



Zen and the Art of Wearing Nametags

How I
Achieved
Social
Enlightenment
Through
a Silly
Experiment



from the brain of @nametagscott

Record
Believe It or Not!

world record holder of wearing nametags

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How I Achieved Social Enlightenment Through a Silly Experiment

By Scott Ginsberg

Hello, my name is Scott!

I wear a nametag twenty-four-seven.

Yes, even to bed. And in the shower.

But we'll cover that later.

As the world record holder of wearing nametags – yes, I actually hold that prestigious title – I've spent the last five thousand days of my life on mission: *Not to convince the whole world to wear nametags, but rather, to remind the everyone that they already do.*

That's what people say to me: *"I wish everybody wore nametags!"*

But that's just it. We already do. *All of us.* Every one of us wears a nametag every day.

It might not be a sticker on a shirt or a badge at a conference. But it's there. Whether we like it or not. As human beings, it's impossible to walk through this world without broadcasting who we are.

A nametag is a celebration of identity, an invitation for openness and a declaration of social belonging. It's an acknowledgement, a human equalizer and a distance reducer. A nametag is a choice to label ourselves before others get a chance to.

And so the question isn't, "Should you wear a nametag?" but rather, "What's written on it?" "How will you choose to wear it?" and "What will you do when people try to rip it off?"

Sound like an ancient proverb?

It is.

Welcome to Zen and the Art of Wearing Nametags.

Section 1: Hello, my name is Scott!

1. **Socialization.** You weren't trying to get attention; you were trying to give yourself away. *It's not a nametag – it's an opening.*
2. **Rule.** Most rules, aren't, especially the unwritten ones. *It's not a nametag – it's a sledgehammer.*
3. **Anger.** You weren't wearing a sticker; you were taking a stand. *It's not a nametag – it's a megaphone.*
4. **Labels.** If you don't make a name for yourself, someone will make one for you. *It's not a nametag – it's a choice.*
5. **Humanity.** It all depends on what you see when you see people. *It's not a nametag – it's a birthright.*
6. **Curiosity.** When we slide into complacency, we descend into fundamentalism. *It's not a nametag – it's a question mark.*
7. **Reason.** Intuition breeds anticipation, which helps you respond to people quicker. *It's not a nametag – it's an instinct.*
8. **Mystery.** Emanate an aura of delightful unpredictability, leaving the public wanting more, wondering about your next move. *It's not a nametag – it's a magic trick.*
9. **Surprise.** It's always to your advantage to be underestimated. *It's not a nametag – it's an ace up my sleeve.*
10. **Identity.** Commitment devices stay in front of our faces to remind us who we are, or, better yet, who we decide to be. *It's not a nametag – it's a totem.*
11. **Equalizer.** It's easier to change the world when we're willing to put ourselves on the same level as the people around us. *It's not a nametag – it's an equal sign.*
12. **Consideration.** With a natural eliminator of conflict, we don't need so many checkpoints after all. *It's not a nametag – it's a gavel.*
13. **Confidence.** If you never get up in front of people and learn who you are, you'll never like who you are. *It's not a nametag – it's a stage.*
14. **Idea.** You have a plan for a treehouse and end up building a skyscraper. *It's not a nametag – it's an accident.*

- 15. Belong.** It's amazing how welcoming people act when you've already made the decision to be a global citizen. *It's not a nametag – it's a membership card.*
- 16. Cool.** If they can't come up to you, they'll never get behind you. *It's not a nametag – it's an acceptance.*
- 17. Name.** You can't force intimacy – but you can accelerate it by reducing the distance between people. *It's not a nametag – it's a social gas pedal.*
- 18. Honesty.** Everything matters, everybody's watching and everything's a performance. *It's not a nametag – it's a lie detector.*
- 19. Marketing.** I spoke to people with a voice that was anticipated, personal and relevant. *It's not a nametag – it's an opt-in box.*
- 20. Asset.** *It's amazing how quickly a woman can change our minds about things. It's not a nametag – it's a magnet.*

SECTION 2: Hello, my name is Entrepreneur!

- 21. Hire.** I never waited to be picked. Instead of going to the career fair, I just hired myself and got to work. *It's not a nametag – it's a job application.*
- 22. Different.** Different isn't just acceptable – but also that it's encouraged and edified. *It's not a nametag – it's a distinction.*
- 23. Lost.** Getting lost is part of being human; it's how we learn to trust ourselves and where we eventually find ourselves. *It's not a nametag – it's a compass.*
- 24. Strangers.** Interaction is the agent of human decision and the cost of it is approaching zero. *It's not a nametag – it's a front porch.*
- 25. Clueless.** The best way to push the limits is not to know they exist. *It's not a nametag – it's a naivety.*
- 26. Extra.** People don't want the cookie – they want the fortune. *It's not a nametag – it's a free prize inside.*
- 27. Reputation.** Shakespeare asked, "What in a name?" but what counts is, "What's after a name?" *It's not a nametag – it's an identity.*
- 28. Sponsor.** There was a box at my doorstep with ten thousand free nametags. It's not a nametag – it's a product demonstration.
- 29. Fool.** Then, it backfired. And admittedly, I should have seen it coming. It's not a nametag – it's a gag.

- 30. Threat.** With most strangers, you're starting with negative balance and operating from a deficit position. *It's not a nametag – it's a white flag.*
- 31. Generosity.** When you relax people's overloaded brains, pamper their memory and frees up their heads to focus, you win. *It's not a nametag – it's a social gift.*
- 32. Trust.** People are lonely and want to be listened to, and need to be that person. *It's not a nametag – it's an open hand.*
- 33. Help.** It just seems like the right thing to do when somebody asks for assistance. It's not a nametag – it's a help desk.
- 34. Sewers.** Not only is everyone a comedian and an expert, but everyone's a critic, too. It's not a nametag – it's an obsession.
- 35. Begging.** If you can't give money, at least give attention. *It's not a nametag – it's an acknowledgement.*
- 36. One.** One matters. One has the power. One can make a difference. It's not a nametag – it's a domino.
- 37. Shove.** We need people to applaud our risk, elevate our hope and notice something we're too close to ourselves to notice. *It's not a nametag – it's a career.*
- 38. Wave.** There was no conversion point. I wasn't ready to ride the wave when it came. *It's not a nametag – it's a surfboard.*
- 39. Match.** Playful is the new professional, and it gives people the priceless gift of social elevation. *It's not a nametag – it's a spark.*
- 40. Test.** We all need something small, repeatable and portable that helps us make sense of the people we meet. *It's not a nametag – it's a Rorschach.*
- 41. Single.** While wearing a nametag is helpful for attracting them, it's not particularly effective for keeping them around. It's not a nametag – it's a filter.
- 42. Vulnerability.** Touch is the difference between a friendly greeting and frontal assault. *It's not a nametag – it's a green light.*
- 43. Ridicule.** Better to be hated for who you are than loved for who you aren't. *It's not a nametag – it's a bullseye.*
- 44. Liability.** Confidence threatens people, especially insecure ones. *It's not a nametag – it's a statement.*

- 45. Capital.** We don't need a call to arms – we need a call to connect. Not access to information, access to each other. *It's not a nametag – it's a bridge.*
- 46. Symbol.** Humans are naturally violent creatures, and we had to teach each other how to forgive. *It's not a nametag – it's a peace offering.*

SECTION 3: Hello, my name is Celebrity!

- 47. Basement.** The asterisk with every win was the subtle undercurrent of notenoughness that blocked fully success. *It's not a nametag – it's a boomerang.*
- 48. Anonymity.** Sign your work, be assertive with your identity and give people the priceless gift of security. *It's not a nametag – it's a security camera.*
- 49. Punch.** The louder you say no, the more judgmental you sound. But abstinence is cheaper than moderation. *It's not a nametag – it's a curfew.*
- 50. Accountability.** Install a daily structure to bankrupt bad behavior and keep you behaviors and actions consistent. *It's not a nametag – it's a construct.*
- 51. Familiarity.** When you're better friends, better service happens naturally. It doesn't breed contempt – it brings them back. *It's not a nametag – it's a permission slip.*
- 52. Discipline.** Commit yourself in small, non-threatening venues where the effort requirements are smaller to win bigger. *It's not a nametag – it's a daily practice.*
- 53. Leverage.** You don't need an idea – you need an “I did.” Ideas are free, but only execution is priceless. *It's not a nametag – it's a gateway.*
- 54. Business.** Simple means eliminating the extraneous, letting the necessary speak and disengaging the inessential. *It's not a nametag – it's a brand.*
- 55. Engagement.** If brand perception hinges on human interaction, work at becoming the bullseye, not the arrow. *It's not a nametag – it's a connection.*
- 56. Attention.** Attention is the great commodity and the scarcest resource we have. *It's not a nametag – it's a social object.*
- 57. Mattering.** The human need to feel valuable to the world runs deeper than just about anything. *It's not a nametag – it's a laxative.*
- 58. Forever.** One day I'll snap out of my delusions, close the door on my cute little experiment and rejoin the rest of the world. *It's not a nametag – it's a commitment.*
- 59. Didn't.** Being different is not the same as being unique. *It's not a nametag – it's a singularity.*

60. **Proof.** When you commit with both feet, the world doesn't just pay attention – it pays dividends. *It's not a nametag – it's a trademark.*
61. **Followers.** I didn't expect to tell millions of people about my colonoscopy. *It's not a nametag – it's a cult.*
62. **Breathe.** Humility shows up when you're incapacitated in a hospital bed for six days with a tube in your chest. *It's not a nametag – it's an anvil.*
63. **Wonder.** Einstein said imagination is more important than knowledge, I say imagination is more important than anything. *It's not a nametag – it's a shortcut.*
64. **Special.** Just because someone is broken doesn't mean they can't teach you a lesson. *It's not a nametag – it's a release*
65. **Safety.** If you see something, say something? Well, I see something. And I'm saying something. *It's not a nametag – it's a whistle.*
66. **Travel.** All the hatemail, insults, negative feedback and death threats came from my own people. *It's not a nametag – it's a translator.*
67. **Opportunity.** If we want to make use of everything that we are, we have to diversify our identity. No labels, no limits. *It's not a nametag – it's a springboard.*

SECTION 4: Hello, my name is Success!

68. **Crazy.** I think if everybody says you're nuts, you just might be onto something. *It's not a nametag – it's a guest pass.*
69. **Loneliness.** Screens are fine, but we can't solely filter our lives through pixels – not if we want those lives to matter. *It's not a nametag – it's a social network.*
70. **Memory.** We're all just winking in the dark, hoping somebody will make us feel seen. *It's not a nametag – it's a spotlight.*
71. **Friend.** It's not who you love – it's whose life is better because you love them. *It's not a nametag – it's a secret handshake.*
72. **Experiment.** Being in the right place at the right time is easy; you just need to be in a lot of places. *It's not a nametag – it's a test tube.*
73. **Legend.** *Because people don't just buy the thing you sell – they buy the story you tell. It's not a nametag – it's a narrative.*
74. **Credentials.** You have to appreciate the irony. But I think it's worth the tradeoff. *It's not a nametag – it's a passport.*

- 75. Trash.** Most great ideas are the result of experiments, mistakes, accidents, errors or jokes. *It's not a nametag – it's an oops.*
- 76. Consistency.** Once is a treat. Twice is a trend. Every day for a decade is a triumph. *It's not a nametag – it's a pattern.*
- 77. Sculpture.** Michelangelo used to say that the sculpture was already inside the stone, and that's all life is: A chance to chip away. *It's not a nametag – it's a chisel.*
- 78. Risk.** Sticking yourself out there gets you started, but keeping yourself out there gets you success, and life requires both. *It's not a nametag – it's a plunge.*

Socialization.

College was hard.

Not the school part – the social part.

Making friends. Going to parties. Hanging out at bars. Trying to meet girls.

All of it was a struggle.

Not because I was shy – but because I was sober.

I don't drink. I don't smoke. I don't do drugs. I don't do anything.

It's nothing religious. Nothing philosophical. Just a choice: Never cared for it. I don't like being out of control of my body. I don't need chemicals to have fun. And I hate being hung over.

But it was still college. And the story we've been programmed to believe is that the purpose of college is to get as intoxicated as possible as often as possible.

And anyone who deviates from that herd gets left behind.

So I was the outcast. I was the weird one. I was the guy who wasn't drunk, wasn't stoned and, as far as people knew, wasn't having fun and wasn't worth talking to. Just a straight edge silently judging the rest of the room. *Who wants hang out with that guy?*

But after two years of college, I finally said to myself: "This has to stop."

I was tired of not having friends. I was tired of being excluded. And I was tired of spending my weekends eating roast beef sandwiches watching Dawson's Creek alone in my dorm room.

Don't judge me. That show was amazing.

So I started wearing the nametag. All the time. And everything changed.

Now, I had an in.

Now, I had an opening.

Now, I had an opportunity to engage.

And it was more than just trying to get attention – I was trying to give myself away.

I was trying to live a better story.

And I was amazed how well that worked.

With the nametag, everybody saw me.
With the nametag, everybody knew me.
With the nametag, everybody talked to me.

It was socialization.

A signal. A permission slip. An invitation for friendliness. A disarming gesture. A non-threatening symbol. A social cue that reduced the distance between the world and me.

From the moment I stuck it on my shirt, I became more approachable. People treated me differently. College started to suck less. And I had some of the best times and made some of the best friends of my life.

And here's the really interesting part.

With the nametag, nobody seemed to care that was always sober.

They were too busy saying hi.

They were getting to know me as a person – not as a preference.

And all I had to do was give myself away.

I broke the box I put around myself and let people like me.

It's not a nametag – it's an opening.

Rule.

It's not like I was the first person to have this idea.

Ever forget to take your nametag off after an event?

It's a strange feeling.

The whole day you're wondering why people are staring, acting overly friendly and calling you by your name.

You're like, *"Do I know you from somewhere?"*

No, they don't. They're just taking the bait. All because you failed to comply.

"Thou shalt remove your nametag immediately after an event."

That's the unwritten rule, right? That the moment the event is over, you rip off that stupid sticker and retreat into the safe confines of anonymity and normality, because God forbid anyone should ever spot you committing such an act of embarrassment public.

Not for me.

I'm a born rule breaker. Have been for thirty-one years. My personal constitution doesn't ask the question, "Who's going to let me?" but rather, "Who's going to stop me?"

Because most rules, aren't. *Especially the unwritten ones.*

If they were real rules, somebody would have written them down by now.

Most of the time, they're not rules – they're self-imposed limitations. They're mindlessly accepted pseudo truths. And while we assume it's a risk to break a rule, the real risk is when we live mindlessly by something that never should've been a rule in the first place.

As conscious human beings, it's important that we believe what we believe because we investigate the truth and make the decision to believe – not because somebody tells us to believe and we mindlessly follow.

And while it's fairly harmless to break a small rule – like leaving your nametag on after an event – it's still good practice. It's a healthy exercise of personal choice. And it's training for the big moments in life when stepping out of line might be the difference between happiness and misery.

What rule did you break today?

It's not a nametag – it's a sledgehammer.

Anger.

Essentially, I started wearing a nametag because I was pissed off.

Pissed off that nobody noticed me. Pissed off that nobody included me.

Eventually, I had enough.

This is ridiculous. I am awesome and you are going to like me. Got it?

Turns out, that actually works. The world is highly responsive when you stop waiting for people to be friends with you and start sticking yourself out there.

And here I thought anger was a pointless emotion.

But being pissed off goes a long way.

Being pissed off is the only way to get uncomfortable enough to change.

That's the upside of anger – it's the ember of initiative.

All we have to do is keep that fire burning.

