

Connection Pros

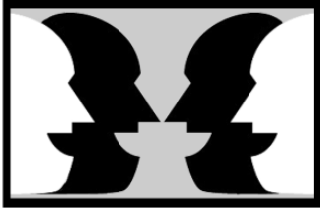
Title – Connecting through the friendly skies

It is one of your worst nightmares. There you are, sitting peacefully waiting for your plane to take off. The middle seat next to you is still empty and you're hoping it stays that way. Just as the flight attendants are about to close the door, one more passenger rushes on board and sits down right next to you.

Once the tardy passenger gets settled, he turns and starts talking to you. It starts off as idle chatter such as, "Boy, this plane sure is jammed," "I thought that security line would never end," and, one of my favorites, "Are you traveling for business or pleasure?" You try to end the conversation many times but your talkative neighbor just keeps on rambling. Are you forced to carry on a conversation with a total stranger that can't take a hint or is there a way to remove yourself from this uncomfortable situation?

As a professional speaker, I travel often and this situation has happened to me many times. As The Networking Guy, I might be considered to be one of those chatty passengers. I promise you, I'm not. However, I do believe there are ways to network on an airplane without forcing the other passengers to leap out of the plane to escape from you. Let's look at a few ways to connect with your fellow passengers without torturing them.

1. Test the water before you dive in – It is always best to start any conversation as casually as possible to see the reaction from the people to whom you are talking. If you make a simple comment such as, "Boy, they don't leave you much room for our knees these days," wait and see what happens next. If people respond with a friendly comment,



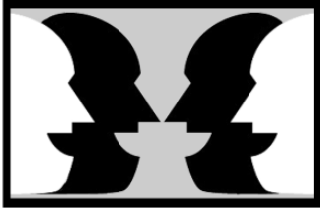
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or any comment that continues the conversation, they are telling you that they are interested in continuing to chat. Now, if after making a casual comment, people look at you like you are some sort of alien from another planet, that's a good signal to pull out your book or your laptop and start entertaining yourself.

2. Keep the other passengers happy – Once you have started a conversation with other passengers, you need to follow the same networking rules you would if you were attending any other networking function. Always remember to ask lots of questions. The more the other people talk, the better conversationalist they will think you are. When you are asking these questions, it's okay to talk about things other than just business. Ask them where they live, what they like to do when they're not working, or what their favorite hobby is. When you connect with people through non-business topics, it's much easier to start a business conversation because you are no longer just someone with a business card; you are a person who might have things in common with them.

3. Watch for warning signs – Keep your eyes and ears open for signals that the other passengers might want to end your fascinating chat. If you see them starting to look at their book or magazine, this might be their way of saying "I've talked enough and I'd like to read now." Don't take this signal as an insult. I'm sure you are a fabulous conversationalist, but people like to read, sleep, work, or stare into space when they are on airplanes.

It's also okay for you to end a conversation, too. Many times, I have said, "It's been nice talking to you but I need to get some work done." It works EVERY TIME and I have



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never upset other people. If you want to stop talking, just tell the other people and, most of the time, they will honor your wishes.

There is one more tip I must offer you if you find yourself in a lengthy conversation on an airplane. There have been many times when I have finished a nice conversation and I will have the worst pain in my neck from keeping my head turned to one side or the other for too long of a period of time. To avoid this pain in the neck, make sure you slightly turn your entire body toward the person to whom you are speaking. By doing this, it shows you are interested in what the other people are saying, and it will prevent you from suffering that uncomfortable “crick” in your neck.

I have met some fascinating people on airplanes and I’ve had some great conversations. I have also had my share of horrible ones, too. While a good conversation can make an eight hour flight seem like two hours, a bad conversation can make two hours feel like a lifetime. People will enjoy chatting with you on planes as long as you follow a few very simple ground rules and do everything you can to make the conversation as pleasant as possible for them. See you next month.