

# THE ART OF PEOPLE

*11 Simple  
People Skills That  
Will Get You  
Everything You Want*

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

# DAVE KERPEN

## Also by Dave Kerpen

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*Likeable Social Media*

*Likeable Business*

*Likeable Leadership*

DAVE KERPEN

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THE ART OF  
**PEOPLE**

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*11 Simple People Skills  
That Will Get You  
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*This book is dedicated to my ultimate "people": my baby boy, Seth Franklin Kerpen, and the women  
around the two Kerpen boys: my wife, Carrie, and my daughters, Charlotte and Kate.*

*Thank you all for teaching me so much about people.*

*I love you all infinity.*

Introduction: People Matter

## 1 Understanding Yourself and Understanding People

- 1: Myers-Briggs Means Nothing; This Means Everything
- 2: How to "Get" Anyone (Even If You Don't Like Him)
- 3: How to Understand Someone Better Than You Do Your Friends (in Just Three Minutes)
- 4: Be Interested Instead of Interesting
- 5: Most People Are Lonely; Help Them Feel Connected

## 2 Meeting the Right People

- 6: Wear Orange Shoes: The Simple Keys to Networking That Nobody Talks About
- 7: How to Meet Just About Anyone
- 8: Create Your Own Advisory Board
- 9: Hire Slow and Fire Fast—at Work and in Life
- 10: Blow Off the Right People

## 3 Reading People

- 11: Stop Waiting to Talk and Start Actually Listening
- 12: Words Mean Little; Listen with Your Eyes, Not Your Ears
- 13: Always Accept the Glass of Water
- 14: Bluffing Is Only for Poker
- 15: The One Trick That Seems Ridiculous but Works Every Time

## 4 Connecting with People

- 16: Validate, Validate, Validate
- 17: The Most Important Question You'll Ever Ask in a First Meeting
- 18: Who You Are Online Is Who You Are in Life
- 19: Crying Is for Winners
- 20: The Platinum Rule Always Trumps the Golden Rule

## 5 Influencing People

- 21: Help People Come Up with Your Idea
- 22: Passion Is Nothing Without Persistence
- 23: Don't Sell It, Storytell It
- 24: The Paradox of Persuasion: Shut Up
- 25: Walk into Every Room Like You Own It
- 26: You Never Get What You Don't Ask For

## 6 Changing People's Minds

- 27: It's Better to Be Happy Than Right
- 28: Always Manage Up
- 29: Go Beyond the Humblebrag
- 30: Make Time Your Friend

## 7 Teaching People

- 31: Be a Model
- 32: Soar with Your Strengths—and Theirs
- 33: Don't Be a Teacher (or a Manager); Be a Coach (and a Student)
- 34: Don't Hold Yourself Accountable

## 8 Leading People

- 35: There's No I in Team, but There Is an I in Leadership
- 36: Mirror Neurons, and How a Good Mood Goes a Long Way
- 37: How to Get Everyone to Want to Be Around You, with One Word (Maybe Two)
- 38: Always Be the One to Give the Bad News
- 39: Get High Before Every Meeting
- 40: Everybody Wants to Be a Leader

## 9 Resolving Conflict with People

- 41: If You're There to Help, You're There to Win
- 42: Let Cooler Heads Prevail
- 43: Let Go to Get What You Want
- 44: Put On a Bulletproof Vest (or the Simple System That Saved My Marriage)

## 10 Inspiring People

- 45: Remember That It's Not About You
- 46: Be Unoriginal, Part 1: You Can Quote Me on This
- 47: Homelessness: The Instant Cure for Any Bad Mood
- 48: Don't Let One Unkind Word Destroy Years of Praise

## 11 Keeping People Happy

- 49: Make It a Honey Day
- 50: Go Back in Time and Write a Thank You Card (Yes, a Real One)
- 51: An Intro a Day Goes a Long Way
- 52: Buy Him a Bonsai
- 53: Be Unoriginal, Part 2: How to Remain Top of Mind for Thousands of People Every Day