It's like my friend Matt likes to remind me:

You weren't wearing a sticker – you were taking a stand.

Damn right I was.

I was taking a stand for my identity.

I was taking a stand against anonymity.

I was taking a stand in the name of approachability.

Life's too short to keep our doubts to ourselves, too important to keep our positions unknown and too beautiful to keep our conclusions quiet.

Opinionated is the new black.

It's not a nametag – it's a megaphone.

Labels.

That's the advantage of wearing a nametag: You get to label yourself first.

Before anyone else gets the chance.

Not as a job. Not as an ethnicity. Not as a role. Not as a condition. Not as a preference.

As a person. *My name is Scott.*

You beat people to the punch.

You make yourself unlabelable.

You silently strip people of their power over you.

And this helps, since putting each other in boxes is a fundamental human drive.

When we meet people for the first time, we're silently chomping at the bit to find something – anything – to label them with. And until we find that hook on which to hang that person, until we satisfy our need to commoditize each other, there's always a certain level of interpersonal comfort we never achieve.

If you don't make a name for yourself, someone will make one for you.

Unless you label yourself first.

It's not a nametag – it's a choice.

Humanity.

Another reason I loved wearing a nametag was because it humanized me. It made me feel like a person. And it made it harder for people to treat me as anything but.

Turns out, it's not that hard to make people happy.

All you have to do is treat them like people.

Not as objects.

Not as integers.

Not as trophies.

Not as machines.

Not as categories.

Not as dollar signs.

Not as commodities.

Not as abstract entities.

Not as a means to an end.

Not as bloodless statistical entities.

Not as impersonal facets of production.

As people.

It all depends on what you see when you see people.

This mindset is sorely needed in our world. Every day our world becomes less humane in our treatment of each other. And because we've become so obsessed with profit, so drowned out in routine, so accelerated by technology, so numbed by rote and so blinded by ego, we are robbing people of their humanity.

We don't need nametags – we need a world where people are treated like people.

I know it's a lot to ask. Especially when so much inhumanity surrounds us.

But I believe in our species.

It's not a nametag – it's a birthright.

Curiosity.

I really just wanted to see what would happen.

That's it.

The nametag was an exercise in curiosity, nothing more.

But that's just me. I've always been incurably curious. I'm the annoying kid who raises his hand right before the lunch bell rings – because he just has to know the answer – then makes everybody late for Tater Tot Tuesday.

The good news is, history proves time and time again that the most successful, most celebrated and most influential people in the world were the ones who asked dangerous questions. Despite overwhelming efforts to silence their enthusiasm and deflect their interest, they kept curiosity burning.

We can't forget this. We can't slide into complacency.

Otherwise we descend into fundamentalism.

Curiosity is not a threat – it's a healthy, active response to life.

It might have killed the cat, but it also changed the world.

What we can't see, what we are afraid to see and what we are unwilling to see, that is what threatens us more.

It's not a nametag – it's a question mark.

Reason.

So there was no agenda. There was no strategy. There was no point.

Wearing a nametag was just something I did.

And what always amazed me was how hard it was for people to wrap their heads around that. They couldn't accept the fact that someone would just do something for the sake of doing it.

"Oh come on, you had to have some reason."

Not really. It just felt right.

And is that so wrong? Am I so crazy?

Life's too short to surround yourself with people who demand a reason for everything.

Sometimes the best reason is the one you don't have.

And yet, people still ask, *"You wear a nametag everyday? What were you thinking?"*

But that's just it – I *wasn't* thinking.

I was feeling.

I was listening.

I was trusting.

I was testing.

I was risking.

I was reacting.

But I definitely wasn't thinking.

And that decision turned out to be the single most important one of my life.

Forget about thinking – wearing a nametag taught me intuiting.

Remember the kid from *The Sixth Sense* who saw dead people?

Well, I see friendly people. And they're everywhere. And I always know exactly when I'm about to meet another one.

This is, by far, the spookiest thing about wearing a nametag: It's my sixth sense.

Every day, about one second before somebody interacts with me – I can feel it coming. In my bones. Whether it's a flight attendant greeting me as I board, a waitress asking for my order or a

group of teenagers who think they're comedians, I always know when that moment is about to happen. It's bizarre.

But it does allow me to anticipate. And it certainly helps me respond to people quickly.

Because they don't know that I know.

It's not a nametag – it's an instinct.

Mystery.

"I just have so many questions!"

I get that a lot.

When people find out I wear a nametag everyday, they're instantly curious about a number of topics. And I'm happy to oblige. It comes with the territory.

I recently met a guy in a jazz club in Hell's Kitchen. Noticing my nametag, he asked me if I had just come from an episode of *The Price is Right*.

Good guess, but no. Even though I've always secretly wanted to be on that show.

So not only is everyone a comedian – everyone is also journalist. They demand answers:

Do you ever change the name on it?
Only for Halloween.

Do the nametags ruin your clothes?
Only when I leave them my shirts during laundry.

Do you write a new one every day?
No, I prewrite them in bulk on an as-needed basis.

Do you ever get tired of wearing it?
Depends on what part of town I'm in.

What's the average lifespan of one nametag?
Depends on how much soy sauce I spill on it.

How many nametags do you go through in a year?
About four hundred.

Do you have them printed or write them yourself?
I hand write every single one. I have arthritis.

Can you wear a nametag in the pool?
Kind of.

What do you do when you take a shower?
Use lots of soap.

What happens when you go to the beach?
I get weird looks from small children.

Is it possible to wear a nametag in cold weather?

Yes, but not in Chicago.

Have you tried every kind of nametag there is?

Every one.

How much do you spend a year on nametags?

Considering the nametag company sends them to me for free, not much.

Do you have stock in the nametag company?

If they were a publicly traded entity, I would.

Does your girlfriend wear a nametag?

Take one look at her, and it's pretty obvious she doesn't need one.

Would you ever make her wear a nametag?

Only if she had a sticker fetish.

What if she didn't like the fact that you wore a nametag?

Then she wouldn't be my girlfriend.

Are you going to make your kids wear nametags?

Not if I want them to like me.

Have you ever forgotten to wear a one?

About once a month.

Do you always carry extra nametags with you?

Ten prewritten, ten blank.

What happens if you don't have one?

I always have one.

The list goes on and on.

And the point is, that people are enthralled by mystery. They never grow tired of things that invite constant interpretation. And your ability to fascinate them is a tremendous asset.

Like Houdini, you have to emanate an aura of delightful unpredictability. You have leave the public always wanting more, wondering about your next move.

Never underestimate its power.

It's not a nametag – it's a magic trick.

Surprise.

The other day I was telling my story to a stranger at a party.

When I showed the girl my business card, she said, “Wow, I thought you were joking.”

Most people do. My story of wearing a nametag – then, somehow miraculously making a career out of that – sounds like a rerun of What’s My Line?

Another time I was buying a scarf at the mall. The clerk behind the counter asked me if I was the guy who wore a nametag all the time. I told him I was.

“Bullshit!” he said. “You’re not that guy.”

Right. As if I had followers.

But he wasn’t convinced. After arguing back and forth, he finally said, “Look, it’s not you. Stop lying.” And then he walked away.

Okay then. Guess he won’t be buying a copy of my new book.

Still, I think not being taken seriously can be an asset. I think it’s always to your advantage to be underestimated. And I think it pays to be a sleeper and come in under the radar.

It’s like Al Pacino said in *The Devil’s Advocate*, “I’m a surprise. The jury, the witnesses, and opposing council – they don’t see me coming. And that’s why I win. I’m the hand up Mona Lisa’s skirt.”

It’s not a nametag – it’s an ace up my sleeve.

Identity.

Still, my favorite response to give when somebody asks about my nametag is:

“I have identity issues.”

That always gets a few weird looks.

But don’t we all? Aren’t we all just stumbling through this world, trying to figure out who we really are?

I know I am.

People ask me if I wear a nametag to remember who I am, and the truth is, *that’s exactly why I do it.*

It’s easy to forget who we are. It’s easy to get so wrapped up in who we think we are – or who other people think we should be – that we overlook our own truth.

That’s when things start to get broken.
That’s when people start to get hurt.

Hell, I’ve lost track of who I was before. I once spent four years in a relationship with the wrong person – pretending to be someone I wasn’t – just so I didn’t have to be alone.

We all need reminders. Visual cues. Commitment devices that stay in front of our faces to remind us who we are, or, better yet, who we decide to be.

Otherwise, who we are gets hammered out of us.

It’s not a nametag – it’s a totem.

Equalizer.

As I mentioned, I hold the world record for wearing nametags.

Don't act like you're not impressed.

But as the world's foremost expert, I am uniquely qualified to give an opinion on how nametags should be worn. Here's my theory:

No last names. No company names. No logos. No titles. No acronyms. No designations.

First name only. Nothing else.

This levels the playing field. This restores the balance of power. This eliminates competition. This prevents pigeonholing. And this stops people from being better than others with a lesser tag.

By eliminating unnecessary labels, by stripping accumulated adjectives and by boiling people down to their human essence – their names – it's harder to judge each other and easier to get to know each other.

Just imagine how different our planet would be if we were willing to put values before vocation, humanity before statistics, personality before position and individuality before industry.

It's a lot easier to change the world when we're willing to put ourselves on the same level as the people around us.

It's not a nametag – it's an equal sign.

Consideration.

And that's the thing: Nametags aren't about you.

They're about everyone in the world but you.

They're about making people feel comfortable approaching you.

They're about reducing their uncertainty while talking to you.

They're about helping people remember you.

And yet, we still complain about wearing them:

"I feel silly wearing this thing."

"My nametag doesn't match my outfit."

"I can't give creepy guys my fake name now."

Get over it.

You may feel uncomfortable wearing the nametag, but not as uncomfortable as the person who is afraid to approach because you're not.

Because when people meet, they run through certain checkpoints.

The goal is to reduce conflict.

It's just human nature: Where there's conflict, there's uncertainty; where there's uncertainty, there's anxiety; and where there's anxiety, there's avoidance.

We can thank the cavemen for this one. Back then, they didn't know if their fellow man was trying to help them, kill them, eat them, take their food or steal their mate.

Yet another reason why I love wearing a nametag: *It's a natural eliminator of conflict.*

Think back to how many people you avoided because you didn't know their name.

"I know that girl, but I don't know where I know her from. God. It's going to drive me crazy all night."

It's like that episode of *Seinfeld* where Jerry dates the girl whose name rhymes with a female body part.

Celeste? Gipple? Mulva? Aretha?

And then, in the middle of the night, he runs over to the window and shouts it for the entire city to hear:

“Delooooorrrrrresssss!”

Conflict is a powerful thing.

No matter who we claim to be, we all avoid it.

But if each of us could find a way – a tool – that becomes a natural eliminator of conflict, maybe we wouldn’t need so many checkpoints after all.

It’s not a nametag – it’s a gavel.

Confidence.

By wearing a nametag, I'm making a statement:

That I'm okay with myself.

That I'm comfortable with my truth.

That I'm confident in the person I've become.

And that I have memory problems.

That's why the first year was so hard: *I was still trying to figure out who I was.*

But it's amazing how quickly your confidence grows when you're forced to stick yourself out there every day. Looking back on the last four thousand days, I probably changed the most during the first four hundred.

And that's exactly why schools should teach subjects like improv, karaoke, acting and public speaking. As early as possible.

Kids don't need long division – they need an audience.

George Carlin used to say that if you don't get up in front of people every day, you'll never learn who you are.

And if you never learn who you are, you'll never like who you are.

It's not a nametag – it's a stage.

Idea.

Truth is, none of this was supposed to happen.

I just wanted to make friends – I didn't want to make history.

It's weird how that works.

You have an idea for a treehouse and end up building a skyscraper.

But that's what makes life worth living.

The surprises.

The unintentionals.

The strange evolutions that turn seeds into forests.

And history is rife with examples of ideas just like this:

Tony Hawk just wanted to skateboard.

He never expected to become world's most unlikely executive.

Judson Liapply just wanted to dance.

He never expected to create the first viral video in Internet history.

Frank Warren just wanted to collect secrets.

He never expected to become the most trusted stranger in America.

I wonder what your idea will become.

It's not a nametag – it's an accident.

Belong.

When I was a kid, I struggled to find a spot.

A niche. A home. A place where I belonged.

Nothing seemed to work. No matter how hard I tried, I still felt like an outsider.

And as I said, I got to the point where I couldn't take it anymore. I was tired of feeling like part of the wallpaper. I was tired of being held hostage by my outsidersness.

So I stuck on a nametag and said, *"Screw it. Now I belong everywhere."*

That changed everything. That changed the way people treated me. That changed the posture with which I approached the world. Because I made the decision that, even if I didn't have a spot, even if I didn't belong anywhere, at least I belonged to myself.

And it's amazing how welcoming people act toward you when you've already made the decision to be a global citizen.

It's not a nametag – it's a membership card.

Cool.

People think my parents are nuts.

“You let your kid wear a nametag everyday? Are you insane?”

Let me explain.

When I first told my family about the idea, two things happened.

First, my grandpa thought – that I thought – he was getting Alzheimer’s.

Woops.

Second, my parents sat me down. They put their arms around me, looked into my eyes and calmly asked why I was the only kid wearing a nametag to family dinner.

I said I wanted to wear it every day for the rest of my life.

How would you feel if that was your kid?

Before I tell you what their response was, let me explain something else.

My parents are heroic. Since the beginning, they did everything they possibly could to instill a foundation of love and respect and character.

They never asked me to edit myself.

And when the time came for me to go out on my own, they would just have to trust that they did the best job they could. The rest was up to me.

That’s why I wasn’t shocked when they responded to the idea of wearing a nametag forever with a four-letter word:

“Cool.”

Not the four-letter word I was expecting.

“Cool? Really? Are you sure?”

“Scott, if you want to wear a nametag everyday for the rest of your life – cool.”

So I did. And I haven’t taken it off since.

It’s not a nametag – it’s an acceptance.

Name.

Speaking of old people.

Let's talk about Dale Carnegie, 1936.

He found that a person's name was the sweetest sound he would hear in any language.

And let's not forget Sigmund Freud, 1938.

He found that a person's name was the single context of human memory most forgotten.

Lucky for me, I don't have that problem. And I never will. Because everybody knows my name, all the time, everywhere I go.

How many people do you work with, everyday, whose names you don't know?

If that number is high, you have a problem on your hands. After all, a person's name is the basic installment of self-disclosure.

Without it, there is an unavoidable awkwardness.

Without it, there is a ceiling on how much intimacy you can create.

Without it, there is a certain level of closeness you'll never achieve with people.

And you can only call people names like buddy, guy, girl, bro, mate, ace, boss, sport, beeyoch, dude, pal, sista, chief or hommie for so long.

If we want to reduce the distance, we have to use each other's names.

I was ordering a burrito once. The customer in front of me noticed my nametag, turned around and said hello.

"Hey Scott, you know my wife Kara. I'm Eric. It's nice to finally meet you in person."

"You too!"

That was the end of our conversation.

Two hours later, I get an email from Kara that says:

"My husband never introduces himself to anybody."

Oh.

It's not enough to just be amicable strangers.

I want to be friends with everyone, all the time, everywhere, forever.

That's just me:

I don't have to warm up to people.

I don't have to get to know someone before we connect.

I don't have to wait until we've hung out six times before I start opening up.

I just jump right in. I reveal myself quickly, openly, honestly and respectfully. I don't make small talk – make big talk. Immediately.

And most of the time, others reciprocate. People appreciate the willingness to cut the formalities and start connecting for real. With the exception of occasional weird looks, most people are cool with it.

