

Network Your NEXT Opportunity feat. Greg Lainas

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Tommy: Welcome back to another episode of “Northeastern Next.” On today's episode we have retired CPA Gregory Lainas. We'll hear some great stories about what it was like going to Northeastern in the 70s, an interesting connection with a Northeastern professor, and the power of networking. Let's get into it.

Music: Fades

Tommy: Hi everybody, welcome back to the “Northeastern Next” podcast. I'm here with Greg. How are you today, Greg?

Greg: Very good, Tommy.

Tommy: Good!

Greg: Thank you for having me here.

Tommy: Yeah, how's everything down in Connecticut?

Greg: Well, we finally got some cold weather.

Tommy: Yeah.

Greg: I'm not complaining. I mean, I'm not complaining with warm weather. Leaves are on the ground. So, my yard is full of those things.

Tommy: It has definitely...this past weekend absolutely felt like the first fall weekend in New England, at least in my opinion. It's either been raining or it's been nothing but a little too much sunshine, a little too hot for me.

Greg: Well, anytime you don't have to turn the thermostat on is a good day.

Tommy: Absolutely. So, thank you again for joining the podcast. And if we can just jump into it, I'd love to hear about your Northeastern experience. If you don't mind giving us just a little bit of background on why you picked Northeastern, what year you graduated from, your degree from Northeastern, even if you have a couple of favorite stories that you'd like to share, because I'm sure we would all love to hear them.

Greg: Very good. All right. Thank you, Tommy. Well, I grew up in Waterbury, Connecticut, and my high school I went to was Holy Cross High School. And I was the second graduating class out of the school. So, there was no history for success with where only one of the classes was ahead of us that could go. So, there's no track record.

So, the guidance counselor really was not helpful, truth be told. But through my own research, the two schools I wanted to go to were either Fordham or Northeastern. Now, I found out about

Northeastern—true story—my parents were reading the article in Time Magazine about the co-op. And since my parents were born in Brooklyn, I remember my mom and dad saying, “You know, you should look at the school because you know New York City, you should learn another city.” So, the more I followed up on the school and research as best as you could, because I'm going back to 1973. So, it's obviously a long time ago. But anyway, I chose Northeastern because of the co-op. And they also were the first school that accepted me. I always said I'd go to the first school that accepted me. And so, it was December of my senior year in high school. And I felt with my grades, which were nothing outrageously good, that I figured I better get an interview. And I got accepted right then and there.

So, going into Christmas, it was wonderful. I already got accepted. So, my first dorm I lived in was Light Hall. And to this day, my two closest Northeastern buds were in that dorm. In 1973, it was the smallest dorm on campus. They only had maybe 60 students in it. So, I did have a couple of classmates from high school that went to Northeastern, only one I really stayed in touch with. But my two closest buddies were Light Hall residents.

So, the co-op program was very good to me. I got my first job working at a Big Eight accounting firm because my friend's father was a manager with the firm in Waterbury. But my co-op coordinator could not believe that I got the job on my own. I said, “What's the big deal? I sent out a letter, made a phone call, and I got the gig.”

The most interesting story, though, I was in the internal audit department. At the time, it was New England Electric System, which became National Grid out in Westborough. The manager and the director both told me to go into sales. I said, “No, I want to be an internal auditor. Like, well, what are you guys talking about?” So, little did I know at that time that I would end up in a sales role.

I also did co-op with the Massachusetts Department of Internal Auditors. And I guess I got too chummy with the audit team because they said they wouldn't hire me. What's so bad about becoming friendly with them? Well, I guess that didn't work out well. But it really was a great experience.

Now, having raised three daughters, I always told them, I want you to enjoy college life, but I don't want you to love school. Because if you love school, when you get out of school, you think it's going to be easier than it is. So, I want people to hate going to school, hate going to class, hate studying, hate midterms, finals, term papers, etc. But I want them to love the environment. And we had a great environment.

Now, I lived in Smith Hall, which was the first co-ed dorm at NU. And coincidentally, that's where I met my wife.

Tommy: Oh!

