



The Untapped Potential in Your Everyday Encounters

If you're reading this in a public place with people nearby, take a look around and observe them. If you're not in public, make a point of doing this the next time you are. Find someone who looks interesting, and think of something you could say to engage that person in conversation. It could be a comment or question about what the other is doing or what's happening where you both are at that moment. It could be something that intrigues you about the other person about which you'd like to know more. Maybe you overheard part of a phone call that leads you to think he or she is in the same business as you. Maybe the person is carrying a backpack with a conference name and date embossed that is intriguing to you or wearing a unique or especially attractive piece of jewelry. Chances are if you approach the person respectfully, you can successfully initiate a conversation. Then, in that very instant, you will have opened the door to possibilities you didn't even know existed until you took a chance by talking to a stranger.

I did this very thing a few years ago during a quiet Sunday afternoon flight from Boston Logan Airport, hardly the time or place you would expect to make two of the most lucrative business connections of a lifetime. But it was, and the results were measured in six figures and ongoing access to a huge network of business opportunities.

Nothing seemed unusual as I was standing near the gate waiting to board the plane, except that the gate agents seemed to be working extra hard to create a smooth boarding experience. *Hmm*, I thought, *someone important must be on this flight*. I didn't see any celebrities or luminaries, at least not that I could recognize. The boarding process continued for our full flight, and when I finally sat in my seat I turned to the person next to me and said, "If I ever get the chance to meet this airline's CEO, I will have to tell him what a great job his Boston people are doing." My seatmate leaned toward me, pointed across the aisle, and whispered in my ear, "Well, you will have your chance...he's sitting right there."

It is a rare moment indeed to find yourself sitting an airplane aisle away from the CEO of that very airline—the third-largest airline in the world; it's even *more* unusual to have the CEO of a leading hotel chain sitting next to you and pointing out that the airline CEO is, in fact, sitting three feet away. But it happened, just like that—all because I talked to a stranger.

When you're a sales consultant with a background in transportation and a random encounter like this presents itself, there's only one thing to do: make the connections, one across the aisle and one sitting next to me. I monetized both within a matter of months.

I had wanted to do business with in this airline for a long time, but I found that it was very difficult to gain access to someone at this level by utilizing the normal channels. Sure, I could call his office and try to get an appointment, but as an unknown consultant, I would have little likelihood of getting one. I could send an e-mail, but chances are it would be intercepted, if it even got past the company's spam filter. I could wait in the company parking lot and approach him as he walked into the building, but in that

case I would be more likely to end up meeting the company's security staff than the CEO. Yet here he was, sitting mere feet away from me; it was my chance—on a quiet Sunday afternoon and the relaxed attitude that goes along with it.

Since he was across the aisle a few rows up, I couldn't initiate conversation easily, and I didn't want to interrupt him while he was working. I would need the flight attendant to deliver my request for a chat so that he could agree and then determine the right time and place. Moments later she returned with the good news: yes, sure, he would be happy to talk with me—in the Jetway, once we were on the ground.

Once we had landed, we stood together just outside the aircraft, with his shuttle van and entourage of assistants waiting. Here I was, face to face with the CEO of a major global transportation company, getting the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to leverage a completely random connection. After a few pleasantries about the trip we had both just taken, I complimented the great job his Boston crew did, explained that I had done consulting work for one of their competitors a few years prior. I went on to tell him that I had a unique approach to getting corporate travel contracts and that I would appreciate some guidance on how to get my program into the company.

He responded by tearing off the seat assignment portion of his ticket and writing down his phone number along with the name of the person in charge of sales development. "Tell her I suggested you get in touch," he said. "And that I thought the idea is worth a close look."

That single, random encounter led to a multiyear, six-figure consulting and training engagement that grew into a long-term relationship with the company, a number of its business units, and a variety of great client friends, many of whom have gone on to other companies and brought me in to work for them there, too. It also led to a smaller but equally rewarding project for the hotel CEO who was sitting next to me and pointed me toward the airline exec.

The opportunities that await you in the people you encounter throughout your day are far-reaching and unpredictable—making them all the more exciting and intriguing. The people you don't even know yet can expand your world in many ways. Which of the following do you want to do?

- Uncover a prospect.
- Sell a new client.
- Land a new and/or better job.
- Get the name of a contact in a prospective company.
- Gain access to an influential person in your industry.
- Be informed about a company moving to the area.
- Hear about a franchise opportunity.
- Learn about new products or services in your marketplace.
- Find out about an industry networking group.
- Discover information about a new career.
- Pick up a tip about how to use the Internet to brand yourself.
- Learn about a new application of technology.
- Find out about a competitor.
- Enlist a new supplier.
- Come up with a new marketing approach.
- Meet an investor.
- Recruit an employee.
- Strike up a strategic business alliance.
- Hear about a book or article that could change your life.
- Discover something about your community.
- Find out about a new restaurant or bar (where you could make *more* random connections).
- Meet a new accountant, dentist, doctor, attorney, Realtor, home repair person, or other personal service provider.
- Become aware of a better school for your children.
- Make a friend.

All you have to do is look in front of you, behind you, beside you, and across from you. And then with a simple acknowledgment—a nod, a smile, a question, or comment, you can unearth unlimited potential.

Chapter at a Glance

- You never know who's around you, until you ask.
- You could be sitting or standing next to the CEO of a major corporation or next to someone who can introduce you to someone of great influence.
- The people you meet in random encounters represent endless possibilities.