The nametag is merely the entry point. The spark. The signal. And while it's nothing grandiose, it's proven to be a strong enough lever.

It doesn't force intimacy – it speeds it up.

Not by false identification.

Not by pretending to be everyone's best friend.

Not by memorizing a few pieces of personal information.

But by reducing the distance between people.

How do you do that?

It's not a nametag – it's a social accelerator.

Honesty.

Still, the stupidest thing I ever did was getting kicked out of a bar for wearing a nametag.

Not because they had a problem with it, but because I tried to buy beer for my friends with my older brother's driver's license – and forgot to take my nametag off.

Hello, my name is Dumbass. My friends still make fun of me to this day.

But that's the new normal: Everything matters, everybody's watching and everything's a performance. And if you run around expecting not to get caught, eventually the world is going to bust you.

Dishonesty has a limited shelf life.

And I get it. I understand why humans lie:

It saves face, shifts the blame, avoids punishment, evades confrontation, protects your situation, spares people's feelings, helps you get your way, makes you feel better about yourself and manipulates the way others perceive you.

What's not to like?

The problem is, I'm a horrible liar. Honesty is too much a part of my personal constitution as human being to do it. And when I don't tell the truth – to myself, to others and to the world – my body broadcasts it like a drive in movie.

So I just tell the truth. As often as possible. Which doesn't mean I never lie. But I'm doing the best I can.

And don't get me wrong. I would love to be dishonest. But frankly, it's just too much work. And I've got books to write.

That's why the nametag is great: *It makes it harder to lie.*

Not that I used to be a big liar before. But I've certainly noticed that I lie significantly less than before I started wearing it. Because it forces me to ask the question: *“Do I want to become known for what I'm about to do?”*

If not, I don't do it. Simple as that.

As my mentor reminds me, “The past always reincarnates in one of two forms: Either to pat you on the back or kick you in the butt.”

It's not a nametag – it's a lie detector.

Marketing.

Sobriety notwithstanding, I don't remember much from college.

Not because I was drunk all the time.

Not because I was a poor student.

Not because I had bad teachers.

But because college isn't about retaining information.

College is about growing up, making friends, making mistakes, making choices, making an ass out of yourself, trying new stuff, figuring out who you are, developing coping skills, eating beef jerky for breakfast, understanding different perspectives, living on your own, learning how to learn, learning how *you* learn and of course, dating the wrong people.

Most schools don't put that on the brochure.

Still, I do recall one thing from my senior marketing capstone.

As graduation drew close, I began collecting emails. Hundreds of them. Not just my close friends I wanted to stay in touch with, but every classmate, casual acquaintance, coworker, professor, girl I had a crush on – everyone. And I promised to drop them a line as soon as my first book was done.

This was long before social media. Back when people still emailed each other. *Sigh.*

Six months later, I published my first book. And as promised, I personally emailed every single one of those people and asked them to buy a copy.

And they did. I spoke to people with a voice that was anticipated, personal and relevant.

In fact, I still have a copy of that email to this day.

Maybe I learned something in college after all.

It's not a nametag – it's an opt in box.

Asset.

Speaking of dating the wrong girls.

My older brother hated the fact that I wore a nametag.

For the first two years, he made fun of me almost every day. Begging me to stop, asking me to take it off and just act like a normal person for once.

Which was just a nice way of saying, “You’re hurting my game.”

Of course, that only motivated me further. That’s what happens with older siblings: *If it annoys them, you do more of it.*

But I’ll never forget the day he turned. The very moment he became a believer.

One weekend he came to visit me at college. I was a senior, only a few weeks away from graduation. And unbeknownst to him, everybody on campus knew who I was.

Especially the girls.

This was the first time he truly experienced the fruits of my nametag labors. Until then, he just thought it was just some stupid experiment.

Until then he realized that I was greatest wingman in the history of dating.

Think about it:

I’m sober – which means I can drive.

And I’m wearing a nametag – which means I can drive traffic.

If you know what I mean.

And so we exploited it. My friends would send me out to reel the girls in – then they’d send me away so they could make their move.

They called me The Fisherman.

And sounds unfair, but frankly, I didn’t care. Sexual conquest was never important to me. Besides, I’m serial monogamist. I always had a girlfriend anyway. The least I can do is use my powers to help a brother in need.

In retrospect, it was more gratifying to sit back at the end of the night, smile as my friends took home girls and say to myself, “My work here is done.”

At which point I went home alone, watched three to five minutes of porn and cried myself to sleep.

Anyway, on that fateful weekend when my brother visited, he decided he would wear a nametag that read, “Scott’s Brother.”

Not only did everybody notice him. Not only did everybody remember him. But the nametag actually helped him get lucky.

Long story short: A friend of mine spotted Steve’s nametag from across the bar. After a few minutes of drunken deductive reasoning, she put two and two together – waited until I went to bathroom – and then made her move.

By the time I returned, I had a text message from my brother that said, “Thanks for the nametag – see you in the morning.”

Funny. My brother hasn’t made fun of my idea since.

Isn’t it amazing how quickly we change our minds about things?

It’s not a nametag – it’s a magnet.

Hire.

Two years into my adventure, my roommate said something I'll never forget:

"Remember to wear your dark suit!"

I knew that could only mean three words: College Career Fair.

Unfortunately, the only outfit I owned was a four-dollar polyester leisure suit with an orange and red paisley collar that I bought at Goodwill sophomore year.

So I did what any smart college student would have done:

Went back to Goodwill and bought a real suit for seven dollars.

Don't worry. I bought a twelve-dollar shirt to class things up.

Then, resumes in hand, I slapped a nametag on my lapel and headed toward the auditorium.

But when I walked in the room, here's what I saw: A sea of stale, corporate exhibits, piles of free notepads and hundreds of fellow students hopping from booth to booth trying to prove themselves to people they didn't even like so they could land boring, soul-sucking jobs that preserved the status quo.

And one question entered my mind: *"What the hell am I doing here?"*

So I went home and finished my book.

Nine months later, I published it.

Nine years later, I published thirteen more.

I never waited to be picked. Instead of going to the career fair, I just hired myself and got to work. And after a decade, I still haven't been fired.

I just figure if you're going to be besieged by a relentless inner voice, it may as well be your own. That's the cool part about being an entrepreneur: You don't have to share the money with anybody. You don't have to ask permission.

And you learn quickly that the best way to bring home the bacon is to raise your own pigs.

It's not a nametag – it's a job application.

Different.

I was always just a little different.

Not just in college – but my whole life.

But not so different that nobody wanted to be friends with me. Not so different that I felt excessively entitled or self-righteously appointed. But different enough to feel like an alien wherever I went.

And then, three weeks after I graduated, I moved to Portland.

The city where different is the default.

Everybody fits in – because nobody fits in. It's so fantastically unique, so delightfully weird and so endearingly eclectic, that you can't help but acknowledge and applaud people's differences.

Coming from the Midwest, that place is so weird, I almost felt normal. That says a lot.

I remember my first day. I was riding the bus when a guy asked, "You're not from around here, are you Scott?"

"How did you guess?"

"Nobody uses umbrellas here. When it rains, we either celebrate it or ignore it."

And that's when I said to myself: "These are my people."

I fell in love with the city. Had some of the greatest times of my life. Made lifelong friends I'll never forget. And learned lessons that changed me forever. And although I only spent fourteen months there, the spirit of Portland will always remain under my fingernails.

You have to understand, I grew up in suburban St. Louis. I went to college in rural Ohio. So it was a nice change of posture to live in a community where accepting people's differences is a given – but celebrating them is the gift.

Can you imagine if more places adopted that mentality?

Can you imagine if we stopped holding ourselves hostage by our intolerance?

Sadly, our society still operates on the outdated, close-minded cliché that the nail that sticks up should be hammered down. That being different is the enemy.

I don't care how open we claim to be: We still actively avoid contact with people who are not like us because of a fear of social contamination.

It's time to adopt a different philosophy about being different.

Not only that it's acceptable – but also that it's encouraged and edified.

Fit out.

It's not a nametag – it's a distinction.

Lost.

From time to time, older women – and it’s always older women – will come up and ask:

“Oh, sweetheart. Did your mother make you wear that nametag in case you get lost?”

Very funny.

But then again, what’s so bad about getting lost?
Is there any shame in having no sense of direction?

Personally, I love getting lost. It’s the highlight of my day. That’s why I started my company when I wasn’t ready, I wasn’t smart enough and I had no experience. I took the plunge anyway. Because I knew that if I waited until I knew what I was doing, I never would have done anything.

Little did I know: *Getting lost can lead to getting paid.*

I once watched an interview with Steve Nash during the playoffs. When the game was over, the announcer said, “It’s fascinating to watch you play. You’re quick, you’re scrappy and you’re smart. And I never know where you’re going to take the ball. Straight to the basket? Across the paint? Out to the circle? Steve, how do you know where you’re going to go?”

“I don’t.”

The announcer froze.

“But you’re one of the best point guards in the league. Millions of fans adore you. And your numbers are off the charts. What do you mean you don’t know?”

And with a sweaty, confident smile, Nash said something I’ll never forget:

If you don’t know where you’re going, nobody can stop you.

Getting lost is part of being human.
Getting lost is how we learn to trust ourselves.
Getting lost is where we eventually find ourselves.

Life is boring when you know all the answers. The idea of living in a world where you can’t get lost is terrifying to me.

Sure, I might be geographically impotent. But that’s the advantage of wearing a nametag: You always find a way to get found.

It’s not a nametag – it’s a compass.

Strangers.

And then it happened.

I was riding the bus one night. The guy sitting next to me noticed my nametag and asked why I was wearing it.

“It makes people friendlier,” I said.

“Cool!” he replied.

We chatted for a few minutes. Nice guy. He told me about the law firm he worked at. I told him about the upcoming release of my first book.

“Tell you what,” Garrett said. “When your new book comes out, I’ll give you a call and buy you a beer.”

He took my card, walked off the bus and waved goodbye.

I never saw him again.

Sniff. He never called. Probably doesn’t even know I exist. Typical guy.

But one week later, somebody did call.

And little did I know, it would become the most important phone call of my life.

Her name was Jill.

She worked for the Portland Tribune.

And she wanted to do a feature article about my upcoming book release.

Two weeks later, the article was sent out on every major newswire in the country.

And life would never be the same again.

People called to buy books.

News outlets requested interviews.

Companies reached out to hire me to speak.

Everything that happened in my career sparked from that one moment when I sat down on a bus and started talking to a complete stranger.

A stranger who just so happened to be the boyfriend of that reporter for the newspaper.

You never know. Everybody is somebody’s somebody. And interaction is the agent of human de-

cision.

Any time people decide to listen to, buy from, get behind, partner with or tell others about you, it's probably because of the interaction they had with you.

How they experienced you.

How they experienced themselves in relation to you.

And fortunately, the cost of interaction is approaching zero.

Thanks to the Internet, we now have greater access to each other than ever before.

Brands are reaching users.

Writers are reaching readers.

Artists are reaching collectors.

Leaders are reaching followers.

But you don't need a nametag. And you don't need to meet a stranger on a bus.

You need to be open to what can emerge from every interaction.

You need to interact with people in praise of whatever they have to offer.

You need to approach everyone you encounter with a spirit of acknowledgement.

Because every time you interact with people, you make a choice.

A choice to engage with swift responsiveness, nonstop gratitude, unexpected honesty, exquisite playfulness and loving unfairness.

Those aren't just interactions – they're social gifts. And they change people forever.

After that fortuitous encounter on the bus, I came to a conclusion.

Friendly costs nothing, yet changes everything.

That's the movement I'm leading.

Will you join me?

It's not a nametag – it's a front porch.

Clueless.

Media attention notwithstanding, I still didn't put lot of thought into that first book.

There was no strategy, no through line, no promise to the reader, no take home value for the buyer and no unique selling proposition for the target market.

HELLO, my name is Scott! It was just an idea. A hundred pages of stories from college.

Actually, it was about eighty pages but my editor made the font size bigger.

Thank you, Courier New.

I wrote it because I was a writer.

I wrote it because I had a story worth telling.

I wrote it because if I didn't, my heart would never forgive me.

I just shipped the thing.

The intention was pure.

The process was organic

The art was solely rooted in love.

"Here," I said.

And it worked. The right people noticed. They told their friends.

The book led to everything.

Had I known what I know now, it never would have gotten done.

Had I known what I was doing, it never would have worked.

Good thing I was clueless.

Maybe the best way to push the limits is not to know they exist.

It's not a nametag – it's a naivety.

Extra.

The book came out when I was twenty-two.

And from a business standpoint, there was no plan. No marketing strategy. No publicity campaign. No social media push. No finely orchestrated plan in perfect alignment with my personal vision statement and life purpose.

I just handed out copies to every single person I knew. That was my marketing plan.

With one catch: *Every copy of the book came with two free nametags.*

One for you, one for a friend.

Readers loved it. They showed everybody. Some even wore the nametags in public to start conversations – with complete strangers – about my idea.

What's amazing is, people didn't care that much about the book itself.

They just wanted the free prize inside.

So I spent dozens of hours staying up late the night before speeches, gluing those little buggers into the back of each book. Wasted tons of money. Signed every copy. Burned my fingers with hot glue a hundred times. And hated every moment of it.

It was worth it.

Extras matter. People don't want the cookie – they want the fortune.

It's not a nametag – it's the toy in the cereal box.

Reputation.

A few weeks later, I did my first television interview.

On CNN Headline News.

Three minutes. Five million people. Twenty-two years old.

Yikes.

I don't remember much about my segment. I'm sure I rambled like a pro.

But what I do remember was rushing home to watch the tape. And the moment that would be forever burned into my brain was noticing what CNN wrote on their lower third screen graphic:

Scott Ginsberg
Name Tag Wearer

And there it is. Four years of college.

Thanks, mom and dad. Money well spent.

But I learned something that day.

First, that you can't outsource reputation. Second, that it's not what's in a name – it's what after a name that counts. And third, if you don't make a name for yourself, somebody will make one for you.

Nametag Wearer. *Sheesh.*

It's not a nametag – it's an identity.

Sponsor.

Naturally, all I wanted was a few free nametags.

After all, I *was* the world record holder. And I was already giving the nametag company free publicity. I think that made me their ideal spokesperson.

Why wouldn't they want to sponsor me?

So I started writing letters. Every month. Complimenting their product line, sharing my story, talking about my book release and, of course, requesting promotional nametags to put in the back of each copy.

I am Andy Dufresne in *Shawshank Redemption*. Determined to get the attention of Maco Tag & Label if it's the last thing I do.

They couldn't have cared less. Not a single letter, email, phone call or even a mere acknowledgment.

About four months later, I was on national television. toThey asked where I bought my nametags, and here's what I said:

"Maco Tag & Label makes the finest nametags in the world. Their paper quality is superior, their colors are bold and their adhesive is so strong it ruins my clothes."

Two days later, I received a letter from Maco's competition, Avery.

The marketing manager saw my segment on television. He suggested that I switch to their brand, as it had a monopoly on the nametag market. And he was willing to supply me with as many nametags as I needed.

Which is unfortunate, because their nametags suck.

Cheap paper, flat colors and adhesive so weak that the sides of your badge will curl up like a scroll after an hour.

So that's what I wrote back to him in my reply.

Then, I sent copies of both letters – plus a recording of my news segment – to the marketing department of Maco Tag & Label.

Two weeks later, there was a box at my doorstep with ten thousand free nametags.

I never paid for another one again.

It's not a nametag – it's a product demonstration.

Fool.

Then, it backfired.

And admittedly, I should have seen it coming.

Let me explain.

