

CHAPTER ONE THE EIGHT TRAITS

What is it about some people – I call them the “You Never Know-It-Alls” -- that makes them successful? Are they born under a lucky star? Do they get all the breaks? NO! To a one, they are people who see the opportunity, perceive a possibility and parlay it into something positive, which has a measure of success. They don’t just **see** opportunity, they **seize** it. They are observers who pay attention: to issues, problems, perplexing situations, and to people. Whether their moment of serendipity turned into a job or business, or two tickets to the Olympics or even the opera, they are OPEN!

In studying their stories, they reveal that they have two types of traits.

The Usual Suspects

When studying the stories that changed careers, jobs or businesses, there is a track of traits I call the USUAL SUSPECTS, which are discussed in most business books. These are the qualities and characteristics generally ascribed to those who are successful. They’re what you’d expect the “given” traits to be. When it came to business and careers, these types don’t just work smart, they work hard instead of hardly work! They have good attitudes. Some days it’s one that’s realistic, other days, it’s simply positive, but whichever it is, their attitude is a good, healthy one that embraces possibility. In addition, they have a vision that is bolstered by great follow-through.

The UNusual Suspects:

What most business books and courses don't identify are the unique traits exhibited by people who have seized the serendipity, co-opted the coincidence, and captured the karma. They are the Unusual Suspects of traits that set them apart from the crowd. They are **counterintuitive** behaviors, actions and attitudes that go against the prescribed norm. Interesting enough, these traits are also the outgrowth of solid, savvy networking skills.

The people who had the 'You Never Know!' experience exhibited different combinations of these Eight Traits.

- Trait One: They talk to strangers.
- Trait Two: They make small talk.
- Trait Three: They "drop" names.
- Trait Four: They eavesdrop and listen.
- Trait Five: They ask for/offer help.
- Trait Six: They stray from their chosen paths.
- Trait Seven: They exit graciously without burning bridges.
- Trait Eight: They say YES when they want to say NO.

These "You Never Know-It-Alls" don't conform to the "Keep it to yourself, play your cards close to your chest" school. They are people who are open and that openness is the lynchpin of their so-called luck.

First and foremost, the people featured in this book talk to people they don't know.

TRAIT ONE: Talk to strangers.

First revealed in How To Work A Room®, as an antidote to the warning “Don’t talk to strangers,” this counterintuitive trait opened up a world of possibilities for most of the people in this book. If you take a moment to think about it, you have had experiences that started with talking to someone you didn’t know. Sometimes that incidental, serendipitous conversation scores a huge success that impacts the bottom line.

A Royal Crown Room

Although we now complain about the inconveniences of cross -country business travel, the reality is that there have always been travails of travel that try our patience: flight delays, cancelled flights, long layovers. While merely annoying for the pleasure traveler, it can mean a disaster for the businessperson who misses a meeting, a presentation or client conference.

One of those flight delays was an annoying one for Mark Mayberry, a professional speaker, consultant and author. “I had planned my travel perfectly. But sometimes the weather gods don’t cooperate and I was facing a long delay. Fortunately I am a Delta Crown Club member and just figured I would go to the club, have a beverage, do some work and read my book. Some other passengers were quite agitated but I figured there was nothing I could do...might as well relax.”

“As I sat down, I struck up a conversation with another fellow who was also delayed. We had a few things in common: we were on our way somewhere, members of the Crown Club and very frequent fliers. We were both agitated because a golf tournament that was on TV was not on a channel available in the Crown Room. That’s what started our conversation. We shared a few golf stories and had a few laughs. It was very casual and a pleasant way to pass the time.

When our flight was called we said goodbye and wished each other well. No big deal. Was I ever wrong!

“I got on the plane and knew I was wasting a good opportunity and decided that was not an option. In the course of our conversation I had learned he was just named president of Atlantic Southeast Airlines. So I walked up to him and made sure I had his contact information and sent him my book. Then I followed up a little later. The result of this coincidental meeting and incidental conversation were two contracts, totaling more than half a million dollars, to consult with his company. It was the most lucrative weather delay of my career.”

