

My Love-Hate Relationship With Landmark: An Honest, Authentic, and Fully Self-Expressed Opinion

by Annie Margarita Yang

I have been involved with Landmark Worldwide for quite some time now and I decided it's time for me to write a review of this personal development and training organization. I have mixed feelings about my time there. I love the breakthroughs and transformations I had, but I hate the pushiness, passive-aggressiveness, and sales tactics. I'm writing this because I was in the Introduction Leaders Program and wanted to drop out, but the manager wouldn't let me so I was left incomplete. I'm writing this to get complete with my experience at Landmark without having to communicate with anyone there. All of it is my own personal opinion and based on all my experiences and interactions with the participants, volunteers, and staff, so you can either take it seriously or with a grain of salt.

Researching The Landmark Forum

I have a mentor who is a self-made millionaire and she works with me closely to guide me on the right path to grow and to develop myself. There is so much to learn from this woman. She takes responsibility for everything in her life, and she is constantly learning and keeping herself updated with everything going on in this world. One day, we were talking on the phone and she mentioned the Landmark Forum.

My mentor urged me to take it saying it's very cheap (only \$550) and to go on their website to learn more about the Forum. I go on their website and it turns out that it's \$620 in New York, probably \$550 when she took it 10 years ago. But anyway, YIKES! \$550 is not cheap. \$100 more and that was a full month's worth of rent for me right there. I thought to myself, *It's probably cheap to her because she's a millionaire...*

Regardless of price, I continued researching the Landmark Forum. The only good things I could find about it was on their official website, with their statistic that 94% of participants say that The Landmark Forum made a profound, lasting difference in the way they lived their lives, and also on popular news sites. Then I came across the Yelp page for Landmark's New York Center. There are a ton of bad reviews about how it is a money scheme, a cult, full of deception, and manipulative. There are more reviews on other websites written about how it's a cult and they brainwash you - beware.

I thought it was really weird how my mentor would recommend me to join a cult, so I decided to ignore all these people and just trust that my mentor knows and wants the best for me.

The Special Evening

Landmark holds the “Special Evening”, a free introduction to the Landmark Forum on a Wednesday once a month. My mentor was in Florida so I decided to attend on my own to learn more about it in person. I walked down the stairs into the windowless basement on W 33rd Street and was greeted by overly and superficially happy people. Their greetings made me feel like I was in for a night of a very hard sell.

It seemed like pretty much everyone except for me and one other person in the room full of 100+ people had a Landmark Forum graduate with them. I was alone and didn't know anybody there. It was weird because I didn't understand why someone who took the Forum months ago would ever want to come back for a free introduction, something they've already been to before. I am the kind of person who hates reading books and watching movies twice. If I were to come back to a free introduction night that I've been to before, I wouldn't because I don't learn anything new there. It'd be a waste of my time. I find out why months later.

Jerry Baden, the Landmark Forum leader leading that special evening was extremely charismatic and expressive on stage. He did a good job explaining everything he got out of participating in Landmark and his stories left me moved. At the end of the night, I asked the graduates around me what they actually learned in the forum and how they changed their life. They had trouble answering and were vague about what happened in that room for 42 hours over the course of 3 days. Do you mean to tell me that you were in that room for 3 whole days and you can't even tell me what you learned - you just came out *feeling* different and transformed?!

Well anyway, in the end some volunteers came over and were being pushy about having me sign up to take the Forum. I didn't have \$200 cash on me, but they told me to use my credit card and to pay it off later. I felt like it was really irresponsible. I don't pay for large expenses without budgeting first, but the pressure was immense, so I put down my deposit without planning. They told me to pick a date and I couldn't even guarantee that my boss would let me off work. I picked a weekend in June.

I got the cell phone number of the lady registering me. She was SO happy to take my money. I wanted to hear more about the Forum from her because I had no idea what I was even signing up for. I wanted more information, someone who could actually explain to me what happens in that room. I called her twice after and she never picked up, never returned my calls. I didn't understand why a volunteer who wasn't making commission would be so happy to take my money, but not call me back. We didn't meet again, until... I'll explain that later.

The Landmark Forum

When June came around, I had to miss work a lot because I needed to settle my financial aid issues at college. I already felt bad for missing so many days, but because I already put the money down and transferring to a later date would cost \$35, I lied to my boss saying I had to be at school for the

weekend (sorry boss!).

