

Chapter 1

The Shape of Things to Come

Seeing Around Corners

“You may not realize it when it happens, but a kick in the teeth may be the best thing in the world for you.”

—Walt Disney

“I want to thank my good friend Andy for putting this conference together,” Steve Wynn told the packed ballroom at the Encore Hotel. “These are very tough times. And it takes a lot of courage for him and his team to be out here—in Las Vegas—putting on this magnificent event.”

The crowd erupted in applause. But I was distracted. My body tensed up as I looked over at my business partner.

“Did Steve Wynn just call me Andy?” I asked with a plastered smile on my face.

“Andrew,” he paused pensively. “Andrew, on behalf of Las Vegas, I want to thank you.”

More applause.

Yup, he definitely got my name wrong. In front of 500 people. A group that included industry thought leaders, hedge fund billionaires, prominent investors, and friends. People who—until that moment—knew me as Anthony Scaramucci. Maybe the Mooch. Certainly not Andy; and, never as Andrew.

But, it didn't matter. After all, at that very moment I was witnessing what could only be considered a minor miracle.



It was May 2009. Steve Wynn had just made the opening remarks at the inaugural SkyBridge Alternatives (SALT) Conference. His newly opened Encore hotel was opulent, filled with celebrity restaurants, gorgeous bars, and an abundance of fiery-red gaming tables, all of which stood empty as the Great Recession wreaked havoc on America's adult playground.

If you told me that just two months earlier I would be standing in Las Vegas, listening to Steve Wynn speak to 500 members of the alternative investment industry about my firm's courageous audacity to host an event during an economic crisis, I would have said you were nuts.

Flashback to March 2009. The Standard & Poor's (S&P) 500 had hit rock bottom. The world, it seemed, was on the verge of collapse. And, I feared that my investment firm—SkyBridge Capital—would soon be among the casualties. I founded SkyBridge—an alternative investment management company, focused on seeding and partnering with emerging managers and mentoring Wall Street's next generation of Wall Street's entrepreneurs—in 2005. And now, just four years later, I feared it I was going to lose my business—and worse, my clients' money. As redemptions starting flooding in, I knew that if we didn't do something proactive, something aggressive, something strategic, we weren't going to be SkyBridge—we were going to be “NoBridge.” I was beginning to feel hopeless as my partners and I faced an all-but-certain death. I wasn't sure if SkyBridge was going to survive.

I was scared. Actually, I was terrified. But I was *not* panicked. Panic is a different emotion. Panic implies that there is no rational thought taking place. That we are frozen and incapable of adjusting. Powerless to logic, and subject to seemingly unthinkable behavior.

Amid the chaos, my business partner Victor Oviedo came to me with an idea. He explained that a business acquaintance was running an alternative investing summit in Las Vegas and was struggling to fill seats. In addition, he continued, many major financial institutions were scrambling to cancel their upcoming conferences and Vegas-related business travel after President Obama sounded the warning bells on Wall Street and corporate America, saying, “You can’t take a trip to Las Vegas or go down to the Super Bowl on the taxpayer’s dime.” Against this seemingly dire backdrop, Victor had a plan.

“What if SkyBridge threw a hedge fund conference in Vegas?” he suggested.

I smirked . . . thinking he was joking. But, by the look on his face, I could tell he was serious.

He excitedly continued, “We’ll call it the SkyBridge Alternatives Conference, or ‘SALT.’”

Victor is an extremely creative and strategic person. He sees around corners and anticipates trends before other people do. He’s also one of the most deliberate people I know . . . and I mean that in a good way. He doesn’t open his mouth unless he has something important to say. He doesn’t throw things to the wall to see what sticks; rather, he is thoughtful and measured in his approach to business. With that in mind, I thought it was rather strange that—as our business was failing—he would come to me pitching the idea of a glorified party in Sin City.

I continued to look at him in utter disbelief. A conference? In Vegas? During an economic crisis? What would our clients say? After all, we were in the seeding business; not the conference business. Besides, we could barely make payroll and were maybe two phone calls away from closing up shop—how were we going to finance

a conference? The idea—even to me—was outlandish . . . bizarre . . . crazy! Or was it?