Striking up a conversation with a stranger isn't always easy. Sometimes shared circumstances make it easier for us to do that. Mark could have been agitated and unpleasant. He could have been so irate that he kept to himself. He could have made some bitter, whining remarks to the stranger in the airport club that would have stopped the conversation cold. There was nothing at stake, so it was just a pleasant interchange between two strangers in the same place at the same time who wished they could watch a golf tournament. And it was serendipity that they were seated in close enough proximity to chat. Mark did see and seize the opportunity to chat with someone who really ended up being the PERFECT (as in a six-figure client) stranger. What's most important is that he made sure he could maintain contact, send a book and pick up the phone and call. And that is what he did.

While Mark scored a huge business success, sometimes our 'You Never Know!' experiences successfully score other things, like tickets to the Opening Night at the Opera.

TRAIT TWO: Make Small Talk

As I travel across the country giving presentations, I have learned that many people hold small talk in low regard. In my research for *What Do I Say Next?*, I discovered that the only people who put down small talk are those who are bad at it. Those who were adept – I called them the **ConverSEnsations®** -- saw small talk as a way to get to know people and never denigrated it.

People who create their own luck don't wait for the great opening line. Nor do they first speak BIG talk -- about famine, quantum theories of physics or the economics of incarcerating first time offenders. Although these are great BIG Talk Topics, the people who attract coincidental opportunities talk about little things: weather, traffic, movies, etc. They start with, "Hello, how are you?" And then they **listen** to the answer.

Diane Parente, an in-demand image and wardrobe specialist and founder of the Association of Image Consultants International, was taking her morning swim before work at a local club in San Francisco. She was running a little late when she spotted one of her clients getting into the pool.

"I was in a hurry, but I felt it would be rude to just say hello and turn around and walk away." Diane, a genuinely open person and great conversationalist, chatted at length with Jill, her client.

"At I was about to leave, Jill said she had to go out of town that weekend and asked me if we could use her two tickets to opening night at the San Francisco Opera. I was ecstatic. My husband Lou and I are great fans of the Opera, but opening night tickets were almost as hard to get as tickets for the Superbowl."

Small talk yielded a big payoff for the Parentes because *La Traviata* is one of their favorites. But You Never Know-It-Alls are not one-trick ponies.

“When we arrived at the opera, we were seated in orchestra next to a couple who were women’s clothing designers in New York, and I was familiar with their work. We just started to chat with them. During intermission, the wife indicated she wasn’t feeling well. Her husband turned to us and asked if we could use their tickets to the Gala Ball following the opera. We were speechless. Fortunately, we were able to say yes, and thank you.”

If Diane and Lou Parente had not exchanged light-hearted conversation with them, they never would have been to opening night of the San Francisco Opera and attending the Gala Opera Ball. Because some of Diane’s clients were season subscribers, she was able to connect with them on another level.

A Plane Lesson on Snobbery

The importance of being open, talking to strangers and making small talk hit home like a sledge hammer for Ed Peters, a sales trainer, who logs many frequent flier miles. One doesn’t have to be a baseball fan to appreciate Ed Peters’ lesson, which he learned the hard way.

“Little did I know that the flight from San Francisco to Chicago in October of 1984 would change my life forever. It was a Friday, the end of a long, exhausting workweek in San Francisco. I wasn’t exactly excited about a four hour flight home to Chicago, but at least I had been upgraded to a first class seat...in which I planned to sleep all the way back home. Making small talk was not part of my plane plan.

“No sooner did I sit down, than I hear a booming voice, ‘How you doing?’ My thought was, with my luck, that guy will have the seat next to me.

“ ‘I asked, how you doing?’ was what he yelled one more time as he crawled across me and landed in the seat right next to me. In between my thinking that I wasn’t going to get any

sleep, and that this guy will want to talk all the way to Chicago, he shouted out, “Hi, I’m Ernie.”

I didn’t even look at him.

“There was one other empty seat in first class and it’s next to the guy across the aisle from me. I’m thinking how lucky he is to get an empty seat next to him when up walks a beautiful woman who sits in that empty seat. I was tired, exasperated and a bit jealous.

“So this guy gets this beautiful woman and I’ve got...Ernie. Meanwhile, I hear the woman across the aisle tell her seatmate she was a Playboy Playmate of the Month and was on her way to Chicago for her centerfold photo shoot. This guy’s got a Playboy Playmate and I’ve got...Ernie.

“I did my best to ignore Ernie by putting on my headphones but it didn’t deter him.