When I was in college, I loved picking up my brother up at the airport. Not because I missed him, but because I wanted to make embarrassing welcome signs that humiliated him in public.

A few of my favorites were, “Welcome back from rehab,” “Congrats on the sex change,” and “Best wishes on the enlargement.” One time I even dressed up in a gorilla costume with a sign that read, “Steve, our baby looks just like me!”

I figure that’s appropriate payback for eighteen years of torture.

So when it came to my nametag, I always sough out ways to keep the joke alive. I remember my first few Halloweens; I just changed the name on the tag as my entire costume. *Lazy, but effective.*

Unfortunately, my propensity for practice jokes almost cost me my nametag sponsor.

It was April Fools Day, 2003. I had the idea to call all of my friends and pretend that I was in hospital because some drunken idiot saw my nametag in a bar, dragged me outside and beat the hell out of me. And, in light of this incident, I was going to quit wearing a nametag forever.

So I started calling. And my acting skills were Oscar-worthy. By the fifth call, I was faking tears for effect. My clients ate it up.

Except Janet. She was the contact person at my sponsor, Maco Tab & Label. When I pulled back the curtain and said, “April Fools!” she said:

“Scott, I can’t believe you just did that to me.”

Click.

We didn’t talk for weeks. She never returned my calls, never replied my emails, nothing. And since they were my sole supplier of nametags, I got a bit nervous.

Two months later, I received a letter from their legal department. In the subject line of the email it read, “Deposition Request.”

“Dear Mr. Ginsberg. One of our employees, Janet Patterson, is currently undergoing a corporate indictment. She is being investigated for stealing company property and illegally distributing it

to outside persons. We understand the two of you maintained a professional relationship involving nametags, and we will need to obtain your testimony as the lead witness in this case. Please call immediately.”

Shit.

You have to be kidding me. Arrested? For free nametags? Seriously?

I talked to an attorney friend of mine. He said technically, I could face charges for accessory to employee theft: Probably a fine, definitely a mark on my permanent record and, worst of all, no more free nametags.

So I laid low for a while. Didn't tell a soul. I even had a nightmare that I was being interviewed on the news as “The Nametag Thief.”

But just when I thought the case had blown over, a few weeks later I received a voicemail from a familiar voice:

“Hey Scott, it's Janet from Maco Tag & Label. Just wanted to drop a line and make sure you got my deposition request ... April fools!”

Well played.

It's not a nametag – it's a gag.

Threat.

I once met my friends for sushi.

They invited a girl named Sandra, a friend of a friend who was passing through town. When we met, she thanked me for wearing a nametag.

“It’s just so non-threatening,” she said.

Interesting.

How do you lower the threat level when you meet people?

Because with most strangers, you’re starting with negative balance. You’re operating from a deficit position.

It’s just the posture of the masses. People have been sold, scammed, screwed, conned, played, hustled, manipulated and used too long – and they’re tired of it.

Once they’ve seen a ghost, they’re always afraid of the dark.

But a nametag takes a few bricks out of the wall. A nametag immediately lowered the threat level and intentionally disqualifies me from people’s fears.

It’s not a nametag – it’s a white flag.

Generosity.

Humans don't like to think, choose or remember.

It's too much work, takes too long and causes anxiety.

That's the upside of technology: You no longer need to remember or know things – only where to find those things.

But you don't always have a computer. Sometimes you have to depend on your brain.

And that's why a nametag is helpful – it's one less name for people to remember. Nobody has to do any extra work to figure out who you are. Your act of generosity relaxes their already overloaded brains, pampers their memory and frees up their heads to focus on more important things.

That's why complete strangers will actually thank me for wearing a nametag.

You're welcome.

It's not a nametag – it's a social gift.

Trust.

Thanks to my nametag, I was starting to realize: Trust is a function of self-disclosure.

The more you reveal about yourself, the more likely people are to trust you.

That's a basic tenant of human communication, first researched by psychologists like Sidney Jourard and John Powell.

But you don't need books to know how trust works.

That's what the nametag proved: *Strangers trusted me more once they knew my name.*

Not that much more. It's not like they gave me their passwords or anything.

But there was enough additional trust to be noticeable. People recognized my willingness to stick myself out there – albeit in a small, simple way – and as a result, perceived me as being a more trustworthy person.

But it was weird.

I didn't really do anything.

Just wore a nametag that said, "Scott."

And yet, people would tell me things. Personal things. Things you would never normally tell someone you just met.

I'll never forget the time I sat down next to this old guy at the train station. He noticed my nametag and said hello. I did the same.

He then proceeded to tell me every single detail about his wife's schizophrenia.

And I was happy to listen. But the whole time I kept thinking to myself, "Sir, why are you telling me all this?"

Simple: He felt like he already knew me.

Not well. But more than every other nameless face in the terminal. And that's how trust works: Sometimes just showing is a synonym for going out on a limb.

People are lonely and want to be listened to. But they're not going to take that first step until they find someone to trust. *What if you were that person?*

It's not a nametag – it's an open hand.

Help.

Still, the problem with wearing a nametag everywhere is that people assume you're an employee of whatever store in which they find you.

While shopping for office supplies recently, an elderly woman stopped me in the middle of the aisle. She asked a question about printer cartridges, so I was happy to help.

I sold her the most expensive one.

Never did get my commission check for that sale.

Another time I was at the copy shop when a fellow customer assumed I was an employee. He asked me a question about using his credit card on the printer, and I told him that it would probably work fine.

Then his card jammed the machine. I walked out of the store immediately.

Woops.

But the best was when I bought a membership to 24-Hour Fitness. Went there every day after work. Got in great shape. And even though I'm not buff, exercise has always been a non-negotiable in my life. When you grow up with a mother who's a fitness instructor, personal trainer, Pilates teacher and cholesterol educator, you don't have much of a choice.

Anyway, the best part about working out was the staff. Every time I walked in the door, they made some kind of joke about my nametag. Always made me feel welcomed.

One night, about six months into my membership, the manager stopped me at the front desk. The entire staff dropped what they were doing and gathered around.

She had a box in her hand and a smile on her face.

"Scott, we just wanted to thank you for being one of our favorite members!"

I opened it to find an official plastic employee nametag that read, "Scott."

"Now you don't have to ruin all your shirts!"

Now, anytime I went to the gym, I worked out. But the irony is, customers ever mistook me as an employee of that place. I guess when you're doing five pound curls; people assume you're probably not a personal trainer.

Still, this kind of interaction happens to me all the time. Over the years I've been mistaken as a clothing salesman, produce sanitizer, high school teacher, game show contestant, coat checker,

furniture mover, underwear salesman, lounge singer, customer service agent, fitness trainer, computer technician, stock boy, stripper, reality show star, restaurant manager and video game mechanic.

“Excuse me, Scott? Could you tell me where the lime green thongs are?”

Maybe I’m too nice.

It just seems like the right thing to do when somebody asks for help.

It’s not a nametag – it’s a help desk.

Sewers.

Not only is everyone a comedian and an expert – but everyone's a critic, too.

Like the people often accuse me of wearing my nametag on the wrong side.

And they get indignant about it, too. Especially the ones who have been brainwashed by Dale Carnegie Training or some other outdated indoctrination system. They claim all nametags are supposed to hang on the right side for easier visibility during handshakes, and anyone who does otherwise is committing some sort of social faux pas.

Three things:

1. Who cares? *It's a nametag.* The fact that you wear it is already enough. The side you wear it on is a moot point.
2. Secondly, I wear my nametag on the left side because we walk on the right side. This makes me more accessible to oncoming traffic.
3. A New York research company interviewed a thousand meeting planners a few years ago, asking them about their nametag standards. Turns out, font size is way more important than horizontal placement.

But what the hell do I know? I'm only the world's foremost expert on nametags.

Not a lot of people fighting me for that title.

The best was when I got a letter from Wake Forest University Medical Center.

One of their veteran physicians – Dr. Eben Alexander – had seen me on television, and he wanted to offer me a special gift.

"I noticed you wore your nametag on the left side. Unfortunately, that's incorrect. So I thought you might to become an official member of an organization I personally founded. It's called Sewers, which stands for the Society for Encouraging the Wearing of Emblems on the Right Hand Side."

I swear to God, I'm not making this up.

If you read the card closely it says:

"The holder of this card is entitled to the right to wear emblems on the right hand side for easy reading. Because even some of our best friends come from the sewers."

I never actually joined the organization. And although I still wear it on my left, I still carry the

card in my wallet to this day, just in case somebody accuses me of improper technique.

It's not a nametag – it's an obsession.

Begging.

On the other hand, the one group of people that historically responds well to my nametag is pan-handlers.

Which makes total sense: It's an easy opening. It's a chance to engage. And it's an instant connection that might increase the chance of a donation.

Still, I rarely give them money. And I have my reasons.

I once met a homeless guy outside of Voodoo Donuts. He asked if I could spare some change for food, so I offered him three boxes of donuts instead. He paused for a moment, looked at my nametag and said:

"Sorry Scott, but I don't eat sweets."

Huh. I guess beggars can be choosers.

That's why I choose not to give.

But I never ignore them, either. I can't. When somebody says your name, it's hard to look the other way. No matter how poor they are.

Instead, I smile, acknowledge their presence, wave hello and keep moving.

That's enough for me to not feel like an jerk.

The point is, if you see people bleeding – you can't pretend they aren't really hurting. You don't have to rescue them. You don't have to give them your life savings. And you don't have to wash their feet.

But don't act like they're not there.

If you can't give money, at least give attention.

It's not a nametag – it's an acknowledgement.

One.

And then, it happened.

April 23, 2003.

I was standing on the corner of Fifth and Morrison in downtown Portland, waiting for the train to take me to the airport.

Opening my copy of *USA TODAY*, these were lead headlines:

1. Identity theft cases rise this month.
2. Seventy-five million Americans living without health insurance.
3. Luther Vandross catches pneumonia after stroke.
4. SARS outbreak troubles China workers.
5. The end of Buffy feels like a dagger to the heart.
6. War letters from the Iraqi front lines.
7. Cost of AIDS drugs increasing for poor nations.
8. Studies find disturbing amounts of contamination in lettuce.
9. Hubble telescope catches approaching storm of turbulent gases.
10. Man wears nametag 24-7 for a friendlier society.

It only takes one.

One matters.

One has the power.

One can make a difference.

Will you be that number?

It's not a nametag – it's a domino.

Shove.

And once that domino fell, everything changed.

Somebody gave me the greatest gift you can give.
Somebody shoved me over the wall.

I was just turning twenty-three.
I was riding the publicity wave from my first book.
I was still working full time as a furniture salesman to make ends meet.

Meanwhile, I get a call from the president of a local Rotary Club. He asked if I could come give a speech to his group. Since I was just out of college I replied, “What the hell is a Rotary Club?”

He told me, and I agreed. Sounded fun. I always liked giving speeches.

By the time I was finished, I’d never sweat more in my life. Pit stains down the side of my shirt. My hands trembled as I clenched the ten pages of notes that I never looked at once.

But when I asked if there were any questions, a ninety-year-old retired surgeon named Harold raised his hand.

“Scott, do you have a job?”

“I sell couches.”

They thought that was hilarious. *Not a laugh line.*

After we adjourned, Harold pulled me aside and said a four-letter word:

“Quit.”

That was a gift. A shove moment. An interaction that made my path brighter.

So I took his advice and never looked back.

Sometimes we need people to shove us. To applaud our risk, elevate our hope and provoke our decision. To help us see something we’re too close to ourselves to notice. To believe in us more than we believe in ourselves.

To shove people is to love people.

It’s not a nametag – it’s a career.

Wave.

It was never supposed to happen this way.

When that major article came out, I must have done three hundreds interviews in six months.

Every. Major. Media. Outlet. In. The. Country.

I did them all.

Which is normal for James Patterson – but not for some twenty-three year old, first-time author who has no idea what the hell he’s doing.

Then again, when you’re fresh out of college and you’re flying to New York on *The Today Show’s* dime to do a two-minute interview in front of millions of people – after which you get to hang out in the green room and eat all the free cookies you can handle – you don’t really think about it.

But I certainly enjoyed the ride. Had a blast, learned a lot and lifted a lot of veils.

The problem was, all of that media attention went underleveraged. Sure, I sold a couple cases of books. Booked a few speeches. Earned a bit of street cred. Got a lot of web traffic.

But there was no conversion point. There was no bigger game.

I wasn’t ready to ride the wave when it came.

Dang it.

Instead, I just sort of plopped down onto the board, held on for dear life, tried not to get eaten by sharks and prayed to God that I would make it back to shore in one piece.

And as a result, I missed out on a lot of profitable waters.

Fortunately, I believe another gnarly swell will come along. It’s only a matter of time.

The only difference is, next time it comes – I’ll be ready to hang ten.

It’s not a nametag – it’s a surfboard.

Match.

Every morning when I put on a nametag, I light a match and see what catches fire.

Will I make a new friend?

Will I have a cool conversation?

Will I be mistaken for an employee?

Will I get insulted by a group of drunken football fans?

Will I get harassed by the flight attendant who thinks I have a memory problem?

There's no way to tell. After tens of thousands of interactions, I'm still never quite sure what's going to happen each day.

The other day I went to a friend's going away party. A woman asked if I had any more nametags, so I gave her one. She proceeded to walk around the bar as "Scooby," talking and laughing with everyone in the room. I've never seen someone have so much fun with a nametag.

Mission accomplished.

That's the beauty of wearing the nametag – it's a constant source of adventure.

It creates a never-ending stream of playful human moments that I live for.

Which is perfect for me, since I am five years old. And wearing a nametag keeps me that age. It encourages people to join me in a spontaneous moment of authentic human interaction, infused with a sprit of humor, playfulness and connection.

Every day.

It's a cue for fun.

That's all human beings crave anyway: An opportunity to express their playful side.

And when you interact with exquisite playfulness, you create an upside wherever you go. You give people the priceless gift of social elevation. And you make this moment, right now, a more humane, pleasant passing of time.

Playful is the new professional.

The best part is, the people who join me in this moment via my nametag, I'm meeting for the first time. It's a great first interaction to have with someone. It gives people permission to be playful as well – no matter what age they are.

I remember sitting in the locker room after yoga one night. An elderly Russian guy hobbled past me, stopped, looked back and said, "Scott, you have memory problem?"

The guy must have laughed under his breath for the next five minutes. Dude thought he was the greatest thing since Yaakov Smirnov.

But you have to let people have those moments. To deny playfulness is to deny humanity.

So that's all I ask for.

I just want to play. I just want to have an interesting life. I just want to live a good story.

Don't you?

It's not a nametag – it's a spark.

Test.

The nametag never changes.

And yet, everyone I meet responds to it just a little differently.

I was at the park. A guy told me that he would never want to wear a nametag, as it would ruin his lifelong dream of becoming a spy.

I was at a downtown deli. On the way out, a man pointed at me, said, “Nice name!” then kept on walking.

I was at an outdoor concert. A cop stopped me. He stared at my nametag, looked me straight in the eye, squinted and then kept walking.

I was at a baseball game. When I bought a soda at the concession stand, the volunteer at the counter said, “Scott, we’re glad you’re here!”

I was walking across the street. A monk in an orange robe asked, “Scott, have you heard of Krishna?” I said yes. He smiled.

I was at a coffee shop. I met a toddler while waiting in line. She pointed to my nametag, so I told her my name was Scott. Utterly confused, she asked, “Why?”

It’s an indicator of perception.

It’s an insight into personality.

It’s an implication of preferences.

