

Sparking Greek Synergy in New York: Workshop Presents Tips and Wisdom

By Angelike Contis

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Networking. After Andrew B. Zezas' talk on the subject at Herald Square's Martinique Café, that's what a gathering of Greek American professionals and their friends were doing. And they actually seemed to be enjoying it! As the July 22 gathering closed, it wasn't just a collection of stiff folks in suits trying to sell themselves while collecting business cards.

At the Greek Synergy event, men and women had genuine smiles and interest on their faces as they exchanged information about where they'd been and where they hoped to go in a rough economy. Two smartly dressed men in real estate said Zezas' tips came right on time; they had job interviews the next day. Other participants ranged from a young woman in publishing who was nervous about industry trends to a man recently let go from a senior post at a major international bank.

"Your career is managing transition. That is your career," Zezas announced, his superhero-like voice booming. At the executive career development workshop entitled "Enough About Me, Let's Talk About Me!", the motivational speaker and real estate executive noted that change is the constant. The average CFO changes post every 14 to 20 months and the average CEO, perhaps every 12 months, he said.

Zezas 'Power Pointed' his way through networking tips. It isn't about grabbing business cards, having a drink and making friends, he explained. It's about strategically selecting people to stay in contact with on a regular basis. He

added: "If you are only a taker, you are not a networker." Generosity, however, is rewarded. Zezas explained: "If you are constantly sending it out, it will come back." He cautioned however, "don't be complacent about your contacts." Being on internet-based networking tools like LinkedIn is key, but it isn't enough.

"It's hard being out there, meeting people," Zezas said. He continued: "But we are adults. We still have mortgage payments to make." He urged the crowd to "get over it", when it came to concerns about being too salesman-like or aggressive.

Zezas warned those in transition not to treat their "time off" like a vacation, but rather to work from



Andrew Zezas, CEO of Real Estate Strategies Corp in New Jersey

Sam each day on the job of finding a job.

During the workshop, participants debated the pros and cons of email vs phone contacts. They learned the merits of having a diverse network, and not just one filled with their own kind. At least one concrete job tip came when a representative from Lyons Mortgage Services, in Long Island City, announced that they were hiring.

Zezas coached the crowd on the need to conduct exhaustive research on companies and people, but also to be ready to seize opportunities when they appear. "Who here can pitch themselves in 15 seconds?" he asked. "Who here has a dynamic, exciting resume?" he inquired. One man offered: "When I was in advertising, I had one." Zezas took a deep breath and advised the group to add headlines to the top of their resumes.

Then Zezas leaned in and let the workshop group in on a secret. Presenting the case for yourself is "like telling a joke in reverse." He repeated several times: "Give the punch-line first!" Many people make the mistake, Zezas explained, of being long-winded and circuitous. It's important to explain clearly and concisely what you can offer – the punch line - and to be ready to explain how you're going to do it.

The CEO of New Jersey-based Real Estate Strategies Corporation cautioned against passive email communication. A phone in hand is the best tool, combined with communication on all other fronts.

As the Manhattan lights glowed outside the windows, the event organizer and Greek Synergy creator Staz Tsiavos thanked café owner Stavros Aktipis and gave a few last words. Referring to the recession's



Andrew Zezas makes a point about networking at a Greek Synergy executive career development workshop titled, "Enough about me. Let's talk about me!" held at Café Martinique in Manhattan.

woes, he noted: "It's hard to be proactive and positive when you are licking your wounds, but we can go from looking at our limited individual resources to being resourceful, which includes helping one another."

Aiming at empowerment in difficult times, Tsiavos formed Greek Synergy in early 2009. It all started as the insurance professional began highlighting Greek names in the Wall Street Journal newspaper, and he began to connect and identify

with those people. Then, it occurred to him: "What is needed is to create a sense of synergia, of working together to help one another." Previous events included the talk "Hope, Prayer and the Economic Crisis: The Really Long Run" at the Harvard Club in March. Two more events will take place this fall.

One of the workshop participants, career coach Penny Kastaris, noted how important networking and building community are when a whopping 75% of jobs are not ad-

vertised and many jobs are posted as long as 90 days after they open.

Before the evening drew to a close, the participants got up and were well on their way in putting new networking lessons into practice.

Additional Reading: *You Inc; Words that Work; The Sales Bible; Mr Schmooze. Helpful Websites:* [15SecondPitch www.15secondpitch.com](http://www.15secondpitch.com), [Debbie Allen www.debbieallen.com](http://www.debbieallen.com).