

Author of *The Art of Influence* and *The Angel Inside*

# How to Talk to *Anyone,* *Anytime,* *Anywhere*



**Best-  
Selling  
Author**

# Chris Widener

How to Talk to Anyone,  
Anytime, Anywhere

3 Steps to Make Instant Connections

Chris Widener

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# Introduction

I am a New York Times and Wall Street Journal best-selling author of books like *The Leadership Rules*, *The Art of Influence* and *The Angle Inside*. I make a living as a professional speaker traveling around the world from Russia to Spain, Egypt, Singapore, China, Australia, Germany and almost every single state in the United States. The audiences I speak to can be as small as 100 and as large as 25,000. The fact is that speaking can be pretty lucrative. But the fact is also that learning how to speak can be pretty lucrative even if you aren't a "motivational speaker".

We all have to learn how to speak to other people, but one of the things I find is that most people don't like to talk, especially when it comes to public speaking. In fact, studies and research find that the number one fear people have is public speaking; number two is dying. So, do you know what that means? That means the next time you go to a funeral, most people would rather be in the casket than give the eulogy. Now that's the fear of public speaking, getting up in front of a group and speaking, but not too far behind that is the discomfort that people get when they are in a new situation, when they are talking to just one person, or a small group of people that they don't know.

The truth is you will make more money if you learn how to talk to people, build rapport with people, engage people, and attract people to you. This eBook will teach you the secrets that anybody can utilize in learning how to talk to anybody, anytime, anywhere. If you can learn how to do these things, you will grow your business, you will see your team explode, and you will have a better and happier work life. Because you are going to be able to engage with people, you are going to make more money and you will have better relationships. All of these things can come to you, if you simply learn how to talk to people.

## **THE BASICS OF STARTING A CONVERSATION**

In my book, *The Art of Influence*, I wrote about how to influence other people. In order to influence people, you have to engage people. I also wrote about how to gain trust, respect, admiration, and loyalty from other people. Wouldn't it be great if we had the trust of other people, the admiration of other people, the respect of other people, and if we had the loyalty of friends and customers? Starting at the very fundamental, basic premise, you have to begin with being able to talk to people. Most people are uncomfortable with this, but situations frequently arise when you have to talk to people you do not know. It might be at a cocktail party, a local chamber of commerce meeting, luncheon, or an after-hours event. Perhaps it might be at church or a wedding where you know the bride or the groom, but you do not know many other people. We are thrust into these social circumstances all the time, both for business and for pleasure. Many, many people have a real problem in these situations and it holds them back. Now, think about the losses you could suffer if you are unable to initiate a conversation. If you do not have the courage or ability to walk up and converse with someone, you may miss out on meeting a person who could become a significant friend in your life; or if you are single, a spouse in your life. If it is in a business situation, you might not be able to meet the person who could bring you a million dollar contract. There are many people that I do business with but before we did business together, we did not know each other. You have to be able to cross that bridge and bridge that gap, and converse with people. It is one of the simplest things, and yet it is one of the most difficult things.

I want to help you get past the discomfort of talking with some very simple and easy principals. We have to re-conceptualize this discomfort inside of our head because so often people have these fears where they think, *what if I get rejected, what if I am not dazzling, what if I am really super UN-interesting?* I am going to boil it down to the basics and help you rethink so that you can confidently walk into any social situation and be able to talk to anybody, anytime, anywhere. Now here is the caveat, there are going to be some people you will not be able to talk to. If somebody is just bent on not talking, if they are a jerk, if they are a curmudgeon, if they do not want to talk to you, then disregard those people. I am referring to the normal, regular people who themselves may not want to engage because they do not

know how. If YOU struggle with it, chances are a lot of other people struggle with it as well.

I frequently fly on airplanes. You plop down in the seat, turn to the person next to you, look at them and think, *I am locked here next to this person for the next 3 to 5 hours*. If you are flying internationally, maybe it will be 11, 12, or 15 hours. The person next to you may be thinking the same thing, *how am I going to talk to this person next to me?* The first thing you need to understand is that most people in these situations are probably thinking the exact same way that you are. Not everybody is a gregarious extrovert who just looks for people to talk to. Most people are just like you and many, many others; they are wondering how to start a conversation with a stranger and how to not look like a moron by saying something stupid. These are universal principals, most people feel like that. So, the first thing you need to do is adjust your brain and realize you are not the only one, in fact the person you are thinking about talking to is probably thinking the same thing. For example, at a cocktail party you see somebody and maybe you are both in the same area of the room and you are thinking, *how am I going to talk to this person*, and the other person is sitting there thinking, *if this person talks to me, how am I going to talk to them?* Everybody is thinking this same thing, so recognize that right out of the shoot; understand that everybody is in the same boat.