And it’s frighteningly accurate. Considering I’ve run this test tens of thousands of times, for more than a decade; you’d be amazed what you can learn about somebody simply based on the way they respond to a nametag.

For example, I know that if they crack a joke immediately, they’re cool people. I know that if they say hello out the window of their car, they’re fun people.

But I also know that if they roll their eyes and look at me like an alien, they’re insecure people. I know that if they try to rip my nametag off in a public venue, they’re jerky people.

Instant analysis. The nametag is my constant. It’s how I judge people.

And I think each of us needs something like this. Something small, repeatable and portable that helps us make sense of the people we meet.

It’s not a nametag – it’s a Rorschach.

Single.

Speaking of people who think I'm weird, let's get back to girls.

Because while wearing a nametag is helpful for attracting them, it's not particularly effective for keeping them around.

But it did make for an interesting single life.

One girl I went out with received a text from her mother during dinner insisting that no daughter of hers would ever date a guy who wore a nametag.

It was our first and last date.

Another girl walked up to me in a dance club and asked if I had any spare nametags. I obliged, she stuck it on and we danced all night. We dated for four months.

Until I realized she was an alcoholic.

At my college graduation, my girlfriend showed up to the commencement ceremony wearing a nametag that read, "Scott's." As is property of. As in you belong to me.

It didn't work out. Hello, my name is Scott-free.

One girl approached me at a bar, poked my nametag and asked me if I had ever met anyone named Alexis. I said yes. Then she asked if I had ever ridden in Alexis before.

I stayed away from that one.

And another time a beautiful girl I met in Vegas thought my nametag was the coolest thing ever. We ended up dancing till dawn and ended up dating for a while.

Unfortunately, she was a blind epileptic midget virgin lawyer gymnast, so, there's that.

Like I said – great for attracting, bad for sustaining.

But the nametag was always a good test. It helped me discern which relationships weren't going to work out.

It's not a nametag – it's a filter.

Vulnerability.

The problem is, wearing a nametag doesn't encourage everybody to be friendly.

It also invites people to stare at me, make fun of me, point at me, spatially violate me, yell at me, curse at me, share overly personal information with me, attempt to sell drugs to me, start fights with me, kiss me in the middle of a crowded bar, and on a few occasions, stalk me.

For real.

And the weird looks I understand, but the boundary violations boggle my mind.

You wouldn't believe it if I told you, but complete strangers will walk right up to me, in public, poke my chest, rip my nametag off and tear it to shreds.

My precious!

I am not making this up. This really happens to me. And it's an utter and complete violation of personal space and personal property.

In the beginning, I used to get upset when people ripped off my nametag.

That's assault, brother. That's a violation of personal space and personal property.

But I don't really mind anymore. At this point in the adventure, I secretly hope people rip it off because it's the perfect chance to show them that I'm serious.

That's why I always carry a dozen pre-written nametags in my wallet at all times.

If someone rips one off, I calmly reach into my pocket, open my billfold, pull out another nametag and slap it right back on.

You should see people's faces when I reapply.

Did you just take another nametag out of your wallet that looked exactly like the other one and put it on your chest?

Yes I did.

Looks like that year of Boy Scouts really paid off.

Still, when it comes to these violations, here's what I find fascinating:

The only people who have ever ripped off my nametag were extremely attractive women.

Not that I'm complaining. Random harassment from beautiful women was great while I was single.

But why the gender bias? Why the physical harassment? And why does wearing a simple, hand-written, adhesive stick give these extremely attractive women license violate a complete stranger?

If the roles were reversed and I did the same, I would either be slapped, arrested or both.

Maybe they think they're doing me a favor. Maybe they're asserting their sexual power. Maybe they're jealous that I'm getting more attention than them.

Or, like the little boy who pulls the hair of the little girl he secretly likes, maybe these women are uncontrollably attracted to me and desperately want to be showered with nametags while we make sweet love until the rain comes falling down.

Or not.

The point is, touch is a touchy subject, and it's worth taking seriously.

In certain cultures and situations, touching the wrong person at the wrong time in the wrong place might be the difference between a friendly greeting and frontal assault.

We have to respect people's physical boundaries.
We have to use our head, not our hands.

It's not a nametag – it's a green light.

Ridicule.

And as if the boundary violations weren't bad enough, it gets worst.

I get hatemail.

For wearing a nametag. To make people friendlier.

One email read, "Please stop wearing a nametag. You anger me. It is not right. Are you ill in the head? Did your mother drop you? Did you choke on a nametag as a child? You are a socially inept frog. And you are nuttier than a bag of trail mix."

I've had people start fights with me.

For wearing a nametag. To make people friendlier

When I was in college, the starting five of the Miami University Hockey Team attempted to beat the snot out of when I walked past their table at a bar. Apparently my nametag was offensive to them, and they had to set things right.

I've even received death threats.

For wearing a nametag. To make people friendlier

Years ago I got an email that said, "Scott, if I ever catch you in New York City wearing your nametag, I'll kill you." That's approachable. So I sent the guy a copy of my book. And two weeks later, I saw that book for sale on Ebay. *For two dollars*. So I bid it up to five hundred and bought it. The only problem was, when I published the online review, I forgot to change my user name. "Scott Ginsberg is a genius. This is the greatest book ever written and it will change your life forever!" Reviewed by, Scott Ginsberg. Crap.

The weird thing is, these reactions only come from men.

I don't understand this. Women rip it off, but men just ridicule me.

Is it resentment? Jealousy? Animosity? Does a sticker threaten their sense of self?

Oh well. Better to be hated for who you are than loved for who you aren't.

Besides: They get the laugh once – I get the laugh forever.

The point is, revolution without ridicule, isn't. You're nobody until somebody hates you. And if your idea isn't being attacked, it's not big enough. Being attacked is a sign that you are important enough to be a target.

It's like Nietzsche said: "Those who were seen dancing were said to be insane by those who could not hear the music."

It's not a nametag – it's a bullseye.

Liability.

What still amazes me is, thought, is that wearing a nametag is surprisingly polarizing.

I've had people refuse to go out in public with me because of it.

I've had businesses refuse to let me in the door because of it.

I've had strangers start fights with me because of it.

I've had girls break up with me because of it.

Good lord. It's just a sticker.

Or is it?

Apparently for some people, it's not a sticker – it's a social liability.

I know this because they've told me this. Their reputation is in danger by association. And standing next to the guy with the nametag is damaging to their image.

“Hey Scott, could you just stand over there for the rest of the night?”

It's just a sticker.

Or is it?

My theory is: It's not that people have a problem with the nametag – it's that people have a problem being around someone who is okay with himself.

Confidence threatens people. Especially insecure people. And I think it's our job, as human beings, to view each other's self-assurance not as a liability, but as an inspiration.

If we encounter someone who puts unadulterated self-belief at the apex of their value system – that's a gift.

And we need to be confident enough to receive it.

On the other hand, sometimes confidence works in the opposite way.

His named was Stephan.

He was a fan of my work.

And he called me every day.

Every. Single. Day. *For three weeks.*

Did I mention he was a middle-aged unemployed alcoholic with social anxiety disorder whose father abused him physically, sexually and emotionally?

He told me these things. On his voicemail messages. Along with the disclaimer that he swore he wasn't a stalker.

I'm sorry, but if you have to tell someone you're not a stalker, you probably are.

I changed my number.
Took it off my website.
And thought that would be the end of it.

Until he showed up at my house.

I was taking out the trash – wearing my nametag, of course – when I saw what looked like a homeless guy hanging out by the dumpster.

He said my name.
He reached out his right hand.
He held his other hand behind his back.

And I was thinking: *Ice pick.*

But instead, he pulled out copy of my book.

He didn't want to kill me – he just wanted an autograph.

I took his pen and signed it. Kind of. I was so terrified I think I wrote, "Best wishes! Love, Jamal."

But that was it. He said thanks, walked away and I never saw him again. And as I went inside to change my underwear, something occurred to me:

If you don't set boundaries for yourself – other people will set them for you.

And then they will violate them. And then they will tell all their little friends to violate them. And it will be your fault because you never decided where to draw the line.

Apparently it's possible to be too approachable.

Besides stalkers, over the years I've had cult members try to covert me, drug dealers try to sell me, religious zealots try to proselytize me and pyramid schemers try to recruit me.

That's what happens when you put yourself out there.

Don't wait until you're defenseless to learn this lesson. Decide where you draw the line early. And the minute somebody tries to push you past it, run.

It's not a nametag – it's a statement.

Capital.

Years ago somebody asked me if I was wearing a nametag to build social capital.

Social what?

So I did some research.

As defined by Robert Putnam's groundbreaking work, *social capital* is our reserve of personal bonds and fellowship. And like a bank account, every interaction that builds trust and reciprocity strengthens our sense of community and instills a felling of belonging.

What's interesting is how many different areas of daily life social capital affects – everything from productivity to depression to suicide to juvenile delinquency to test scores to government response time to divorce rate.

The problem is, our reserve is eroding. Nobody engages anymore. People are building bigger fences and smaller porches. And we're becoming more disconnected from each other than ever before.

Are nametags the answer? *Probably not.*

But each of us needs to be reminded that our species is better together. Each of us needs to remember that navigating life is much easier when you have a solid crew. Each of us needs to be reminded that life is a lot richer when you have people to share it with.

We don't need a call to arms – we need a call to connect.

It's not a nametag – it's a bridge.

Symbol.

Every culture, every culture and country has its own peace symbol.

Let the dove fly.
Write a peace sign.
Hold up two fingers.
Hang the paper crane.
Extend an olive branch.
Face your palm upwards.
Point your spear to the sky.
Greet with shalom, salaam or aloha.

Personally, I like what they did in *Avatar*. If you recall, natives on the planet Pandora greet each other with three words:

“I see you.”

According to director James Cameron, this phrase was more than a simple greeting.

It was an acknowledgement. A form of namaste.

I love you, I honor you, I understand you and I remember you.

Their peace offering was an acknowledgement. A way to make someone feel seen.

The point is, they all work. Peace is a universal language.

The problem is, peace is a learned behavior. Humans are naturally violent creatures, and we had to teach each other how to forgive. And sadly, many people who stood for peace were targeted and, many times, killed.

But even though it sounds like the world isn't ready for peace, I think that somewhere inside all of us, we all possess that faculty. We've just forgotten. And what we need are symbols remind us who we were before the world told us who we were supposed to be.

Mine is a nametag.

What's yours?

It's not a nametag – it's a peace offering.

Basement.

At this point, I'd worn the nametag for three years, graduated college, started my company, published my first book, milked my fifteen minutes of fame to its last drop, gave a few speeches and logged thousands of interactions both positive and negative.

Right around that time, I also ran out of money. So I made a crucial career decision:

Time to move back in with my parents.

For two years, eight months and twenty-nine days, to be exact.

Not that I was counting.

But they were cool about it. They even charged me rent, which I thought was solid parenting move. Every month, I paid them the amount of never getting dates.

Seriously. As if wearing a nametag everyday wasn't bad enough – ever tried having phone sex with a girl while your mom is yelling from the kitchen to ask if you want asparagus with your salmon?

Dial tone.

But apparently this is an actual trend. After a period of living on our own, young people will co-habitate with their parents to save money, cope with economic downturns and eliminate any possibility of a social life whatsoever.

This wasn't good for business. Note to self: Never schedule a sales call when your dad might pick up the line to ask you to take out the trash before your mother gets home.

I remember one particular speech I gave to a large financial company. When I finished, the audience gave me the first standing ovation of my career.

It was a beautiful moment that I'll never forget.

Until my client walked up to me, shook my hand and said, "Good thing you're not still living with your parents, huh?"

Right.

So there was always an asterisk with every win. This subtle undercurrent of notenoughness that kept me from feeling completely successful. And I knew that until I moved out on my own – until I let go of that security blanket – I would never be okay with myself.

But I'm not complaining. I never regret a single day living at home. I was grateful to have par-

ents that loved me and who were willing to disrupt their empty-nester lifestyle to support me as I started my career. And when I earned enough to move out, they lovingly helped me pack my bags.

What more can a kid ask for?

It's not a nametag – it's a boomerang.

Anonymity.

As companies got word about my story, my books and presentations, more and more of them would hire me to give speeches at their conferences.

En route to one particular gig, I met a cowboy on the airport shuttle in Dallas.

He asked if I knew I was still wearing a nametag, and said I wore it all the time.

“I’d hate to wear a nametag all the time,” he smirked, “because then I’d have to be good.”

Man.

And that’s when I started to realize: *Anonymity is the death of civility.*

In person. Online. Over the phone. In the mail. *Doesn’t matter.*

As a person. As an organization. As a brand. *Doesn’t matter.*

In your personal life. In the business world. *Doesn’t matter.*

When you’re anonymous, there’s no verifiable identity. There’s always something to hide behind. There’s a constant invitation for selfish behavior. There’s more incentive get away with bad behavior. And there’s less people watching to modify your behavior.

Two famous studies come to mind.

The first is a 1976 issue of *The Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

Concealed scientists observed thirteen hundred children during trick or treating. The variable group of children was given an opportunity to steal candy.

What did their research prove?

Significantly more stealing was observed under conditions of anonymity.

Interesting. Would you steal if people couldn’t see your face?

The second study was conducted in 1970 by famed social psychologist, Philip Zimbardo.

He wanted to see how physical anonymity lessened inhibitions. He dressed New York women in white coats and hoods. They were asked to give electric shocks to unknown patients.

Of course, the shocks weren’t real, but the fake nurses didn’t know that.

What’s amazing is, only half of the nurses were given nametags for their lab coats. But the women who didn’t wear nametags actually held the shock button twice as long as the ones who did.

Interesting. Would you inflict pain on a stranger if she couldn't read your name?

Sign your work.

Be assertive with your identity.

Give people the priceless gift of security by letting know whom they're dealing with.

Otherwise, you retreat into depersonalization and namelessness. You take less responsibility for what you do and say. And civility goes out the window.

As technology accelerates, as population increases and as face-to-face interaction decreases, the temptation to engage from a place of anonymity is greater than ever before.

Will you resist it?

It's not a nametag – it's a security camera.

Punch.

Speaking of bad behavior, let's talk about East St. Louis.

Because in my experience, there are just some places you never want to go wearing a nametag.

Like a strip club.

At four in the morning.

In the city with the highest crime rate in the country.

But not because the dancers will give you extra attention, but because other customers will notice you, call out your name and strike up conversation in the middle of the bar.

I'll never forget the last time I went to a strip club. It was the tail end of my friend's bachelor party. I was ready to call it a night, but I was selected as the designating driver. *Shocking*.

And you know you're in for trouble when the groom-to-be utters those two fateful words you always regret the next day:

"East Side!"

In case you've never been to my hometown, that's code for East St. Louis. A city in which, if you walk into one of the bars and *aren't* carrying a firearm, they issue you one.

Within five minutes of walking in the door to the infamous Diamond Cabaret – whose slogan is, "Don't laugh, your daughter might be working here" – some random drunk guy comes up to me, points to my nametag and says, "Hey Scott! I know you. Didn't you just give a speech to my company last week?"

I have never felt smaller in my life.

I wanted to rip off my nametag, lock myself in the bathroom stall and curl up and die. And I would have done it, too. Except for the fact that it was a strip club in East St. Louis, and I'm pretty sure the floors were caked in herpes.

I'll be waiting in the car.

Since then, I've never gone back to strip club. And I don't plan on going to another one any time soon. Even if that means taking a fifty-dollar cab ride across town while the rest of my friends stay out all night, fine. It's just not worth it to me.

But I never make a big deal about it. I don't stand my ground just to step on people's toes. Whether it comes to drinking, drugs – or in this case, strip clubs – I've learned that not everybody wants to hear the entire philosophy behind each of your life choices.