**Conclusion:** Getting Everything You Want in Life Is All About People and the Ultimate Paradox

**Acknowledgments**

**Appendix A:** Enneagram Assessment





# Introduction

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## **People Matter**

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I had just walked a red carpet behind *American Idol* sensations Clay Aiken and Ruben Studdard at VH1's Big in 2003 Awards, yet I felt as unhappy and unsuccessful as I'd ever felt in my life. I was living in Los Angeles after a four-month appearance on the reality TV show *Paradise Hotel*, and on the surface you'd think I was doing great. I was smack dab in the middle of fifteen minutes of fame, having appeared on thirty-one episodes of a summer network hit, and I was getting paid appearance fees of \$5,000 to \$10,000 just to show up at malls, nightclubs, and bars. I was attending parties with the likes of Paris Hilton, Jessica Alba, and Kathy Griffin.

I was famous and was making money, but I was miserable. I felt empty and lonely and disconnected. Los Angeles, California, is a difficult town in which to feel genuinely connected to others, and I was struggling with loneliness and depression big-time. A lack of connection to people in turns out, is very powerful in a bad way.

The moment after walking that red carpet was the wake-up call I needed, and so I made a decision to reconnect. I took my phone out of my pocket and called the one person I wanted to reconnect with more than anyone in the world. I dialed Carrie's number and waited.

Two years earlier, I had met Carrie at the Radio Disney offices in Boston when she took a sales position working opposite my desk. I had been the number one salesperson in the county, until Carrie came along, that is. She dropped me to number two within three months, and we quickly became best friends even though we were rivals at work. In another three months, I had fallen madly in love with her.

There was one slight problem, however: Carrie was married at the time. What do you do when you find your soul mate and she's not available? Well, Carrie moved to New York with her husband to focus on making her marriage work, and I did what anyone with unrequited love would do: I decided to go on a reality TV show to find another soul mate.

Yup, Fox's *Paradise Hotel*. Filmed in a \$30 million home in Acapulco, Mexico, the show featured eighteen sexy singles at a luxury resort trying to "hook up or check out." And me.

Staying on the show had been a challenge for me, as I was very different from most of the model/actor cast members and they didn't like me. Yet somehow, week after week, I was able to maneuver my way out of getting voted off during the weekly elimination ceremony, and thirty-one weeks in I was still standing. I had orchestrated my way to the top through careful favor currying and relationship building with both the players (the cast) and the game makers (the producers). Somehow I had gotten even people who hated me to vote for me to stay on the show and the real influencers, the producers, to drive a story line that had me there week after week, the lone "nicer guy" on the island of pretty boys and girls.

But I was still unhappy. I missed Carrie and felt empty in my work (or lack of work) both during the show and in the months after the show. When I dialed that number the night after walking the red carpet in Los Angeles, I was hoping to reconnect with the one person I had met who "got" people better than I did.

"Wow, hey, Dave," Carrie replied. "Crazy to hear from you after a year of not talking and watching you on TV. What are you up to?"

"I'm hanging out with the stars of *American Idol*," I said, secretly trying to maintain a semblance

of pride. “And you?”

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“I’m hanging out at home. Actually, I’m going through a divorce right now.”

“I’m so sorry to hear that, Carrie,” I said while doing a fist pump with the hand not holding the phone. “Actually, I have to be in New York to meet with my agent in two weeks,” I fibbed.

Two weeks later I was on a flight to New York. One month later I was dating Carrie, and two months later I was moving to New York for her.

Since that phone call I’ve been fortunate enough to enjoy eleven amazing years with Carrie by my side, blissful years that have brought me three terrific children, two very successful businesses, and two bestselling books. Although there have been obstacles, challenges, and downtimes, I’ve been both happier and more successful than in my wildest dreams thanks to Carrie and the many other people I’ve formed productive, fulfilling relationships with over the last ten years. Not only that, along the way I’ve learned something invaluable about life, about myself, and about human beings in general: You can’t achieve happiness or success in a vacuum; it all hinges on the bonds you build with the people around you.