“When we landed, I got off the plane very quickly, ducked in to the nearest restroom and bumped into the guy who sat across the aisle. He asked me, ‘So, are you and Ernie good friends?’ ‘Yeah, right,’ I said sarcastically. Then he said, ‘Man, I would have given anything to have been able to spend 4 hours sitting next to one of the MR. Cubs, Ernie Banks!’

“My jaw dropped in disbelief and I slinked out of the restroom thinking, ‘I just sat next to Ernie Banks, one of my all-time favorite baseball heroes, and I completely blew the best coincidence of a lifetime because I didn’t give him the time of day -- much less exchange small talk.’

“If I’m such a huge baseball fan, how was it I didn’t know I was sitting next to Ernie Banks? I didn’t want to make eye contact, so I never looked at him.”

Ed believes that in 1984 he learned the ultimate lesson in networking. Now he talks to everybody! Ed learned that if you talk to strangers, open up and make small talk with them...better yet...LISTEN to them...good things happen.

This true story changed his outlook, behavior and life, especially his business life.

“I’ve come to realize that all business starts with a relationship, and that relationships start with communication. Since that fateful plane ride with Ernie Banks, I’ve never underestimated that business is all around us if we are open to that possibility...and embrace the opportunities that present themselves.

“I learned not to let ‘prime times’ become ‘slime times,’ and that to be open to the world of possibilities that exists, can make your business profitable and your life pleasurable beyond your wildest dreams.”

For me, growing up in Chicago, Ernie Banks was and still is a hero; MR. CUB. I have a brother and several friends who would have traded their first and second born to spend even an hour in the presence of the Great One! Ed Peters will always remember how he blew a situation of serendipity. To his credit, he learned a lesson and was willing to let us learn from his mistake.

The people with Create Your Own Luck Experiences make time for the casual conversation we call ‘small talk’. Much like the ConverSENSations I observed in *What Do I Say Next?*, You Never Know-It-Alls are not dismissive of small talk. As Michael Korda wrote in *Power*, they see small talk as a way to get to know people...and that it often leads to Big Talk.

It can start with kids, pets, food, parents, sports, books, and yes, even the weather--- as it happens to all of us. Small talk can happen at a party, and opera, at the water cooler, a fundraiser, a bookstore, on the golf course or in line at the supermarket. The best of listeners and eavesdroppers are empathic and that forms deeper connections.

TRAIT Three: Drop Names

As I sat across the table at the historic Old Ebbett Grill on a very hot and humid summer day in DC, I looked at my young companion and thought ...how unlikely it is that we would have spent a day together at the Corcoran Gallery and at lunch. That this lovely 20 year-old college coed would even want to hang with me was amazing, as she only met me once and I was older than her parents. But when her mother , Jody Pilka, received my email about my pending visit and realized she would be on a business trip and her husband had a meeting, she mentioned my invite for lunch and a museum tour. Her daughter Courtney volunteered. How this came about is just one of the ‘small world’, ‘you never know’, ‘be sure to drop names’ stories that have added spice to my life.

It started four years earlier, when I received the web site inquiry from a potential client wanted to discuss a presentation, based on my prior books. It was very businesslike, although I couldn’t help but notice her last name. When Jody -- a vice president of Ryan Homes -- and I finally spoke, she said her office was in Gaithersburg. My connecting comment was, “Oh, I have sister-in-law there.” (I left off the ‘ex’ because I still think of Florine as my sister in law.) .

We did the usual: talked about how she found me and came to read my books, discussed the agenda of the two-day meeting for sales staff, the objectives for the meeting, when and where it would take place, etc. It was pleasant, and our conversational energies matched. I knew she was interviewing other speakers as well.

At the end of the conversation, I decided to take a risk and ask a personal question. “Jody, are you from Chicago?” “No, but my husband’s family is.”

“Really, were they in the paper business?” “NO, but I think his grandfather was.”

I had to tell her and drop the big name. There is a school of thought that says dropping names is a way of showing off. And if I were to mention that I had just been at the party with some high muckety-muck, it would be offensive. But this was not the case. There was a connection between us, and I had to let her know.

“Please sit down,” I forewarned Jody. “Is your husband’s grandfather named Ike?”

The surprise in her voice was audible...even palpable. “How did you know?” “Jody my dad worked for your husband’s grandfather for 26 years...then bought the company.” Jody’s response was one of surprise, excitement and disbelief. Out of nowhere, she contacts an author to speak for her company and discovers a connection to the Pilka family. Wow. I was a connection to their past and she was to mine.