I went to the Landmark Forum, which started at 9AM on Friday. I was greeted by overly happy people again. There were only two short half hour breaks and one 90-minute dinner break. During the half hour breaks, there were homework assignments to call everyone we had drama with in the past and to get complete with them (and invite them to Landmark). During the dinner breaks, we were instructed to break off into groups with people in the Forum. We had to talk about what we were going through, what we want to get out of the Forum, and whatever was related to the conversations in class for that day. The seminar ended at 10PM and again, we were instructed to make calls to people we needed to get complete with, write some letters, (and invite them to Landmark) for homework.

Now rinse and repeat. That was generally what the schedule was like for the entire weekend. We were allowed to go to the bathroom anytime. There was no food or drinks allowed though. And with this kind of schedule, I'm sure most people were starving due having three 13-hour days with only one 90-minute meal break per day. There was not enough time to eat during the two half-hour breaks because we had to spend it doing homework. There was also a lack of sufficient sleep among pretty much everyone. I personally live in Brooklyn and it takes me a little over an hour to commute to the center. So here is what it was like for me: I had to leave my house before 8AM and I would get home around 11:30PM because trains went local at night. I was exhausted and sleep deprived.

I don't want to get too much into what distinctions are actually taught in the Forum because it can be found right here in their syllabus. At the start of the Forum, we needed to declare what area of our lives we wanted to work on and overcome by Tuesday night of the Forum. I went up to the mic and said I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life and had no sense of direction for my higher calling and purpose. This is a chronic problem I had for years and I was aimlessly searching, reading tons of books, trying out new hobbies.

At some point in the Forum, I had my breakthrough, an epiphany after deep reflection and introspection. I realized that I was lying to myself by saying I didn't know what I wanted to do. Back then, I constantly blamed my parents for my lack of direction because all they wanted from me was to be a teacher, accountant, doctor, engineer, or lawyer and tried to steer me away from my passions. In reality, I was too scared to admit to everyone the truth.

I am capable of ANYTHING I want to do, and therefore I can choose any path and succeed no matter what.

I was lying to myself because if I admitted that, then I would have to answer the question: If I am so capable of success, then why didn't I pick a path already and take action yet? And that was a tough pill to swallow.

This was my main breakthrough. I had other breakthroughs, like how I hated asking people for help

because I was scared to look weak and dependent. I always complained about my parents not giving me money and how I had to work for everything. In reality, I never asked them for money after a while because they said no to me a couple of times when I was younger. So even though I didn't live with them anymore, I started letting go of trying to always look like a strong, independent woman, and asked them to pay for my swimming lessons. And they said YES! After that, I stopped being so stubborn and started making requests to my friends for help, or took their help when they offered. It made my life much easier.

When I had these breakthroughs and transformed into a different person, that's when I started to fall in love with Landmark. I love their work. I've overcome all the major problems I've been dealing with for years and stopped being a complainer. For once, I was fully responsible for my own life and for creating the future of my dreams.

We were encouraged to share our breakthroughs and invite our friends and family to come on our mandatory Tuesday night for our "graduation". Tuesday night turned out to be a hard sell. It was from 7PM to 10PM. They spent the first two hours and 45 minutes pretty much selling the Forum and the Advanced course to people. The last 15 minutes was the glorified exercise on how to turn a breakdown into a breakthrough, which I am pretty sure no one remembers because it wasn't that impactful an exercise. I was turned off by Landmark's selling tactics.

Breakthroughs After The Landmark Forum

My life has been pretty much smooth sailing ever since I took the Landmark Forum. Here are some of the breakthroughs I had:

- I was dating a guy at that time. I really liked him and he said he didn't want to be my boyfriend. For ten days, I mulled over what happened, crying, and hurting myself because I felt like I wasn't good enough somehow. I realized that I was already perfect and I didn't need to make such a huge story and drama over what happened. I felt empowered. It's his loss and his problem if he doesn't want to be with me or talk to me.
- I became more confident in my public speaking because I realized that it didn't matter what other people think of me. What matters most is that I am sharing and contributing to people's lives.
- After realizing I am capable of anything, I chose to be a public speaker for my career. I gained the confidence to quit my full time job to pursue it, and trust that everything would work out in the end. The past was behind me, my reasonings disappeared. My future is uncertain and for me to create.
- I learned to share, to be authentic, and tell people what I was going through. The same day I announced my resignation, I was able to work out a deal with my property manager. Now I work for him for a couple hours a month in exchange for free rent. I don't need to worry about

rent while I pursue my career.

