

14. John Gilroy: The Practical Art of Networking

[background conversation]

00:06 John Gilroy: 200 people in a room. This is like a bowl full of ice cream. It's like, wow, this is great. I can meet people, I can interact. There's all kinds of opportunities here.

00:13 Kendall Lott: That may be a familiar voice. From interviews on Federal News Radio, to The Computer Guys on NPR, a show he founded in 1991, John Gilroy has over 20 years experience at the intersection of technology and business in the Washington, DC area and he's all over the air waves with it. An instructor of social media marketing at Georgetown University, he has recently developed a class on the purposes, practices, do's and don'ts of networking.

00:37 JG: Grow your business. That's the ultimate objective. Now, you can grow your personal business or your company business.

00:42 KL: But it's more than growing your business.

00:44 JG: There's so much new technology out there. No one can be an expert in everything. So, I think what networking does is it forces you to learn new and different areas.

00:54 Speaker 3: From the Washington, DC Chapter of the Product Management Institute, this is PM Point of View, the podcast that looks at project management from all the angles. Here's your host, Kendall Lott.

01:03 KL: Networking: An art that can be learned. With communication said to be 90% of a project manager's job, and increasingly with the focus on the role of management of stakeholders, including the executive layer, PMs are becoming attuned to the need to get and keep political and institutional support. You have to network. Program note: John hits us with a lot of topics and subtopics fast, so you may wanna have a pen ready for your second-time listening. It's cheaper than taking the master's course.

01:33 JG: Ideally, in an ideal world, is that you'll grow your own personal brand, and that's what I see happening more and more, especially with the people under 30, is that many of them don't wanna work for big companies for 30 years.

01:43 KL: Right.

01:44 JG: They work for a small company, they work for themselves, they wanna promote their own brand, and that's what you can do with networking is branding yourself. I think if you develop a strong network of contacts, if you're in a situation where you have to change jobs or start your own company, that's the best thing you can do is have a strong federation of weak links. You know, I have like a thousand people on LinkedIn. I'm not gonna go to the beach for a week with every one of those people, but I like to keep in contact with everyone I know. So, a project manager should understand that they control their destiny, and one way to control it is with a strong social media

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profile, LinkedIn specifically.

02:17 KL: And then one of the things that you caught my ear with when we spoke on the phone was you had noted that as you're teaching more about the digital interaction, or the virtual interaction, that you wanted to talk to people about what to do from a networking sense in a very physical interaction as well.

02:31 JG: Well, I've taught for the last four years all kinds of different students, and what happens is the university has me go out and do events for them. So, I speak at events for Georgetown, and I was at an event in September with a bunch of Georgetown people, and I watched my students, and then I did my network and I went home, and I was driving home in my car I said to myself, "These students are terrible. I gotta coach 'em up. I gotta teach them how to do networking." Most of my students are project managers and they're trying to get promoted, so they take my class or they take the Master's degree, and so I came up with a 90-minute workshop on how to do face-to-face networking.

03:01 KL: So what was the gap that you saw that caused you to go like, "Oh, man, there's something missing here"?

03:05 JG: 200 people in a room. This is like a bowl full of ice cream. It's like, wow, this is great. I can meet people, I can interact. I can, you know, promote my company. I can promote myself. There's all kinds of opportunities there. What I saw them doing, they were clumping. They were all sticking together and talking about the Redskins or something. I said, "No, no, no. What you wanna do is you wanna meet as many people as you can in the room and get to know the crowd," because, you know, what I tell my students, there's 1440 minutes in a day. Take 20 minutes of those at that event and network. I mean, that's really the most important thing. That's the first pillar is when to network and, you know, when to grip and grin.

[music]

03:43 KL: So, we have a graphic here.

03:44 JG: Of course!

03:45 KL: One, two, three, four, five parts. So, that'll be, I think, grip and grin, ask a question, be... I feel like we're like doing Jeopardy here.

03:51 JG: Yes, we are! Categories are...

03:53 KL: Grip and grin, ask a question, be specific, weak ink.

03:57 JG: Weak ink, yes.

04:00 KL: And LinkedIn, which is not weak ink.

04:01 JG: Weak ink, yeah. Yeah, these are the five pillars of networking. Let's take them seriatim, one by one.

04:07 KL: Do it.

04:08 JG: First one: Grip and grin. What do you mean by grip and grin? Well, there are many opportunities to network that are presented to everyone every day, but some are good, some are bad. If there's a break between speakers and people go get coffee and it's called a networking break, well, that's your opportunity to meet people, so that's where you can grip and grin. If you go to the Washington Network Group, you'll find out that they're all about networking. If you go to a Chamber of Commerce, Northern Virginia Technology Council, they all have networking opportunities. So, you have to identify what a good opportunity is. I think there's certain easily identified ones and some that you have to personally decide, now I'm very conservative about that, and so when I'm in a business environment I do business networking. When I'm outside, I normally don't.