Emails and phone calls were made. What a reconnection. My mother and father were at her husband’s parents’ wedding and his grandparents were at my parents’ wedding. My mother even remembered the gift they gave to her and my Dad.

Yes, I was chosen to be the speaker for the programs! But we added something extra. I spent the weekend in Baltimore, and drove out to Virginia to visit with Jody and Eric and their daughters in order to meet the family of the man I grew up hearing so much about. Eric’s grandfather was part of the lore of Randolph Paper Company.

We stay in touch and have seen each other since -- and none of that would have happened had I not risked sounding foolish to a potential client and tried to connect by ‘dropping’ the name we had in common.

The reality is that Jody’s openness to my questions is what made the connection happen. At any point along my conversational path she could have said:

No, I am not from Chicago.

No, my husband is not in the paper biz.

Or she could have done a Dragnet-“just the facts, Ma’am”- and then scurried off of the phone. But she didn’t.

Jody was not monosyllabic; she did not save the mini-moments by being terse; rather, she took the time to elaborate. Yes, it impacted my business but it also gave a lot of joy and fond memories to Eric’s stepmom who knew my parents, and to my Mother who adored Ike Pilka.

Dropping the names of people, places and events that could be links to the person you are talking to creates connections that open the door to opportunity.

Life is like that.

TRAIT FOUR: Eavesdrop and Listen

People who had situations arise out of coincidence and serendipity were people who not only listened and observed, but had highly refined OVERHEARING. We were taught it wasn’t nice to eavesdrop as reinforced on an episode of “Frasier”. Dr. Crane overheard a bit of news and was told by his very sensible father, a former cop, “ OVERhearing is like wiretaps: inadmissible in court.” But for the savvy communicator, keeping one’s ears open is a way to court information, learn, assess and get a feel for the market, what it wants and prefers. Listening and overhearing are ways to do very low-cost ‘market research’. You just may end up getting more direction than you thought. There are benefits to being both the eavesdropper and the eavesdroppee.

TAPPED Out: A Success for Body and SOUL

A local longtime small business was in trouble. The rent at the shopping center had skyrocketed and the owner now had competition from major health clubs and studios that did not exist when she was the “first on her block” ---and for miles around. Sharon, a small business owner, had started her aerobics studio over two decades earlier and was a pioneer in the area.

Body and Soul lost clients to other full service health clubs. Over the two decades, her clients became older and, as their needs changed, Sharon focused her effort on senior prime-time classes. Although getting new clients was hard, she had a loyal base of customers who had been with her for many of her years in business.

Sharon did have a subletter, a dance company, which made it possible to keep the doors open. When her subletter of over 15 years moved to a new location, things became gloomy. She was on the verge of having to close her studio after twenty years in business.

But, a customer, who was a tap dance instructor, saved the day and Sharon’s business.

Bonnie Alexander had been teaching tap at the local recreation and park center. “I never thought that the current studio was very amenable,” she says “One day, after attending an exercise class, I **overheard** Sharon on the phone say that she had lost her tenant. I waited till she was alone so I would not risk embarrassing her or spill the beans in front of other students. I told Sharon what I had heard, and that I thought her studio was in a great location for our tap and ballet classes. It was well lit for night classes, had unlimited parking and it had a great sound

system and even a piano. Plus, I had always enjoyed the aerobics classes at Body and Soul and wanted to continue having it available. Sharon was very interested.

“I mentioned the studio to my colleague who taught the ballet and jazz dance classes in the students program. It just seemed like the perfect option for both of our classes. It would solve Sharon’s problem and we would have a much better facility. Little did I know that a week after I had started the ball rolling, the studio that the Rec and Park department was using... would be condemned and closed! It was amazing serendipity that the solution was in progress before we knew that there was a real problem. The timing was more perfect than I could have planned.

“Because it involved city codes, board votes and some politicizing, the final decision took longer than we would have preferred. But it did happen. Our ballet, tap and hula dance classes now take place in a lovely studio. Our students have made the transition of location very easily. The parents prefer the location because it is in one of the shopping centers and that makes it easy for them. They get to do their grocery shopping, errands or have a cup of Peet’s coffee until the class is over.”

And Sharon’s business is no longer in danger of losing its lease.

