

MODEL 1 – For the *Business to Business* and *Leadership* Categories

My *Field of Dreams* Moment: The Morning in '08 That Changed Everything
By XXX

Note: It's tough out there, and whether you're able to connect with people in person or you must do so remotely, this story will still serve you well.

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We were right in the middle of the Great Recession. Our promotional marketing business had dropped off considerably. Bills were piling up. The 6 o'clock news had nothing positive to report. Small businesses were closing, as were small and medium sized banks. Despite the rise in unemployment, the monthly chamber of commerce networking breakfast would commence shortly.

I didn't want to go. I had plenty of reasons not to. Many of our projects had either been postponed or downright cancelled. But I was on the Board of Directors, and it would be bad form not to show up, right? Then again, who could blame me? The last three breakfasts had produced zero new business. Wouldn't it be smarter, I reasoned, to stay at our home office, make calls, and see what I could stir up? Going would be a colossal waste of time.

My wife and business partner, Gaye, patiently waited as I paced in the kitchen. I could see her wheels turning. Gaye obviously had an opinion and was lovingly waiting to share it before grabbing her cup and heading back to her desk.

Yep . . . here it comes.

"I really think you should go," she offered. "I don't know why, but I think something good will come from it. You'll only be gone for a few hours and I have east coast calls to make, anyway, so go! Who knows, you might find us new business."

"Not a chance, Gaye," I protested. "New blood hasn't walked through those doors in months and the economy is getting worse." But Gaye insisted that her intuition tells her otherwise and I might be surprised. She kissed me on the cheek and left the room.

Since Gaye's intuitive rarely misses, I reluctantly grabbed my keys and headed out, still in doubt. *The Greatest Economic Downturn Since the Great Depression* was upon us. I was rattled, so perhaps I wasn't thinking that straight. Economic turmoil will do that.

Traffic was lighter than expected. The usual number of early arrivals had already parked. I was still questioning my presence there as I pulled in. I hopped out, adjusted my tie, put on my coat and headed up the driveway. As I approached the front entrance, I could see through the windows that the registration setup was nearly finished. The venue was poised for routine. But what was about to happen next would change my life forever.

Have you ever had a *Field of Dreams* moment? Ever hear things in your head no one else hears? It's kind of freaky, to say the least. In the movie, Kevin Costner's character Ray Kinsella was about to lose his farm to creditors when a voice came to him, "If you build it, he will come." The movie is about baseball, but it also touches deeply on relationships, love, and family. I highly recommend it.

I remember how intense this moment seemed. I kept wondering what I should be doing with my time. The world seemed to have come down on me heavier than everyone else. Surely, I had more bills, a larger overhead, and more reasons to feel victimized and sorry for myself! It's amazing, isn't it, how circumstances can alter our personalities so easily?

Approaching the front door, I instinctively transferred my business cards from my coat pocket into my shirt pocket. Then, as I touched the door handle, a voice inside my head stopped me in my tracks. "Leave your business cards in your pocket." Stunned, I pulled my hand from my coat pocket and stepped back from the door.

A friend must have snuck up behind me and was playing a joke. I turned quickly, but no one was there. I contemplated a possible caffeine overload. My common-sense kicked in. I shook it off and reached for the handle again. This time, in an even calmer tone, the voice continued: "Just see how many people you can help."

I swung open the door and walked on in to the foyer as composed as possible. I stepped up to the registration table, paid my 20 bucks, attached my nametag, and decided to see where this mysterious advice would lead me. If I was going nuts, then so be it. But I needed to find out what this was all about. I squared my shoulders and headed straight for the main room.

Rather than joining my usual group, I scanned the room to prove, once and for all, there was no reason to be here. Starting on the far left, I identified three people I already knew. Then I saw five newcomers! I couldn't believe it. One by one, I introduced myself and began to interview them, not in an interrogating way, however, but empathetically. The questions I asked were not part of my usual routine. I genuinely wanted to learn about them. And I was thoroughly enjoying this process. In fewer than 30 minutes, I learned a ton of information about each person, and then connected all five to the exact chamber member they needed to meet. Not one had asked me about me, and I didn't even care!

It felt really good, this sense of calm. Sure, I still had the same worries and concerns about our business, but I discovered that it was more interesting to see who I could help. I wasn't altogether sure yet what this huge shift meant, but the panic I had arrived with was gone. My listening skills improved. I asked smarter questions, ones that helped each person feel comfortable talking with me. How many other such opportunities had I missed in past months, opportunities that might have made a difference for us, too? I will never know.

After the guest speaker finished talking about his garage door business and the raffle prizes had been distributed, it was time for testimonials. I was sitting at one of the tables, filling up my little notebook with what I had learned, not paying too much attention to what was going on in the room. Finally, I looked up and John, the first man I had met that morning, had the microphone in

his hand. He stood up and announced, “I just want to say what a pleasure it was to meet Dave Ribble this morning. Dave, thanks so much for your enthusiastic welcome and for introducing me to Dennis, here. You are a class act.”

He handed the microphone to Dennis, who stood and thanked me as well. “Dave, much appreciated! John and I are meeting this afternoon.” And with that, Dennis handed the microphone to another and so on until all ten people I had introduced to each other thanked *me*, publicly. It was a beautiful, awkward experience I will never forget.

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I have told this story to many audiences and when I do, I typically ask this question: “*How many people would you say I influenced that morning?*” Some will say Five. Others will say Ten.

In truth, I influenced all one hundred in the room because they witnessed the testimonials. My reputation for being a professional, someone who could put others first, improved dramatically. Not once did I push my business onto anyone. I demonstrated genuine empathy in my questions and comments. I didn’t beg for business. And it remains to be seen how many of those in attendance that day have referred us to others because many years later, we continue to enjoy being referred and recommended.

This experience took me to a whole new level. As I began to practice the new acumen, I interviewed our associates, colleagues, teachers, authors and other professionals and collected the tested information that would later be the foundation for my book.

As of this writing, we are now expanding with more information and training you can use to help you in these three specific disciplines: Communication, Connection, Collaboration. We call it StandOut Mastery. If you would like more information, please direct message me on Facebook.

The circumstances and conditions we will all face in 2021 are formidable, for sure. But we’ll get through it if we stick together. Listen to your heart. Stay safe, healthy, and dedicated to contributing to a better world by putting others first. Find out what you can do to help them and watch where it takes you.