Here are a couple of other thoughts before I give you a very specific technique to utilize. You do not have to be interesting. The most important thing is to be *interested*. It helps if you are interesting; in fact I always encourage people to be well-read. I read a ton of different magazine across a wide variety of topics because it helps me discuss with other people when I am in these situations. So, it is certainly beneficial to be interesting, but do not think you have to show up and dazzle everybody by being super interesting. Far more important than that, is to be *interested* in the other person. We are going to get to these techniques, but I want to lay out the premise that people respond to people who are *interested* in them, who show concern for them.

In my book *The Art of Influence* I talk about how to gain loyalty from other people by considering their interests more important than your own interests. Zig Ziglar was a mentor of mine and we had a TV show together. I love this famous Zig Ziglar quote, “You can have anything in the world

you want if you'll just help enough other people get what they want." That is an others' centered orientation. It says, "I am going to be thinking about you."

One of the greatest books of all time and certainly the monumental work in the area of influence, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, by Dale Carnegie, says that the sweetest sound on anybody's ear is their name. If you read that book, you should have remembered that 'the sweetest sound on anybody's ear is their own name'. People love it when we are interested in them, when we remember them, when we are thinking about them, when we are considering them. This applies even at the very beginning of a relationship, before you have even started talking to them. When you enter into that relationship by walking up and starting a discussion, just think to yourself, *I want to consider that person's interest more important than my own. I want to make them feel important; I want them to think that I am interested in them.* In fact, you ought to be interested in them.

People often ask what has enabled me to do so many of the things that I have done in my life. I had my own TV show for a number of years where I interviewed very successful CEOs, authors, and athletes. The show received very good reviews and people would often ask what the key to my success was. I replied, "I just am interested in people. I love people. I love to find out what they are doing, what they are thinking, and the experiences they have had." When you approach a person in these situations, don't think that you have to bring everything to the table and you have to WOW them, dazzle them and regale them with stories of your exploits. Simply go into it thinking, *how can I draw them out?*



## CONSIDER OTHER PEOPLE

When one of my daughters was 14 years old she had a job as a Barista. She made coffee at a local coffee store, not one of the big national chains, but a local store with a couple of outlets. At 14 years old she learned how to triple her income based on this principal of considering other people. Now, here is how it happened. She got her job and at the time minimum wage was in the mid-\$8 range so she would make \$8 an hour and then she would get her tips. She would work all day long and at the beginning she would bring home \$20 to \$25 a day in tips, which is pretty great money. If you work 8 hours at \$8 an hour and then another \$25 in tips, that's \$80 to \$90 a day, not bad for a 14 year old girl. But then my daughter started bringing home \$40 a day, \$50 a day, \$60 a day, \$75 a day in tips. At \$75 a day I called her into my office and asked, "Hannah, I have a question for you. Umm, how do I put this.... You're just selling coffee up there, right?" She laughed and she said, "Oh yes, Dad. I finally figured people out". Brilliant! I said, "Okay Dalai Lama, tell me the secret to life." And she replied, "Dad, you know what I figured out about people? People love to talk about themselves". Amazing that a 14 year old girl figured out what many 50 year old men and women in business still don't understand. The key to her business success was demonstrating interest in the people who were buying coffee from her and it tripled her income from \$20 - \$25 to \$70 - \$75 a day in tips. So she said, "Dad, here's what I did. When I first started out I would just take their order and sort of ignore them at the counter. I would turn around and make the coffee, then hand them the coffee and gave them good service. I'd give them their change back and some of the money would go in the tip jar. But Dad, do you know what I realized? I started to ask them questions about themselves. My whole goal was to let them talk about themselves... *I see that you come in here regularly, where do you work, how long have you worked there, what kind of degree did you have to get in order to work there, what do you do there, what kind of industry are you in?* Then if I noticed a ring on their finger, I'd ask *how long have you been married, what does your spouse do, do you have any kids?*" Once she learned that they had kids, she would remember their names and when they come in after a weekend, she would ask about little Johnny's soccer game or little Suzie's t-ball game. She said, "Now I make their drink and all I do is ask them questions about themselves so they can talk about themselves. I give them their change back and guess where it all goes now, Dad; it all

goes in the tip jar.” A young 14 year old girl realized she could triple her income if she would just simply ask questions and let other people talk.