In my first book, *Likeable Social Media*, I shared a blueprint for being a successful marketer navigating the fast-changing world of social media. In *Likeable Business*, I shared a blueprint for building a successful social business. Now it’s time to think bigger. It’s time to think about what it takes to be successful in getting everything you want out of your career and your life. I am writing this book to share this blueprint for success with you.

Talent. Luck. Hard work. Courage. Grit. Persistence. I could go on for hours about what others say it takes to be successful. But although these things aren’t unimportant, what it ultimately comes down to is people. How well do you understand people, how well can you communicate with people, and how well can you get people to do what you want them to do?

People matter. More than anything, in getting what you want in your job, career, and life, the relationships you have with other people, big and small, make all the difference between a dead-end career and an empty existence—like the one that was sucking the life out of me in Los Angeles—and the full life and thriving business I enjoy today.

*This is the art of people.*

You may think  
**the hard-driving,  
take-no-prisoners  
self-promoter** is  
the person who  
ends up on top, but  
today it is actually  
the person with  
**the best people  
skills** who gets  
everything she  
wants at **home**, at  
**work**, and in **life**.

In my first two books, *Likeable Social Media* and *Likeable Business*, I wrote about how being “likeable” and what that stood for—listening, storytelling, and building relationships based on authenticity and transparency—is critical for success in online marketing (*Likeable Social Media*) and in business (*Likeable Business*). But building relationships and being likeable isn’t important just in social media or within a company; it’s important out in the wider world, as well. It’s important in every single interaction you have with every single one of the people you encounter, from the receptionist at your client’s office to your first date, from your boss at work to the influential woman on Twitter who can help you sell more of your product, from the venture capitalist who might invest in your start-up to the guy you went to high school with whom you see only on Facebook now.

*This is the art of people.*

Whether it’s online or offline, the interactions and relationships with the people around you, who these people are, and what they are willing to do for you will determine how successful you will be. Have empty, weak relationships with the people around you and every challenge you face and every obstacle you encounter will feel like trying to push a boulder up a hill on your own. Cultivating authentic, mutually beneficial relationships built on trust, respect, and cooperation and getting that boulder up that hill will feel a lot easier thanks to the team of people pushing behind you. This book will help you with those interactions and relationships because it describes the eleven essential people skills that, when mastered, will help you get more of what you want in any situation.

*This is the art of people.*

Many of the tools, tricks, and tips contained in this book may surprise you. They certainly often go against typical business and success wisdom. But then, if typical business and success wisdom worked, everyone would be wildly successful, no? The truth is that even if that traditional wisdom once worked, the times have changed. You may think the hard-driving, take-no-prisoners self-promoter is the person who ends up on top, but today it is actually the person with the best people skills who gets everything she wants at home, at work, and in life.

*This is the art of people.*

Today, people skills are more important than ever; they are the key to getting what you want both at work and outside it. We are constantly connected to one another: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and other social media have become the primary way we communicate with others. Plus, in today’s world there is so much noise, we are trusting personal referrals more than ever; we have a short attention span, and so we are listening to the people who “get us” and whom we trust. As a result, the key to wielding influence and getting what we want is to be the person *others* like, respect, and trust.

This book is going to discuss the eleven people skills I have learned that will change your life at home and at work. Within the description of each major skill, I’ll share stories from my life as well as the lives of some of the most successful and influential people in the world to help illustrate my points. We’ll begin with a self-assessment available in the appendix, and another available online at [ArtofPeopleBook.com](http://ArtofPeopleBook.com). Along the way, we’ll learn the eleven key people skills through fifty-three bite-size lessons you can put into practice right now.