Greg: So, we grew up 20 minutes apart, and we lived in the same dorm on the same floor.

Tommy: Wow, that's funny!

Greg: We were introduced by a mutual friend. So, you just never know. And my two closest friends, one of them met his wife at NU, and his wife fixed my other roommate with one of her buddies. So, you just never know what happens.

Tommy: Oh, yeah.

Greg: So overall, it was a very good experience. And I felt quite fortunate to have attended NU.

Tommy: I think that's a really...just taking away from that story. I think that's just a really interesting perspective to have on not only your university life, but I think that it's pretty clear to that from that story, you're able to take some of the stuff that you learned at Northeastern and develop them into life skills, and really apply them to your future career, your personal life, just wherever it may be. Now, that being said, it sounds like from our preliminary call, one of your best skills is networking. And do you mind telling us a little bit about how not only did you network your first job out of college, but you even networked your first co-op at Northeastern?

Greg: I did. Well, I was also going to say I was an RA in the dorm. And when I interviewed, and when I later would interview for full-time employment, everybody I met always remembered about their RA and what... So, that was always a good conversation piece.

Tommy: Yeah.

Greg: But regarding the co-op, what I mean, running the networking, we'll talk about later, I ended up in sales. However, when you first start out, your spectrum of wanting to do things is very wide.

Tommy: Right.

Greg: You're going to retire by the time you're 35. You're going to see the world. It's incredibly wide. You become a CFO, president, whatever. And as you get older, if you don't like vegetables when you're older, you don't have to eat them unless your doctor is telling you to. But as you get older, you migrate to what you really like to do.

But you may not realize that when you're first coming out of school. So, the co-op was, as I started to make reference to was with Pete Mark Mitchell, which is now KPMG. And I got the job just through my friend and my co-coordinator couldn't get over how I was able to pull that off.

Now, roll forward to when I'm a senior and I took an internal audit course, and we had an adjunct. And the adjunct got me the job with Industrial National Bank, which became Fleet Bank in Providence, Rhode Island. So, I was involved with career services on campus. Really, Northeastern had an incredible program of attracting companies. I took as many interviews as I could.

And one thing I did do, I remember IBM and Texas Instruments both came on campus for sales and marketing people. And I got an interview and they look at my resume and they said, “Well, why are you here, Greg?” Because here I was, I wanted to be an accountant, internal audit, whatever. And I said, “This is my only chance to have a one-on-one with a representative of your company. And if you like me, even if you are here for sales or marketing people, you're going to refer me to the accounting recruiter.” Well, I got seconds with both of them, but it was a great program.

So, I'm working in the bank in Rhode Island. My wife and I are engaged. We made a decision. She's living in Boston—well, Framingham—working in Boston. I'm living in Cranston, Rhode Island, and we grew up in Naugatuck Valley of Connecticut. So, we made a decision. We want to move back to Connecticut, but yet, neither of us had a job in Connecticut.

So, we got married in '79. We got out of school in '78, do the math, five years, right? Northeastern. So how I got the job in Connecticut, because I went to a CPA firm whose name is now Whittlesey, but when I was there it was Whittlesey and Hadley. And I would pick up the Hartford Current on the weekend. And then I'd get back to my apartment Sunday night in Cranston, and I would circle the entry-level public accounting ads. So, the decision I had to make was, “Well, do I call? Do I send a letter? Send my resume? What do I do? What do I do? What do I do?” And under the adage, if you have all day to do something, it'll take you all day to do it. We were getting married and the clock's ticking.

So, I got lucky. I made also the decision rather than take a roll of dimes and go into a phone booth at lunchtime, or go to a private office and charge it to my apartment phone, or as I said, send a letter, I made a decision. I'm going to fly home to my apartment and start dialing right then and there, because it's now closer to 5:30 and the only people that answer the phone are going to be leaders.