Getting a new market for a stand-alone aerobics studio is difficult when surrounded by newer, full-service clubs. Without investors, it’s almost impossible. But we don’t know when a customer --who knows the situation we are facing ---will be able to save the day. There are many stories of communities saving a local small business in the wake of the BIG GUYs moving into town. Be they bookstores, coffee houses, the local shoe repair or the ice cream parlor, a little nostalgia, some shared information and loyal customers can make a difference.

In this case, Bonnie Alexander's overhearing, and the way she approached Sharon with the solution she had in mind, made it easier for Sharon to be forthright about the problem.

Bonnie's subsequent actions help save a longtime small business from closing its doors.

In this case, a bit of eavesdropping, matchmaking, the timing of superb serendipity and, as Bonnie says, "my big mouth," were the marketing tools that turned a potential disaster into a 'small business saved' success story.

TRAIT FIVE: Ask/Offer Help

So many of us were raised with the old adage about "Making it on our own," not asking for help but instead "pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps." That may work for some, but the You Never Know It Alls are willing to do what New York Times best-selling novelist E. Lynn Harris did.

He spent 13 years selling computers for a major blue chip company. But his heart was set on writing a novel.

In a San Francisco Chronicle article by Adair Lara he was quoted as saying "I always knew words could change peoples lives. I'd go to the library when I was younger. I knew there was a big world waiting for me."

He quit his job and moved to Atlanta to write his novel. Because he could not sell it to any publisher, he self-published it. But bookstores wouldn't take his book.

"I knew from selling computers that it takes sales get peoples attention," he said.

So E. Lynn Harris **asked** friends to give him book parties and he **asked** owners of black small businesses if he could leave copies of his books.

"I'd leave a copy in beauty salons with a note, 'Please don't remove.'"

People who began reading his book while waiting their turn in the chair started to call him with orders.

“One day a woman called me from Doubleday publishing who happened to read one of these self-published copies. She said it was ‘one of the most enjoyable reading experiences’ and asked if I had an agent.”

When Mr. Harris went to see the literary agent, John Hawkins, he left a copy and later mentioned the lady from Doubleday. The woman that he thought might have been a secretary, he learned from John Hawkins, was a powerful person in publishing, Martha Levin. John Hawkes asked E. Lynn Harris if he could represent him!

E. Lynn Harris is now a New York Times best-selling author who has sold over 3 million books. He had a passion and a plan and was willing to ask for help. The combination of the knowledge of his community and the sales process yielded a series of coincidences and sweet serendipity that catapulted E. Lynn Harris to where he is today.

TRAIT SIX: Stray From the Path

Some very successful individuals were on paths that they had chosen and for which they were trained, schooled and experienced. But some exemplified a counterintuitive trait by not staying stay on course. When the “AHA!” light bulb was lit, they allowed themselves to detour from their paths in order to pursue new ones. For some, like Jansen Chan, the fork in the road becomes a new permanent path.

We all make choices based on gut reactions, research and advice as well as family and peer pressure. The unpredictable result can fall into the ‘you never know’ category. We travel

roads that lead us, albeit circuitously, to the place where we are. What if we had or had not taken the fork in the road that, as Robert Frost said, ‘has made all the difference’?”

When Jansen Chan was a little boy, he learned to bake from his father. When he was in primary school, Jansen and Dad would bake cakes for birthdays, parties, anniversaries and traditional Chinese celebrations. They thought about the foundation, design and structure and, of course, the ingredients and taste. The presentation was part of the pre-planning. Jansen was ten years old when his father succumbed to cancer after a seven-year bout with the disease, but his memories of baking with his Dad remained strong throughout the years.

Jansen was interested in design, structure and form as well as visual presentation. So at the time of high school graduation he planned to explore those interests at the University of California, Berkeley, in the school of architecture. He was an excellent student who completed the five-year course and found a job as an architect with a local firm.

“For two years, I worked on design projects and structures and discovered that I didn’t like working as an architect.” The path Jansen had not chosen called to him from a place deep within his most wonderful memories. Jansen broke the news to his employers and to his mother and left the firm. “I had to see if the path I didn’t originally pursue was the one I wanted.”