- The same day as my last day at work, a friend I hadn't spoken to in two years called me out of the blue to invite me to a financial seminar. It was a huge coincidence because I wanted to teach other people about personal finance.
- My best friend did something before I took the Forum that made me lose trust in him. I was able to forgive him and now I can talk to and share with him like that incident never happened.
- I gained integrity. Whenever I follow through with my words, my word becomes stronger and more powerful. My word creates my reality. I made a list of all the promises I made to people and started following through. There was this one friend from childhood I promised to have dinner with before she went back to Cornell for the fall semester. I didn't want to follow through and was not intent on calling her to make plans. Chances were slim I would ever see her again. Out of all the people I could possibly meet in NYC's transit system, I met her while going home one night. I followed through and had dinner with her.
- Another coincidence - I went through my phone's contact list and deleted people I never spoke to because it was growing too large. There was one woman I spoke to once and made a promise to her to travel the world with her. I deleted her number because I thought it would be awkward to call her. I never saw her again after the Forum and she probably didn't remember me. Later that same day, I ran into her and got her number again... I needed to follow through on that promise.
- I gave a speech at Landmark one night about how I wanted to hold a Financial Peace University class, but was asking everyone I knew and couldn't get a free space to use. A man came up to me after and offered to let me use his office in Long Island for free. I got my career started with that.
- I learned to be unreasonable and unstoppable. I was about to let the reason "Long Island? That's way too far." from having me host the class and having my dreams come true. But I didn't let that get in the way and now I go to Long Island every Wednesday.
- I quit my job and wanted to go to Chicago to work out a publishing deal with Black Card Books. I was about to let the reason "I don't have money and I don't have a job" stop me from going. I am so glad I paid for the plane ticket and went.
- I got into a car accident last month. I was riding my bike and got the door prize. I didn't let the accident stop me from getting to church that night. Terrible injuries though. My arms and knee still occasionally hurt even though the physical wounds are gone. But my relationship to what happened is fine so I continue on living my life as normal.
- I told everyone what I wanted to do and got my first clients through Landmark.
- I became more compassionate for the poor and started changing the lives of the homeless by giving to them and listening to them.

- I learned to be good at cold calling. During my phone assisting agreements at Landmark, I had to make hello calls to people and welcome those who were signed up for a seminar. Now I am a natural at talking on the phone and I'm popular. I've gotten good at listening to people and understanding them with just their voice. I get many phone calls a day and I've expanded my social network.

What I don't like About Landmark

Though I love the courses offered by Landmark, all the breakthroughs and transformations I had, I really didn't like the sales side of it. I understand Landmark is a business and needs to make sales, but they get overly pushy about it.

- They will call you all the time, non-stop. If you go to a free event and give them your phone number, they hand that over to volunteers who will call you over and over again to sign you up for the Landmark Forum. I was in their Introduction Leaders Program and we were required to have a 4-hour phoning agreement each week. And in this program, they make it a *game* to see how many people you can register into the Landmark Forum. So that's why the volunteers are just so enthusiastic and pushy on the phone. They need to hand in their statistics.
- I realized why that volunteer lady was so enthusiastic to take my credit card information register me into the Landmark Forum, and then never pick up or return my call. She was in the Introduction Leaders Program and the requirements to be a candidate as an introduction leader are 15 guests and 15 registrations. At that time, she just started her program, so she was really happy to make progress. She ended up having the most amount of guests and registrations out of everyone in her class. This woman ended up becoming my personal coach when I was in the Introduction Leaders Program. Alas, we met again. Though she doesn't remember me.
- I was volunteering for the Advanced course one time and I saw a woman walk out of the room bursting out crying. She couldn't attend the "mandatory" Tuesday night, but she was in communication about not being able to attend, therefore honoring her word. The Advanced course leader told this woman during break that if she can't come to Tuesday night, she might as well just drop out of the entire course. This woman was from out of town and came all the way to New York just to take this course. The leader made her feel so bad that she did drop out and did not transfer to a later date.
- If you don't understand what this rudeness is all about, this is about selling the Forum and Advanced course to her friends and family on Tuesday night. That is what Tuesday night is mainly about: a massive, pushy sales pitch. They sell the Forum to new guests and the Advanced course to Forum graduates who didn't take it yet. I went to one and the leader asked me why I wasn't registered.

My mentor was going to pay for it after I completed my 10-week seminar first. She wanted me to have a good foundation and master the distinctions from the Forum before learning new ones. The leader started yelling at me to register, telling me to put it on my credit card and pass the bill to her to reimburse me. He was “taking a stand for me.” No you’re not taking a stand for me when you are asking me to do something I don’t want to do. This was my worst experience at Landmark and it left a really bad taste in my mouth.