So, I call this one guy, a CPA, who subsequently passed away. And he said, “I can't help you, but I know someone who can.” He gives me Bob Hadley's name and phone number. Well, I call immediately, mispronounced Bob's name. He answered the phone. So, I had a prepared 30 second commercial as it's called today, elevator pitch, call it whatever you want. But I knew I had to do something and it was genuine, not reciteful. Well, as soon as I said Northeastern to Bob Hadley, Bob starts asking me about the school. I said, “Why is he asking me about the school? What's the big deal? Well, guess where his daughter and son went?”

Tommy: Oh, that's funny.

Greg: And then another partner in the CPA firm, his son went to Northeastern. And on top of this, Bob and I went to Northeastern, and we recruited a co-op. That was his only co-op job. And he's one of the top partners in the firm now. So, the Northeastern mix or numbers were really good to Whittlesey. So, to this day, I still tell him, “You owe me.” The guy helped me get a job.

We're both old farts. And I said, "But you owe me." So that was probably my greatest networking. And I used to tell people, if I can do it, you can do it.

Tommy: That story right there, I think is great too, because it really shows the strength of Northeastern's global network and how much weight the Northeastern name truly carries in the professional world. So that being said, after your first job, you were working at some pretty name brand companies like Robert Half and ESPN. Did the Northeastern name help you at all with those positions or did anything that you learned at Northeastern really help you?

Greg: Well, I mean, when you look at the career services and all the interviews that the school had available to me with all the companies coming on campus and all the little seminars we had and resume writing, et cetera, interviewing, blah, blah, blah. That lasts a lifetime. Because once you can do it again, it's just how many times you do it.

But after the public accounting, well, one of the clients of the CPA firm was the manager of the Robert Half office. So, I went knocking on the door and this was, I want to say 1983, I'm a little shaky. And he started talking about becoming a recruiter, going into sales. And I said, "No, this isn't what I want to do." Meanwhile, a very good friend of mine is a cameraman at ESPN. So, we were living in Bristol, Connecticut at the time, my wife and I and our children, one of our children. We only had one at the time, excuse me.

So, I begged them to give me a tour. We go in on a Saturday night and I'm walking into a live ESPN Sports Center update. I said, "What are we doing in the room?" He goes, "You drop paperclip, you're going to get me fired." "Well, what are we doing here?" He goes, "I want you to get the experience."

So, I met Bob Ley that night.

Tommy: Wow!

Greg: And I forgot the other person I met, might've been Roger Twibell, I'm a little shaky on who that was, but I came out and I said, "I have to work here." So, when the opportunity came up in my cover letter, I wrote how I got a tour of the company, and I wanted to work there. Of the other, supposing 99 people that applied for the job, not one had a tour.

Tommy: That's a really cool story. And it kind of is making me think about my next question. And obviously your bread and butter is networking. So, I think that, especially for the younger listeners of this podcast, I think a question that they'd be really interested in, even myself, is what do you think the key to networking is? Do you think that there's one real key to success for it? Or is it a little more multifaceted than that?

Greg: Well, it's really common sense. And I've done a lot of seminars on really giving people fundamentals about networking. The first thing is you basically ask for help because you never know how a contact can lead. Getting to Robert Half, I ended up working in the sales and marketing departments at ESPN. And I said, "Well, these guys are all making a ton of money

and I'm putting numbers in boxes.” I'm a finance person because I became a CPA. Sso, I got out of that. I wanted to get into sales. So I went back. So, working at ESPN inspired me to get into Robert Half.

But to answer your question, whether it's LinkedIn, whether it's a family member, whether it's your place of worship, whether it's your high school you went to, whether it's Northeastern Career Services, whether it's grads after you or before you, all those are sources. All you have to do is pick up the phone and call.

So, it's not hard. It's just common sense. I mean, I tell people I can do it. You can do it. I mean, I got the job in the public accounting firm. And then when I was at Robert Half, I became president of the Connecticut Society of CPAs. I was the first non-practicing CPA to attain that role. I was president of one of the local IMA chapters, Institute of Management Accounts. But I've been in podcasts. I serve on the advisory board to two universities.

But the fact is, all that came out of networking. Becoming president of the Connecticut Society, I was playing in the golf tournament. And a good friend of mine asked me again on the committee, the golf committee. I actually raised the most money. I got people from ESPN, the talent to be our MCs.