Jansen arranged to apprentice to the pastry chef at a downtown restaurant rather than attend culinary school. His love of art ---designing, attention to detail and creating eye pleasing edible structures (desserts) ---prevailed. Jansen Chan worked at a four star restaurant as the assistant pastry chef and was part of the team that created the “Pecan Marjolaine with Julia’s Chocolate Mousse” for Julia Child’s 90th Birthday celebration. He followed his dream by returning to his preferred path -- and found it to be the right one.

What did Mom, chief development officer in the public schools, say about his career change? “At first I was surprised and a little disappointed. Now I see how happy he is, how good he is at what he does, and that makes me happy.”

He is now the pastry chef at the tony Beaucoup on Nob Hill.

“I now love what I do, although it requires a lot of hard work and standing on your feet for ten hours a day. It’s not lucrative, but it’s my passion.”

What Jansen did allowed him to be working in an arena that he has loved since he was the little boy who helped Dad bake cakes.

He followed the prescribed path to UC Berkeley School of Architecture and studied design, details, foundation and presentation in an academic setting. He gave it a chance, working in the field while he learned the machinations of the market, the business and the politics. And also learned that he did NOT like it. Jansen took a risk by leaving a traditional and respected profession and disappointing his mother. He had the courage to pay attention to the “voice in his stomach.”

To make this career switch, Jansen had to network in a brand new arena to find a pastry chef willing to mentor him, and once again he had to learn the details, procedures, policies and politics of his new profession -- and continues to do so.

TRAIT SEVEN: Timely, Gracious Exits Without Bridge Burning

Newspapers and magazines often carry stories of sports figures, entertainers and executives who leave their careers in a timely fashion. They know “when to hold ‘em, and when to fold ‘em.” As Shakespeare said , “All’s well that ends well.”

Jerry Seinfeld wanted to leave at the top of his game because too many television series stay too long at the fair. In a recent Emmy award interview, Ray Romano (Everybody Loves Raymond) echoed his desire to do the same...to have a timely exit at the top of his game. He doesn't want to be like "the Fonz" and have to "jump the shark."

I was in New York during the US Open when tennis star Pete Sampras, winner of five US Opens and seven Wimbledon championships, was to be honored. It was his official retirement at the age of 36 from the game he loved. The tributes to Sampras were abundant. He was great on and off the court --- a gentleman who was admired by his fans, the press and his colleagues. His tribute at the US Open reflected a most gracious and timely exit.

The corollary to a gracious exit is not burning any bridges. Why? Because you just never know!

After her Fond Farewell Tour, Cher explained, "You have to stop when you're really good at it." For her, it's the pre-concert hustle and staging that wears her down, according to an USA Today article by Edna Gunderson.

"Performing is the easy part. The hard part is going from hotel to hotel, venue to venue. It's strenuous and backbreaking." At 56, Cher wants to "exit gracefully before rust sets in." Not burning bridges is a result of gracious and timely exits.

On Her Toes - Salvaging a Burnt Bridge

Marika Sakellariou's careers combined her passion for ballet with her commitment to fitness and excellence in sports. But it was her gracious, well-thought out and well-

choreographed conversation with Maestro Kurt Herbert Adler-- after he fired her—that was Marika's Turning Point.

“I was a little girl living in my native Greece when my best school friend invited me to come to a class with her. I was excited as I thought I was going to her gymnastics class and would get to do cartwheels. My best friend was Finnish and she spoke no Greek, I spoke no Finnish. When I walked into the ‘gymnastics class’, I found a very different class: ballet. But the minute I heard the music, I fell in love with the dance.

“I worked very hard in ballet. One day my ballet teacher, Miss Laine Metz, said she was getting too old to demonstrate the steps. She said I could earn my classes by learning all of the ballet terminology and ballet exercises and teaching them to the students. She ended up closing her studio and becoming my mentor and advocate in the ballet world.”

Marika and her family moved to Canada, where she became involved in sports and was an Olympic gymnastics competitor. She attended Connecticut College for Women and Juilliard and started her own ballet company in Marin County, The Marin Repertory Dance Theater.

“One day, Mr. Kurt Herbert Adler of the San Francisco Opera, known as a demanding and formidable maestro, saw a performance of my company. We later learned that the Opera Ballet was having an audition and my partner thought that I should go with him to try out. Although I knew it would interfere with my dance company and wanted to refuse, I agreed and was hired as a soloist.

