

3/1/2019

## Be Like Gary and Brian

*Ellen C. Wells*



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I have interesting conversations with men at airport bars. Let me clarify. I'm actually referring to just two conversations with men. And by "airport bar" I mean the service bar at the one good restaurant that is in walking distance to your next flight's gate. (If there is anything you know about me by now, it's that I do not eat food from the food court.)

The first conversation I'm referring to took place last fall with a guy, maybe in his upper 60s, at the airport in Providence, Rhode Island. Let's call him Gary. Gary spent the first 30 minutes not in conversation with me, but with the bartender, whom he had spoken to just 24 hours earlier. He was explaining to her "the rest of the story" of the previous night's cancelled flight to Belize for his birthday—it had just disappeared from the departure list without any notice or explanation (thanks, United). He then turned his attention to me.

He was a successful Boston property developer of the ilk that built 20-plus story buildings over the Mass Pike. Gary was an important guy, had lots of friends in high places and he was all business. But you know what put a sparkle in his eye? Chickens. He raised a handful of them at his Rhode Island home. A few years back he had purchased a 19th-century home along an inlet—far away from his business dealings in Boston—and renovated it, leaving himself with enough outdoor space to raise some hens. Gary explained how when it turns cold or when a heavy rain is predicted, he moves them into his basement. The soul of a big-time developer could be lit up brightly by the slow-and-easy coastal farm life. Imagine that.

The second conversation happened this January in Fort Lauderdale. The man (let's call him Brian) looked haggard when he sat down. After placing his order he began to unload the story, unprovoked by me, of his last 24 hours. Just that morning he had flown in from Chicago and was that evening flying back. In the interim he'd driven down to Key Largo where his family was renting a vacation home for the month. Brian had spent the day oceanside with his wife, then got in his car to drive back to the airport, where he met his daughter and some of her friends who had just flown in. They jumped in his car and drove away, nary a hug or hello. I asked the obvious question: Why did he have to fly back so quickly? Because he was selling one of his eight restaurants the next morning. The next question: Why not just stay in Chicago? "Because my wife wanted me to come," I think were his exact words.

Brian had been living the breakneck life of a chef and restaurateur for decades, always on the go, always borrowing and spending and always working—and he was burnt out. But when he started talking about his food and his kitchens, he immediately changed from frazzled to passionate, engaged conversation. And boy, when he spoke

about the type of equipment he could buy once he sold one of his restaurants, he was like Chris Beytes in a hardware store.

These conversations remind me of that adage about turning your passion into your profession—essentially, don't do it. I bet you've loved plants your whole life and enjoy sharing that with others, right? And that's why you got into this crazy horticulture business—either that or you were born into it. The thrill of learning and potting and growing has been replaced by spreadsheets and HR tasks, ordering supplies and investigating POS systems. It's all good and it has to be done, but you didn't get into this biz to write orders and analyze glazing efficiencies.

My suggestion? Be like Gary and take some time and space for what refuels you. And be like Brian—trim your crowded list of responsibilities to free up energy for your passion. It's not about "more," after all. It's about what matters. **GP**