

UP FRONT



Connecting: Business people mingle at Lyric Culture off the Sunset Strip.

Networking

Entrepreneurs event lets business owners quickly bond with peers – but no sales pitches!

Heard of speed networking? It's the business version of speed dating, a format where two people sit together and chat for three minutes, then change partners.

The L.A. chapter of the Entrepreneurs Organization, a business group for company owners, recently staged its first speed networking event with about 40 chief executives in attendance.

But it's not networking in the traditional sense; participants can ask for services if they want, but cannot offer them. Instead, it's more a support group for chief executives with the theme of "it's lonely at the top."

Under the rules, entrepreneurs had three minutes to give their name, explain their business and describe their

biggest managerial challenge. This ritual repeated itself for about 90 minutes, and each participant met 20 to 30 fellow entrepreneurs.

Hanna Rochelle Schmieder, an EO-LA member, hosted the event at the offices of her fashion company, Lyric Culture, in a mansion off the Sunset Strip.

"As entrepreneurs, we're good at getting to the point fast," Schmieder said. "In three minutes, you got to know a business. It really worked."

The organization restricts membership to owners of companies with at least \$1 million in revenues, so the events provide a sense of camaraderie for chief executives of somewhat like-sized businesses, CEOs who often share a sense of loneliness that leadership brings.

"We all gain through the building of stronger bonds, especially in these hard times," said EO-LA President Jamie Douraghy, who organized the party.

"I have challenges come up every day, and I don't have any peers to talk with," Schmieder said. "At this event, you all have the same HR issues, cash flow stresses, labor laws and marketing problems."

— Joel Russell