Here is the principal. *You should not be the star of your conversation.* When you enter into a conversation, you need to let *them* be the star of the conversation. Why? Because people like to be the star of the conversation. If you want to gain trust, if you want to gain rapport, if you want to gain loyalty from other people, let them be the star of the conversation. So I gave you a little bit of a hint into the first direction we are going to go in learning how to talk to anybody, anytime, anywhere and that is what my daughter discovered, by asking questions.

## STEP 1: ASK QUESTIONS

The very first thing that I am going to ask you to think about and teach you to think about is if you want to start a conversation, just ask questions. They do not have to be profound questions. In fact when you are just starting a relationship they should not be profound conversations or questions. When I sit down in an airplane, I do not turn to the person next to me and say, “Hi, I’m wondering, what’s the meaning of life?” What is that going to do? That is going to get you a, *you’re really weird*, look. So I ask a simple question. I am actually going to give you a few questions to use which are great opening lines that I have used over the years and have worked very, very well. If I sit down on an airplane next to somebody and am going to spend the next 3 to 15 hours with them, I turn to them and say, “So, are you going home or leaving home?” That is my opening question. “Are you going home, or leaving home?”. I even say it in a little folksy accent and drop off the ‘g’, *are you goin’ home or leavin’ home?* They look at me and they might say, “Oh, I’m going home. I’ve been on the road for a week now and I’m finally going home”. Well, that’s great because then you can say, “Oh, you’ve been on the road? Where have you been? What do you do?” ..... right into a conversation.

Here is another thing that I may do in a social situation such as a wedding or a birthday party where I don’t know the other person. I will walk in and if I end up around the punch bowl or the dessert tray or something like that, I will ask a person a very simple question, “So how do you fit into the grand scheme of things around here?” It is really an interesting way of asking the question ‘how do you fit in?’ They may say, oh, well... Bob’s my cousin or the bride is my aunt, or whatever the case may be. This is just a really simple way to introduce a conversation and just ask, “How do you fit in?” They will usually tell you. Those are just a couple of little ways that you do not have to start out with something really big or awesome or incredible. But you do need to ask questions. So, the very first thing to remember is to ask questions.

If you want to make a connection to somebody, you have to ask questions. The questions that I just gave you were some simple ice breaking questions you can begin with. Here is an example of how a conversation may begin:

“Hey, how are you?”

“I’m doing pretty well.”

“What is your name?”

“My name is Joe.”

“Oh, hey Joe. It’s nice to meet you. Where are you from?” That is a great, simple thing to ask ... *where are you from*. They will usually tell you where they are from.

“What do you do for a living?”

That is a very non-threatening, sort of a getting-to-know-you kind of question, *what do you do for a living*. The focus is to keep the conversation at the outer level, you are not are going for the jugular, you are just starting a simple conversation. Depending upon their age, if they are 35 to 40, another question might be, “Are you married or have any kids”, and they might say, “Yes. I have been married for 15 years and I have 3 little kids.” You are just asking questions and as the conversation grows, you want to keep finding different questions to ask, “Did you grow up around here”. Ask this question especially if you are in a big city. In a metropolitan area like Seattle where I live, a lot of people did not grow up here. Perhaps their response is, “No, No, I moved here in 1995”. Being from Seattle I might hear a Boston accent or a southern accent and I will say, “I notice an accent, so you must not be from around here originally. Where did you grow up?” They might say, “Oh, I grew up Boston” or “I grew up in Oklahoma.” Then they might turn to you and say, “What about you?” Now for me, I was born and raised in the Seattle area so I would say, “Yes, I was born and raised in the Seattle area. I went to college in Minnesota and spent my first three years after college in New Jersey.”

You are just asking questions. You are building bridges and allowing yourself to get to know them as long as you can. But, be careful not to come across like a prosecutor.... “Tell me, where were you born” and “tell me where do you work, and tell me....” The goal is to conversationally ask these questions. We are laying our cards on the table, conversationally so to speak, which is a very simple thing to do. There is no pressure. If they are from Texas don’t think, *oh I have to come up with 17 facts about Texas*. You don’t have to do that. Take it easy; think about ways to ask questions, to

build that rapport, to find out a little bit about them and to give them an opportunity to find out about you. It's a very, very simple thing.