Because the louder you say no, the more judgmental you sound.

The point is – abstinence is cheaper than moderation. Mr. Miyagi was right:

The best way to block a punch – no be there.

It's not a nametag – it's a curfew.

Accountability.

And so, people will ask me:

“But if you wear a nametag all the time, doesn’t that mean you have to be nice to everyone?”

That’s the point.

Wearing a nametag paints me into an accountable corner. Which makes it very difficult to be disrespectful to people. Especially strangers.

I remember a nightmare I had about seven years ago.

In the dream, I murdered someone. I was on the run from the cops. And for some idiotic reason, I thought it would be a good idea to stop for a Slurpee.

Rookie mistake.

When I approached the counter to pay, the cashier was watching the news. Sure enough, on the screen was a picture of me, my nametag and a graphic that said, “Convicted Killer.”

It didn’t take long for him to put two and two together. By the time I walked out of the store, cop cars, officers, helicopters and Tommy Lee Jones were waiting to take me in.

So much for my career as a criminal.

That’s the upside to wearing a nametag: *It’s a structure.* It’s something I put in place that limits me to only practicing positive behavior. It takes away all my choices. And it permanently positions me in a situation where acting in accordance with my values is the only plausible course of action.

What structure could you install to bankrupt bad behavior?

It’s not a nametag – it’s a construct.

Familiarity.

Which brings up an interesting question:

If your customers wore nametags, would you give them better service?

Sure you would.

Names reduce the distance between people.

Like the time I rode the hotel shuttle during a snowstorm. It was midnight. The weather was unbearable. Everyone on the bus was delayed. As the last passenger lugged his bags onto the rack, he noticed there was only one seat left. Covered in snow, the guy said, “*Scott, do you mind if I sit next to you?*”

Everyone on the bus laughed. And as the man sat down, he looked up and said:

“What? Scott’s the only guy on the bus I know.”

Makes sense.

With a nametag, it’s an unmasking. It assures you’re no longer just another face in the crowd. It humanizes you. And it makes it easier for people treat you with dignity, respect, and compassion.

It an invitation for personalization.

Jeffrey is another good example. He was the barista at the Starbucks by my old house. And I’m pretty sure he was trying to get into my pants.

But I was asking for it. The problem was, I used to order the same thing every day: *Hot tea, half passion/half wild sweet orange*. So anytime I walked in the door, he would always anticipate my order. Which was great from a customer service point of view, except when he yelled out loud enough for the entire store to hear:

“Hey Scott, do you want me to give you some wild sweet passion?”

“Yes, Jeffrey. Thank you.”

“Ooh, did you want some extra cream on that?”

“Fine.”

Whatever. It’s not gay if it happens in a public bathroom.

The point is, most companies miss this. They obsess over offering better customer service, but fail to see the big picture about the actual relationship. The purpose of a nametag isn’t to enable customers to tattle on someone who gives poor service. The purpose of nametag is to reduce the distance. To help you become better friends with customers, that way better service happens naturally.

Familiarity doesn't breed contempt – it brings people back.

And when it's missing, customers can tell.

Like the coffee shop by my girlfriend's house. The other day the barista asked me for a name on my order.

I didn't answer.

Instead, I just waited until she looked up from her computer, actually made eye contact with me and noticed my nametag.

“Oh, duh – Scott. Your name's right there. Sorry.”

Amazingly, this happens to me at least twice a week.

Sometimes employees feel embarrassed.

Sometimes employees say thanks.

Sometimes employees just laugh.

But I always smile. And I never bust chops about it.

I just wish employees would pay more attention to their customers.

I just wish employees would notice opportunities to take a moment and make a memory.

What if, upon seeing my nametag, she thanked me for making her job easier?

What if, upon seeing my nametag, she used my name and said she was psychic?

What if, upon seeing my nametag, she offered a friendly joke that made my day?

That would be worth repeating. That would be worth telling a friend about. That would be worth remembering next time I walked in the door.

Instead of reaching for another robotic, ready-made script about how important someone's call is, we need to say things that invite people to store memories in the heart.

It's not a nametag – it's a permission slip.

Discipline.

As you've no doubt noticed, it doesn't take a lot of effort to wear a nametag every day.

But it does take discipline.

Not much. But enough to accumulate. Enough to carry over to bigger pursuits like writing, meditation and exercise, which I also do everyday.

That's how discipline works: When you commit yourself in small, non-threatening venues where the effort requirements are lower, you make it easier for yourself to win at something bigger.

It's kind of a side door approach, but it works.

Ask any high school coach: Students who play on a sports team achieve higher academic scores than those who don't.

Their discipline multiplies. Their minds are already conditioned for consistency. And once practice is over, all they have to do is change gears.

That's why we each need a micro discipline to pave the way.

Personally, I use a nametag.

Usually.

But I am human being, and I *do* forget to my nametag from time to time. Maybe once a month, I'll get out the door, into my car or halfway down the street only to realize my chest is naked.

Not to worry. I always keep a few spares in my wallet for such occasions.

But this used to be a bigger deal. When I first started my journey, the idea of not having a nametag on – even for a few minutes – legitimately terrified me.

What if somebody spots me?

What if somebody takes a picture?

God forbid I should ever be without – *my precious*.

I'll never forget the time my brother took me to the Chicago Pancake House. About halfway through the meal, he whipped out his camera and said, "Smile!"

Before I had a chance to swallow, he handed me the camera and said, "What's missing from this picture?"

Sweet Jesus.

I made it halfway through the meal without wearing a nametag.

My heart fell to the floor.

But Steve reacted in a loving, compassionate way that only an older brother could:

“If you don’t pay for breakfast, I’m posting this picture on the Internet.”

I dropped a twenty on the table, quickly reapplied a new nametag and deleted the picture from his memory card. Then I looked my brother in the eye and said:

“This never happened.”

That was seven years ago. Never did find that picture online. And thankfully, my level of obsessive compulsiveness about my nametag has tapered off since then.

But don’t get me wrong. I still wear it twenty-four seven. I still carry spares with me at all times. But if I see that I’ve forgotten to put one on, my world no longer comes crashing down. It’s just a nametag for god’s sake. *Get a life.*

Just last month I was at the airport. I ran into my friend Meghan, who stopped to say hi and introduce me to her boyfriend.

“Don’t you usually wear a nametag?” she asked.

“Huh. Well I’ll be damned. Looks like I forgot one today.”

So I pulled a spare out of my wallet, slapped it on and got on with my life.

Because frankly, there are more important things in the world worth freaking out about.

It’s not a nametag – it’s a daily practice.

Leverage.

And so, when people learn that I've made entire career out of wearing a nametag everyday, they often comment:

"Damn it! Now why didn't I think of that?"

Wrong question.

Because odds are, they probably *did* think of that.

They just didn't do anything about it. They forgot to attach action to the idea.

It's not about the idea – it's about the "I did."

Of course, people are too busy.

Too busy being patient, waiting for permission, following rules, setting goals, fearing failure, planning, responding to useless distractions, listening to the wrong feedback, attending meetings, working with counterproductive teams, waiting until they're ready, waiting until they know what they're doing, waiting for perfection and wasting time with parade rainers.

Just to name a few.

And that's why nobody executes what matters.

Execution isn't a skill – it's a way of life. It's a predisposition to action, an adamant refusal to stay where you are and an outright insistence on focusing on what's most important to you.

The world doesn't need another idea guy.

Ideas are free – only execution is priceless.

So I fully admit that wearing a nametag every day isn't much of an accomplishment.

But making a successful career out of it is.

That's leverage. Killing two stones with one bird. And it all pivots on one question:

Now that I have this, what else does this make possible?

That's not just a question, that's a catapult.

And if we want to adopt leverage as a way of thinking, as a way of living – and not just another downloadable skill – it's be amazed at the things we can execute.

Leverage is the **bridge between opportunity and profitability.**

I wear a nametag to remind myself to cross it daily.

It's not a nametag – it's a gateway.

Business.

I write books, give speeches and do consulting about branding.

Not because I'm an expert on the branding, but because I am branding.

That's the difference between knowing and embodying.

But I didn't intend for this to happen, it's just the result of consistency. If you look at my nametag, it's always the same, every time.

Blue font.
One word.
Red border.
White background.
Always handwritten.
Worn in the same spot.

No changes. No variations. No exceptions. Except for Halloween when I change the nametag to match my costume. Last year I was "Baby" from *Dirty Dancing*. I never knew I looked so good in a dress.

And yet, nametag companies send me their fancy, cluttered badges to wear instead of my own. *No thanks*. Not that I don't appreciate the gesture. In fact, I save all the nametags people send me. But my brand is a friend of simplicity and consistency.

That's where companies mess up. They try to be too fancy, make things bigger than they need to be and create riddles that take too long for impatient customers to solve.

Shakespeare said that action is eloquence; I say that simplicity is eloquence.

Simple means instantly repeatable. Simple means easy enough for a kindergartner to understand. Simple means explainable in less than ten seconds with less than ten words. Simple means eliminating the extraneous, letting the necessary speak and disengaging the inessential.

Unfortunately, simple is hard. It requires more energy, more brainpower and more courage than complexity. But simplicity, pursued relentlessly, can change the world.

That's why I never change the look of my nametag. I can't. Not now. It's too much a part of the story.

Sound ridiculous? Sound obsessive compulsive? You're right. It is. Because when it comes to your enterprise, you have to be.

It's not a nametag – it's a brand.

Engagement.

Speaking of obsessive-compulsive behavior, I never go anywhere without extras.

It's my uniform. It's my armor. Ever ready for battle.

And everywhere I go, people ask me if they can have one.

So I'm happy to pass them out to strangers, friends, random kids at the ballpark, whomever. I don't discriminate.

But I don't pass them out to convert people – I pass them out to send a message

My brand is participatory.

I don't care if people wear the nametags. Most of them don't. What matters is that they join me that spontaneous moment of authentic human interaction, infused with a sprit of humor, playfulness and connection.

That's my brand. And their life is better because of it.

Truth is, brand perception hinges on human interaction. The only thing people can make a judgment about is how engaging with you makes them feel. And every encounter you have with another person either adds to – or subtracts from – its overall joinability.

And the crazy thing is, I used to think advertising was the same as marketing.

When I was a kid, my favorite hobby was perusing and analyzing the pullout ads from Saturday morning newspaper.

Then I went to business school.

And I learned that advertising is a disrespectful, ugly form of pollution.

Then I started my own company.

And I learned that advertising is the price companies pay for not having enough friends.

Years later, I came to a conclusion: *We don't need more advertisements – we need acts that create emotional connections.*

Simple, inclusive, accessible, relevant and human encounters that change the momentary experience of engaging with your brand.

Another reason I love nametags.

Instead of interrupting – I'm interacting.

Instead of demanding attention – I’m offering permission.
Instead of bothering people into buying from me – I’m allowing them to target me.

The cool part is, nametags have tons of uses beyond simply engaging people: Bandages, address labels, adhesives – even pasties.

Not for me.
Okay once.
And by once I mean four times.
In one month.

Don’t judge me.

The best was the interaction I had at *The Weiner Circle*.

I’d heard about this Chicago favorite from my brother. It was the only hotdog stand that was open till dawn. They made the best cheddar dogs in the city. And it was managed by eight of the crudest, rudest and most vulgar women you’d ever met. Who, for a small fee, would give you a “chocolate shake.”

And I’m not talking about the drink.

The only problem was, *you had to talk trash or you’d never get served*. And unfortunately, being mean to complete strangers isn’t in my blood.

But under a tiny awning in the rain, dozens of drunken hotdog lovers were yelling obscenities at the top of their lungs. People pushed and shoved. There was money and ketchup everywhere. And I just stood there in silence.

No way anybody would to pay attention to polite old me.

Until I had an idea.

I whipped out a blank nametag and wrote “Cheddar Dog” in thick letters.

And I just stood there, holding the nametag in the air with a giant smile on my face.

The woman behind the counter squinted through the window as she read my nametag. She responded by flipping the bird with both hands and walked away.

But I just kept smiling. And contrary to her sexual advice, I held my nametag high.

When she returned to the window and spotted me, she broke character, laughed and said, “You want pickles on that, Scotty baby?”

“Yes I do.”

I gave her a huge tip, took my dog and sat down on the curb. People watched in amazement that I had hacked the system. Meanwhile, the rest of the customers continued with their obscenities and didn't get served for the next half hour.

Meanwhile, I finished clogging my arteries and hailed a cab back to my hotel.

The Dalai Lama was right.

Kindness works.

We can never be afraid of letting people into the moment.

It's not a nametag – it's a connection.

Attention.

I admit it: I love the attention the nametag attracts.

When I attend classes, teachers call on me more.

When I take yoga, instructors adjust my posture more.

When I dine out, waiters seat me quicker, treat me nicer and serve me faster.

This is not an accident.

I'm just slightly more memorable than the average person. And as a result, I earn more attention than most.

The nametag builds novelty, overrides people's native defenses, breaks the ice, creates a smile in the mind and tickles the eye. It reduces psychological distance, expedites familiarity, pampers people's memories, creates a human connection and accelerates intimacy.

Every day, the nametag it makes another deposit in my attention account.

Do I wear a nametag for attention? *You're damn right I do.*

Attention is the great commodity.

It's the scarcest resource we have.

How much do you attract?

I'll never forget the time I got an email from a guy named Scott Ginsberg.

At first I thought it was a joke. *Probably one of my friends messing with me.*

Turns out, Scott was actually a lawyer who lived in Colorado. About the same age as me. And he stumbled across my website while googling himself. Which explains why the subject line of his email read:

"Dude, you're killing my Google ranking!"

Sorry pal. Maybe you should try writing books instead of being a liar.

Attention is currency.

It's not a nametag – it's a social object.

Mattering.

Still, the most memorable email I ever received was about six years ago.

It was the day I became an amateur proctologist.

Let me explain.

One morning, I received the following email:

“Dear Scott. My name is Katie Terrochine. I’m sixty-five years old, and lately, I’ve been having a very difficult time with my bowel movements. However, I read your blog about wearing a nametag every morning and it never fails to make me laugh. Now, thanks to you, I have become regular again. Apparently humor is just what the doctor order to get things moving. Thank you.”

It was the greatest day of my life.

Forget making money – I make old people poop.

I can now die a happy man.

But I kept that letter on my bulletin board for about five years. And I looked at it every single day, as a reminder that mattering is a choice. That the human need to feel valuable to the world runs deeper than just about anything. And if we want to overcome the crippling fear that we don’t matter, we have to reinforce our why. We have to remind ourselves why we do what we do.

Personally, I help people void their bowels.

It’s not a nametag – it’s a laxative.

Forever.

And yet, people were still asking me:

“How long do you plan on doing this?”

As if my dream had an expiration date. As if one day I was going to snap out of my delusions, close the door on my cute little experiment and rejoin the rest of the world.

But I just kept saying forever.

Me and my nametag just kept showing up.

All day. Every day.

And after about five years, the questions stopped. People knew I was serious. People knew I was in it for the long haul. And they no longer doubted my dedication.

It's not a daydream if you decide to make it your life.

Dennis Miller used to say a good rule of thumb is, if you've made it to thirty-five and your job still requires you to wear a nametag, you've made a serious vocational error.

Isn't funny what forever can change?

It's not a nametag – it's a commitment.

Didn't.

Admittedly, however, I did think about quitting once.

I was at a bachelor party. It was four in the morning. And my friend Andy was drunk.

Not hammered. Not incoherent. But on the timeline of intoxication, I'd say he was at that perfect place between belligerent drunk and annoying drunk: Philosophical drunk.

