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## Beatles-inspired executive networkers offer mutual help

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By Gary Puleo



Steve English, finance manager of Special Olympics of Pennsylvania, inside the conference room of the West Norriton offices. Photo by Gene Walsh

WEST NORRITON — It's not your average bunch of CEOs who invoke the curtain-closing moments of The Beatles' "Abbey Road" album in their mission statement.

But then again, there's nothing average about the folks who network through Greater Philadelphia Senior Executives Group (GPSEG), where the leaders believe that, as The Beatles said in one of the last tracks they ever recorded, "in the end the love you take ... is equal to the love you make," and strive to embrace that philosophy in everything from sharing job leads to volunteerism.

You don't necessarily have to attend a CEO Roundtable session — it's one of several GPSEG specialized subgroups — to understand how a bunch of guys accustomed to earning hefty salaries regularly put The Beatles' words of sharing the "love" into practice.

Just ask eight-year-member Steve English.

Though he didn't land his job as manager of local programs with West Norriton-based Special Olympics of Pennsylvania from his GPSEG connections, English does credit the group for the networking savvy he's cultivated there, which sprung him from the corporate rat race into the nonprofit world.

“The principles I learned from GPSEG helped me get in touch with an old college friend who had a need at the time,” said English, who co-led one of the aforementioned subgroups, geared toward supply chain and operation management positions.

“So networking does help.”

English easily met GPSEG’s selective standards for membership — a “C” level executive position salaried with at least 20 years experience at a pre-bonus salary of \$100,000 or \$150,000, for starters — which gave him initial confidence in the types of individuals he’d be hobnobbing with.

With members coming from Montgomery, Bucks, Lehigh, Chester and other surrounding counties, GPSEG breakfast, lunch or dinner meetings are held regularly in the Philadelphia area and New Jersey.

Membership is split fairly evenly between those “in transition” and those who are gainfully employed.

Though some folks choose to bail out when they hit pay dirt in the way of a job, many remain members, which English thinks is a sound idea.

“Some people get a position and drop out of it, figuring they don’t have the time, but it never hurts to keep your network up. If I’m ever back out on the street I know I at least have my network of people that I know quite well. I could easily just pick up the phone and get back in touch ... and that’s really the whole thing. You really have to network for life.”

Staying in the group also provides the ultimate opportunity to uphold that Beatles “equal to the love you make” philosophy by allowing one to share knowledge with those in the group who are not quite as fortunate on the job front.

Dwayne Patterson, Vice President of Townsend Machine in Chesterfield, N.J. has been a GPSEG devotee practically from the time the group was founded in 2002 by Chris Pavlides, who, sadly, was killed in a car accident in 2009.

“Chris was in transition and looking to meet with other executives, so he pulled together the first meeting by inviting 30 people he knew at a hotel in King of Prussia,” Patterson recalled. “Everybody had five minutes to tell their story and started connecting with each other and how they could help each other.”

From that gathering of 30 people, GPSEG has blossomed into an organization with 1,500 members today.

“I got into the group via networking; meeting one person, you build a relationship, and they introduce you to somebody else,” Patterson noted. “That’s the essence of GPSEG: building relationships and getting comfortable knowing you can recommend someone when you know a little bit about what their strengths are and where they may potentially have value.

“It’s kind of a ‘pay it forward’ mentality. In the end, you get a lot of rewards back.”

Lately the rewards have been proliferating in the form of volunteerism, Patterson added.

Early this month, a group of members got down to work sorting clothing and testing toys and baby equipment for the nonprofit Cradles to Crayons organization in West Conshohocken.

“We now have a mentorship program of about 300 members who are mentoring students in the various universities in the area,” he said. “A number of members have done volunteering over the years, but it’s more of a coordinated effort now. There’s a pretty strong spirit of community minded responsibility that permeates the group.”