## **STEP 2: FIND A CONNECTION**

Now the next key, however, is to find a connection. So, you ask questions until you find a connection. For example, a conversation may go something like this:

“Hi, what’s your name?”

“My name is Joe.”

“Oh, Joe, it’s nice to meet you. How do you fit into the grand scheme of things around here?”

“Bob, the groom, is my cousin.”

“Oh, that’s fantastic! What do you do for a living?”

“I sell insurance.”

Well, everybody either needs insurance or already has insurance so that might be a connection right there. The conversation continues,

“What kind of insurance?”

“Well, I sell insurance to oil rigs out in the sea.”

OK, well the connection is now lost because you probably don’t buy insurance for oil rigs that are based out in the sea. But if he sells life insurance, a connection is made and a conversation about insurance can carry on.

“Well, I sell life insurance.”

“Oh that’s interesting. I just bought a policy.”

“What kind of policy did you get?”

If you are in the market for insurance you might say, “Oh I am actually thinking about buying some insurance. Would you mind if I ask you a couple of questions?” As long as you are not in the thick of the wedding, this is a great ice breaker. If you are at the reception, all the toasts are done and you are having a little bit of champagne and kicking back, this is an opportune time to pursue a conversation. You don’t want to get deep into a discussion where it might distract them with from what the real purpose of the event is. Keep it light; the goal is to find a connection.

Let's say he is in some sort of business that you have no connection to and don't know anything about in order to continue in that area of questioning. Then you would move on to another question such as, "I noticed that you have an accent. Where is that from?" He might say, "Oh, well I am originally from Dallas". If it was me, I would say, "Oh, Dallas! I used to have an office in Dallas where I shot my TV show. What part of Dallas were you from?" He tells you and then you can ask "How is the housing market down there?" You are just trying to find a connection. Maybe you go through all that and he's lived in a place that you have never lived and do not know much about. Maybe he's from an area that you don't know about or he's in a business that you are not knowledgeable about. Again, these things are fine, you are just asking questions.

Another ice breaker question could be, "What do you do for fun?" Perhaps his idea of fun is going to a major league baseball game and you are also a big baseball fan. Now you have found a connection. You just are looking and addressing these questions in order to find a connection. Maybe they are into the theater or maybe they are into golf or saving wild life, it doesn't matter. All you are trying to accomplish is to find out from them what they are interested in to the point where you can find a connection.

The connection is really the important part. That is the part that becomes the glue of the relationship that can turn into a personal friendship or into a business relationship. Your ability to discuss with people, to ask these questions and to be diligent enough to expand those questions to the point where you can find a connection is going to be the key to your relational success. Again, whether it is a private relationship or it's a business relationship, the fact is that if you do this right, if you practice it, and if you are even remotely well-traveled or well-read, you are going to be able to find something that will be a connection within a few minutes. It might be a hobby or interest, it might be a career, or it might be a mutual friend. Maybe you are at a friend's party and the person you just met went to college with your friend, perhaps you discover that you are college rivals or maybe you went to the same college and he was just a few years ahead but you never met him before. You are trying to find those connections.

The first point is to ask questions fully focusing on the other person, trying to get to know them, letting them be the star of the show, letting them know that you care and are interested in them. The second point is to find the

connection. Ask questions until you find the connection. Here is the third point, and we make them rhyme. Go in that direction. Ask questions. Find a connection. Go in that direction.



### **STEP 3: GO IN THAT DIRECTION**

I really honestly believe that we do have something in common with almost everybody. It takes a little bit of diligence to drill down to the point where we find it, but once we find it, we go in that direction. You do not want to focus on the areas where you DON'T have a connection; you want to focus on the areas where you DO have a connection. Maybe you are talking to the person and you find that they are a fan of golf, they love golf. You might reply, "Golf, I love golf! That is fantastic. I just took up golf three years ago and am learning, but I am not that great yet." Here you are just telling them a little bit about yourself to make the golf connection and then go back to asking questions, but you have now found the direction you are going to go in. Once you hit a connection and have found that direction, all of your questions go deep into that direction. So here is how a conversation might go:

"Hey, what's your name?"

"I'm Joe."