I read online that apparently, Landmark leaders lose their paid positions unless they bring in a certain amount of income at the end of each seminar. The income is measured solely by the number of attendees who enroll in the next, more expensive seminar. Also, leaders earn promotions (more money) based on the number of people who bring guests to the introduction that is held at the end of each seminar.

- The Landmark definition of “enrollment” is communication with another that leaves the two (or more) moved, touched, and inspired. The dictionary definition is to sign up or register. It’s a conflicting view of what the word really means, so when people tell you to have an enrollment conversation with someone, it subconsciously comes to mean to sign someone up for the Landmark Forum, NOT to leave them touched, moved, and inspired. Out of all the words they could have chosen, they chose the word enrollment.

One of our lunch break homework for the Introduction Leaders Program was to find stranger not involved with Landmark and have an enrollment conversation. The group I was hanging out with quickly took a stack of Landmark Forum flyers, and proceeded to tell strangers about what they got out of the Landmark Forum and why they should register too. I went ahead and bought lunch for two homeless people and listened to their stories on how they ended up that way. And I shared with them how my mom is an immigrant and worked hard to become successful here, so they can be successful like her too. They started crying. THAT is leaving someone touched, moved, and inspired WITHOUT having to talk about Landmark/having an agenda to get someone to do something.

- During one of the Friday nights when we were learning how to do in person registrations, we were told that the Landmark Forum is non-refundable, and to tell people AFTER they register into the Landmark Forum that they should consult their doctor about whether they should take this course. I find this poor business ethics. I think people should get an okay from their doctor first before signing up.

reasons why people think it’s a cult, and why i’m starting to think so also

After I came back from Chicago and was well rested, I decided to research into why people think it’s a cult. There’s obviously some reason why they think so.

- Their courses are so time consuming that it is so easy to become sleep deprived. The Forum

and Advanced course are three 13-hour days. The seminars are always done in the evening after work and they end at 10:15PM, plus they are never available for weekends. The Introduction Leaders Program ends after 11PM and demands a lot of time to do volunteering agreements and homework. In the program, sleep stops becoming a priority. Landmark is the priority and makes you become unreasonable about spending so much time there. Chronic sleep deprivation causes you to lose your critical thinking, so it makes it easier for people to brainwash you and control you.

- Food is not allowed during seminars. Days are long and breaks are short. The food deprivation makes it easy to brainwash people. If you were stuck in a basement for a long time without being allowed to eat, you would start to believe anything.
- You are not allowed to use the bathroom during class time. I didn't experience this in my Forum but I did experience it in the Introduction Leaders Program. No one can force me to do anything, but when volunteers have a golden name tag, they're perceived to have more authority and they pressure you to stay in the room.
- The Introduction Leaders Program is designed to deprive you in all these areas. Stress from all this deprivation leads to mental breakdowns and the program leaders break you into having their viewpoint, especially in the Introduction Leaders Program. They break any second thoughts and doubts you have about Landmark. The pressure in the Introduction Leaders Program to register people in your life into the Landmark Forum is immense. They make you list 100 people and you have to call and sell to them constantly. That's why people in the program end up being enthusiastic Landmarkians by the end of it.
- There is a gradual increase of discipline and dedication required to participate with Landmark's programs. It was slowly, I was becoming a more devout Landmarkian, and all the behaviors I thought were weird started to become accepted as normal. When I tried to drop out of the Introduction Leaders Program, this was the response I got: "You were warned that every thought (doubt, change of heart) and obstacle (scheduling, work, illness) would come up, that overcoming those obstacles, no matter what, were part of the process for transformation, and though the requests and recommendations (really rules and regulations) seem stringent, they were necessary to the process." They demand more and more of my time.
- This for-profit business has the majority of people there working for free. They rake in \$85 million revenue every year. They have 500 employees and have 7,500 volunteers called "assistants". They don't have volunteers, they have "assistants".
- Landmark is full of jargon and redefines words. RUNNING RACKET. ENROLLMENT. STORY. ALREADY ALWAYS LISTENING. MOVING IN TO A NEW REALM OF POSSIBILITY. STRONG SUIT. POSSIBILITY OF TRANSFORMATION. IMPECCABLE. GETTING FLAT. ARE YOU COMPLETE. DISAPPEARING - NOT FIXING - YOUR PROBLEMS. This is a common in cults, because when cults control language, they reform minds (brainwash).

After writing all of this, I feel more complete about my time at Landmark. I really don't think it's a bad organization. I really got everything I wanted out of doing their programs. There are just some things they do that I can't stand and go against my grain. If you decide to do the Forum, do it after researching and deciding if what they have to offer is really for you.

www.AnnieMargaritaYang.com