“On a day my dance company had a scheduled performance, I was supposed to dance a solo and, luckily, the choreographer of SFOB agreed that I would not appear and could be with my dance company. But when Mr. Adler noticed I wasn't on stage, he fired me! I was very upset

because I had permission to be absent, which he did not know. I felt I had to speak to him and requested a meeting. I was quite nervous but I calmly told him that my absence was authorized. And added that if he didn't know that, then there was no administrative leadership.”

“I was twenty-three at the time and to say what I did to Maestro Adler could have been career suicide. It took more guts than I thought I had. He paused, and asked me who he should hire to provide that leadership. I thought about it, looked him in the eye and said, ‘Me.’ He asked me to write a proposal describing the position I would fill. He accepted it. I stayed for ten years, choreographed over forty ballets and designed a fitness regime for the dancers in the off-season.

“After a ballet injury, I became more involved in sports fitness and became a licensed fitness instructor. I designed Enduradance™ as a training for Olympic athletes.”

Under the umbrella of her company Marikasport, she also invented the Ski-slide to prepare US gold-medalist, Jonnie Mosley, for the 1998 Winter Olympics. The Ski-slide exercise method won a Nike Innovation Award and was licensed to Reebok. “I continue to teach ballet, combining my first love with my passion for fitness.”

Avoiding the burning of bridges is not about being meek or a victim. It's about being professional and reasonable. Marika was unfairly fired and had every right to be furious and resentful, but chose to handle the situation with a combination of tact, grace and chutzpah.

Because she had the courage to speak to Maestro Adler with respect and graciousness, Marika salvaged a bridge that was almost burnt for her, and the rest is ballet history.

Not burning bridges is a common trait of the You Never Know-It-Alls, but being able to reconstruct one that has been burnt for you -- that's an act of grace.

When we experience an untimely exit due to a lay-off, a merger or cost-cutting measures, it is often disruptive and unexpected. While we can't control company decisions, we can control our response. The gracious exit can ensure a good letter of recommendation, possibly some work as an independent contractor or a re-hire in the future. But a bitter end ensures that none of the aforementioned are possibilities.

People who have their opportunities turn into success often benefit from good behavior. When CEO of Clearbrook, Carl LaMell, interviewed two final candidates for a senior executive position, he asked both when they could start. One fellow said he could start that Monday. The other said it would take a month, as had projects to finish and he couldn't leave his present employer in the lurch. The staff thought Carl would choose the first candidate. "Not at all," Carl explained, "Why would I want someone who would leave a position with four days notice? If he would do that to his current boss, he'd do that to us. I didn't want to hire someone who could leave a position so lightly and not care about burning bridges."

TRAIT EIGHT: Say "yes" when you want to say "no"

A current trend, recommended as a time-management technique, is to Just Say NO to anything that might require our time and be an imposition. The subtext is that we are also saying no to any opportunities that might result if we had said yes.

Some people's lives are a series of serendipity. They are open and live large and embrace life. Anna Maria Bertacchi is Executive Administration Manager of UN Federal Credit Union because many years earlier she said "yes" when she really wanted to say "no".

Anna Maria has a smile that lights up a room. It caught the eye of an older woman in her church who seemed to be alone most of the time.

When she began to smile back, Anna Maria would say hello and ask her how she was. “After a few months of our growing conversations, she asked me if I would drive her to Wednesday night Bible study. I was a bit surprised and speechless because I didn’t often go to that class.

“But I felt honored that she would ask me out of everyone at the church. And I thought Elizabeth was alone. Even though it was not something I planned to attend regularly, instead of doing the sensible thing and say no...I heard myself say, ‘Sure, I’ll take you.’

“Over the course of time, we became close. She knew I lived near my family home and helped to care for my Dad who had been an invalid since I was 10 years old. The year following my dad’s death was a time of great change for me. I began to work at a struggling community hospital in the public relations and development office. I also wanted to go to school and get a bachelor’s degree. During that year, Elizabeth decided to sell her home and move to Phoenix to be near her son. As I helped her pack, she made me promise two things: to visit her and to get my degree. I was determined to keep both those promises. I just couldn’t figure out how to work and go to school.

“Then I remembered that, years earlier, when I was working as a secretary at IBM in New York, I had won an award that was presented at a conference in the Los Angeles area. As I was sitting on the beach, staring at the Pacific Ocean, I knew that it was my destiny to move there. I went home, told my supervisor and asked for a transfer to the California office.”

