

## **Chapter 1**

# **Breakfast with Mr. Shmooze**

**L**ike any good intern, I was determined to show up at our Atlanta office bright and early on my first day of work. I was quite pleased to find that I had arrived before Mr. Shmooze and was eager to see his surprised expression when he showed up. Suddenly, my phone rang. I wondered who had my new number and who would be calling me at 7 AM.

"Kid, I am pulling into the Ritz-Carlton for breakfast. Just a minute..." Mr. Shmooze spoke to someone away from the phone. I would later come to know the man he was speaking to: Rudy, the carhop at the Ritz. "Hey, Rudy, how's your wife's cold? Better? Good. Listen, my client will be showing up in a silver Lexus. Would you have someone send it through a wash and have it parked in front when we come out? Thanks, buddy. Oh, here's a couple of these new Macanudos. Yeah, try these. They're great!" His voice became louder and I knew he was speaking to me again. "Kid, run over to a newsstand, pick up a new Forbes, and bring it to the Ritz. My client's biggest customer is featured. Meet me in the dining room. Hey! Glad you're on board! We're going to have some fun!" As I hung up I could feel my adrenaline pumping. I was already in motion and, in just 60 seconds, had gotten a glimpse of the summer ahead: a summer with Mr. Shmooze.

Running toward the door, I happened to glance into Mr. Shmooze's office and noticed something peculiar. Whereas

everybody else's desks were covered with in and out boxes, neat and not-so-neat piles of important-looking documents, and computers with impressive-looking screen savers, Mr. Shmooze's office was different. While by no means neat or organized, paper was replaced by books and magazines, boxes of cigars, pictures from golf outings and ball games. The pictures all had one thing in common: Everyone was smiling, hugging, and laughing!

I arrived at the Ritz around 7:45. As I pulled up, the attendant opened my door and said, "Hi, Robert! Mr. Shmooze is in the main dining room. Your car will be right over here when you come out!" I started walking toward the door and the attendant called back to me. "Hey, kid. You're working for a great guy! You're going to have a heck of a summer!"

The Ritz-Carlton is a nucleus of business in Atlanta. It is elegant, sophisticated, and an epicenter for business networking. As I worked my way through the bustling lobby and waiting area, I spotted the restaurant hostess standing in front of a magnificent, multilevel dining room. Before I could introduce myself, she looked at me and said, "You must be looking for Mr. Shmooze. Follow me." Before I knew it we were at his table, in the corner—and there he was—the one and only Mr. Shmooze, holding court.

Naturally, Mr. Shmooze was sitting in the most prominent position in the room, a place from which he could easily see everyone else coming and going and, of course, where everyone could see him. His client sat next to him but the table was large enough to seat several more people, which I was to find out later often became the case. The table was full of various foods, juice, coffee, and the morning news—the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, and the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. It was organized chaos. The energy was incredible.

"Here he is, Mr. Shmooze," announced the hostess, as I self-consciously approached the table. "Thank you," said

Mr. Shmooze. "Didn't I say he was good-looking?" Both the hostess and I laughed and blushed. "You're going to be seeing a lot of him this summer, so take good care of him!"

"Kid, I want you to meet John Smith, VP of marketing for U.S. Paper. John, this young man is studying at Georgia Tech and has the dubious distinction of being my intern this summer." I shook Mr. Smith's hand and took a seat, as Mr. Smith laughed heartily at my boss's self-deprecation and the vision of my summer ahead.

"Young man, I can guarantee that what you will learn this summer you would not learn at the Harvard Business School. You may not know it yet, but you just won the lottery!"

"Hey, speaking of the lottery, I've got six instant games here," Mr. Shmooze said. "C'mon, let's go through them. We'll split any winnings among the three of us!" Suddenly, we were scratching the cards with quarters, when I saw I had won \$5.

"Hey, I won five bucks!"

"Me too," said Smith. He laughed and tossed it back to Mr. Shmooze. "Too bad I can't retire on this."

"I know—let's just leave them with the waiter."

"Great idea!" said Smith.

"Kid, sit down for a minute. Have you had breakfast?" I shook my head. Turning to the waiter, Mr. Shmooze called out. "George! Bring my friend a bowl of fruit and a croissant. Coffee?" he asked me, as he was already filling my cup.

"John, this young man is on a full basketball ride at Georgia Tech. Kid, John, has two sons, ages 12 and 14, who are both playing ball in junior high. We were just discussing basketball camps. What do you think?"

"Well," I said, "I like Georgia Tech's camp because it really stresses fundamentals and teaches the kids about proper conditioning techniques. Lots of people do not understand how to relate weight training to basketball."

Mr. Shmooze seized the concept. "What a great point! You mean that, if John Jr. and young Jimmy learn some weight-lifting techniques, they will actually be able to jump higher?"

"You bet."

Mr. Smith was now leaning in and getting very excited. "Really? I thought jumping was something you were born with?"

"That's true," I said, "but we have guys who have increased their vertical jumps substantially through proper weight training."

