

PLANE TALK



*Networking at
30,000 Feet*

DON GABOR

Author of How to Start a Conversation and Make Friends

Plane-Talk Networking at 30,000 Feet

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Conversation Arts Media

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INTRODUCTION

Plane-Talk: Networking at 30,000 Feet is designed for frequent flyers like you. Do you find yourself spending many hours in airports and on planes? Even though you use this time to catch up on reading or writing reports, answering emails, making phone calls, sleeping, relaxing or just thinking, are you still frustrated by time you spend flying from place to place? If you are like most time-conscious professionals, you hate to lose any opportunity to increase your productivity. So why not use your time in the air to expand your business contacts and referrals?

Three Challenges of Networking at 30,000 Feet

There are three challenges to networking on airplanes and in airports. The first challenge is to assess how receptive other passengers (particularly those seated near you) are to networking during the flight. The second challenge is to break the ice and engage them in small talk. And finally, the third challenge is to turn small talk into a business-related networking conversation.

The reality is that not every passenger will want to chat with you and not every conversation you have while you are in the air will turn into a big deal by the time you touch down at your destination. But after reading the tips, strategies and sample opening lines in this fast and easy-to-read e-book, you'll get dozens of proven networking strategies, communications skills and opening line to help you start conversations and make business contacts while you travel. So if you're ready for your business opportunities to take-off, then fasten your seat belt and begin networking at 30,000 feet!



Respect your fellow traveler's right not to be disturbed.

Pestering a seatmate who wishes to work, sleep, think, read, or chooses not to talk is extremely annoying. If you start talking without considering your seat partner's openness to conversation, then you are probably eliminating a potential networking opportunity later on in the flight.

Plane Networking No-No's

Avoid these plane networking pitfalls and increase the likelihood of making a beneficial connection with your seatmates.

Don't:

- ✗ Be too talkative.
- ✗ Talk only about yourself, your business or your favorite topic.
- ✗ Pump your fellow passengers for professional advice or inside information.
- ✗ Bad-mouth your competition or talk negatively about your current or past employer.
- ✗ Complain about business, the economy or government regulations.
- ✗ Drink or eat excessively during the flight.
- ✗ Exaggerate your achievements or those of your company.
- ✗ Talk so loudly that passengers a few seats away can hear you.

Networking Strategies Before You Take Off

Airports are great places to network because most people are waiting to go somewhere and willing to talk to other passengers. You can initiate conversations and network while you:

- ✓ wait in check-in lines.
- ✓ sit in the waiting area.
- ✓ have a snack in the restaurant or bar.
- ✓ browse in gift and magazine shops.

Keep the conversation light. Center it around your destination and your reasons for traveling—whether they are for business, pleasure, or a bit of both. Your goal is to establish rapport and an openness to have a conversation. Judge the conversation as you go. If your conversation in the lounge appears to be percolating along and you're on a shuttle flight or airline that has open seating, then why not find a seat together? Sharing a row and networking doesn't mean you have to continue the conversation for the whole flight.

Show Interest

If the person seated next to you is involved in an activity, glance over at what he or she is doing. Look for a company logo on a home page, letterhead, book title, or other clues to the person's business or interests. Do not interrupt or be too obvious. While you have a certain amount of leeway to observe what your seatmate is doing, don't stare. Instead, take out some work of your own—a book or an item that reveals your interests. Then wait for the right moment to open up the conversation—it will come.

Being patient shows that you understand the unstated rule of networking on airplanes—don't intrude on the mental space of the person seated next to you. Even if you do exchange a few words, remember that the other person is free to stop talking at any time.

Break the Ice—the Sooner the Better

There are usually a few awkward moments of silence when passengers board a plane and take their seats. Most are getting settled, grabbing a book, magazine, snack or newspaper, from a bag, fastening their seatbelt or adjusting their travel pillow. This is an ideal time to gently break the ice with your seatmates and say hello. It is a quick way to establish how receptive they may be to conversation.

To see if your seatmate is open for conversation, ask a few information-seeking questions. For example:

“Is this a pleasure or business trip for you?”

“Have you spent much time in (your place of departure)?”

“What takes you to ... (your destination)?”

“This is my first time in (your destination). What about you?”

“Would you happen to know a good way to get from the airport to downtown?”

Listen for Key Words and Free Information

Information-seeking questions show interest and your willingness to talk. They provide an opportunity for your fellow traveler to include key words and extra, or free information, in his or her answer. Key words and free information suggest topics of interest or a desire to talk about a certain subject. From a networking perspective, the most productive topics to listen for are ones related to business. Key words and free information in a

conversation are like the tip of an iceberg—most of the conversation is waiting below the surface. They reveal topics that the speaker wants to or is willing to talk about. (new paragraph)

How do you use key words and free information to get a business conversation going? Just ask an easy question or make a comment based on what you think the other person might want to talk about. If you get a positive response, pursue it further.