A lot of business books are filled with theory, but readers walk away from them wondering what to actually do. This isn’t one of those books. Every chapter will close with a set of First Action Steps to Take (FAST). You’ll walk away with dozens of practical ideas about how to communicate better with people and get what you want at work and at home.

Before we start, I urge you to take the assessment in [Appendix A](#). It's a take on the Enneagram: ~~centuries-old personality test to help you understand what values you're most driven by and how~~ others can best communicate with you. This won't change with time, but you should take this quiz so that you'll learn more about how to connect better with others and in turn get others to respect and like you.

One of my core values is responsiveness, and so even though a book is a static, one-way communication channel, if you have comments or questions along the way, I want you to contact me. If you want to scream in anger or applaud with excitement, are baffled by an assertion, or simply want to experience this book by having a conversation with its author, please don't hesitate to contact me. The best way is through Twitter ([@DaveKerpen](#)), followed by LinkedIn ([DaveLinkedIn.com](#)), but if you want to go old school, you can email me at [dave@likeable.com](mailto:dave@likeable.com); either way, I promise to get back to you as quickly as I possibly can.

*This is the art of people.* Let's get started!





**Understanding  
Yourself and  
Understanding  
People**



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## 1. Myers-Briggs Means Nothing; This Means Everything

ugh, I thought. Another touchy-feely personality activity.

I was on a retreat at the Canyon Ranch resort in Miami with fellow forum members from the Entrepreneurs' Organization, a global network of CEOs that includes some of my best friends in the world. Normally, I'd be having the time of my life at such a retreat, but for me, a Type A personality who's always on the move and never likes to stop, at this time in this particular location I was struggling to stay engaged. *Relax* is not a word I'd ever liked, and after two rounds of yoga and meditation, the last thing I wanted to do was sit through four hours of a personality assessment I had never heard of.

But I braced myself and forced myself to keep an open mind and a positive attitude about the experience. I'm glad I did, because the four hours that followed changed my life and the way I communicate with others and understand myself forever.

"This is the Enneagram," our psychologist instructor, Brad Kerschensteiner, informed the eight of us. "While much less famous than the Myers-Briggs or DISC assessment, it's actually far more reliable than those two or any other personality assessment for that matter, and its wisdom has been used and passed on over centuries."

Now I was intrigued and paying attention. Over the four hours that followed, I picked up a wealth of information about myself and how people can best communicate with me. Moreover, I learned about the nine major motivators for people and how we can best communicate with all people on the basis of their Enneagram types, 1 through 9. As Brad assessed all eight of us and talked to us about our Enneagram types and the communication implications for each one, I was blown away by how accurate it all was. It was like he was reading my mind!

**Self-awareness is  
the fundamental  
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~~In the year that followed, I became increasingly fluent with the Enneagram and its power in helping us understand ourselves as well as others. I administered the Enneagram to my management team, then to my whole staff, and then to my wife's company's whole team as well. I read whole books on the subject. I became totally engrossed with the value of the Enneagram for self-awareness. I also realized the following:~~

Self-awareness is the fundamental building block of the art of people. You can't understand and influence others until you fully understand yourself at a deep level.

Of course, like any personality assessment, the Enneagram isn't perfect. Any system that classifies people into only nine categories obviously has its limitations. Yet research has shown time and time again that the Myers-Briggs assessment, the most popular personality assessment, is highly flawed and unreliable over time. Take it twice and you'll probably get a different result than you got six months earlier. The results of the Enneagram, in contrast, don't change over time; they give you a sense of what motivates you most, what to look out for as potential detractors, and how people can best communicate with you, and those things are remarkably stable over time.

Before you read any further, turn to [Appendix A](#) and take the Enneagram assessment cowritten by Mario Sikora if you haven't already. An internationally recognized speaker and author, Mario is the coauthor of *Awareness to Action: The Enneagram, Emotional Intelligence, and Change* and the author of many articles on personality styles and leadership, performance improvement, and team building. Mario says, "The Enneagram is a great tool to better understand yourself, which in turn can help you take smarter action."