So, it's not what you do. It's how well you do it. So, because of my volunteering there, I got asked to be on the board. And then that grew into becoming president of the society.

Tommy: That's really cool. And its kind of just, as you're saying that, it kind of reminds me of, to steal your word from earlier, the adage that the best jobs aren't necessarily the ones that are listed.

Greg: The one I got at Whittlesey, they weren't even looking for anybody. They hired me. So, I don't know if they regretted that, but they hired me, nonetheless.

Tommy: So how did you get into a space of giving seminars on networking?

Greg: Well, when I look at my strengths, I mean, nobody was going to ask me to give a talk on technical accounting. I wouldn't ask me to give a talk on technical accounting. But yet, what value did I bring? Well, resume writing, interviewing, networking, et cetera.

So, it started innocently enough speaking at one of the schools, one of the colleges. It was a panel discussion. And the next thing I know, I got asked to speak again. And then next thing you know, I got involved with other professors, other schools, because it would come from literally doing reference checks on some of their students that I may have placed. And it just began. And I would say, “Well, what are you looking for, for your audience?” “Well, networking would be great. Resume writing.”

Okay. So, I put together some programs and I would tailor it so that it wasn't literally designing the next rocket. I made it simple. So, you take baby steps until you get confident and

comfortable. I used to tell people, what is the worst thing that happens if you don't pick up the phone and call somebody? Nothing's going to happen.

Tommy: Right!

Greg: But what's the worst thing that happens if you do? It could lead to something, a lifelong friendship.

Tommy: Yeah, absolutely. The benefits absolutely outweigh the risk of everything.

Greg: Right.

Tommy: Yeah.

Greg: And the thing is, when you talk to people who obtain employment or continue to prosper, if you put them all in the room, they would all have the same strengths. I don't care what their field of endeavor is, whether it's accounting, whether it's physics, schoolteacher, scientist, I don't care, whatever it was, they'd all have the same common traits. But it's asking for help and thanking the person for help. And if someone helps you, you must remember to help somebody else.

Tommy: Oh, absolutely. I think paying it forward is probably a bit of a cornerstone when it comes to networking.

Greg: I've spoken at high schools, colleges, universities, the Connecticut side of CPAs. This organization is no longer in business, but it used to be the Association of Women Accountants, the Financial Executives Institute, all the IMA chapters, even regionally. I'm forgetting how many I've spoken. I don't mean that it just all blended together. And quite often, more than once.

Tommy: So how often are you given these speaking engagements? And when you are giving them, how can somebody find out about it and maybe attend one?

Greg: Well, since I'm retired now, Tommy, that has diminished. The last one I did was probably a year ago. And I did do some during COVID. And I did them virtually. And I did one on how to network during the COVID and how to interview virtually.

Tommy: Yeah, that's important.

Greg: There was nothing out there to guide people. But I, you know, truth be told, I haven't been asked. And I'm also not necessarily pounding on the door to ask to be speakers. But if someone wants me, I'm available. So, I find over the years, I've actually helped the clients that I dealt with. I've actually helped their children.

Tommy: Oh, wow.

Greg: The kid, whatever, the child doesn't want to listen to mom and dad, but they'll listen to a total stranger.

Tommy: Yeah, it's funny how that works.

Greg: I give them a plan. And I say, listen, if you don't ever call me back, that's fine. If you want to call me back, I'll help you.

Tommy: And it goes back. It's like, what's the worst that can happen if the worst happens?

Greg: What's the worst thing that's going to happen? Nothing.

Tommy: Really, yeah.

Greg: No one is going to chop your head off.

Tommy: Right? Honestly, the worst they can say is no.

Greg: And you move on.

Tommy: Move on. Exactly.

Greg: I mean, LinkedIn is probably the most powerful tool. It is a wonderful tool to find people. And something as simple as, let's say, Tommy, you're at another school, your current role, but you want to get to Northeastern. Well, you can send your resume in, you can apply online, and it'll end up in the circular or the delete button. Or you can find somebody who knows somebody that knows somebody that is in the department that you want to pursue. It could be an alum of your high school. It could be actually be an alum of the college that you went to. You just never know. All you have to do is look.

