

**Don DeRosa's**

# *Real Estate Investing for The Real World*



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## **Networking, Again: The Art of Conversation**

*Let us make a special effort to stop communicating with each other, so we can have some conversation. Mark Twain*

A few months back, after spending a heady week leading the semi-annual Investor Bonanza boot camp with Pete Youngs, I wrote about the value of networking to build collective genius. I was delighted, as always, at just how smart my students are, and at how much we can all learn from one another. With another Investor Bonanza coming to Atlanta in September, networking is on my mind again.

Last time, I suggested some ways to meet people. To put it simply, the world is your networking forum. Wherever investors, realtors, homeowners, attorneys, and accountants meet, you can network. Georgia REIA is a great place to start. So is the soccer field at your daughter's school. And so is your house of worship.

But knowing where to go is the easy part. The hard part is knowing what to say and how to say it when you get there. After all, it's called the *art* of conversation for a reason.

How do you break the ice? Why is it so darned hard for some of us to start a conversation? Why do so many of us hate networking, and what can we do about it?

Some of us think the world is divided into three groups of people. First, there are the people you associate with because you want to. That's the A list. Second, there are the people you associate with because have to – the B list. Finally, there's the Z list: the people you don't associate with, either because you don't want to or because you don't think you can. You've probably had a Z list since the third grade. The cutest girl in school was on it, and so was that really strange kid with the stained shirt who was always talking to himself. And everyone has spent at least a little time *on* the Z list.

If you subscribe to the A-B-Z List Theory, then networking will never be pleasant or easy. Why? Because for you, networking is what you do to move people from the Z list (the people you'd just as soon avoid) onto the B list (the people you *can't* avoid). Gee. No wonder you hate it!

But guess what? There aren't three groups of people. There are just *people*. And every single one of them has something unique and interesting to say to you. If you keep that in mind, networking is a lot easier.

How do you uncover a person's unique gift for you? It's easy. Start a conversation. And then, *listen*.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Just what do you say when you're trying to strike up a conversation? Well, hopefully, your networking conversations don't go like this:

"Hi. My name is Biff Gardner." (reaches out to shake hands)

"Oh, hi. Larry Finebloom. Nice to meet you."

"Yeah. Well, I'm a landscaper, and I'd love to give you an estimate on work for your houses. Here's my card."

"Uh, huh. Hey, I'm a landscaper, too. If you ever get a job you need to refer out, give me a call, okay? Yeah. Here's my card."

“Oh. Yeah, sure. And vice versa. So, okay, thanks. Nice to meet you.”

“Yeah, you too.” (And both think in unison, “*Thank goodness that’s over... Next!*”).

When these two guys empty out their pockets tonight, where do you think those business cards are going? Biff saves all his cards, so his will go into a huge book with a thousand others. Larry will just throw his in the trash. Either way, the cards will end up lost in the shuffle. And Larry and Biff won’t even feel good about the conversation. They’ll just chalk up one more person they’ve tried to move from B to Z. It’s one more notch in the belt of networking, but heaven knows which notch.

Not very effective, is it? Yet this is just how people network all the time. It may get more polished with practice, but in the end, it’s just one more nameless notch.

Networking doesn’t have to be like this. The key to meaningful networking is less communication and more conversation, just like Mark Twain said. You don’t even need to exchange names until the very end of the conversation. You just need some opening questions.

If Biff noticed Larry’s brochures on the table, he could say, “Hey, I see you’re a landscaper, too. How are you handling these watering restrictions? They’re driving me crazy!” Then he could sit back and *listen*. And then, perhaps, respond. By the end of this conversation, exchanging business cards would feel a lot more natural. Larry and Biff might even remember each other tomorrow. Over time, they might even become friends and refer work to each other like crazy. How easy is that?

Wherever you’re going, whatever you’re doing, you can prepare quick, easy-to-remember one-liners to get the ball rolling. You can keep your eyes open for something interesting to talk about. It doesn’t have to be about business. Make it about life. Here are some ideas:

At your daughter’s soccer game ask, “Which kid is yours?” or “What do you think of the new coach?”

At the church pot luck, say, “Who made the meat loaf? It’s delicious!” or, “How long have you been coming to this church?”

At a REIA meeting ask, “What neighborhood do you buy in? Why did you choose it?” or, “Do you know of any good seminars coming up?”

And here are some you can say anywhere: “Wow, that bracelet is beautiful. Where is it from?” or, “I overheard you say you were in New Orleans during Katrina? How did you get through it?” or finally, “Hey, that Don DeRosa guy really knows his stuff, doesn’t he?”

Okay, I just threw that last one in.

The fact is, networking is about building relationships. And relationship-building takes a little time. Prepare simple questions. Keep your eyes and ears open for opportunities. Know that every person is inherently interesting and has something to offer. It’s true of you, too.

Oh, and remember that strange kid from the third grade that you didn’t want to talk to? Little William Gates had big things on his mind that year.

*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 info on Building Wealth with Real Estate, visit [www.donderosa.com](http://www.donderosa.com).*

**Synopsis:** Networking isn’t just about quick introductions and business-card exchanges. It’s about building relationships, and that takes time. Everyone has something uniquely interesting to offer you, and you have something unique to give back. Ask questions and listen for the answers. If you have trouble thinking of questions, make up some in advance. As Mark Twain said, concentrate less on communicating and more on conversation. Take it slow, and reap the rewards.