[music]

04:51 KL: Talk to me about grip and grin itself. I'm seeing a handshake, this is a smile and a handshake. Is this as far as you wanna go with that definition or you got something else going on there?

04:58 JG: Well, what I do when I work a room, I look around and I look at what they call the edge cases. An edge case is a person who's standing all alone or standing in a corner. For example, at this event, there are a bunch of software developers in t-shirts and jeans, and there's one guy standing in a corner alone with a three-piece suit on, and I said "Hmm." So, I walked up to him and said, "Hi, I'm with the welcome wagon, how you doing? Hey, you don't look like a software developer, do you?" And I found he was a lawyer. He was an IP lawyer. Oh, now I get it, so he represents a company that was there for the intellectual property, and so it was great. So what I try to do is look at a networking situation, find someone who is not included, and try to include them.

05:35 KL: The idea of the grip and grin is, is you're meeting people that you don't know, so it's an uncovering process.

05:39 JG: And I have no idea how it's going to go.

05:41 KL: It's a discovery.

05:42 JG: But, what my job is, I meet someone, walk up to someone like you and say, "Kendall, how can I help you? Kendall, what's a good referral for you?" Which is the next point, is number two, ask a question. So, you see Kendall sitting out there. He's got a three-piece suit on, doesn't know anyone in the room, walk up to him. "Hi, my name is John with the welcome wagon. How you doing? What company do you work for? Oh, ABC Company, well, that's interesting. What do you do?" So you ask a question and try to include them into the room. Now what I normally do is I have a very specific list of questions to ask and they're normally very, very specific, which is point number three. In order to be terrific, you got to be specific.

06:13 KL: So what kind of specificity are you after here?

06:15 JG: Well, the question I always use is, "Tell me, Kendall, what's a good referral for you?" So if you ask me that question, "Well, Kendall, a good referral for me would be a \$10 million company

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that has a sales force implementation project that's stuck, that's in hot water. We can help you out."

06:29 KL: That's a really good question, because it drives right to what a person wants, it gets to their need but it's not visioning. It's a very specific thing, like, "Give me a pragmatic response."

06:39 JG: Right. It's not, what's your favorite color? Do you like raisins? Then there's a law of reciprocity kicks in. Then they'll turn to you and say, "Well, jeez, John, how can I help you? What's a good referral for you?" And what I'm teaching the people at BDO is, a good referral for me is a CFO of a \$20 million company that's got a compliance project in trouble. That's a good referral for BDO, isn't it? So grip and grin and then ask a question, but the question should be specific.

07:05 KL: What other kind of specificities do you drive for?

07:07 JG: What size of company? What's the title of a person you're looking for? Is it a CFO? Is that what's important to you? Is it a CEO, who in the C-suite would be important to you? If you have a business card and you walk up to someone, put it right in their face. Well that's not what you do in a social situation. What you do is, "Well, that's interesting, Kendall. May I have your business card?" You never force your business card to anyone. If he doesn't have a business card he doesn't wanna give it to you, doesn't have to give it to you. What I've done is, I'm so aggressive, I reach out and give someone my business card what they'll do is all read it and hand it back. It's called the Card Return. Yeah.

07:45 JG: So you don't wanna do the card... What you wanna do is, "That's interesting, Kendall. May I have your business card?" "Well, certainly." The law of reciprocity. "Well, may I have your business card?" "Sure," you exchange business cards. The biggest problem I've seen is something called the Washington handshake. This is you're at an event and you walk up to someone like Kendall. And you go, "Hey, Kendall, I'm with the welcome wagon, how you doing?" Reaching out to shake your hand, and over your shoulder, I see Bill Clinton and I push you aside and I walk over to Bill Clinton, because I wanna meet him rather than you.

08:13 KL: Oh, it's like a trade in.

08:16 JG: It's the Washington handshake, the Washington is a terrible thing to do.

08:20 KL: So everyone's just power climbing.

08:21 JG: Well, I've seen it and you've seen it. And guess what? It's really offensive, I would never do that.

[music]

08:31 JG: And the point number four is weak ink is stronger than a strong mind. So I'm saying is that if you're in a networking situation, and someone says to you, "Yes, Kendall, Joe Smith over at Xerox needs a software development." What you wanna do is write that down so you remember it, because if you try to remember it, you're gonna forget it. Which brings us to the final point, which is the fifth pillar, is what you wanna do is go to a networking event, come back with five or six cards and then before you go to sleep that night, LinkIn to everyone you meet.