Tommy: Yeah, that's a really great point. So, kind of to just, well, actually, no, this is another question. You mentioned LinkedIn. Are you on Northeastern's website, NU source? Have you heard of that?

Greg: Well, all right. Now, I've got to come clean, be transparent, call whatever you want. Have I been? No. Will I be? Yes.

Tommy: Good. That's awesome.

Greg: That was after talking to you and Elsie.

Tommy: Oh, great. Oh, I'm glad to hear that. Yeah.

Greg: I'm not going to lie. I wasn't on it before because once I retired, I would go on the Northeastern...I mean, there's thousands on the LinkedIn page and I would when I was working, I would go to the LinkedIn group.

Tommy: Oh, yeah.

Greg: See if there's people on there that I know, because I could have clients that went to Northeastern or there could be a company I was trying to get to know and do business with and would make a big difference if there was the NU connection.

Tommy: And NU source I know really emphasizes that NU connection. And it's my understanding. It's been a fantastic way, especially for undergraduates to find their co-ops. And it's really just Northeastern, almost exclusive jobs just for Northeastern students or Northeastern graduates.

But speaking of just Northeastern and utilizing the network, your networking skills, it sounds like have given you a really cool opportunity with Northeastern professors. What was that?

Greg: That's a true story. Well, you go back to 1973. My English Lit professor was a guy named Robert Parker. Now, Robert Parker wrote the Jesse Stone series and all the Spencer for Hire series books.

Tommy: That's so cool.

Greg: And that became a TV show in the 80s, starred Robert Urich, who's passed. Now, Bob Parker died. But roll forward to 1975 and I'm with my roommate. And he said to me, "We have to take this course." I said, "What are you talking about?" He goes, "It's science fiction and it's taught by Gary Goshgarian." I said, "What? What accountant takes an English Lit course as an elective? What are you nuts?" So, I take the course.

Now, interesting thing is I'm of Greek descent and Gary is Armenian. I'm going to come back to that. But the Greeks and the Armenians are very close. So, customs, food, et cetera. Well, I don't get to know Gary. I don't meet him. And it was in the auditorium, which at the time was the largest class size in the whole university.

So, roll forward to our 25th college reunion, which if I did the math right, it was 2003. It was held obviously at Northeastern. My wife and I went, one of my roommates who met his wife, that group from Light Hall came. And the roommate who made me take the course was there too. He didn't bring his wife. So, it was poorly attended. And you must remember, Tommy, that in the 70s, Northeastern was the largest private university in the country.

Tommy: Really? Oh, I didn't realize that.

Greg: Well, because of the five years, the co-op, the day students, the enrollment. So, we get to this hole in the wall, small room. We couldn't even find the building. "Where are we going?" So, we walk in, there's the president greeting, whatever. There was a band, they had a marching band, whatever. They had some of the band members there.

I look around, I said to my wife, "Well, we paid for the meal. Our kids are home. We got babysitting in Connecticut. So, this is a night on the town for us." Well, I find the propaganda and it said that Gary Goshgarian was going to be the speaker. I said, "Oh, this is cool."

So, I see him walk in. And to this day, I still tell him the story. He was standing in the corner chewing gum, looking like a fish out of water. So, I said to my wife, "There's Gary. I have to go talk to him." She goes, "Don't embarrass me." I said, "Don't worry, I will." So, I go talk to Gary.

He ends up sitting with us for dinner and he ad-libbed his talk. And it was phenomenal. And he even talked about how, “Hey, I was having dinner with Nick and Joan and Greg and Larry and Marianne.” I said, “This is great.” So, you never know.

Anyway, post that. I start to email Gary and call him rarely because you have this image. He's a college professor. He's way up there and he's not going to want to talk to me other than that one night. So, use the Greek connection. And Gary is quite an accomplished author for anybody that's never read his books. He's got one, I believe one book is under Gary Goshgarian and the rest are under Gary Braver. So, you can go to GaryBraver.com.