“Come on, Vic,” I said. But as the words fell out of my mouth, I knew we were on to something. This was the time to take a calculated risk. This was the time to ignore political rhetoric and bring together members of the financial community to identify solutions that would allow us all to capitalize on tomorrow’s opportunities. This was the time to dive in with both feet and hop—actually, leap—over the rabbit hole. Suddenly, Victor’s idea was beginning to make sense. If fact, the contrarian in me suddenly found it brilliant!

If we didn’t change the way we were doing business, we wouldn’t even have a business. We needed to think outside the box. We needed to be creative; adaptable; entrepreneurial. Reinvent ourselves. We needed to play offense, while the rest of the industry was playing defense. And while there was no tangible relationship between the conference business and the hedge fund business, I did, however, recognize the void in the marketplace as well as SkyBridge’s need to move in another direction.

It was becoming more and more clear to me—this conference would give SkyBridge the opportunity to send a message to our clients, our competitors, and the industry that we were hopeful about SkyBridge’s future . . . that we were hopeful about Wall Street’s—and America’s—future. We’d be instilling confidence, optimism, and perseverance—something no government official, policymaker, or central bank was willing to do in 2009. We would be sending a message that we may have encountered a roadblock, but we were going to come together to overcome it. And as a firm, SkyBridge would be leading this charge.

As the founder of SkyBridge, I also saw SALT as a huge asset to help us grow—actually, save—our business. If we were going to survive the Great Recession, the only way to get the message out was to operate on the balls of our feet, not our heels. Call it “fake it ’til you make it.” Call it “smoke and mirrors.” Call it whatever you want. The message was clear—we were not going down without a fight.

Having worked in the industry for 20+ years, I also knew that Wall Street was all about building trust, goodwill, and relationships. And I knew that there was no better way to develop meaningful relationships than by taking the time to meet prospective and existing clients face-to-face. As such, I firmly believed that SALT would introduce SkyBridge to a critical mass of potential investors and peer managers. Furthermore, it would be an opportunity to raise our profile and separate us from our peers. In my mind, SALT had morphed from a non-sensical idea to a no-brainer. A strategy to save our business. But, now I had to convince my partners.



Two months before the proposed first annual SALT Conference, I gathered my partners together in our oversized conference room so I could present the idea.

“Gentlemen,” I said as we began the partner’s meeting. “We have an opportunity in front of us. An opportunity to start a conference. The SkyBridge Alternatives Conference. SALT. It will serve as an industry platform. One that will introduce us to a ton of potential investors, while raising the profile of SkyBridge Capital.”

Silence.

Absolute silence.

“Besides, what is the worst that can happen?” I continued, hoping to inject some levity in the room, “At least we will have a going-out-of-business party.”

As expected, my other partners did not exactly share my enthusiasm. In fact, they thought Victor and I were completely crazy. Our business was on life support. And this event would cost money that we didn’t need to spend. They pleaded: “How is this glorified going-away party going to contribute to our bottom-line?” “What would investors say?” “Besides, do we even know how to put together a conference . . . and in less than two months?” But the more my team kept telling me it was too risky, the more the contrarian in me believed in its promise.

Well, as you can imagine, the vote was five against two—and I bet you can guess the culprits of those two lone votes. There we had it. No conference. No Las Vegas. And, perhaps, no SkyBridge.

I am a team player. I believe in consensus. I believe in a democratic corporate practice, where checks and balances are in place in order to ensure that my partners and I are collectively reaching our business objectives and responsibly propelling the organization while serving the needs of our clients. But, at that moment in time, the stakes were just too high. Our business—and, some would argue, the industry—was on the brink of failure. Besides, I truly believed that the conference was the key to reinvigorating our business—that, and I maintained control through our corporate governance agreement.

“Gentlemen, I hear your concerns.” I paused. “Thank you for your vote. We’re doing it anyway.”

(There was a famous cabinet vote during the Civil War where Lincoln called for the vote: “9 nays, 1 aye, the ayes have it.” Well, it sort of went like that. In times of distress, real leadership means making bold—sometimes unilateral—decisions.)

And with that we started planning.