"Wearing a nametag was cool idea and everything, but you gotta admit: Anybody could've done that – I could've done that. What do you think of that?"

Nice friend.

By the time I got home, those four words were ringing like church bells:

"Anybody could've done that. Anybody could've done that."

I didn't sleep that night. Spent the next five hours staring at the ceiling, contemplating the validity of my idea and questioning my own self-belief. I remember sitting in bed, thinking about cashing in my chips, taking off the nametag for good and getting a real job.

Is this a big joke? Should I just quit? Was the nametag a cool idea at first, but now it's time to rip it off and get a real job?

I got up, went downstairs and told the story to my dad. And in his infinite wisdom, he responded with a four-letter word:

"Putz."

Not helpful.

But, then he said five words that changed me forever:

"It's not about the nametag."

I listened closely.

"Scott, anybody can go to the store, buy a box of nametags, wear them around town and people will act friendlier. But you're the only one who could have made a career out of that."

Being different is not the same as being unique.

One means to stand out, one means to be the only.

A week later, I called Andy back. Told him I'd been thinking a lot about our conversation.

“You were right man. I fully admit that anybody could've done that. You could've done that.”

But you didn't.

It's not a nametag – it's a singularity.

Proof.

And then it happened.

I finally committed with both feet.

Which surprised a lot of people, as my generation is typecast as being afraid of commitment. The consensus is that we're impatient, have mediocre work ethic, don't offer loyalty easily and are quick to quit and pursue something better.

Is that an accurate description? *Doesn't matter.*

What matters is that commitment is unquestionable.

That's why I got a tattoo of the nametag on my chest.

Not a marker. Not temporary ink. Not the sticker on my skin. *Tried all those already.*

A real tattoo. The kind that doesn't come off.

It symbolizes my commitment to my truth, my name, my identity, my brand, my philosophy and my life purpose.

And it hurt like hell.

But while the needle hurt my chest for an hour, not being taken seriously would've hurt my career for a lifetime.

And when people ask me if the tattoo is real, I say:

"It's as real as my commitment."

What's interesting is, when I got my tattoo, that was right around the time my company finally starting making money.

Huh.

I remember getting an email from a guy who wrote, "*Scott, all you are is the nametag guy. All you're ever going to be is the nametag guy. How does that make you feel?*"

Rich.

Last time I ever heard from that guy.

But I did keep that letter on my bulletin board to remind me of a few things: Not everybody

is going to get you. But people's power over you is inversely related to your need for their approval. Whoever you are, whatever you've done and wherever you've been: *When you own every minute of your history, nobody can touch you.*

But I also learned that when you commit with both feet, the world doesn't just pay attention – it pays dividends.

Not to mention, it's handy to have that tattoo ready go, just in case someone challenges your commitment.

I'll never forget my friend Jason's wedding. I was eating an appetizer, minding my own business. When out of nowhere, the bride noticed me and started marching in my direction.

And she was wearing her crazy face.

"Why are you wearing a nametag to my black tie wedding?"

HELLO, my name is Bridezilla.

"Oh, I'm Jason's friend. I always wear a nametag."

"Really?"

"Really."

"That's so weird," she said. "Wait a minute: Have you heard about that guy who wears a nametag all the time?"

It could be someone else, right?

Meanwhile, my friends are trying not to spit out their drinks.

"Well, as far as I know, I'm the only person in the world doing this. Is it possible that I'm the guy you heard about?"

"Oh trust me Scott – it's not you. This guy is crazy. I even heard a rumor that he has a nametag tattooed on his chest."

What would you have done in this situation?

And so, in the middle of her own wedding, I unbuttoned my tuxedo shirt and said:

"You mean he's got a tattoo like this?"

In eleven years, that may have been the funniest reaction I've seen. Poor girl. The color of her face matched her dress. But I started thinking to myself – as security dragged me away – that

running through her mind was one of two thoughts:

1. That guy is committed.
2. That guy should be committed.

I'll let you decide which one.

Still, the only story that comes close to that was the speech I gave thousand senior citizens.

It's really a perfect audience for me, since I'm an old soul. *Always have been.* I'm not really sure how that works. Maybe I was reincarnated a bunch of times. But I've always been wise for my years. Mature for my age. And I think that's why I tend to seek out the oldest person in the room. There's this uncontrollable attraction that makes me want to sit at their feet, hear their story, tap their wisdom and ask their advice. The cool part is, old people seek me out too. That's why I've attracted so many wonderful mentors in my life. I think they see something in me that somebody once saw in them.

In the speech, toward the end, I talked about getting my tattoo. Even showed a few pictures. But before I had a chance to finish the story, a group of old ladies from the front row starting yelling, "Take it off!"

Beet red, all I could think to say in response was, "I'd be happy to show you my tattoo after the show – *for five dollars.*"

I was kidding when I said that.

They weren't.

By the time I got to my book table, there was line around the corner of silverbacks digging through their coin purses, waving five-dollar bills in the air and whistling for me to unbutton my shirt.

I raised three hundred dollars.

But I couldn't take the money. It didn't seem right. Besides, I'm pretty sure that's prostitution. Not good for the brand.

Instead, I donated the money to my new charitable foundation, "Stripping for Seniors."

Because even geriatrics need to gyrate.

It's not a nametag – it's a trademark.

Followers.

“Has anyone ever tried to steal your nametag idea?”

Steal, no. Borrow, yes.

I once gave a speech to a kindergarten class. Fun kids. My nametag really seemed to resonate with them. *Especially Daniel*. Two days after my presentation, I got the following email from his father:

“When my son came home from school yesterday, he asked if he could wear a nametag in the shower just like Scott. I told him that was impossible, and that he’d have to settle for wearing it on his pajamas instead.”

Glad to see my work is inspiring the youth of America.

Years later, a guy named Joe Porcelli, a police officer from Boston, took on my idea. He wore a paper nametag on his uniform to promote friendliness in the city. And with my permission, the guy actually started a non-profit called “The Nametag Project.” He conducted interviews, put up a website – even got the Boston Red Sox to sponsor a special “Nametag Day,” at the Fenway Park.

Sadly, I read a review in the *Boston Globe* that completely ripped Joe’s idea apart. He was humiliated and decided to shut down the project. Oh well.

Another time, I got an email once from a kid who started doing it.

His name was Cameron.

He lived in Minneapolis.

He wore a nametag every day of his sophomore year of high school.

According to the report from my young disciple, the nametag changed his life. First, everyone in school knew who he was. *Especially the girls*. Second, all of his teachers thought it was cool. *He got more attention in class*. Third, the school paper did a write up on his experiment. *He became a school legend*.

I felt like a proud parent. What an honor to influence someone in such a positive way.

Until I found out that a group of football players beat the crap out of Cameron for wearing a nametag all the time.

My bad.

The problem is, we live in a litigious, oversensitive society. And because I don’t want some crazy parent from suing me for child endangerment, I put the following disclaimer on my website:

Scott Ginsberg does not recommend or encourage all people to wear nametags. Although nametags can be successful tools for encouraging friendliness, nametags may be potentially dangerous for anyone whose anonymity is vital to their own personal safety.

I think it was the right thing to do.

And since then, there haven't been any compromising situations.

Except for during my colonoscopy.

Let me explain.

A few years ago I visited Washington University Medical Center for my procedure. And their level of patient care was anything but average.

Lying on the bed in the surgery room, I waited for the nurses to administer general anesthesia. Having never experienced this procedure, having a family history of colon cancer, and having no idea what was wrong with my body, my pulse raced.

And that's when it happened.

The entire surgical team walked into the room wearing nametags on their scrubs.

I sat up in my gown, busted out laughing and got a high five from each of them.

My heart rate must have dropped ten points. I exhaled as a wave of relaxation washed over me. And I shook my head in disbelief as I lay down to begin the procedure.

And the last I remember before the drugs kicked in was hearing my doctor say:

"Scott, before we give you our medicine, we thought you might like a taste of your own."

When was the last time you bragged about your colonoscopy?

It's not a nametag – it's a cult.

Breathe.

Unfortunately, not all of my hospital visits were that remarkable.

Little did I know, success morphs into failure when it comes too fast, too early and too abundantly.

I learned this the hard way when I was twenty-six and my left lung collapsed.

It's called a *pneumothorax*, which is a fairly common incident among young, tall men in their late twenties. And although the doctor said it was sporadic, I chose to tell myself a different story. A story that would teach me a lesson I'd never forget:

When you own your breath, nobody can steal your peace.

That was my issue: I hadn't developed a healthy relationship with my breath. Sure, money loves speed – but velocity creates stress, and stress kills people.

You have to honor what stops you. And if nothing stops you, sometimes you have to stop yourself. Otherwise, you become a victim of your own conviction.

It's amazing how quickly humility shows up when you're incapacitated in a hospital bed for six days with a tube in your chest wacked out on morphine experiencing multiple anxiety attacks.

Interestingly, it was my left lung that collapsed.

Directly underneath my nametag.

Who knew a sticker could be so heavy?

It's not a nametag – it's an anvil.

Wonder.

So I took it easy for a little while.

Finally learned how to relax.
Didn't fly for a few months.
Cancelled three speeches.
Got back to meditating.
Won my breath back.

Several months later, I went to Ohio for my college reunion.

And I had this romantic, cinematic vision that I'd walk in the door, tell everybody the story about how I made a career out of wearing nametag and watch as they listened in disbelief.

Especially Claire, that snobby bitch from Alpha Phi who wouldn't give me the time of day when we were in college.

You know, one of those *how-do-you-like-me-now* moments.

But apparently it doesn't work that way. Not anymore.

Instead of asking what I've been up to since graduation, former classmates I hadn't seen in years came up to me – didn't even say hello – poked my chest and asked to see my nametag tattoo.

Um, I'm fine, how are you?

That's the downside of the Internet: We never have to wonder about anything anymore.

No finding things out on accident.
No learning things through trial and error.
No imagining things by sitting around and pondering.

The Internet just gives you a blank box and puts the entire world behind it.

And personally, I think that's too easy.

If we want to practice feeling fully alive, we can never bury our sense of wonder. It's what sustains or species, helps us feel alive and enables us to connect with each other.

Einstein said imagination is more important than knowledge. I say imagination is more important than anything.

It's not a nametag – it's a shortcut.

Special.

At the request of my doctor, I started taking yoga.

After all, that's why my lung collapsed in the first place: *I didn't have a healthy relationship with my breath.*

And since the distance was doable, the weather was ideal and the scenery was beautiful, that summer I started walking to class.

It didn't take long to become one of my favorite rituals. And I probably would have kept it up, until a friend pointed out the message I was sending to the neighbors.

Think about it.

At the same time every day, people would see the same guy, marching down the same street, wearing the same outfit, singing the same Journey song, dancing at the same stoplights, smiling and waving to the same people, carrying a backpack – and of course, wearing a nametag.

I can just hear the neighbors now.

"Hey kids look, there's that nice retarded boy who always wears the nametag. Let's wave hello. Hello Scott."

And I'm so oblivious; all I do is make things worse by yelling across the street:

"Hello! My name is Scott."

I'm special.

But is that so wrong? Am I so weird? Has our hypersensitive, repressed society become so inhibited in its public behavior that we can't all act a little retarded from time to time?

You know you want to. You know that every time you go to the football game and see the mentally retarded kid singing and dancing his heart out without a care in the world, *you secretly wish you could act so freely.*

And that's the irony, too. The word retarded means "to hold back."

Which is the exact opposite of how those people behave.

They hold nothing back.

And I saw this firsthand about a year later when I gave a speech to a group of individuals with disabilities.

I was terrified. I thought the message would go completely over the heads. And I assumed that their intelligence level would prevent them from understanding me.

I was wrong. They loved it. Best audience I've ever had.

Afterwards, a young man from the front row ran up to me with a huge smile on his face.

And although his mental condition made it very difficult for him to speak, he placed his hand on my chest and said:

"It's not the nametag; it's the heart behind it."

Just because someone is broken doesn't mean they can't teach you a lesson.

Is your heart behind your brand?

It's not a nametag – it's s release.

Safety.

Now that I was working more and more, traveling with a nametag started to become a fascinating experience.

Once I was in New York. At the train station, the conductor noticed my nametag and said: *“Scott, eh? That’s good. Now I know who I’m dealin with.”*

That interaction always stuck with me.

As a reminder that people are skeptical. As a reminder that people are always looking for a reason not to trust you. And as a reminder that – in world driven by fear – anything we can do to verify ourselves immediately is always worthwhile.

Another time, a cranky and compliant agent asked if my nametag was embroidered onto my shirt. Just for fun, I told her that I wore it because if I died, the police would have an easier time identifying the body.

Wrong thing to say.

She stared at me, emotionless, for five seconds – then told me I had been randomly selected for addition screening.

Woops.

Whatever. That’s funny.

Meanwhile, two weeks later I was traveling through the same airport. When they called my boarding group, I approached the gate to scan my ticket. And right as the machine beeped, the agent stopped me abruptly, pointed to my chest and asked:

“Hang on, why does your nametag say Scott?”

“Um. Because that’s my name...?”

“Really. Then can you explain why your boarding pass says Kurt?”

“What?”

“Sir, your boarding pass says ‘Kurt Gransberg.’”

“Who the is that?”

“You tell me.”

"I don't know. I've never heard that name in my life."

Unbeknownst to me – and unbeknownst to the astute staff of the Transportation Security Administration – I had cleared three security checkpoints wearing a nametag that didn't match the name on my ticket.

They made me exit the terminal, check in again, get in line again, go through security again – and refused to hold the plane for me.

I ended up missing my flight.

And they say that our safety is their priority.

Horseshit.

Their priority is to violate the fourth amendment.

Their priority is to humiliate and grope harmless people

Their priority is to protect the assets of the airline industry.

Their priority is to reduce our liberty a little more each day.

Their priority is to promote the illusion of safety and security.

Their priority is to convince us that they're actually doing something to protect us.

If you see something, say something?

Well, I see something.

And I'm saying something.

It's not a nametag – it's a whistle.

Travel.

The fun part about traveling is, every culture and country responds to my nametag in its own unique way.

Latin Americans are engaging.

When I walk in their stores, they smile and say, “Buenos dias, Escott!”

Indians are proper.

When I shake their hands, they always call me, “Mr. Scott.”

Australians are affirmative and humorous.

When I tell them I wear a nametag everyday, they nod and say, “Good on ya mate! I reckon that’s helpful when you’ve had a few pints.”

Canadians are childlike and non-threatening.

When I meet them they say, “Oh you betchya nice to meet ya. I love nametags ya know.”

Asians are enthusiastic.

When I walk into a sushi bar, the chefs bow and say, “Scotto!”

Jamaicans are hospitable.

When I walk through the airport, they yell, “Scott my brother! Ya mon! Anything you need, no problem.”

Brits are dry and sarcastic.

When they see my nametag, they ask, “I take it your name is Scott?”

French people are snobby.

When I walk into their store, they look at me like I’m crazy and said, “Scott.”

Russians are playful.

When I meet them at conferences, they joke, “You have memory problem?”

Hasidics are inquisitive.

When I interact with them, they ask me a million questions, “Why do you wear the nametag on left side? What about color? Where do you buy them? How much you pay?”

Middle Easterners are accommodating.

When I shop with them, they say, “Scott my friend, come inside. I like you. You have nice face. I give you good price.”

But the best was what happened when I traveled to Tokyo.

When I sat down at the sushi bar, the chef noticed my nametag, bowed and greeted me with what

I assume is the Japanese version of my name:

“Scotto!”

He laughed, so I showed him the second nametag under my jacket.

