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**"It doesn't take a lot of strength to hold on.  
It takes a lot of strength to let go."**

» J.C. Watts



## A Service Pick-Me-Up

Until last week, I'd never visited Duluth, MN. I didn't know that it had an "international airport" until I booked flights.

Turns out, the airport is about the size of the Buc-ee's convenience stores around Texas.

Landing on a Monday evening, I soon learned that having transportation lined up ahead of time might have been nice. Neither Lyft nor Uber were any help.

After 10 minutes, you know that the "finding you a driver" message is a stretch goal.

Oh well, I'll just get a cab. What a quaint idea. There were none there and apparently none coming.

I walked back in and asked an airport worker for options. She pointed me to a list of local cab companies on a nearby wall.

Great! And then, none answered their phones. Okay...on to plan...uh...D. I called the hotel and found that they did have a shuttle. Awesome!

It was somewhere else but should get to me in 20 to 30 minutes. Okay, then.



## Tell Me All About It

Like many folks, I tend to put on earbuds and zone out when I travel.

(Okay, not if I'm driving.)

On my most recent trip, however, I vowed to practice one of the things I preach.

A standard soapbox topic of mine is that the most productive business development conversations you will ever have do not look or sound like sales pitches.

Through the years, more folks than I can remember have told me that they think most customers are in too much of a hurry to have a conversation.

Whether at a branch or in a store or out in public somewhere, folks are always in a hurry or preoccupied staring at their phones.

I frequently kiddingly remind them that, no, these folks don't have time or interest in talking about...you.

But if you get them talking about themselves or the things that are important to them, their schedule suddenly begins to clear.

A quote that I've borrowed countless times is, "The busiest man in the world will stop

With no other options, I settled in. Twenty minutes later, I got a call from the hotel.

The young lady apologized and said that the shuttle wasn't going to be able to get me for quite some time. She told me to look for a grey Jeep in about 20 minutes.

I asked, "A grey Jeep? No markings. Just... a grey Jeep?" I was told, "Uh...yeah, Mary is going to pick you up."

I chuckled and said, "Well, I don't think I have many options. So...great!"

To be fair, the fact that I was now closing in on an hour just to have the promise of a ride to my hotel wasn't the hotel's fault. I wasn't upset with them at all.

Yet, when Mary pulled up 10 minutes later, she acted like they owed me an apology.

I smiled as I climbed into the front seat (there were bags on the back seat) and told her, "Hey, this isn't your fault."

Within a minute, we were having a great chat about everything from our families, to where we've lived, to the history of Duluth, MN and the hotel we were heading to.

Only upon arrival did I learn that Mary was the manager of the hotel.

She overheard the desk clerk struggling to find me a ride and jumped in her own vehicle to pick me up.

I later noted that every hotel employee I met over two days was exceptionally friendly and professional.

That didn't surprise me.

Leaders who take personal ownership of a situation and step up to go the extra mile (or in this case, about 14 miles) for customers tend to have teams who do the same.

everything he's doing to tell you about himself."

When you get folks talking about themselves, their families, their work, their hobbies or favorite sports teams, or their pets – you accomplish a few things.

First, you learn stuff. A pretty good gauge of a productive conversation is that you walked away knowing something you didn't when that chat started.

Second, when you actively listen to people talking about the things that are important to them, you are paying the kind of compliment too few people pay today.

You convey they are important enough to listen to. That's bigger than many realize.

On this trip, I made more of a point than ever to get folks I'd never met before talking.

I learned sailing tips and how to avoid hypothermia from a waiter, the history of a historic building from a salesclerk, and supply chain chokepoints from a guy in line with me who owns a shipping business.

Without fail, these folks eventually asked about me.

When you first show interest in people and get them talking about themselves, they naturally become more interested in you.

Be curious, polite, and enthusiastic about learning people's stories.

At the least, you'll have more interesting days. You'll also be more likely to learn ways you might be of actual service to them.

Everyone has a story.

Strive to listen to a few today.

**"Only the weak are cruel.  
Gentleness can only be expected from the strong."  
» Leo Buscaglia**



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