Truth be told, we had less than two months to gather the relevant industry players, plan a comprehensive agenda, create a web site, and produce a unique event . . . something that would grab the market’s attention. Perhaps more overwhelming was the fact that my lean team had never planned a conference—let alone an event—in their entire lives . . . and we still had our day jobs.

Remember, we were all in the financial services business; not the event-planning industry. What the hell did we know about throwing an event . . . let alone an entire conference! But one thing we all had in common was that we had all been to tons of conferences throughout our careers and understood the needs of the audience as

we—ourselves—were often in their seats. And so it hit us—we knew that SALT needed to be a conference *we* would all want to attend. It couldn't be some run-of-the-mill event nor a vendor expo where there was an overabundance of service suppliers hounding asset managers and investors on their way to the bathroom. It needed to be a forum where professionals were exposed to relevant and insightful editorial content, while providing them with opportunities to build meaningful relationships that would help their businesses grow. We wanted the audience to be properly composed of check writers and asset managers, with the best and brightest from Wall Street, Washington, and beyond. In order to reach these objectives, we knew that we needed head-turning names at the top of the speaker docket.

My first call was to Bob Miller, the former governor of Nevada. Having known his son, Ross—who was Nevada's secretary of state as well as a friend of the firm—I was put in touch with Governor Miller. It was a strategic first move, as I knew his support was integral in pulling off an event in the economically devastated state of Nevada. Furthermore, he was also on the board of Wynn Resorts, and—perhaps most importantly—he was closely acquainted with the man we hoped would be our keynote speaker at the first SALT Conference: Michael Milken.

I'll admit it. I have a man crush on Michael Milken. The guy was—and still is—a hero of mine. Often said to have “revolutionized modern capital markets,” he is an entrepreneurial genius whose brilliance gave birth to the modern age of finance. Perhaps more importantly, he has also changed the face of medicine and is saving lives through his tireless efforts and formation of his Prostate Cancer Foundation and Faster Cures. Milken's approach to life and business represented the type of out-of-the-box mentality I was trying to instill at SkyBridge and impart at SALT.

With the help of Governor Miller, I was able to get Milken on the phone. And then something strange happened to me. I suddenly grew unbelievably nervous . . . intimidated even.

“Mr. Milken,” I said. “Let me say that it is an honor to speak with you.” I rarely get flustered, but I was definitely nervous.

“Call me Mike,” he replied, immediately putting me at ease.

I explained the goals of SALT and its objectives and why we chose to hold it in Vegas. He interjected intermittently, with insightful questions and clarifying statements.

And, suddenly, I found myself not asking—but declaratively stating to my idol—that I’d like him to be SALT’s inaugural keynote speaker.

Dead air.

A pregnant pause that felt like an hour, but probably was less than two seconds.

“Sure. I’d love to,” Mike said. “And I’d like to invite you to attend my Global Conference, too. And, of course, make a donation to my foundation as a gesture of goodwill.”

Little did I know this phone call would spark the beginning of a terrific relationship. To this day, Mike remains one of my most trusted advisers and mentors. He is my first phone call if a family member has a serious health issue and a true confidant. And, in retrospect, this episode is also an important reminder that we need to put our egos on the floor, get outside of our comfort zones, and push ourselves, while maintaining some level of gracious audacity.

With Mike Milken keynoting the event, he humbly suggested that Steve Wynn—the godfather of the American luxury hotel and casino industry—provide the introduction to his keynote remarks. At that time, he had just opened the Encore Las Vegas, which was the venue for the conference.

With Milken and Wynn on board, suddenly the task of completing a two-and-a-half-day agenda—and populating it with relevant headliners—came together nicely.

We secured Governor Oscar B. Goodman, Mayor of the city of Las Vegas; Dick Gephardt, former Democratic House majority leader and member of the U.S. House of Representatives representing Missouri; General Wesley Clark, former NATO supreme allied commander; and

Harvey Pitt, former chairman of the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. From there, we rounded out the agenda with members of the alternative asset industry who participated on panels that discussed the state and future of the economy and hedge funds.