But he wrote a book called “Flashback” that came out, I don't know, 10 years ago. While he's writing, I said, “Gary, you have to put me in one of your books. You've got to take care of your Greek brethren here.” So, my wife and I are in that book.

Now his book that just came out two weeks ago, it's called “Rumor of Evil.” My wife and I are in that book too. So, anybody who's ever read Clive Cussler books, when he wrote his books, he used to put himself in a book and he always put himself in a scene. So, I used to say, “Hey Gary, if Clive Custer can do it, why can't I do it? Who cares? No one's going to care.” So, and the deal is that if it goes bestseller and it becomes a movie, I get to play my own part.

Tommy: Nice.

Greg: Yeah, we'll see about that. But anyway. So, tying that into my speeches and into the podcasts that...were the two podcasts I was in, what I used to do was take “Flashback” in the class. And when my session was over, I would pick on a student, usually the one that I thought was sleeping, pick on someone in the audience. And these were mature adults or college kids. It didn't matter. So, I'd make them, I'd throw, you know, toss the book. I said, “Read the back flap.” And the back flap is traditionally about the author. It said, “Gary, Gary Braver, pen name, real name, Gary Goshgarian, professor at Northeastern.” I said, “Okay, stop there. Okay. Where did I say I went to school?” Northeastern. I said, “Now go to page 115.”

So, they go to page 115. It's a scene in Hartford. And my wife and I are in the book as a couple and someone starts reading and all of a sudden I get, “Wow.” So, I was saying, ‘Okay, that's enough. You don't need to read anymore. We're only in there a couple of pages.’ So, I stopped. Then I ask, “So why do you think I asked you to read the book?” And, of course, the answer is that they give us, “Well, you want us to know you're in a book.”

No, that's not the correct answer. The answer is if I can network my way into a book, you can network your way into a job. Now, the podcast that I was in was by, the host name is Peter Margaritas, another Greek guy that I met at a continuing professional education seminar called a CPE seminar. Cause I had my license at the time, and he was the speaker. And he wrote his name on the board. He said, this guy's Greek. I have to go talk to him.

So that spawned a friendship. And then lo and behold, I don't know, a year later, six months later, whatever it was, he asked me if I'd be interested in doing a podcast with him. And Peter did 29 episodes of interviews. And then his 30th episode was a summary of the 29 interviews, and they were 50 minutes, an hour long, whatever. So, he went through all 29 people and their one quote, and you know, "Mary Jones says this, Charlie Jones says this." Then when it was, when that was done, he then ranked his five best quotes.

So, why am I telling you that? Here's another story. So, he reads off number five. I said, "Well, I guess that didn't come in fifth place." Good. Reads off number four. "Well, didn't get that one either." Odds are plummeting. Goes to number three, number two. And he said, "My number one quote is from Greg Lainas. And it says, if I can network my way into a book, you can network your way into a job." So, I tie that all into the networking to show that it is not hard. It's not writing a term paper.

Tommy: And I think that quote really sums up that sentiment too. And I think that's something that, you know, especially like I mentioned earlier, the younger listeners, the listeners who are still in their undergraduate years or are about to graduate their fifth years and about to graduate and really enter the quote unquote real world. It's an important part of the professional world. But at the same time, I can understand why it would be a little daunting at first, but it really is not as bad as it seems to network. And it's a lot easier to network than you might initially realize.

Greg: Well, you don't want to be phony. You want to be genuine.

Tommy: Of course.

Greg: Have you ever been to a party where you're in conversation with somebody and they're going like this. Like, dude, you're not engaged. You're not even listening to me. You don't want to talk to me. That's not, I find to be, that's very disrespectful. So, you and I meet for the first time. Well, follow up with an email, a thank you note. And by the way, I tell people to have after an interview or some type of networking meeting, I tell them to follow up with a handwritten note, provided your handwriting is good.