Mr. Shmooze was now fully energized. "Wow, that's incredible! *Exactly how much* is 'substantial'?"

"Well, I know at least two guys who went from 26 inches to 32 inches."

"Thirty-two inches!" said Mr. Shmooze. "Holy cow! John, if John Jr. took his jumping to 32 inches, I bet he could dunk the basketball! Can you imagine Johnny cutting through the lane and doing a two-handed, reverse slam in the state tournament next year?"

"Yeah, baby!" yelled Mr. Smith as he reached out and high-fived Mr. Shmooze.

"Kid, take my cell phone, go out to the lobby and call the camp. Let us know what details you can find out before we leave." I left the table and was able to speak with a marketing person at Tech's basketball camp. She gave me dates and quotes and promised to send a brochure. When I returned, I noticed that two other people had joined the table.

"Kid, meet Joan Anderson and Helen Ralle. These are corporate services people from Premier Properties, a commercial real estate company. They 'happened' to be having breakfast so I asked them to join us for a cup of coffee."

Ms. Anderson was a no-nonsense type, and she came straight to the point. "So, Mr. Smith, your real estate is managed from your facilities-management group in Atlanta. Is that division run by Bob Nixon, by any chance?"

“Yes, I know him, but not well.”

Mr. Shmooze jumped in. “Hey, John, speaking of real estate, you probably know that Premier is one of the largest property managers in the country. They must buy more paper than anybody.”

“You’re right,” said Smith. “We sell to a lot of the buildings, but I wish I could get to the very top of the big organizations so we could do some real pricing on scale.”

“Joan, wouldn’t that be Eric Taylor at Premier?” said Mr. Shmooze.

“Exactly.”

“Man, this is perfect! Obviously, Premier wants to handle U.S. Paper’s real estate and U.S. Paper wants to sell Premier paper. I know Eric well—with everyone’s permission, I’ll set the whole thing up!” There were enthusiastic nods and smiles all around the table. “Wow, what a breakfast,” continued Mr. Shmooze. “We’re all going to make a *boatload* of money!” At that, everyone broke out into appreciative laughter, even the somewhat stoic Ms. Anderson. Then, when we were leaving, I watched in awe as Mr. Shmooze reached out and “touched” every player in this extraordinary production, again.

First, he signed the check and thanked our waiter, George, for his “usual outstanding service.” Besides the tip, he also left the two winning lottery tickets for George. No cash changed hands.

Next, he stopped at the front desk, hugged the hostess, and told her that when her father came to town the next week, he would be sure to have his good-looking intern drop off the two tickets to the baseball game he had promised. As we walked outside, Mr. Smith’s car was clean and waiting, engine running, right in front of us. It occurred to me that George must have alerted Rudy we were coming.

“You really are too much!” said Mr. Smith to Mr. Shmooze as they hugged and slapped each other on the back.

“Knock ‘em dead,” said Mr. Shmooze. “I will fax you some information on basketball camps this afternoon.”

Mr. Shmooze now turned to Rudy and handed him an envelope. “Rudy, here is a list of some people I will be meeting here for breakfast Wednesday.”

“Okay, Mr. Shmooze! Hey, thanks for that article on night courses for real estate licenses you gave me last week. I think I am going to pursue that this fall, if I can figure out the details.”

“That’s great, Rudy! Robert, hop in the car with me. We’ll pick up your car later!” With a surge of the engine and a slight peeling of the tires, we were off. Before I could say a word, Mr. Shmooze was on the phone and, in rapid fire, dictated points into his assistant’s voicemail.

- “Mary, remember to get the two tickets for Susan, the hostess at the Ritz, to the Braves game next week. Besides the tickets, I want to send them two nice Braves hats. Also, her dad is a Glavin fan, so let’s get an autographed ball as well.
- “I also want you to call the real estate license people and get a schedule and location of classes for this fall. Fax them to Rudy over at the Ritz-Carlton this morning.
- “Call Jimmy Jeffries, my buddy who is the big donor at Georgia Tech. Tell him I would like to stop by and meet the head basketball coach for a minute this week, if possible, regarding his basketball camp.
- “Look up Commercial Property News on the Internet. Print out a copy of anything you can find on Premier’s property management program. E-mail them to John Smith over at U.S. Paper.

- “Pull U.S. Paper’s annual report and anything else you can find to locate their offices and plants around the world. Fax or e-mail them to Joan Anderson at Premier.
- “Check Amazon.com to see if you can find any books on weight training and basketball. I will call you back.”

Mr. Shmooze hung up the phone and turned to look at me. I noticed how fast he switched focus. I was suddenly the only person in the world.

“So, Robert, how are you doing? I can’t tell you how glad I am you’re here! I know Professor Mathis over at the school and you come highly recommended. He says you have enough energy for the job!”