In the meantime, Victor, Jason Wright—a senior partner and head of marketing at SkyBridge—and I focused our efforts on filling those empty seats and financing the event. We hit the phones . . . aggressively. We called every relevant player in the industry in order to gather a critical mass of prominent investors and asset managers. Having attended numerous conferences ourselves, we took a portfolio manager’s asset allocation approach to composing the SALT delegation and strove for a 2:1 investor-to-manager ratio with a low number of service providers. We also approached each of the major banks’ prime brokerage and cap intro teams, encouraging them to selectively invite their hedge fund clients to attend. In exchange, we offered each bank a bespoke sponsorship package, which enabled them to provide their clients with exclusive access to prominent speakers and networking events throughout the entire conference. Lastly, we invited a select number of academics, nonprofit leaders, and media personalities.

With only days to go before SALT, we had somehow managed to register approximately 500 people. To this day, I am not sure how it happened . . . and, I would be lying if I told you we envisioned the positive impact SALT would have on SkyBridge. But with that, we packed up and headed to Las Vegas. It was show time.



The big day arrived on May 9, 2009. The ballroom was packed. Wynn took the stage to thunderous applause. His pearly whites seemed to shine even brighter on stage, his deep voice resonating thanks to flawless acoustics in his brand new venue. Talk about fearless. If there was a financial crisis going on, you couldn’t tell from Wynn’s body language. Cool and collected, he strutted out and winked at the crowd. Here was

a guy who had just opened up a billion-dollar resort smack dab in the middle of the worst financial crisis in 70 years, and he couldn't have looked more relaxed.

He stood in front of the SkyBridge Capital branded podium and—after thanking Andrew . . . I mean, me—proceeded to tell the story of the first time he met Milken.

It was 1978. A 36-year-old Steve Wynn wanted to build a grand hotel in Atlantic City, which—at the time—seemed destined to rival Vegas as America's favorite gambling destination. But, Wynn had no money. No investors. His friend, Stan Zax, suggested he meet with his cousin, Mike Milken, in Los Angeles to discuss the project.

Upon arriving at Milken's LA offices with Zax, Wynn cumber-somely hobbled around the lobby, as he had just broken his foot four days prior and was on crutches. Sensing his uncomfortableness, a young man in a golf polo and casual jeans approached him and Zax and suggested that they go into a conference room.

Wynn obliged and immediately rested his feet on the large table. The young man kindly offered Wynn a drink.

"Diet Cola would be great," Wynn promptly replied.

As the man left the room, Wynn turned to Zax and said, "I can't wait to meet this genius cousin of yours."

Without missing a beat, Zax responded, "You just did."

Amid a roar of laughter, Wynn proceeded to tell the audience how Milken changed his life. How Milken gave him the confidence to transform from a young, green, and inexperienced professional, who had a narrow strip of knowledge about a certain thing—in his case, a gambling hall called the Golden Nugget—into one of the biggest names in the gaming industry.

"One day," Wynn recalled Milken telling him "One day, you will be able to pick up the phone and borrow a billion dollars from people who trust you.' It was truly an education."

Milken would go on to finance some of Wynn's most iconic hotels. Together, the two changed the face of the luxury casino and gaming

industry. In the process, they also transformed the Las Vegas strip into a high-end destination and family resort, consequently creating a metropolis burgeoning with middle-class jobs, great schools, and top-notch hospitals.

The speech struck a chord with me as I stood off stage. It made me think about where I was in my business. I, too, was at a crossroads. I wanted to grow SkyBridge beyond its narrow parameters. I wanted to change the face of the industry. I wanted to try something big, bold, and different I just wasn't sure how.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he concluded, “my teacher, my friend, and the most brilliant guy I’ve ever known, Michael Milken.”

If Wynn’s speech was inspiring, Milken’s was downright mesmerizing. He provided insightful, thought-provoking, and encouraging commentary on the state of the economy, showcasing his trademark contrarian way of thinking. He noted how the brightest investment opportunities often emerge when things seem darkest. To illustrate this point, he flashed the audience back to the late 1980s and talked about the collapse of the junk bond market and how investors with the presence of mind not to panic ultimately realized the opportunity of a lifetime. He then drew a correlation to the current market conditions and—against conventional wisdom and political rhetoric—encouraged investors to be uber-bullish. I could see heads in the crowd nodding as he spoke. They could not have been more engaged.