Because in the day of snail mail, you get something, you toss it. And then when we went to email, oh, people couldn't wait to read an email. Well, eventually their emails flooded, delete, delete, delete, delete. Then you get something in the mail. You read it. You do what nobody else is doing. So, you have a good conversation. You meet someone. I don't care if you're a freshman or a sophomore or a senior. You're at a function, whether it's a fundraiser, whether it's some type of dance, a dinner, I don't care, whatever it is. You just never know who you meet and what that can do for you.

And when you don't do something with it, then shame on you. So, I used to tell people, I'm not saying go in with a tape recorder and record the conversation, but I am saying, get a diary. I don't care. Put an Excel spreadsheet. I don't care. Write down who you spoke to. What did you talk about? Where does he or she work? Is there a next step? If there isn't, so be it. Because you are

not going to remember a week later that you met Sally Smith at this function. How do you think Sally would feel if you followed up with a phone call or you send her a note saying how it was so nice meet you. Do you think anyone else is doing it? Probably not. Do you need Sally's help? Maybe not today but tomorrow you might.

One of the easiest ways to find a job in networking is to serve in a not-for-profit.

Tommy: Okay.

Greg: A not-for-profit that you are passionate about. Not to go just for shaking hands and passing out your resume. Something dear to your heart. Because, traditionally, people will judge you based on how you act as a volunteer. Who serves on the boards? Most likely professional people in the workforce. Whether a doctor, a nurse, CPA, whatever! How cool is that, that you get to meet them.

Tommy: That is really cool. That's awesome.

Greg: I always tell people in a recession, volunteer your time. If you are unemployed—or, excuse me, between positions—and you are trying really hard, volunteer. You never know where that leads.

Tommy: Yeah, absolutely. Some of the most I've ever met have been through volunteer opportunities.

Greg: There you go.

Tommy: Yeah.

Greg: Now, if you don't follow-up with those people or develop a rapport with them, not with the expense of your responsibilities as a volunteer, but if you don't follow-up with them, shame on you.

Tommy: Oh, yeah, it's one of those things where there is a very self-driven aspect to it. It's kind of a balance between like...you can only lead a horse to water so many times.

Greg: There you go. Make them drink. Right. So, just something as simple with my first co-op job. It grew exponentially. So, I lived and died by my networking at Robert Half. When I was there, I became the first in the history of Robert Half to get 20 million in gross margin. So, at one point, I was the top all-time cumulative producer, world-wide.

Tommy: That is impressive.

Greg: These are people who, other representatives who lived in very large cities and I'm working in downtown Hartford. So, I used to tell people, "If I can do it, you can do it." I wouldn't have become president of the Connecticut Society if I wasn't at Robert Half. I wouldn't have ended up at Robert Half if it wasn't for Whittlesey. The list...you can trace it back and peel back the onion until the original days at NU. It goes back to Bob Hadley.

Tommy: So, it sounds like you have a very extensive career and...

Greg: I'm no different from anybody else. I mean, that is very kind of you to say that, Tommy. I'm just an average guy. I mean, my wife loved me, she thought I had money, but all I had was hair. So, that's a separate issue. I found my niche and I went after it.

Tommy: And I think that's a very important thing for people to remember is that everybody is going to be talented at something. It's really just a matter of focusing on it is a better way to put it. And really just... I don't know if exploiting is the right word but...once you find your lane and able to capitalize on it, great things are going to happen.

Greg: That's right! And I loved...because what I did was, I helped people find work and I helped clients solve problems. I was literally a matchmaker. Now, I solved problems, and I got paid to do it, which is even better. My whole thing is if I can do it, you can do it.

Now, I'll say this is that to those that hear this or don't hear it, whatever. To those who hear it, you can find me on LinkedIn, and you can send me an email LinkedIn, whatever they call it. And we'll talk! I'll do my best to help you because I also find that most people are hesitant to talk in a group setting to say that they have a problem. But the moment one person says it, they all pipe in and they all have the same issue. So, if someone is uncomfortable and needs some help and guidance, I'll walk them down the path because some of these skills are timeless. There are other methods to reach the goal but the networking skills are always the same.

