

» THE WORLD'S LEADING «
ENTREPRENEURS & PROFESSIONALS
REVEAL THEIR CORE STRATEGIES FOR
GETTING TO THE HEART OF

HEALTH, WEALTH & SUCCESS

The Soul of Success



WITH
Jack Canfield



FEATURING
**Brenda R.
McGuire**

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**The
Soul of
Success**

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CHAPTER 6

SMALL WORLD, BIG CONNECTIONS

BY BRENDA R. McGUIRE

A journey is measured in friends, rather than miles.

~ Tim Cahill

Blazing like a giant red Christmas ornament, the sun seemed to float on the glowing horizon as the Peace Boat sailed toward the African country of Eritrea where we were to make harbor. It was early Christmas morning, and I had gone up on deck to sort through my mixed feelings. It was hard being away from home at Christmas, and yet the anticipation of experiencing a holiday in an exotic culture left me with a feeling of excitement. Traveling was not new to me, and I usually felt ‘at home’ wherever I was in the world, but on such a special day, I was feeling homesick. Still, my travels had taught me how welcoming and hospitable people could be in this small world.

When the ship docked, the joyful refrain of “Jingle Bells” accompanied by banging drums being played by a large group of women dressed in white Tigray dress warmed my heart. Christmas in Eritrea was so special as local villagers opened their hearts and homes. Although they had very little to call their own, they generously shared what they had and helped remind me of the true meaning of Christmas. At a local orphanage, fellow shipmates handed out presents that I’d helped gather and wrap

on Christmas Eve. The children's eyes glistened with hope, and laughter filled the room when Santa handed out the gifts. They were simply amazed by the "man in the red suit," having never met Santa before! Later, when I was seated on a tour bus and we were getting ready to leave, a woman took off what was obviously a much-worn and beloved, beaded leather necklace and handed it to me through the window. Without words, her sacrifice and gift from the heart brought tears to my eyes—her gesture was so generous and loving that even though it was my only Christmas present that year, Christmas felt complete.

Later that day, as we pulled out of Eritrea at sunset, I leaned over the wooden railing of the ship and waved goodbye to my new friends, reflecting on how my life had brought me to Africa. So far from home, my thoughts drifted back to my childhood growing up in rural Iowa. Back then, I used to stare out over the fields of green corn that moved so much like the waves of an ocean, and dream of exploring the world and meeting people in faraway lands. While in high school, I became best friends with an exchange student from Norway and was fascinated by the stories of her culture. That relationship further sparked a curiosity to see the world and connect with different cultures—an interest that continued to grow in college.

Without a passport, having limited funds, and knowing almost no one who'd traveled overseas, I had no idea how to make my travel dreams a reality. Then one day, in 1992, I saw a poster on my college campus about *Semester at Sea*, an academic world voyage, which ultimately would change my world forever. Little did I know when I signed up that this opportunity would set me on a path to every corner of the globe and allow me to connect with people from diverse cultures. At the time, I never dreamed that the connections I was about to make over the next decade would allow me to live, work and travel the world, and eventually, lead me back home.

After working hard to overcome the obstacles and financial challenges of going on my first global adventure, *Semester at Sea*, I set sail on the U.S.S. Universe. My destination—THE WORLD! During our 102-day academic voyage of discovery and exploration, we visited 12 countries on four continents. I came home forever changed, as I had quickly learned that we live in a small, kind-hearted and globally connected world. With this experience and just a little money, a backpack and

a dream, I had the courage to move by myself to Australia, England and Ireland. While living and working in these countries, I took every opportunity to immerse myself in each culture. Eventually, my heart called me back to Japan—something I'd wanted to do since visiting there during Semester at Sea's first port of call. I headed for Osaka, to face the challenge of making a life in a non-English speaking country with a culture very different from my own. The first connection I made in Japan ultimately would lead to a myriad of life-changing connections that continue to impact my life and shape who I am today.

Shortly after my arrival at Osaka's Kansai airport, I went to the information counter to find a place to stay. A young Japanese woman, sporting a familiar yellow and purple Lion's Club jacket, caught my eye. Interested in what her story might be, I struck up a conversation with her. Her name was Akiko, and she was delighted to share her experience—she'd just returned from a wonderful stay with a host family in Indiana and wanted to somehow reciprocate the hospitality. Before I knew it, she invited me to her home for the night. Amazingly, she and her family's invitation turned into a home-stay of nearly two years. My priceless friendship with Akiko, a true 'soul sister,' led to a job, a home, a church, and valuable links into the Japanese community.

One day, while walking down a busy street in Osaka, I saw another poster that would further change my life. It was advertising 'Peace Boat'—a non-governmental organization that took Japanese passengers around the world to promote peace and cultural understanding. Eventually, I accepted a teaching job on Peace Boat—sailing around the globe, meeting people on six continents, and marveling at the kindness of strangers. While the places I saw were amazing, it was the people I met—like the woman in Eritrea on Christmas—that made the experience richer. In particular, one woman, who I became friends with on Peace Boat, Yayoi, would eventually impact my future, although I didn't realize it at the time.