(By the way, Milken was right . . . again. At the time, little did we know that we were about to embark on one of the greatest bull market runs of all time.)

After Milken’s speech, Wynn pulled me aside, this time getting my name right. As he patted my shoulder, he congratulated me for ignoring the naysayers and putting together a stellar, educational conference during an economic recession. He continued, “And, I thank you for helping Vegas, too. After the president slammed us, we have gotten a bad rap. But, what he doesn’t get is just how many middle-class people depend on events like this. We have maids and bellhops who need these conferences, and it speaks to what you guys are about over there.”

He could not have been more right.

The night after the conference ended, I headed over to the SW Steakhouse for a celebratory dinner with Victor and the SkyBridge team. Despite being a couple hundred thousand in the red, we felt pretty good about what we had just pulled off.

“This was a success,” I told the team, hoisting a glass of red wine to toast. “Now how do we build on this for next year?”

It seemed like an obvious—yet, an audacious—question because we didn’t know if there would even be a next year at SkyBridge . . . let alone another SALT Conference. And while we were encouraged by the success of SALT, we didn’t fully grasp what we had created in just two months.

I felt an inevitable sense of dread the moment I boarded the plane back to New York. Remember, it was May 2009. The fact that we threw a killer conference and congregated some of the brightest minds in finance to identify solutions for economic recovery didn’t negate the fact that the immediate global financial outlook seemed dire and SkyBridge’s future remained uncertain. We didn’t know what the next day would bring.

Entranced by Milken’s words, I knew now more than ever that it was time to pivot and redefine ourselves. But, as what? Third-party marketers? Advisers? Conference organizers?



2010 proved to be a big year for us. A year that answered that question in ways I wouldn’t have imagined at the time.

Through a series of bold and strategic strokes, our small firm acquired Citigroup’s Alternative Investments Hedge Funds Management Group. No longer a pure seeding firm, we were now heading into the fund of hedge funds industry, and were about to quadruple in size . . . and staff.

As a result, the SALT Conference was about to take on an even greater meaning for us. In 2009, we just wanted people to know we

weren't going out of business. Now, in 2010, we wanted people to recognize our brand as a household name. It was our coming-out party.



The stakes were high. Amid these negotiations, the SkyBridge team went into “SALT mode.” Remember, we were investment and marketing professionals who still had our day jobs. And, as you know, the financial services industry is notoriously competitive, brutal, and unforgiving. SkyBridge was no different. Ten to twelve hour days were the norm. Planning SALT took it to another level. It was a seven-day-a-week, 24-hour-a-day meat grinder.

As part of the planning process, Victor and I established a creative content team. The goal was to identify relevant speakers in the industry and then organize them into themed panels. In a lot of ways, we functioned as television producers, figuring out the optimal rhythm and flow of the conference.

During this creative process, I began to see SALT a little bit differently and suddenly went into overdrive brainstorming ways in which we could elevate the editorial content of the conference's program. We needed to make the event about more than just alternative investing. We needed to expose our audience to lively discussions and debates on the world's most pressing issues. We needed to push the envelope, be provocative, be aspirational, be forward-thinking. Most of all, we needed bigger speakers . . . icons and influencers like Michael Milken.

“We need more than just money managers and financial advisors,” I said to my team. “We need to think out-of-the-box and identify relevant speakers who are industry decision makers, who represent solutions, who are forward thinking. SALT can't just be about making money. It needs to be about leadership. It needs to be about,” I paused for a second, searching for the right word: “*excellence*.”

And, I knew exactly who to get.

“I want one of the best public speakers in the world,” I told my team in one of our planning meetings. “I want Bill Clinton.”

President Clinton is another one of my personal heroes. Yes, I am a Republican, but I admire him and all great leaders regardless of party lines. His story—raised by his mom and an alcoholic stepfather in a poor, rural Arkansas town only to reach the highest office in the land—was an inspirational testament to the can-do spirit of the American people. Democrats revere him. Republicans respect him. And, despite how one may feel about some of his policies—it's impossible to deny his undeniable intelligence, ability to connect with people, and soulful charisma.

