

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



442 Using Questions to Open Networking Conversations

Since I suffered through years as a reluctant scared puppy of a networker, I'm always interested in new ideas on how to meet up with people you don't know and get a conversation going. I bumped into some advice on that recently and I'm gonna share. I'm Jerry Roberts and today, ideas you can use to get things up and running when you first connect. That's coming next on The Extra Point.

I've told the story before. I was a networking mess from the very beginning. I had no confidence, didn't know what to say, and didn't think I measured up to the others in the room. It took some powerful advice from people who wanted to help, then applying it, before things changed for the better.

Articles and books on networking jump out at me and I'm drawn in by the promise of new and better ideas. This article listed dozens of opening lines to use to guarantee the conversation starts flowing. One of the two the author put at the very top of the list was this: "Hello, my friends and I have been arguing about something. Would you mind serving as our tie-breaker?" I just about stopped reading right there.

Can you imagine walking up to a big business owner or senior leader and delivering that line? Remember, your goal is not just to launch a good two-way discussion, but also to make a solid impression on the other person. Sadly, that line will likely make the wrong impression.

The other *guaranteed* winner was: "Hello, over the last few weeks I've been asking everyone I meet this one question..." Okay, that one has possibilities. Opening with a question is different from the robotic path we usually take when first meeting someone — "So, what do you do?" One, it offers relief to the other person that you're not going to launch into some carefully crafted unique selling proposition, one

that will have them breathlessly hungry to buy from you. Yeah, be careful on that one, okay?

I think questions can be a great way to start the conversation, if they're perceived as legit questions, not a trap that puts them into a buying sequence.

I found a few others that might work with a little editing:

- "If you could take the stage and give a talk about anything you wanted, what would you talk about?"
- "What's the greatest lesson you've learned from one of your adversaries?"
- "If you could have any job in the world, other than the one you have now...what would it be?"
- "How different is the job you have today from what you dreamed of doing as a kid?"

I might rework it like this: "Mary, can I ask you a question?" This gets you away from "I've been asking everyone I meet the same question." How does that make them feel in any way special? "Mary, can I ask you a question? They nod approval and you continue, "What's the greatest lesson you've learned from one of your competitors?"

Since I'm at the Live2Lead conference today and intend to use that line on everybody there, you'll have to choose something else. I'm just kidding. Your assignment for today is to come up with five creative ways to start up a networking conversation. Happy connections!

That's The Extra Point. Get out there and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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For information on how to send your team to the Live2Lead conference on November 7, please click this link: guamtraining.com