Once you have your score, look at the chart summarizing the nine major Enneagram types, the associated strengths, and the potential pitfalls to look out for. How well these elements resonate with you probably depends on how high your raw numerical score was for your type on the quiz.

For example, I am a strong Enneagram type 3, striving to be outstanding. One of my common pitfalls has been the "I'll Do It" syndrome, or saying yes to every offer, opportunity, and request I get, thinking that the more I accomplish—the more interviews I do, the more projects I agree to, and the more clients I take on—the more outstanding I'll be. This makes me sound like a real go-getter, but it became a real problem earlier in my career as I was stretched too thin and became worn out to the point where even my family life suffered. That is, it was a problem until I changed the script in my head according to my Enneagram assessment. If I said yes to fewer things, I realized, I could be more outstanding in the things I said yes to. It wasn't easy (fellow Threes out there can sympathize with me, I'm sure), but now I am able to say no to opportunities to speak or do interviews so that I can be more outstanding at other things. I rewrote the script once I understood what really motivates me, and you can do the same thing.

What are your pitfalls based on your Enneagram type? Choose the one that resonates most with you and keep it in mind as you read this book. By the end, I guarantee you'll have a better understanding of how to rewrite the script in light of all you've learned about how you communicate with others and how others communicate with you.

Now that you have a better understanding of yourself from the Enneagram, including your strengths and weaknesses in communication, it's time to take one more quiz: the PeopleStrengths quiz. We developed this assessment to help you understand, among the eleven essential people skills you'll learn in these pages, where your top strengths lie and where you may need more help. Take this now online at [ArtofPeopleQuiz.com](http://ArtofPeopleQuiz.com).

So are you a People-Pleaser? A People-Leader? A People-Guru? Or a People-Persuader? Whichever category you're in, we all know we have lots of room for improvement when it comes to dealing with and influencing people. The great news is that you've already begun the improvement process by getting to know yourself a little better than you did before you picked up this book.

Of course, there are hundreds of other assessments you can take to understand yourself and your strengths and weaknesses. I happen to be a huge fan of the Enneagram because it's time-tested, simple, and reliable, and of the People Strengths Quiz because, well, I wrote it. But of course whatever your particular assessment is, the important takeaway is this:

*The first step in learning how to better influence others to get what you want in your career and life is to understand yourself.*

The better you understand yourself—your unconscious motivations, what gets you up and what gets you down, what makes you tick, and how you best interact with others—the better off you'll be at understanding other people and getting them to do things for you.

#### **FAST** First Action Steps to Take:

1. Complete the Enneagram quiz in [Appendix A](#) if you haven't already done that.
2. Write down three people-related weaknesses you want to work on. Write down a solution for each one in light of your core Enneagram assessment.
3. Write down your greatest strength. How can you improve on it as you read this book?

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## 2. How to “Get” Anyone (Even If You Don’t Like Him)

“I just don’t get him,” I muttered to myself after hanging up the phone. I had just finished a phone call with the senior person at a company that was an important business partner of ours, and I felt frustrated, angry, and confused. We had been struggling to get this business partnership on the ground for months, and I believed I had key insights into understanding why and helping rectify the problem. But John (as we’ll call him) just didn’t want to listen to me or cooperate or be helpful in any way.

John was mean and grumpy, and I just didn’t get him. He seemed to have a huge chip on his shoulder, was angry at the world, and was determined to plow down anyone who stood in his way. He seemed a lot like the hard-driving, take-no-prisoners self-promoter I described in [Chapter 1](#), good at making orders but not good at making relationships. In several face-to-face meetings I had never once seen him even hint at a smile.

The first step in influencing people is understanding them, and I simply didn’t understand John. I had tried for months to connect with him, but to no avail. How could I work effectively with someone I didn’t like? How could I work with someone I didn’t even understand?