“How are we going to get him?” Victor asked, quizzically. “Do you really think a former president of United States is going to travel to Las Vegas and participate in a hedge fund conference?”

Probably not, but I had a secret weapon: Rick Lerner. Perhaps one of my closest friends, Rick was my college roommate at Tufts University. Upon graduation, he went to work at the White House during the Clinton administration and is now a successful private banker at Goldman Sachs.

“Hey, Rick,” I exclaimed into my Blackberry, “I need a favor. I need to figure out a way to get to Bill Clinton to speak at SALT. Do you still have any contacts from your White House days that could help?”

I could hear him chuckling on the other end of the phone.

“Come on, Rick.” I continued. “It would be huge. A game changer.”

“If you want to get to Bill, you have talk to Doug,” Rick told me.

Rick immediately put me in touch with Douglas J. Brand—President Clinton's former chief adviser and special assistant, who later went on to shape Clinton's post-presidency legacy and build the Clinton Global Initiative. Considered by many as Clinton's gatekeeper, he forged an unusually tight bond with the former president. Those who have seen the relationship up-close describe it more as more father-son than president-aide.

In any case, after a few e-mail exchanges back and forth, Doug and I arranged to speak by phone. As I had done just a year prior with

Milken, I told him about SALT and how we'd be honored to have former president Clinton provide the keynote address. Doug immediately gave me his blessing and put me in direct touch with the former president's speaking agency.

One discussion later and we got the former president of the United States to speak at SALT!

"We got Clinton," I said to Victor. "It's on."

Clinton's participation acted as a tractor beam for other high-profile guests. Knowing that my friend—Marc Lasry, legendary hedge fund manager and founder of Avenue Capital—was a Clinton advocate and acquaintance, I quickly gave him a call. Not only did he agree to speak on a SALT panel, but he even flew out and dined with Clinton while at the conference.

From there, we secured additional hedge fund titans, including Citadel's Ken Griffin, York Capital's Jamie Dinan, and Highbridge Capital's Glenn Dubin. We booked economic legends such as Austan Goolsbee, Nouriel Roubini, and Jeremy Siegel. And political leaders, such as Governor Mitt Romney and—of course—President Clinton. Michael Milken also agreed to come back and provide a keynote on "Unprecedented Times, Unprecedented Opportunities."

To fulfill my out-of-the-box mandate, we also secured Frank Abagnale—the subject of Steven Spielberg's 2002 movie *Catch Me if You Can*. Having seen him speak at an event a few months earlier, we immediately knew his story would make a great addition to the SALT lineup as his honestly and bluntness about his own personal shortcomings were so compelling. (As a side note, many attendees—to this day—single out Abagnale's lunch presentation as their favorite SALT highlight.)

All told, we assembled over 100 speakers—the GDP of a several small nations. An eclectic mix of world leaders, renowned investors, and leading economists.



The 2010 SALT Conference was shaping up as a crucial event for us, and not just because of the Citigroup deal or resurgent stock market. CNBC was considering covering it.

Through my good friend, Gary Kaminsky, I met CNBC fireball producer Susan Krakower, who told me the network would cover the conference on two conditions: I agreed to sign on as an exclusive network contributor and I lined up big guests for CNBC's exclusive coverage while her team was on the ground to cover the event.

"And not just the same people I see on CNBC day-in-day-out, Anthony!" Krakower screamed at me over dinner at the Core Club; for some reason, she always emphasized my name at the end. Susan and I clicked instantly. Now working at SkyBridge, she remains one of the most creative and brutally honest people I've ever met. She's also one of the loudest. "And you better up your game on TV. You're too soft. Kick it up. And get me big guests," she exclaimed. "I want to make this big."

CNBC's coverage of the conference helped to take SALT to another level. And, the network wasn't just going to cover it. They were sending David Faber and Maria Bartiromo—two of the network's biggest names—to broadcast live from the event. If anyone doubted we were for real, CNBC's presence put that notion to bed. SALT would become the news, and people—no matter who you are—love to be close to where news is happening. It was the type of advertising money couldn't buy as the discussions at SALT would be unfolding on one of the biggest financial news channels for the entire world to see.