“Well, I hope so, sir. I have a strong financial background and I’m certainly comfortable around the computer. I also—”

Mr. Shmooze gently, but firmly cut me off. “Hey, I know you’re smart or Mathis wouldn’t have sent you to me. And all that stuff is absolutely important, and will be for the rest of your career. But when I look for an intern, I also look for somebody who has it here—” Mr. Shmooze thumped his heart, “and here,” he said, slapping his mid-section. “I want passion, guts, drive, and enthusiasm. And I want someone who is in love with life, who loves people, and who laughs hard and often. That’s where I live.” Mr. Shmooze’s phone rang. “Excuse me,” he said, clicking it on and taking the call.

“Shmooze here. . . . Billy! What’s happening in the Big Apple this morning? . . . No way! Steinbrenner said that? The players must be really upset. Hey, I met with U.S. Paper this morning. Who is their lead investment bank up there? . . . Goldman? Know anybody there? . . . No, don’t call him yet, but I may ask for an introduction the next time I’m in town. Anything I can do for you? . . . No problem. Hey, how did you like those new

Macanudos? . . . Yeah, I agree. . . Outstanding! I'll shoot you a box next week. . . Over and out." Mr. Shmooze punched a button to hang up and then another to speed dial his phone.

"Mary, put Billy on the list for a box of Macanudos."

Now turning to me, Mr. Shmooze said, "Sorry, kid. Now, like I was saying, the name of the game with me is passion, heart, laughter. One of the things I do with my interns is stop occasionally and review. What have you learned so far this morning?"

"That you are a force of nature!" I said.

Laughing, Mr. Shmooze said, "Very good. Actually, you just illustrated one of my key points: Say something exciting, something positive, every single time you engage someone. *Every single time!* I like being called a force of nature! You just made me feel good. Made me smile. Made me laugh. Force of nature! And, guess what? I'll remember that."

I now began to recall the morning's events. "You called me, energized me, but also took a moment to welcome me. You also said we were going to have fun. I felt excited."

"Good!"

"When I got to the hotel, the car attendant was clearly waiting for me. I felt important."

"Uh-huh. . ."

"He—that is, Rudy—yelled to me that I was working for a great guy. He had caught your enthusiasm."

"Great! He's a super guy!"

"The hostess was also ready for me. She complimented me, too. You also made her—and me, come to think of it—feel good about you and about each other. You did the same thing with George, the waiter."

Mr. Shmooze smiled. "Professor Mathis was right about you, kid. Keep going!"

"When I sat down, rather than running through some stiff formalities, you went right to something Mr. Smith and I both

have in common: basketball. Now that I think about it, you must have thought about that in advance.” By now, Mr. Shmooze was grinning from ear to ear. “And when I told my story, you really drilled down on the details, in fact, the numbers. Why did you do that?”

“Very good. A keen observation. Most people speak in generalities. Numbers, if accurate, are not only more hard-hitting, but they are also ten times more memorable than words. Studies prove that. I guarantee that Smith will tell his sons *exactly* how much your buddies increased their vertical jumps through weights. From 26 to 32 inches, right?”

“Right.”

“See what I mean?”

“Also, it is important, whether socializing or selling, to paint a *spectacular* picture for someone. To get the adrenaline flowing. To ignite their imaginations!”

“His son, slam-dunking in traffic?” I asked.

“Bingo! Let’s not just talk about weight training and camps and basketball! Let’s get excited! Let’s get passionate! Let’s dream together! What else did you learn?”

“I loved the way you ended the meeting. As they were leaving, you made each one of them feel special—again!”

“Always! Every time! These are my friends. This is my family, my team. We are on the planet together, right now, working, struggling, laughing, crying, every day. I love these people and I want them to know it. Every time!” Mr. Shmooze turned to me with a serious look, and continued. “Robert, if you remember nothing else from this morning’s breakfast, remember this: Everyone makes decisions about who will be their friend, who will be their partner, who they will take a call from and, in business, who they will buy from based on two basic sensations: *pleasure* and *pain*. If they associate you with pleasure, you win! If they associate you with pain. . . .” He shook his head. “Log these

concepts, kid, because I am going to pound them home every day you are with me this summer.”

“You know, Mr. Shmooze, in retrospect, it almost seems like you choreographed that whole breakfast.”

“Right down to the carhop! Kid, it’s amazing to me how many people *don’t* plan their social events. They just throw people together and hope it works. I approach a social meeting like Lou Holtz approaches a football game. Like David Mamet approaches a play. Like Martha Graham approaches dance. This is my craft, my livelihood. I am out to make these encounters the best part of everyone’s day. After all—my life depends on them! I don’t mean to say you can’t improvise, relax, and have fun. The idea is not to be rigid and phony. On the contrary, everyone knows exactly what I am doing, and they love it because they see the passion and my honest efforts to make the meeting a success.”

Mr. Shmooze suddenly veered off the freeway. The Indianapolis 500 came to mind. “Where to?” I asked. “Back to the office?” Mr. Shmooze froze for a moment, then his head jerked back and he laughed so hard, the windows rattled.

“Office?” he said. “Hey, kid,” sweeping his arm 180 degrees around the ears, “*this* is my office.” We pulled into Children’s Hospital and he said, “Let’s do something for the kids.”