For example, on a recent red-eye flight I said “Good evening” to my seatmate as she entered our row and stuffed her bag beneath the seat in front of her. When she buckled her seatbelt and pulled out her sleep mask I added, “I’m happy to be heading home! Which way are you going—home or away?” Her polite response, “I’m traveling for business,” and the key word business was the key word I needed to continue the conversation with, “What kind of business are you in?” She said, “Selling stuff,” and then added this potent free information: “But my real passion is mentoring girls and young women for scholarship pageants.”

“By the way, my name is”

After chatting for a few minutes, I learned that the contestants needed help with their public speaking and answering the judges’ interview questions. It was at that point that I took the opportunity to introduce myself to my seatmate and tell her what I do for a living. I said, “By the way, my name is Don Gabor. I’m a communications trainer, networking coach and professional speaker. Maybe I can help your contestants. Do you have a business card?” The result of our short chat and follow-up telephone call was an assignment for me to coach two contestants in the 2013 Miss California pageant on how to answer interview questions.

Make Your Seatmate Feel Comfortable Talking to You

To effectively network with a fellow passenger you'll need to establish rapport, or a sense of compatibility and trust. The fastest and least risky way to build rapport is to discuss several light subjects based on key words and free information that you hear and reveal. That's why it's important to balance the amount of time you talk and listen along with the information you seek and disclose. Here are some other tips for making that stranger in the seat next to you feel comfortable talking to you.

- Turn slightly toward your seatmate so you can make eye contact.
- Initiate a variety of light and upbeat topics of conversation.
- Show interest and enthusiasm in topics your fellow traveler brings up.
- Avoid controversial subjects such as sex, politics, religion and, above, travel disasters!
- Encourage your other seatmate to join your conversation.

You Never Know Who is Sitting Next to You

On one flight I was seated next to a woman who was eager to talk from the moment she sat down. She told me she was on vacation from her job teaching English as a foreign language to adults. For the first hour of the flight we chatted about teaching, writing and several other topics in which we shared an interest, including her desire to buy copies of my book, (s/b ital) *How to Start a Conversation and Make Friends*, for her students. When our other seatmate overheard our conversation, he expressed interest in my books, too! The moral of the story is, you never know who you are sitting next to on an airplane. If you and your seatmates have something in common it may lead to business.



You can build rapport with fellow travelers if you focus on subjects that encourage them to talk. Always listen for key words that will help you direct the conversation to professional or business topics. Here are topics that most airline passengers like to talk about and some opening lines to start the conversation.

BUSINESS topics lead the conversation to networking. As you ask questions and reveal free information, listen carefully for key words that may alert you to potential business opportunities.

“I’m in the _____ business. What about you?”

“What made you decide to go into your line of work?”

“Have you always been in this industry or have you done some other kind of work?”

“What would you say are the major challenges in your industry these days?”

“How has your business changed since you started in the industry?”

TRAVEL is a natural topic because most frequent flyers love to share road stories about places they stay while on the road.

“What’s your favorite hotel? Airline?”

“The last time I was in (your destination) I stayed at a place I liked called”

“What is your favorite place to travel?”

“Can you recommend a few interesting places to see where we are going?”

“So you fly a lot, too. Do you have any tips on how to decrease jet lag?”

FOOD topics can range from comparing restaurants to chef knives to swapping recipes.

“What’s your favorite cuisine?”

“Can you recommend any good restaurants in (your destination)?”

“Do you have any good recipes you are willing to share with me?”

“Have you even wanted to be a professional chef or open a restaurant?”

“I enjoy eating _____ and drinking _____. What about you?”

“If you like _____ I can recommend a great place to shop.”

HOBBIES reveal interests and activities outside of business. Most people like to talk about what they do for fun.

“What do you like to do when you're not working?”

“How do you keep yourself from getting bored when you travel on business?”

“What is it about your hobby that you enjoy so much?”

“How did you get involved in that hobby?”

“What would you recommend to someone who wants to get started in that kind of hobby?”

BOOKS, MOVIES, MUSIC, CULTURE and ENTERTAINMENT are topics that can lead to extended conversations.

“What kinds of entertainment do you enjoy?”

“Have you seen any good movies lately?”

“I like live music. Do you happen to know of any _____ clubs in (your destination)?”

“I understand (your destination) has great museums. Which ones have you visited?”

“What’s your book about? Are you enjoying it?”

“What do you recommend I see while I'm in (your destination)?”

SPORTS AND FITNESS are popular topics for all ages.