It's hard to identify, in real time, the line between faking it and making it. But during the planning of the 2010 SALT Conference, I felt like we had surely crossed it. The success was starting to feel real, and it was unfolding on television for the entire world to see.

It was time to deliver. CNBC would be broadcasting, Wall Street would be watching, and the market would be talking. We couldn't mess up this opportunity.



I called Victor. I wanted SALT to have the look and feel of a heavy-weight boxing match. Reading about it in the *Wall Street Journal* wasn't enough. You *needed* to be there. And if you were at home watching it on CNBC, you needed to see it all.

“No more tiny plasma screens . . . we need to think big,” we told our production team.

You see, we simply didn't have the funds to spend on AV elements at the first SALT Conference. One year later, I knew we needed something bigger to showcase our brand for the entire world to see.

“A wall of video screens,” I said, “screens like they have at sporting events in major stadiums. Screens that boldly state ‘SkyBridge’ and showcase our brand.”



When we sent over the final SALT 2010 agenda, the CNBC producers were thrilled. Not only did the speakers generate headlines by the hour, but we were making finance seem accessible, transparent, and—perhaps, even—sexy. SALT was the place to see and be seen. Yes, it had a festive atmosphere, but there was real learning taking place. You also never knew who you would run into.

And that was the point. SALT trafficked in excellence, but what the conference was really about was access. Information is everywhere. And in the era of smartphones, it's become even more of a commodity. What people really want is context for all this information. They want insight delivered in a fun and digestible format. SALT provided that experience.

At the conclusion of the second annual SALT Conference, my team and I gathered for a celebratory dinner at Rao's. While the mood after the previous year's conference was cautious optimism, this time it was unbridled euphoria. As we dined on meatballs—which almost tasted as delicious as my Nana's—we knew we had created something very special. Not only had we helped transform the narrative about

the financial industry and American economy, we helped its members establish new business relationships while engaging in cutting-edge discussions about the future of our industry, the global economy, and societal issues. In addition, SALT—or, more specifically, the ideals underlying it—would springboard our business into the future. Now we had a platform to promote our brand, demonstrate our expertise within the industry, and build relationships with both existing and potential clients.



I'm a firm believer in the idea that you're either moving forward or backward. You're either growing in confidence or swelling with hubris. The moment you become complacent is the moment you lose your edge. There is always somebody working harder than you, and there are always copycats ready to take the model you've built and make it better.

After our success in 2010, I told my team that we couldn't rest on our laurels. We needed to grow, scale, and evolve. And while we always aimed to break even on the event—and almost never do—we needed to create a business model that enabled us to secure more prominent and diverse speakers. Public figures and thought leaders who were leaders in their field and changing the way business was done. And, while the core agenda would stay true to the tenets of macroeconomic issues, geopolitical debates, and investment themes for the year ahead, we needed to strategically weave insights from prominent actors, athletes, and technology leaders into the event's tapestry. We wanted to associate the SkyBridge and SALT brands with excellence, with success, with relevancy. And we wanted to have fun while we were doing it. Where one minute you could hear David Tepper's market-moving view on the stock market and the next you could hear Magic Johnson discuss the similarities between sports and entrepreneurship.

Over the next five years, SALT would evolve from an alternative investments conference to a forum for alternative thinking. An

international experience that attracts an eclectic array of prominent thought leaders from the interesting worlds of finance, politics, public policy, science, entertainment, and philanthropy. An experience designed to motivate and inspire, to educate and entertain, to move markets, and to grow business . . . and, a place—of course—to have fun.

Little did I know just how big things were about to get.



CNBC's wall-to-wall media coverage was doing more than just getting the word out on SALT. It was making me a bit of a TV star as well. It's funny, when I was at Goldman, I used to make fun of people who were on television all the time. "That dude's a clown," I'd often mumble at the screen. There was probably some jealousy in that statement, although I didn't fully realize it at the time. I was never a TV person. For the first 20+ years of my career, I anxiously avoided the bright lights. I only started to dabble in television because I thought some media exposure could help SkyBridge by instilling confidence in our clients, who would watch me on a financial television show and perceive me as an industry expert. And, it worked . . . People were starting to learn about our firm. Our name was getting out there. SkyBridge appeared to be a bigger deal than we really were. And, over time, the illusion became the reality, and suddenly, before I knew it, we had become leading players in the alternative investments space.