"Nice to meet you Joe. I'm Chris. How do you fit into the grand scheme of thing here?"

"Well, Bob and I, we went to college together."

"Oh, that's interesting. I met Bob through a local networking group here in the area and am so excited that he and Susan are getting married. Where are you from?"

"I am from Oklahoma."

"Oh, interesting. I've been to Oklahoma a couple of times. I've spoken at speaking engagements in Oklahoma City and Tulsa. What do you do for a living?"

"I sell cars."

"Oh, cool. What kind of car dealership do you have?"

The dialogue will continue as he tells you what kind of car dealership he works at or owns. If you have had that car in the past, then you might talk to him about the car or if you haven't then you might say, "I've seen those around and they seem like a pretty nice car. Are they?"

“Yes, they are pretty nice car.”

“Ah, interesting. Are you married or have kids? Did you bring them with you?” Ask this question especially if you see a ring on their hand.

“Yes I am. My wife Cheryl is sitting down over there. We have a couple of kids, but we left them with their grandparents.”

“Oh, that’s neat. I will have to meet her a little bit later. So, what do you do for fun?”

“Well, you know I am really into golf”

“Golf?! I love golf. That is really fantastic. So how long have you been golfing?”

“Oh, I have been golfing for a very long time, somewhere around 20 years now.”

“I used to golf frequently and was pretty good. I even went to golf school once. But, I’m not that good anymore. I haven’t really been diligent about taking enough time to get out there. What are some of your favorite golf courses that you have played?” If he is a sales person, especially at a high-end car dealership, they receive a lot of reward trips and bonuses so he might say, “I have played Pebble Beach and I have played Augusta.....” and he might list quite a few different courses.

“Wow, Pebble Beach and Augusta! What was that like, tell me about it. How did you play? What did you score?”

All I am going to do is let him be the star of the show. In fact, sometimes it’s good to be self-deprecating. I have made a list of great golf courses that I have spoken at, but not played. I spoke at Saw Grass, didn’t play it. It was a fantastic place and I should have played it. I have spoken at Pebble Beach a couple of times but didn’t play it even though I was a golfer. So people always ask, “How could you go there and not play Pebble Beach?” I usually respond, “Oh, I was dumb. I went in and came back out really fast. I was focused on getting in and getting out for the speaking engagement.” Now you are connecting, talking about golf and asking them how they played, keeping them the star of the show. You can continue the questioning:

“What kind of clubs do you use?”

Golfers, or anyone who is intensely involved in a specific sport, or any sort of interest, typically buy one particular, favorite brand. He might say, “Oh, I am a Callaway guy” or “I’m a Taylor-made guy.”

“How do you like those clubs? Have you played them forever? When did you make the switch”?

By just asking these types of questions you are making that person, at a conscious and a subconscious level, feel like you are safe person to converse with. You are building rapport. You are building trust. The longer you can go in this conversation without some wacko breakdown, the more they trust you and think: *this is a safe person to have a conversation with.* The more that you have connection with them; they are going to think positively about you because everybody thinks positive of themselves. If you find something that you have a connection with, then they are going to think, *well I like golf and he likes golf and since I’m a good guy because I like golf, he must be a good guy because he likes golf.* Because you have made that connection, rapport is being built and trust is being built.

## **RELATIONAL SUCCESS**

Let me wrap this up for you. I really honestly believe that this can be the key to your relational success both in your private life and in your personal, professional life. It is going to be something that is going to help you make more money, have more fun, build a better business. Ask questions. Find a connection. Go in that direction. Remember; let the other person be the star of the show. Be *interested* more than interesting. Enter into a conversation with the idea that you are going to be *interested* in this person. Remember their name, call them by their name, and let them be the star of the show.

One more time, memorize it. Next time you go into a party or a business meeting or anywhere you might have to address people for the first time, what do you do? Ask questions. How many questions do you ask? You ask as many questions as it takes to find a connection. And once you find the connection you go in that direction.

Question. Connection. Direction. That is how you are going to be successful. That is how you are going to be able to talk to anybody, anytime, anywhere.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Chris Widener** has been speaking professionally since 1988 and has shared the stage with top political figures, nationally known TV news anchors, best-selling authors and professional athletes. Chris has written over 450 articles and is the author of eight books including the New York Times best seller "The Angel Inside". He has produced over 30 audio programs on leadership and motivation.

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