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09:04 JG: And you just reach and you reach out with a specific. "Hey, Kendall, good meeting you at the Chamber of Commerce event. I'd like to link you on LinkedIn." Seed you sow is the grass you mow. Make sure you have a good LinkedIn network where you can keep in touch with people just to find out. For example, three months from now I could be at an event and I go, "Oh, jeez, you're looking for an IP lawyer, oh really? Let me see. Oh, I have his name right here, I met him three months ago." So I can go to my card catalog, or I can go to LinkedIn and find out. I'll probably go to LinkedIn.

09:30 KL: Now you're saying LinkedIn, why are you picking LinkedIn over others?

09:34 JG: Well, I've been involved in many different social networking sites, and from a business perspective LinkedIn seems to be the champ. There are over 300 million people on LinkedIn, it's a very active community and it puts the relationship in a very specific manner. No one cares if I like bagels. No one cares if I lost my shoe yesterday, they care about specific business problems. So what I post on LinkedIn is information that's of benefit to all the people who contacted me.

10:00 KL: Can you talk to us about the use of LinkedIn a little bit to help hone that, 'cause I suspect a lot of us are on LinkedIn but maybe we're not using it in a way that is pointed.

10:07 JG: You can look at LinkedIn from a couple of perspectives. What I teach my class is that LinkedIn is a tool to distribute content. So what I do is I would join 30 groups on LinkedIn and I'd come up with an original blog post that solves a problem for one of my customers and I'll post it not only on LinkedIn with a status update, but to all 30 of my LinkedIn groups. And this can be duplicated for software development, it can be duplicated for something like wire testing for aerospace. It can be duplicated for Share Point. For example with this interview. What you should do is you should write a 600-word blog post about this interview, take a photograph of the person who is being interviewed and then you post that to your website and then you put the keywords in, they're 'face-to-face networking', 'networking', 'John Gilroy', then you take and post that to every one of your 15 LinkedIn groups that you're a member of. There are two million LinkedIn groups out there of social media. What does it cost? Free. What's it cost to be in LinkedIn? Free, what about Twitter? Free, what about email? Free.

11:04 KL: So coming out of a physical meeting, you're gonna go into a LinkedIn environment.

11:08 JG: Oh, definitely.

11:09 KL: Work it the other way round. Is this a place to be inviting people to events, is this how you generate desire to be at networking events?

11:18 JG: Here's the phrase that pays: Affinity groups. What I see people reacting to is, "Hey, Kendall, do you wanna go to trade show with 20,000 people?" "I don't know. I don't wanna sit in a room with 300 people." I spoke at a trade show in December. There were 4,000 people there. I was approached by three CIOs, and they said, "You know, this show's just too big. I can't really sit down with Kendall, and spend 20 minutes and pick his brain." So we'd like to do is we like to set up a small affinity group of just 20 people and meet once a month in a breakfast club and bring in a speaker. I have to know about so many new things I wanna get to know about creative analytics, I wanna get to know about data visualization, I wanna get to know about mobile device management. It would be much better for 20 of my peers.

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12:05 KL: One of the things that project managers need to do is to keep political support for their projects. I think that seems to be a valid area that perhaps networking would be important in. But what have you seen?

12:16 JG: There's so much new technology out there. No one can be an expert in everything. If you're at a networking event and you walk up to someone and go, "Hey, Kendall. You got a suit and tie on here, buddy. You don't look like a software developer." "Well, I'm a project manager." "Oh, that's interesting. What kind of..." "Well, I'm working on a project where we're taking multiple data streams and we're combining them with Oracle to come up with some predictive analytics." "Wow, what's the new stuff you're working?" "Working with a company called Burst." "Oh, really?" Well, the more people you know who understand Burst, the more people you know who understand how HTML5 can be broken in Wordpress, the more people you know about managing mobile devices and the Microsoft Surface versus iPad, the better you can be at managing a project. So, I think what networking does is it forces you to learn new and different areas.

13:01 KL: Well, thank you for all that input. Here, I'll give you a card, too. We're exchanging cards...

13:05 JG: Yeah. It's gonna go in my card file.

13:07 KL: I'm not looking at the guy behind his shoulder, I give him the card.

13:09 JG: This isn't a Washington card exchange? [laughter]

13:11 KL: No, it's not a Washington card exchange. You actually get to keep that one.

[music]

13:17 KL: Special thanks to today's guest, John Gilroy. Our theme music was composed by Molly Flannery, used with permission. Post-production performed at Empowered Strategies and technical and web support provided by Potomac Management Resources. I'm your host, Kendall Lott and until next time, keep it in scope and get it done.