Tommy: Yeah. Absolutely. And I think that every you've said this episode is going to resonate with a lot of people and it's kind of like what you were alluding to earlier, it's universal. It doesn't matter what stage you are at in your career, whether or not you are just graduating, you're in the middle of your career, or wherever, these are skills you are going to be able to use and you are going to be able to utilize them fully to help you get to that next level.

Greg: You know, my oldest daughter graduated number one in UCONN's accounting class. My middle daughter became a licensed social worker, undergrad, masters. And my youngest became a naturopathic doctor. So, my wife and I are brought up with the same work ethic because we are both children of two World War II vets. So, we have a work ethic instilled in us that I refuse to let it succumb to what's out there today.

So, a couple of things I would tell to your students is that you can never have enough money, but you can only get a grade once. You can only find a job, but you can't take that test over. Never sacrifice grades for money. The other thing is that when you go to Northeastern, and because the name is so pronounced, there is an expectation level that you are going to be better than other schools' students. So, because of that, you are going to have to rise to the occasion but one thing I used to tell my kids is that in everything you do, you have to give an A effort. Because an A effort doesn't always get an A grade, but a C effort seldom gets an A grade. So, everything that you do, give it an A effort.

Tommy: Yeah.

Greg: That will pay off dividends in your life.

Tommy: Absolutely. I totally agree with that. I think it's just one of those things where I remember one of the best pieces of advice that I ever received was "It doesn't matter what your job is, you give it all you got."

Greg: It's not what you do. It's how well you do it.

Tommy: Oh, absolutely. Now, all that being said, like I mentioned earlier—I know you disagree with this...

Greg: Uh, oh.

Tommy: —I know you've had an extensive career, and I think your stories have been great but, this is "Northeastern Next," so I have to ask you, Greg, what is next?

Greg: My wife and I have an equity interest in a golf course.

Tommy: Oh, ok!

Greg: We have four grandchildren. And my wife is a med tech. She retired but she is back per diem. We babysit two days a week. Yesterday was election day, we had all four of them here. So, what's next is we will travel across country, drive for five weeks, all national parks. And work at the golf course, my wife works at the hospital. So, take care of our children, travel, and reap the rewards of all the effort I have put in.

Tommy: Yeah, that sounds lovely honestly.

Greg: Thank you.

Tommy: And it sounds like you deserved every bit of it. So, I hope that...

Greg: I'm no different than anybody else. I mean, the harder you work, the luckier you get. Nothing ever came easy to me. You didn't ask me how many times it took me to pass the CPA exam. I paid my dues. I got to know people on a first-name basis. "Oh, nice to see you again!"

Tommy: Oh, that's funny.

Greg: So, I learned to appreciate everything I have. I always wanted more but I'm always grateful for what I do have.

Tommy: And I think that is a really nice note to end on because I think that is something that, like I said earlier, is going to resonate with people from all walks of life. And I think that's great. I think that is something everybody is going to love hearing.

Greg: You know how this came out to be. I got Gary a speaking...he is going to come to the Southington Connecticut Library—which is where we live—and he is going to do a book signing.

Tommy: Oh!

Greg: So, I know there was a Connecticut alumni chapter of NU. I never joined so I went looking for it or couldn't find it so I went to the alumni page, and I saw that Elsie handles Connecticut so I called her out of the blue to see if there is something that the school can do to all the Connecticut alums, students, whatever and promote Gary's book signing. Well, Elsie said, "Greg, would you be interested in doing a podcast?" And I said, "What do you want me for?" And that connected us! All by picking up the phone and calling Elsie.

Tommy: Exactly, this whole podcast wouldn't have happened without networking.

Greg: Right.

Tommy: Yeah, that's awesome. Well, thank you so much again, Greg, for everything.

Greg: My pleasure.

Tommy: And I hope we stay in touch, I'm sure we will.

Greg: Call me anytime and, again, for your listeners, find me on LinkedIn and I will be happy to talk to you.

Music: Enters

Tommy: Thanks for listening to this week's episode of "Northeastern Next." Are you or do you know a Northeastern alum with a great story to tell? If so, email us at alumni@northeastern.edu to be featured on a future episode of the pod. I hope you enjoyed the episode, and I'll see you the week after next.

Music: Fades