

BY LARRY IORII / GUEST COLUMNIST

I gained more practical information at my networking meeting than at any other event I've ever attended.



Come over to my place

If you want to learn a lot of useful information that you can use in your company, hold a meeting. It's as simple as opening your home or business for an evening to a group of local competitors. Last year, I held my first networking meeting. This year, I hosted two.

In my case, I organized it for local branch members of the Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS).

The meeting was designed to gather information I couldn't get at traditional conferences. I think it worked great. I've attended local, regional and national conferences for 25 years, but I can say without

a doubt I gained more practical information during the two or three hours my meeting took than during any other event I've ever attended.

How to get started

I mailed a simple notice to all the PGMS branch members, suggesting possible discussion topics. My flyer invited them to "open up" and share information. We then had an informal gathering at my house, complete with favorite local foods.

The two meetings I've held so far were overwhelming successes, probably because everyone was eager to trade information. Once the guests arrived, I handed them a form listing all the discussion topics and let them pick five.

Each discussion group split up into a separate room in my house. Every half hour, guests rotated to a different room to discuss a different topic or the original one.

During the rest of last year, owners and key employees who had attended the meetings continued to thank me for having such a useful gathering. Many competitors got to know each other better and established better ties by trading information.

— The author owns and operates Down to Earth Inc., a landscape firm in Wilmington, DE. He can be reached at 302/654-8113.

Larry Iorii sent this letter to PGMS branch members inviting them to a networking meeting. Copying this format will be helpful to you when you decide to hold your own meeting.

Dear PGMS member:

Due to a positive response from last year's meeting, it's obvious we have many mutual topics to discuss and not enough time. It's also apparent we share many of the same concerns and problems. That meeting was a success because the majority of owners and key employees opened up and shared their practical experiences, concerns, successes and failures.

This meeting's objective: To encourage networking and build relationships between old and new members in an informal setting.

Dinner: Pizza, subs, steak sandwiches, beverages and, of course, desserts.

Cost: No cost (defrayed by sponsors)

Sponsors: I need two at \$___ each per meeting

Meeting 1: Tuesday, Jan. 16 at 6:00 p.m.

Meeting 2: Tuesday, Feb. 13 at 6:00 p.m.

Location: My house, Wilmington, DE

Possible topics (majority vote will select five main topics)

- ▶ Pricing
- ▶ Sources for annuals, perennials, evergreen trees, deciduous trees, etc.
- ▶ Cell phone alternatives and communication/electronic devices
- ▶ Specialty services we can offer each other
- ▶ Insurance (business and health)
- ▶ Employee sources, wages, benefits
- ▶ Snow plowing pricing and concerns
- ▶ Equipment repair, new machines
- ▶ Investments and profit sharing
- ▶ Advertising alternatives
- ▶ Problem-solving plants
- ▶ Your topic

To confirm your attendance, become a sponsor or receive more information, call me at 302/654-8113.