Feeling utterly defeated, I approached my wife, Carrie, with the problem: “I just don’t get this man, Carrie. What can I do?”

Carrie, the person who gets people better than anyone I’ve ever met, replied right away: “If you say you don’t get him, you’ll definitely never get him.”

We all have people we don’t get at first or maybe ever. Everyone’s different, and sometimes it’s hard to understand people who are very different from ourselves. Many times that may be okay because you may not need to interact with some person you don’t get, but often it does matter. If you’re ever going to want or need to have a meaningful or productive interaction with someone, whether it’s a colleague at work, a client of your business, or a cousin at family gatherings, it pays to figure out a way to get that person.

Step 1, as Carrie shared with me, is to refuse to believe that you can’t. No matter how different a person is, no matter how you may feel when you’re around her, no matter what her actions are, you have to believe that with some effort you will be able to understand her.

Self-determination is a powerful force, and once you refuse to say “I don’t get him,” you’ll be better off. But that alone isn’t enough.

“Take him out for coffee,” Carrie suggested about John, the man I was now determined to get.

“But I absolutely loathe him,” I replied, cringing at the thought.

“See it as an experiment, then,” Carrie said. “An experiment to see if you can understand someone very different from you. Ask questions, then shut up and listen.”

As much as I protested, Carrie’s advice, as usual, turned out to be spot-on. Two weeks and one coffee later, I got John. I still didn’t like him very much, but after sitting down with him for coffee outside the office and getting the opportunity to talk (and listen) face-to-face for just thirty minutes, I really did feel that I understood where John was coming from. As it turns out, John had had a tough stretch of several years as a child with just one parent, and it seemed that somewhere along the way

he had decided to become fiercely independent. John was unmistakably an Enneagram type 8—driven to be powerful—and sometimes that drive for independence could make him abrasive and standoffish and generally tough to be around.

John's behaviors didn't change as a result of our meeting, of course, but just a little bit of understanding made a big difference in my future interactions with him. Over the weeks that followed, our conversations got more congenial, and we actually made some progress toward driving the mutual business results we were both looking for. He even cracked a smile at one face-to-face meeting a few months later. I ended up getting most of what I wanted out of the business deal and the relationship.

I never would have had that opportunity, though, if I had resigned myself to the fact that I didn't get John and left it at that. Who do *you* work with whom you just don't get? Who do you come in contact with on a regular basis whom you can't seem to understand no matter how much you scratch your head?

*The first step is to insist that you can get that person. The next step is to invest fifteen minutes and five dollars in having a cup of coffee with that person.*

You may not walk away understanding the person completely or even liking him any better. But you'll have a fighting chance to build a more productive and beneficial relationship from then on.

John, wherever you are today, I hope you're still enjoying your coffee black and occasionally cracking a smile.

#### **FAST** First Action Steps to Take:

1. Write down the names of three people in your life whom you're struggling to get.
2. Commit to asking one to have coffee with you after you finish this chapter.
3. Walk into the coffee meeting determined to get this person (even if you still don't like her).

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### 3. How to Understand Someone Better Than You Do Your Friends (in Just Three Minutes)

Now you're going to get to know the person next to you better than you know many of your friends, in just three minutes with just three questions!" said the tall, enthusiastic speaker on stage in front of 1,200 people.

I sat in the front row, excited but dubious about the claim that Larry Benet had just made at the Social Media Marketing World conference in spring 2013. Larry is a man on a networking mission. Often referred to as one of the "Most Connected People on the Planet," Larry Benet builds much more than just passing friendships. He has earned a sterling reputation as a master relationship builder as well as a thought-provoking and highly entertaining seminar speaker.

But this was my first experience with Larry Benet, and I must admit that I was a doubter. Larry was the first keynote speaker at the conference, and I knew he was there to teach people how to network better. Still, the notion that he could teach me to understand someone better than I know many of my friends in three minutes seemed a bit far-fetched even for an expert.