After Peace Boat, I felt drawn back to Australia—the first foreign country that I'd lived and worked in after college—to pursue a master's degree in International Communication. Once again, I learned not to underestimate the power of connections and what I like to call the 'small world effect'—the amazing way life seems to have for bringing people together again in the most unexpected ways and places—even when doing so seems to defy the odds.

I relocated back to Sydney, Australia, just in time for the 2000 Olympics and Yayoi came for the world event. While out socializing one night, she introduced me to someone from Malaysia who introduced me to his boss from Iowa. Through this introduction, I eventually met my future husband who, coincidentally, also was from small-town Iowa. Ironically, he was working for the same company as my mom back in Iowa! We'd both moved to Australia at nearly the same time and met during the Closing Ceremony of the Olympics while watching a magical fireworks show from a balcony overlooking the twinkling Sydney Harbor. Four years later, on the eve of the Athens Olympics, that Iowa guy got down on one knee and proposed to me on the romantic Greek island of Santorini at sunset on a cliff overlooking the Aegean Sea. Amazingly, in yet another 'small world' moment, the first people to congratulate us were some of my Japanese friends from Peace Boat, who we ran into in Athens at the Olympics the next day.

We got married in Maui and my friend Yayoi, a native of Hawaii, helped us plan and celebrate our beach wedding, which was attended by friends from all over the world. During our reception, as I went around the room recounting how each guest had impacted my life, I couldn't help but marvel at the ripple effect of the connections I'd made that led me halfway around the world to meet and eventually marry a fellow Iowan.

After a decade spent living, working and traveling overseas, life soon brought me full circle back home to Iowa. When I started my global journey as a naïve, rural Midwestern girl, I never dreamed that through my connections I would sail around the world three times, live in six countries, travel to over 70 countries, oversee a multimillion-dollar business division for a Fortune 500 company, and lead one of the world's largest cross-cultural training organizations.

Filled with the knowledge of the value of connections, my personal experiences and education, I soon founded and became the CEO of two international companies, WorldWide Connect® and Global Gals®. Both companies help people connect with cultures and countries around the world—whether personally or professionally. WorldWide Connect, a cross-cultural training firm with a team of over 100 trainers on six continents, has helped thousands of business professionals, travelers, and expatriates handle the challenges of navigating a culturally diverse world. Global Gals empowers and educates women who want to live,

work and travel around the world. While we emphasize how women can be smart, safe and savvy travelers through our workshops, retreats and events, our most important gift is to help them meet and travel with other women around the world.

Looking back, the series of connections I've made—most poignantly the friendships I formed with Akiko and Yayoi—make it clear to me that the most precious part of my world travels is the people I've met and the friends I've found. They led me to my husband, led me home, and led me to follow my dreams of helping others bridge cultural gaps and get the most out of their international experiences.

While memories of breathtaking vistas may fade, it is the people you meet and the kindness of strangers that will stay with you forever. Travel is an investment you can make, which no one can ever take away from you. The relationships you build with people open doors, broaden minds, and lead to opportunities you never thought were possible.

Below are some tips that I've found to be most effective in cultivating professional and personal connections, and discovering friends—both locally and globally.

THE 4 C'S FOR CREATING CONNECTIONS IN A CROSS-CULTURAL WORLD

1) Connecting

My experiences have taught me that the people you meet will be, by far, the most priceless gift of your international experiences, so don't miss out on the magic! As one of my trusted mentors says, "I've learned that friendships don't have to cost, they can actually pay, by making life richer and more exciting." Your experiences will be enriched when you open your heart, your mind and your soul to meeting people from different cultures, backgrounds, viewpoints, and ways of life.

In the business world, it's important to recognize the importance of taking the time to develop relationships with your clients, colleagues and customers, and understand that in some cultures, building trust and respect must happen first before 'getting down to business.' A U.S. business executive once admitted to me that he lost out on a multimillion-dollar deal because he overlooked the importance of building a long-term relationship with his Asian client.

2) **Caring**

So often when people think of traveling overseas they think of what they see on international news networks and view the world as a ‘big and scary’ place with potential threats lurking around every corner. Through my travels, I’ve learned that the world is overwhelmingly kind-hearted. Repeatedly, during my most distressing times of need, total strangers offered me help, kindness and support. Once while stranded in a small village in Japan, someone generously gave me several hundred dollars to get a train ticket back to Osaka!