The success of SALT—in conjunction with my appearances on CNBC—helped raise SkyBridge's profile, but what happened next was something I never could have imagined. While I knew the conference had become a massive networking event for the hedge fund industry, I didn't fully realize how much the mainstream public was paying attention.

Oliver Stone called. He wanted to put me in his next movie, the long-awaited sequel to *Wall Street*. Through a mutual acquaintance, he asked if we could meet to talk about his next project. A week later, I was sitting in Stone's New York office reviewing parts of the script with Josh Brolin and Shia LaBeouf. In return, I asked Stone if he would take a look at a book I was currently writing that combined the themes of maintaining your moral compass with achieving financial security and professional success.

Not only did he read the manuscript, but he endorsed it and wrote the foreword. Kelly O'Connor—my brilliant editor, who now works at SkyBridge—suggested we integrate the Gordon Gekko name into the title. At first, I was hesitant. The name Gordon Gekko is synonymous with Wall Street douchebags, and the book was actually about the importance of rejecting materialistic values. But, Kelly won out with clever wordplay.

“We’ll call it *Goodbye Gordon Gekko: How to Find Your Fortune without Losing Your Soul*,” she suggested. “Remember, the book is about moving past that era. It’s the perfect title.”

Stone agreed, and soon after offered me a small cameo in *Wall Street 2: Money Never Sleeps* where I played myself at a fundraising event. Perhaps more importantly, he featured the SkyBridge logo prominently in the scene, further raising the awareness of our brand throughout the world.

Despite the good-natured ribbing from a few of my Wall Street buddies, I knew this out-of-the-box thinking was the exact type of thing I needed to do in order to differentiate the SkyBridge brand and make it a household name. And besides, the whole experience could not have been more enjoyable . . . and left me with some great stories to tell.

Before I knew it, I found myself on a flight to Cannes for the movie's premiere. I was seated five rows behind Michael Douglas. I was more excited than a five-year-old at Disney World. I brought along a copy of my brand new book, which I coyly handed to its factious namesake.

“Anthony! This is so great. Thank you,” Douglas said, in his most convincing acting job to date.

He sat down and opened the book. As the plane took off, I was dying to know what he thought of it. After we reached a cruising altitude, I walked over to his seat. He was in a Stage 9 deep REM sleep, his mouth agape and the copy of *Goodbye Gordon Gekko* on his lap. I snapped a quick picture and sent it to all my friends under the caption: “Here’s what Gordon Gekko thinks of my book.”



As I looked out the window at 36,000 feet, my mind was racing. Although I am an optimistic person, I couldn’t believe the transformation that had taken place in such a short time. In just one year, my company and I went from almost going out of business to hosting a wildly successful conference, appearing regularly on top business news networks, acquiring a fund of hedge funds business, having a cameo in an Oliver Stone blockbuster, and publishing a book. It was a lot . . . and we were trying to generate a return on our luck and good fortune.

And suddenly, amidst the clear blue, endless sky, I realized something—we were seemingly hopping over the rabbit hole. Rather than spiraling, twisting, and turning down an endless tunnel toward an illogical, nonsensical, and unknown demise, we were strategically taking control of SkyBridge’s future by embracing our potential failures and turning them into potential successes.

It would have been easy to throw in the towel during those dark days and give up on the business, but that would have been selling out at the bottom. I take pride in the resilience our team showed and strive never to forget the tough times.

But even I must admit that I have never imagined the extent of my company’s turnaround. Luck certainly had a hand in my good fortune. I can’t deny that. But it came down to more than luck. I had

stopped waiting for good things to happen. I had gone out and made them happen. Abraham Lincoln is credited with saying, “The best way to predict your future is to create it,” and never before had I felt so in control of my own destiny. At least the parts I could control.