"Question number one: What is the most exciting thing you're working on right now? On your marks, get set, go!" Larry said confidently.

I turned to my left and very quickly introduced myself to the man next to me. We didn't have much time, so I quickly told Steven about Likeable Local, the new company I was getting ready to launch, and he told me about a science project in a box his company was about to unveil. Whew, just under the deadline.

"Question number two!" Larry's big voice bellowed from the center of the stage. "If you had enough money to retire and then some, what would you be doing?"

The pressure was on with only a minute to share answers, and so I quickly learned that Steven would travel the world with his wife, going to all seven continents, and I said that I would run for office, perhaps for mayor of New York City or governor of the state. Again, we made it in just under a minute. This was proving to be a very interesting experiment!

"Final question, and remember, you have just a minute to both answer it," Larry announced. "What is your favorite charity organization to support and why?"

I insisted that Steven go first this time, because I had two organizations I wished to talk about and wanted to make sure he got his in. He told me about the Nature Conservancy ([Nature.org](http://Nature.org)) and how passionately he felt about conversation and climate change, and I told him about the Multiple Sclerosis Society and the National Alliance for Mental Illness and how with multiple family members affected, my wife and I felt compelled to support both organizations.

And that was it. Steven and I didn't immediately become best friends after this exchange. We didn't continue the conversation over dinner or invite each other over to meet our respective families. Although Steven and I exchanged a few emails after the event, it's been over two years since that first and only conversation I had with him. But here's the really interesting thing: It's been over two years, yet I still recall with ease the contents of that conversation. I still know more about Steven after three minutes over two years ago than I do about most of my casual friends from high

school, college, and work.

After informally surveying the audience and smugly determining that the doubters like me had been persuaded, Larry continued with his keynote. He told the audience that life's too short to waste precious minutes on small talk about the weather or where people are from or what they do for living. He argued that if we could get to know the person sitting next to us as well as we had in just three minutes, why shouldn't we give ourselves and the people we meet the same gift in future encounters?

Larry Benet was absolutely right. When we meet people "in real life" we may open up a conversation with a bit of small talk because it's far more socially acceptable than asking pointed questions. But the truth is that by asking better, smarter questions, we can understand the people we meet much more quickly and determine rapidly whether they're friend or foe, a potential business partner or mate, a future employee or casual acquaintance. Life is short. The less time we waste on the weather, the better.

The three questions Larry taught me are excellent ones. That said, there are lots of other questions you can ask early in a first encounter with someone to better understand that person and his or her worldview. Here are ten questions for your consideration:

1. What is the most exciting thing in your professional life right now?
2. What is the most exciting thing in your personal life right now?
3. If you had enough money to retire, what would you be doing today?
4. What's one thing you would like to be doing or would like to have five years from now?
5. What's your favorite charity organization to support and why?
6. If you weren't doing what you do today, what would you be doing and why?
7. Other than a member of your family, tell me about your role model.
8. Who's been the most important influence on you?
9. How would your favorite teacher describe you?
10. If you could choose to do anything for a day, what would it be and why?

These questions not only break the ice, they quickly get people talking about the things that really matter, the things that will reveal their true personalities: their values, their likes, their hopes, and their passions. Although you can't administer a personality test to someone you've just met, you can ask better questions than the standard "Where are you from?" "Where did you go to school?" "What do you do?" and "How do you like this weather?"

At this point perhaps some of you are thinking, "Dave, you were told by a conference speaker not to ask these questions. I can't just come out to someone I've just met and ask these sorts of things without people giving me a crazy look."

You may be right, and so when it comes time to put this experiment into action for yourself, you can simply open with, "I just read this crazy book that talked about asking better questions when you first meet someone. Mind if we try out a couple of these questions and each answer them?"

You'll be surprised how easily the conversation goes and how valuable it is, just as I was surprised



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