. You'll learn something every time you come. We even have a library for you to use at our main office. Talk about the ultimate networking tool!

Other organizations and events. Collectively, members of Georgia REIA probably know more about real estate investing than any other group in the state, but sometimes it's helpful to branch out a bit, to other REIA groups, or better still, to other organizations.

Need to know about markets in a particular neighborhood? Attend a function of the Georgia Association of Realtors in that area, or even just an open house, and start asking questions. Want

to know what people look for in a home? Go to the home show and stand by a booth with an interesting product. Then just listen to people as they walk by.

There are places on the Internet, like meetup.com, where you can look for like minded individuals – people who are interested in real estate investing. There are several in the Atlanta area alone.

Internet real estate forums. The Internet is an amazing thing. Whatever you want, it's there, including communities of real estate investors. Georgia REIA has forums, and so do many other REIA groups and organizations. If you find a good one, it's a great source for tips, questions, and advertisements.

Many forums are pretty awful, though, so how do you find the good ones? Go to your REIA site and look on their list of forums. Or go to Yahoo or Google and do a group search.

Look for active forums with lots of members and lots of recent comments. Sign up and join in. Be prepared to weed some groups out after you've had a chance to watch them for a while.

Eventually, you'll find one or two that really fit you. Those forums will each have a core of people that you'll get to know, and if you "speak" up, they'll get to know you too.

Blogs. A blog, for anyone who doesn't know, is simply an Internet journal or diary. I'll be honest with you, most blogs really stink! Too many of them are just advertisements with no useful information. But the good ones can be wonderful. It's all about content.

What do you look for? Look for blogs that are updated regularly (at least a couple of times a week), have useful information, and allow you to post comments. Once you find a couple of blogs that you like, bookmark them and follow them for a couple weeks to see if they're useful or enjoyable.

Most good blogs have links to the writer's favorite blogs, so check those out as well. Join in, and don't forget to give a link in your comments to your own blog or website.

The whole world. It doesn't matter whether you need to know how to fix a faucet, how to design a web page, or how to find a caterer for a presentation. Between the Internet and the public library, the world is your network.

Of course, for any of these brain-picking ideas to work, you've got to be a good listener. Or to put it another way, you've got to be teachable. Sometimes you'll even have to ask stupid questions. No matter how much of an expert you think you are, don't let your ego stop you from getting even smarter!

Don't ever underestimate (or overestimate!) the intelligence of other people. Everyone can teach you something. Use that fact to build your store of knowledge. Then, guess what? People will get to know you, too. When they know you, they will call you. And that's exactly what you want.

Don DeRosa was recognized as one of the nation's top 21 real estate investors in the New York Times bestseller The Millionaire Real Estate Investor. Don, who is a full-time investor, trainer, and mentor, offers a complete system to build and run a thriving real estate business. For more information on Building Wealth with Real Estate, visit www.donderosa.com.

Synopsis: Everyone, even expert investors, can benefit from networking and listening to others. By listening and sharing information, you can increase your effectiveness, build contacts, and increase profits. If you're at a loss for networking venues, check out seminars, Georgia REIA meetings, events held by other organizations, the Internet, online forums, and blogs.