“I’m a _____ fan. What teams do you follow?”

“I like to play _____ to stay in shape. Do you play any sports?”

“My favorite form of exercise is _____. What about you?”

“Can you recommend a good place to jog or walk while I’m in (your destination).”

“You look like you are in good shape. What do you do to stay so fit?”

TECHNOLOGY is an easy topic to bring up when you see your seatmate using an electronic device like a laptop, e-reader, tablet or mobile phone.

“I see you are using a _____. How do you like it?”

“Do you use LinkedIn or you use other social media?”

“What are your favorite websites?”

“I use the Internet for research. What about you?”

“Is that a technology magazine you’re reading? What new gadgets are hitting the stores these days?”

FAMILY and LIFE at HOME are topics many travelers like to talk about because they provide an opportunity to share some personal information.

“I live in Where do you call home?”

“I’ve never spent much time in ... What’s it like where you live?”

“You say you have children? How old are your kids?”

“Do you have any pets? We have _____.”

“What is life like where you live?”

Taboo Topics

Bringing up certain topics can make other passengers feel uncomfortable. Here are common taboo topics that are best to omit from your conversations with fellow travelers.

- ✗ Revealing overly personal, mental, physical, or financial information
- ✗ Discussing urban violence and gory crimes
- ✗ Complaining about the economy
- ✗ Blaming the government or others for your business's weak performance
- ✗ Claiming that your competitors have an unfair advantage over you
- ✗ Belittling or spreading rumors about your competitors
- ✗ Talking about sex, religion, politics
- ✗ Illnesses contracted on airplanes
- ✗ Health problems
- ✗ Money problems
- ✗ Marital, family or other relationship problems

Push the Networking “Pause” Button

At some point in your conversation you or your fellow traveler will want to take a break from your conversation. When someone opens a laptop, pulls out a book or dons a sleep mask, this usually suggests that it’s time to do something other than talk—at least for the time being. You can take a break from the conversation by saying,

“Well, I think it’s time for my nap.” Or “Excuse me. I’m going to take a walk to the restroom.” Or, “It’s been fun chatting with you, but I really need to get some work done. I love to continue our conversation a little later.”

Be patient if there is a lull in the conversation. Chances are another opportunity to network will present itself later in the flight. This is also a good time to network in other places on the plane.

Networking in the Aisles

There are other places where you can network on planes besides in your assigned seat, especially on longer flights. Keep your eyes and ears open for flyers who might be good networking prospects. For example, when I heard two passengers chatting in the aisle near my seat about a “TED-Talk” they were on their way to attend. (TED = Technology, Entertainment, Design.) I wanted to know more about event so as one of the passengers was returning to his seat, I tapped him on the shoulder and said,

“Hello. Excuse me, I couldn’t help but overhear your conversation a moment ago about an upcoming TED Talk. Do you mind if I ask you a question about it?”

After chatting for about ten minutes we exchanged cards and agreed to follow up. As a result, of this conversation, I learned more about TED Talks and made a good business contact.



Identify Potentially Profitable Contacts

Of course, it's impossible to know who will be a good business prospect on your flight, but your chances of meeting profitable contacts will improve if you look for people who are:

Dressed in business suits, business-casual attire, polo shirts with company logos, or, for many IT professionals and entrepreneurs, jeans and t-shirts.

Using their laptops or tablets to write reports or read email.

Reading business or industry-related books or magazines.

Chatting with colleagues about business or company issues.

Describing themselves as road warriors to flight attendants.

Willing to talk about their businesses. (insert period)

Transition to a Business Conversation

You've learned that your fellow passenger lives in your home city, shares your interest in old movies, has two cats, loves health food, and runs a training program for a large company. You can use this information to transition your conversation to a business topic. Remember that skilled networkers offer useful information and referrals to others as well as looking for business opportunities for themselves. Here are some examples of how to open a business conversation:

“Who are your typical clients?”

“If I meet someone interested in your service or product, how can they contact you?”

“Let me tell you a little about my business.”

“What professional associations do you belong to?”

“Who are the big players in your business?”

“What kind of trends are you seeing in your business?”

“In what ways has the changing economic climate affected your business?”

“Does your company have any new products coming out soon?”

Exchange Contact Information

Following-up with contacts is one of the most important, but unfortunately most neglected skills in networking. Building a lasting business relationship begins with an invitation to talk at another

time. Without coming on too strong let your fellow passenger know that you want to stay in contact by saying:

“I'd like to keep in touch with you. What's the best way to contact you? Do you have a business card?”

“I'd like to talk to continue our conversation. Can I call you next week?”

“I recently read an article that may be of interest to you. If you'd like I'd be happy to send it to you when I get back to my office.”

