

Networking “It’s Just Lunch”

By Kevin Geer

I remember my first day as a children’s pastor sitting in my first office. I sat in front of a blank computer screen thinking to myself, “I have worked for this a long time—four years of college, thousands of dollars in debt—I have arrived!” The only problem was I didn’t have a clue what to do. So after ten games of Solitaire and 5 games of Minesweeper it was lunch time. I called Josh, a children’s pastor in North Seattle, and asked him to join me for lunch. I still count that as the wisest decision I have made in my 12 years of ministry. That lunch with Josh proved to be the most profitable Kentucky Fried Chicken experience ever! Not only was the chicken great but Josh brought samples of everything he was doing at his church including some curriculum called “The Power Tool Box.” I had everything. In that first day of work I had written all new policies for the children’s ministries (off of which I took Josh’s church’s name and added mine) and planned my first year of curriculum (The Power Tool Box). To top it all off, lunch was free.

What I experienced is the power of networking. Maureen Claury says this: *“Good networks foster good partnerships. These partnerships are based on mutual support for both parties even when they may have different goals.”* Josh and I met for many more lunches following the first—exchanging ideas and information, debating Harry Potter and sharing contacts. Exchanging contacts usually leads to more lunches with different people and more exchanging of ideas. What I did on that first day in the office was start a network of friends that shared and helped each other to fulfill our common desire—to do the Mission of God.

The first step in networking is deciding that you do not want to do ministry alone. Ministry has a natural inclination to be a lonely job. Choosing not to do ministry alone motivates you to pick up that phone and schedule that lunch appointment. I like to compare it to that dating program called “It’s Just Lunch” with the exception that you are not trying to get a spouse out of the deal (though you never know). Often the reason our personal network is so small is because we are insecure and afraid to make the effort in connecting with someone. We worry about what people will think of us or that we may bother them. I have found that people love to help other people. When people are given an opportunity to reproduce what they are doing in other people or simply to share what their ministry is doing, they rarely turn it down.

One principle that helps me take the initiative to make that first contact is this complicated sentence: “People do not think about you as often as you *think* they think about you. The reason is they are too busy thinking about what others are thinking about them. In fact, if you knew how often people actually thought about you, you might feel even worse.” You may have to read that a few times to get it. I had to write it several times just for it to make sense. Simply put, do not let insecurity stop you from connecting with people that can help take your ministry to the next level.

The second step in networking is realizing that you have something to add to the conversation.

Networking is not just one way, but an opportunity for you to have influence on the people you network with as well. The size of church or years of experience should not play a role in who you network with, but the broader your network the more perspectives you receive and can share. I intentionally network with a couple people that do not think like I do. This is often when I grow the most because it forces me to expand my perspective. This also causes me to think through my own personal perspectives and now why I do what I do.

One final thought on networking. Many people want to network, they know they need to network, they just never get around to doing it. My advice... set up a lunch today. "It's Just Lunch".