After two years, Anna Maria sensed that her family needed her back in New York. She spent her last few months in California working as a temporary secretary for a supervisor who

was pursuing a weekend college degree program at Loyola Marymount. She encouraged Anna Maria to do the same and mentioned that Marymount College in Tarrytown, New York which had the exact same weekend degree program. Although she never heard of the program, Anna Maria had grown up in Tarrytown.

“Years later, after I promised Elizabeth I would go to college, I remembered this conversation and enrolled in the program. I still worked at a local hospital doing pr, volunteered at church and continued my friendship with Elizabeth.

“Three years into the program, I began to feel so tired and discouraged. One evening, when Elizabeth had called, I became very emotional said that I wanted to give up. A couple of weeks later, Elizabeth’s son contacted me and asked me how much it would cost for me to get my degree. He said that his mom had spoken with him and they decided that they wanted to pay my way through college. I was shocked.

“Shortly after that conversation, I received a check for \$10,000 to cover the cost of my courses and a new computer. And two years later, at the age of 36, I marched across the stage and received my Bachelors in Psychology with Honors.

“After I got my degree, I looked for a new job and saw an ad for a company in Manhattan that was looking for a PR Specialist. The job involved international relations, and required a college degree, which I now had. I began working for the United Nations Federal Credit Union, have organized a grand opening of our office in Geneva, Switzerland and traveled to Germany and Rome, where we made presentations to the UN staff. As I stood on the balcony of my hotel overlooking the Coliseum, I thought, wow, I had come a long way.

“If I had said NO to Elizabeth, who wanted to attend Bible Study, instead of YES, I would not had this incredible series of opportunities nor met the sweet woman who changed my entire life.”

Sometimes saying ‘yes’ instead of ‘no’ as a volunteer in a professional association can make impact our lives in a way we never imagined. Jennifer Klein was involved in her Sacramento chapter of Public Relations Society of America when she was asked to do yet another task for their holiday event.

“I had so much on my plate between client work, holiday obligations and my other responsibilities for the organization that one more thing seemed like the last straw. But, I had been a member since I was a student at UC Davis, and everyone had been so helpful to me in my career that I just thought that it wouldn’t kill me to meet with the Celebrity MC. Sander Walker was a DJ at our local radio station not too far from my office. So I arranged to meet with him to deliver the script.

“As we went over the event’s agenda and script, we ended up having a great time; talking and laughing a lot.”

And they still are. Jennifer and Sander turned their serendipitous meeting into a success by my (and every matchmaker’s) standards! They are married and the parents of Jayde Anne.

Why join professional associations? Why say ‘yes’ to something when “no” is a more obvious answer? Because doing so in our business life can impact our personal life as well.

ROANE'S REMINDERS

The Eight Counterintuitive Traits are what set apart the “lucky ones” from the rest of us. Their behaviors and actions elevated those experiences we call coincidence, kismet, karma, fate, destiny and luck from serendipity to success. Here is what they do that we can adopt:

- Trait One: Talk to strangers
- Trait Two: Make small talk.
- Trait Three: Drop names.
- Trait Four: Eavesdrop and listen.
- Trait Five: Ask for/offer help
- Trait Six: Stray from chosen paths
- Trait Seven: Exit graciously without burning bridges
- Trait Eight: Say YES, instead of NO.

You Never Know-It-Alls live large, are **open to possibility**, and **expect** that good things will happen. And so they do. As you read the stories in this book, you will be able to identify at least one, if not more, of the Eight Traits that the You Never Know It Alls exhibited.

Think about the events, the opportunities and the coincidences that exist in your life right now. Maybe a door is closing, but there is a crack in a window that can be pried open. Or you are feeling a bit burned out and someone suggests you ought to talk to his former boss ---who is starting a company. Or you find out they are forming a new brainstorming group of executives in your field. The first step is to see the opportunity, then evaluate it for potential. What can you do now to transform your potential opportunities into possibilities with positive outcomes?

A Closer Look at the Current Opportunities In Your Life

Opportunity	Action Plan
1. Invited to join the board of a highly regarded not- for- profit	Interview current board members Assess time commitment and responsibilities Attend a meeting and/or event.
2.	
3	
4	
.5	

Once you are open, you will hear, see and ‘bump into’ more opportunities that you can add to the list.