“Would you send me some information about your services? There may be an opportunity for you to do some business with us.”

Down-To-Earth Follow-Ups

During your flight, you and your fellow traveler have traded travel stories, discussed economic trends, and even laughed over an amusing travel experience. If you feel comfortable enough to extend a social invitation, you might say:

“If you have some time, please feel free to drop by our hospitality suite at the ABC Hotel. I'd like to find out more about your company and what you do.”

“Since we are here for the same conference let's get together before it ends. Here's my cell phone number. Give me a call if you want to get a bite or a drink later.”

“Would you like to join me for some sightseeing after you've finished working?”

“If you'd like to join me for a dinner or a movie, I love to have the company. Here's my card. I'm staying at the XYZ Hotel for three days. Call me if you'd like to get together.”

“I’ve got two tickets to the baseball game (concert, etc.). Would you care to join me?”

“Some of my colleagues and I are going to a local restaurant for dinner tonight. Would you like to come along?”

One More Thing After You Land ...

The final words you say to your seatmate are the ones that will leave the strongest impression. As you are waiting for the cabin door to open, offer your seatmate a warm smile, a handshake and direct eye contact. Then say his or her name and a few parting words:

“_____, I really enjoyed sharing this flight with you. It made the time go really fast and it was great networking! I’ll be in touch soon. Enjoy the rest of your travels.”

Remember to call, email or send the information you promised within a week!

CONCLUSION

Turn Every Flight into a Networking Opportunity

Now that you know the protocol, strategies, skills and goals for networking on airplanes, it's up to you to put them into practice. Remember, you never know who is seated next to you on an airplane or how you can help one another build your businesses until you introduce yourself and start a conversation! Even if your efforts don't turn fellow travelers into customers or clients right away, don't be discouraged. As long as you continue to expand your personal network and refer potential clients to the other travelers you meet, your business will grow. Networking at 30,000 feet will put more prospects into your sales pipeline and give you many opportunities to meet a lot of profitable business contacts in the friendly skies!

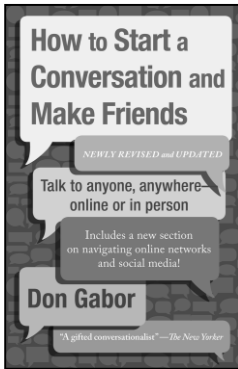


About the Author

Don Gabor is an author, communications coach and “small talk expert.” He trains sales, IT professionals and entrepreneurs how to turn networking opportunities into profitable conversations. He has been presenting programs to corporations, associations and colleges since 1980. Don is a member of the National Speakers Association and was the 2010-2011 NYC chapter President. The New Yorker called Don “a gifted conversationalist.”

For information about how Don Gabor can speak to your group or help you communicate more effectively at work, home and everywhere in between, contact him at 718-768-0824, don@dongabor.com or visit his website at www.dongabor.com.

BUILDING LASTING RELATIONSHIPS IS WHAT SUCCESS IS ALL ABOUT!



The way we communicate is constantly changing—but you can always meet more people and make new friends!

Don Gabor's bestseller, *How to Start a Conversation and Make Friends*, has helped more than 500,000 people communicate with wit, confidence, and enthusiasm. First published in 1983 this newly revised and updated 2011 edition combines classic techniques in the art of conversation with

necessary skills for communicating in the twenty-first century.

By following the simple and dynamic guidelines in this easy-to-read book, you'll be ready to strike up a great conversation anytime, anywhere. Learn how to keep the conversation going by asking the right questions, using body language effectively, and avoiding conversation pitfalls. Combining his tried-and-true methods with a whole new section on communicating online and through social networking, Don shows you how to:

- Identify your personal conversation style
- Engage in online conversations using proper etiquette and security
- Turn online conversations into face-to-face relationships
- Boost your conversation and networking skills
- Packed with charts, hundreds of opening lines, real-life examples, FAQs, helpful hints, and solid professional advice, *How to Start a Conversation and Make Friends* is sure to help you connect with others at home, work, and everywhere in between for years to come.

Request a free conversation tip sheet, "60 Ways to Improve Your Conversations" at don@dongabor.com.

There's Networking Gold in Them-Thar Clouds!

Use the time you spend in airports and on airplanes to build your business and increase your income. Don Gabor, author and "small talk expert," shows you how.

In this booklet you will discover easy ways to:

- 🗨 Network with fellow travelers in airports and on planes.
- 🗨 Turn small talk into business opportunities.
- 🗨 Use travel time to expand your business network.
- 🗨 Make new friends and business contacts.

Don Gabor is the author of *How to Start a Conversation and Make Friends*, plus ten other books on how to connect with people in business, social, and personal situations.

The New Yorker called Don, "a gifted conversationalist."

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