In 2013, my father was diagnosed with cancer just 13 days before he passed away. As messages of caring and concern poured in from around the globe, the most important lesson was clear—the friendships you make and keep are one of the most important things in life. Over the years, I introduced my Dad to my international friends, and he made his own friends around the world, but in the end he was moved by all the lives he realized he’d touched. As a legacy to my father, I established Global Gals to help other women connect with cultures, countries, and new friends around the world.

3) **Cultures**

Whether you’re moving to a new country, traveling for leisure or conducting business globally, it’s important to understand the culture you’re operating in. Each country has its own customs, social etiquette and cultural do’s and don’ts. For example, when you arrive at your destination, do you know the appropriate attire? Do you know how to negotiate effectively or whether or not it’s polite to make direct eye contact? When meeting someone for the first time, do you know whether you should kiss, bow or shake hands?

Through my international business experiences, I’ve learned the importance of understanding the culture you’re working with in order to avoid making embarrassing and costly cultural mistakes, which can lead to lost business opportunities, damaged relationships, and lost revenue. A company’s ‘bottom line’ can be negatively impacted if its employees aren’t equipped with the appropriate cross-cultural skills needed to build and develop effective business relationships around the world.

4) Coincidences

Time and again in my travels, I've experienced the uncanny serendipity that often seems to dictate the paths of many a traveler. On multiple occasions while visiting one country, by coincidence, I've run into an old friend or acquaintance from another country across the globe. For example, early in my career, I moved to London without a job. As I was walking down the street, I ran into my old boss from Australia, whom I hadn't seen in two years. She had an opening at her new office across the street, and within an hour, I was gainfully employed!

I've met so many people who have experienced similar stories that it inspired me to launch www.smallworldstories.com where people can share the 'small world' coincidences and kind-hearted gestures they've experienced first-hand.

* * *

I often wonder how different my life would be if I hadn't had the courage to strike up a conversation with a complete stranger at the Kansai Airport. That single interaction with Akiko caused a ripple effect that would change my life forever and impact both of our destinies. If I hadn't met Akiko, I know that my life wouldn't be nearly so exciting or so rich. Without a doubt, my understanding of the importance of making and maintaining relationships, wherever I go, has helped me get to where I am today. More importantly, it has given me the opportunity to help others connect around the world.

My journey has taught me just how true the anonymous quote is: *There are no strangers in the world, just people I haven't met yet.*



About Brenda

Brenda McGuire is an avid globetrotter, entrepreneur, and global business and travel expert whose global journey has taken her to over 70 countries on six continents. Wherever she is in the world, whether it's backpacking in Europe, exploring the Amazon rainforest, interacting with the locals of Morocco or traversing the Australian outback, she feels right at home.

As a young girl, Brenda had limited opportunities to see a world beyond her small, rural Iowa town, but that all changed after she participated in the Semester at Sea program, visiting 12 countries in 102 days. She returned home a “citizen of the world,” and spent the next 20 years turning her global dreams into reality.

During her global career, Brenda has lived and worked in Japan, Australia, the United Kingdom, Ireland, the United States and Switzerland, with positions in the corporate, academic, non-profit and government sectors. In New York, she led a multimillion-dollar division of a Fortune 500 company, overseeing one of the world's largest intercultural and global workforce development organizations. A recognized cross-cultural expert in her field, she has taught thousands of individuals and companies in more than 50 countries how to effectively live, work and travel—across diverse cultures, time zones, and language barriers.

Brenda is the Founder and CEO of WorldWide Connect®. With an extensive global network of over 100 consultants on six continents, they deliver cross-cultural training, global business and leadership effectiveness programs, and expatriate support to international companies. Brenda also founded and is the Chief Global Gal of Global Gals®, which empowers and educates women to reach their travel dreams through workshops, retreats, cultural training and networking events.

Brenda is a frequent international speaker at conferences, corporate meetings, and industry events and has served as a guest lecturer aboard several cruise ships. An internationally recognized speaker, she won the acclaimed Speakers EXPY® Award. Sharing her experience and knowledge, she gives audiences the tools to succeed in business, travel, and cross-cultural understanding. Along her journey, she has connected with fascinating people whose own stories broadened the depths of her cultural awareness. She created www.smallworldstories.com for people to share the kind-hearted and coincidental ‘small world’ stories they’ve experienced.

Due to her international travel and business expertise, Brenda has won many awards and was selected as one of America's PremierExperts®. Brenda is a No. 1 best-selling

author and recently co-authored, *Answering The Call: Entrepreneurs and Professionals Reveal How They Said Yes to Success and You Can Too*, which immediately hit three No.1 best-seller lists. Brenda was featured in over 350 media outlets, including CNBC and *The New York Times*, as well as on ABC, CBS and NBC affiliates for receiving the Best-Selling Author *Quilly*® Award. In addition, she was invited to share her expertise on a US Airways in-flight video, which aired on 1,700 flights.

She has an MA in International Communication from Macquarie University in Australia and a BS in Psychology and International Relations with Distinction from Iowa State University.

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