“Scotto!”

He motioned over to his boss, yelled something in Japanese and brought him over to meet me. I pulled down my shirt and showed them layer number three, my tattoo.

“Scotto!”

They both laughed and bowed. I bowed back.

And then they started feeding me. For two hours. I have no idea what I was eating, but it was the freshest, most delicious sushi I ever had.

Eventually, the rice expanded in my stomach to the point of immobility. And as I sat back to celebrate the moment, the proud chef looked me in the eye and imparted a priceless life lesson:

“Sushi that taste like fish – no good sushi.”

Arigato.

That’s what’s amazing to me: In eleven years, the people who have responded most negatively to my nametag were Americans. All the hate mail, insults, negative feedback and death threats came from my own people.

So much for winning the war at home.

It’s not a nametag – it’s a translator.

Opportunity.

Beyond the interpersonal side, wearing a nametag also kicked open a lot of professional doors.

Writing. Publishing. Speaking. Performing. Hosting. Teaching. Leading. Volunteering. Traveling. Branding. Consulting. I even wrote a quiz for Cosmopolitan once.

I've also gotten a few requests from television and film screenwriters. One in particular wanted to pitch a network reality show that revolved around my nametag.

Awesome.

But I had to ask the crucial question. I had to find out why he picked me. Not for ego purposes, but for market research purposes. I wanted to know where the rock created the ripple so I could go throw more rocks.

"Television is about the personality and the message, somebody who would be fun to watch every episode. Viewers don't care about talent and skill. They want to laugh, be entertained and have their imagination captured. And after doing a lot of research on potential, I didn't like anyone else. But you – you remind me of me. And that's why I reached out."

Cool.

So we did a few conference calls, got the lawyers involved, signed an option agreement – they even flew me out to Hollywood to meet with a few network producers.

Unfortunately, my screenwriter got an offer to become a lead a writer on *Survivor*, the highest rated reality show of the decade.

So that was the end of that.

And I'd be lying if I said I wasn't disappointed. But I wasn't devastated. If anything, it was another glimpse into that whole world. It was an educational experience that taught me what networks want.

That's one thing you learn about working with the media: You can't get your hopes up. You can't beat yourself up. And you can't torture yourself waiting in limbo. Nor can you run around telling everyone you're going to be on television. The media is your customer, and you are an ocean under a fickle moon.

You just have to keep saying to yourself, "It's only a matter of time."

And when it hits, you better be ready.

What's neat is, the older I get, the more roles I've taken on and the more plates I've chosen to

spin, the clearer it's become:

We're not supposed to be one thing in life.

If we want to make use of everything that we are, we have to listen to what the world is telling us. That way, we can diversify our identity. We can open ourselves to becoming more.

I remember getting an email from a reader that read:

"Dear Scott: Big fan. Love the nametag concept. Hope you keep it up. And I hope you remember that what identifies you doesn't define you."

As hard as it is for me to admit, we all have to learn to live larger than our labels.

No labels, no limits.

It's not a nametag – it's a springboard.

Crazy.

And the irony of the whole thing is, it feels like a coup. I've never even had a real job, and yet these organizations are paying me a nice chunk of money to tell them how to do their jobs better.

It's that whole Imposter Syndrome.

I'm standing on stage thinking to myself, "There must be some kind of mistake."

I can't believe this is my job.

I can't believe I'm getting paid for this.

I can't believe I haven't been found out yet.

I can't believe nobody has exposed me as inadequate.

I can't believe people haven't caught on to how clueless I really am.

I can't believe I've deceived the world into believing that I know what I'm doing.

I'm a fraud. A complete imposter. And at any second, I'm going to slip up and blow my cover. Then, it's only a matter of time before the world spots my shortcomings, wises up and boots me out.

But sometimes all we need is one supporter to help us realize our own value.

I'll never forget the time my client came up to me right before my presentation and told me that everyone on the board of directors thought I was crazy.

I didn't know what to say.

But it didn't matter. She patted me on the shoulder and said, "*Don't worry Scott, of course you're crazy – that's why we hired you!*"

Pretty much made my year.

Thing is, I've been crazy my whole life. And what sucks is, the world is quick to confuse crazy with dangerous. Or stupid. Or unprofitable. Or mentally unstable.

Like a reverse halo effect, it's as if being called crazy is a dangerous thing.

But consider this list of people:

Aurelius. Bezos. Buddha. Buffet. Carlin. Christ. Churchill. Clinton. Confucius. Darwin. Drucker. Dylan. Edison. Einstein. Franklin. Gandhi. Gates. Gorbachev. Hemingway. Jefferson. Jobs. Krishna. Kroc. Lennon. Lincoln. Mandela. Marx. Mozart. Newton. Obama. Orwell. Presley. Shakespeare. Teresa. Tolkien. Tolstoy. Trump. Tutu. Voltaire. Wilde. Winfrey. Woods. Yeltsin. Zuckerberg.

All were considered crazy, but all changed the world forever.

Personally, I think crazy a compliment.

I think if everybody says you're nuts, you just might be onto something.

It's not a nametag – it's a guest pass.

Loneliness.

I was flying to Denver when it happened.

I was preparing my notes for a speech called, “The Entrepreneur’s Dilemma.” The focus of the presentation was how loneliness was an inevitable landmark of the entrepreneurial landscape, and how to manage it. A topic near and dear to my heart.

The guy next to me couldn’t help but notice my screen. After about twenty minutes of sneaking glances, he finally asked, “So, Scott, are you writing a book?”

Headphones still in, I said yes.

Next, he asked about the topic of the book. And I said something vague like “communication.” Being on a roll with my work, I didn’t want to give an answer that garnered too many follow up questions.

Couldn’t this guy see that I was busy trying to write about loneliness?

I went back to my work.

About thirty seconds later, he asked another question. Then another. And another. Apparently he had never met an author before and was curious about the publishing process.

Seriously. This guy really needs to leave me alone. How am I supposed to finish writing this piece about how lonely I am if –

Oh. Right.

Standing on a whale, fishing for minnows.

Smacked in the face with a healthy dose of irony. I wised up, unplugged and started talking to him.

Nice guy, actually. He was an entrepreneur himself.

And I asked him, “What takes you out to Denver?”

“My father’s funeral.”

Oh.

And I thought I was lonely.

But don’t get me wrong. I wouldn’t trade my job for anything on the planet. Being an entrepre-

neur is the best. The fact that I get to make my own schedule, make my own decisions, make my own money and make a measurable difference in the world – all while doing what I love – is an honor and a privilege.

Still.

When the inevitable loneliness starts to creep in like a toxic mist, you need every ounce of your creative capacity to stay connected, stay supported and stay afloat. Otherwise the isolation will drive you insane, and will drive your business into the ground.

Sure, screens are fine. But we can't solely filter our lives through pixels. Not if we want those lives to matter.

Face-to-face is making a comeback. Which doesn't mean information is irrelevant. It's just that contact offers an unquantifiable humanness that content can't provide.

Only face-to-face can you truly learn who you are.

Only face-to-face can you truly discover how the world works.

Only face-to-face can you truly resonate with the soul of another human being.

I don't care what line of work you're in.

Every time we touch each other's skin, look each other in the eye and talk to each other with our mouths, the world feels a little bit more connected.

We need to create an act of humanity in a moment of distance. That never goes out of style.

That's why I wear a nametag: It keeps me plugged in. It sustains me. It's my constant spark for human contact. And every day I get to interact with cool new people from all walks of life that I never would have met otherwise.

It's my analog friend request.

What's yours?

It's not a nametag – it's a social network.

Memory.

Speaking of entrepreneurs, meet my mentor.

His name is Bill Jenkins. He's an author, lecturer, educator and publisher. Best yet, he's a Baptist preacher from Mississippi. And during one of his recent sermons, he made a powerful observation:

"Most of what we do has no witness. But it is the sum of our witnesses that creates the picture of who we are."

Reverend Jenkins was right.

We're all just winking in the dark, hoping somebody will make us feel seen.

That's why it's important to remember people.

Without witness, our lives go unnoticed.

Without witness, our lives are a series of small incidents.

Without witness, our lives lack affirmation and understanding.

Yet another reason I love nametags: People always remember me.

Sound egotistical and selfish? *It is.* And I'm okay with that. I don't like being forgotten. And my nametag makes sure nobody has a chance to forget me.

Over the summer I met the mother of the bride at a friend's wedding. She spotted my nametag for the second day in a row and asked if I always wore it. I told her it helped people remember me. And she replied:

"Really? Most of the people I meet, I want to forget!"

Sounds like a personal problem.

The point is, to remember is to bear witness, to bear witness is to notice, and to notice is to love. And since my nametag constantly invites that gift into my life, I strive to be sensitive to people's visibility needs in return.

Otherwise they're just winking in the dark.

Who needs you to see them?

It's not a nametag – it's a spotlight.

Friend.

My business card is a nametag.

But it doesn't say *Scott* – it says *Scott's Friend*.

I don't give people a choice. Everybody my friend, whether they like it or not.

Amigo del mundo. That's how I was raised. I want to be friends with everyone, all the time, everywhere. And I want to love everybody I meet forever and then some.

Over the years, these friend cards have created a lot of special moments.

I'll never forget the incident on the tarmac. I was waiting to board my plane when I felt someone's eyes upon me. Glancing up at the door, I noticed the groundsman holding up his laminated security badge with one of my business cards facing outward.

"Hey look everybody – I'm Scott's Friend!" he laughed.

"Wait a minute. Where did you get that? Have we met before?"

"No, but you flew through here last week. And I think the zipper on your bag must have broke, because we found three hundred of your cards scattered across the runway!"

Great. Not only am I a litterbug, but my contact information is all over the trash.

"Oh, don't worry about it Scott. Matter of fact, I made my entire staff on the runway wear your cards in their security badge holders."

"Really? Why?"

"Well, our airport just got a new general manager. His name is Scott, and he doesn't have any friends."

It's not who you love – it's whose life is better because you love them.

It's not a nametag – it's a secret handshake.

Experiment.

So each of these interactions, these stories, these moments of human connection, are all little tests.

That's exactly what wearing nametag is:

An experiment.

An awareness plan.

An ongoing research study.

An endless source of curiosity.

It's a learning system.

It's a listening platform.

It's a lifelong case study.

It's a living laboratory of human interaction.

And when class is in session, every hour of every day, it's amazing what you can learn.

Because the truth is, I'm not that smart.

I've just done more experiments than most people.

Tens of thousands. All over the world. For more than a decade.

Plus, I've documented all of my observations, stories, trends, lessons, questions and theories – along with the universal applicability thereof. Everything I know is written down somewhere. And I can find it in ten seconds.

If you don't write it down – it never happened.

That's why I'm successful: Because I'm willing to be a scientist.

But that's not an accident.

If you want to increase the probability of success, you've got to put yourself in the way of success. The door must be opened from the inside. You have to experiment.

I learned this early. From the moment I started wearing a nametag, amazing things started happening to me: I met cool people, got invited to events, finagled my way into cool situations – even stumbled into business opportunities that I never would have found otherwise.

It wasn't a nametag – it was a good luck charm.

And I realized that being in the right place at the right time is easy.

You just need to be in a lot of places.

It's like we learned in math class: If you have a fifty red marbles and seventy blue marbles, which color are you more likely to pull out of the bag?

Exactly.

That's why wearing a nametag works – it gives me more blue marbles. It's all about volume. I get consistency lucky because my constant experimentation enables me to meet more people than the average person. I exponentially increase my activity level.

Ironically, I once did a segment on 20/20 about the topic of luck. They flew a camera crew to my house. Followed me around for a day. Then, aired the interview on national television for an audience of five million people.

That segment earned more credibility and more money than any other in my career.

And how did they find me?

By doing a search on the phrase “luckiest person you know.”

A topic I had written on more than anyone.

That's not luck, that's volume.

Which proves that you don't need a nametag – you need more blue marbles.

You need to experiment.

It's not a nametag – it's a test tube.

Legend.

The good news is, wearing nametag everyday for a decade means people are going to tell your story.

I've tried to stop it, but to no avail.

Whether I'm attending a conference with colleagues, practicing yoga with friends, interacting online with readers or having dinner with family, people constantly tell me stories about telling my story.

A few years ago I was on the bike at the gym. The guy next to me noticed my nametag. And after a few moments of awkward silence, he launched right into the rumor:

"You know, I once heard a story about some guy who wore a nametag everyday in college. I think it was a sociological experiment or something. But they made a documentary about him. And think he set a world record. Pretty crazy, huh?"

Unlike the Bridezilla at the wedding, I didn't have the heart to tell him. The rumors were far too interesting to listen to. And I didn't want to ruin the image he had about the story. So I just kept asking questions.

"Did you ever meet him?"

"What ever happened to that guy?"

"Do you think he went crazy or something?"

I wonder if he knew I knew.

The point is, your life tells a story whether you like it or not. And while facts are misleading, rumors are always revealing – even if they're wrong.

Truth is, the truth is relative.

For example:

Is it true that I'm the world record holder of wearing nametags?

Absolutely. Not a soul could prove otherwise.

But.

Is it the truth that I've been inducted into the Guinness Book of World Records?

Absolutely not. The organization never actually recognized my record.

I'm still a little bitter about this, no pun intended. I really should be in there. And it's not for a lack of trying, either. I've attempted the nametag record four times in the past decade. I've

slogged through their very lengthy verification process, applied into their documentation system, even paid a few hundred bucks to “fast track” my application for a higher probability of being accepted.

What a scam.

Unfortunately, with every application I submit, their office always sends me the following rejection letter:

“Thank you for your submission to Guinness Book of World Records. Thank you for your submission to Guinness Book of World Records. Thank you for your submission to Guinness Book of World Records. Thank you for your submission to Guinness Book of World Records.”

My favorite part is where it says, “You have, at your sole expense, taken all appropriate professional safety advice in relation to all aspects of risk and safety connected with the record attempt.”

Of course. No nametags were harmed in the process of setting this record.

The amazing thing is, most people just assume I’ve already been inducted. In fact, some people will vehemently try to convince me that I really do hold the record: “I saw your record in Guinness!” “I heard your nametag was featured on their website!” “I swear to God I read about your induction into hall of fame!”

No, you didn’t.

But what’s the harm in letting people think I did?

The truth is what you choose to believe.

I did, however, manage to make it into the hall of fame of Ripley’s Believe It Or Not.

In their book, *Planet Eccentric*, you find the following entry:

SENSE OF IDENTITY – Scott Ginsberg of St. Louis, Illinois, has worn a nametag every day since November 2, 2000, just to find out what would happen. He now works with people who want to become more approachable and says wearing nametags is a great start.

Did you notice the mistake in the first sentence?

Believe it or not, *Ripley’s* doesn’t check their facts.

But is my story so weird? Considering the guy to the left of my entry is famous for hammering nails into his own nose, and considering the guy to the right of my entry is famous for kissing snakes, I don’t think so.

There's always somebody weirder than you.

Personally, I think weird is a compliment.

Weird people challenge you.

Weird people make you think.

Weird people encourage individuality.

Weird people bring valuable perspective.

Weird people promote personal expression.

Compliance is dead.

Forcing people into little boxes doesn't work anymore.

We don't need to fall in love – we need to fall in weird.

And so, if you want to make your legend worth crossing the street for, if you want people to feel proud and eager to spread your myth, you have to manage your story like an asset.

Because people don't just buy what you sell – they buy what you tell.

Especially if you're weird.

Start positive rumors about yourself.

It's not a nametag – it's a narrative.

Credentials.

You have to appreciate the irony.

I've been kicked out of parties.

I've been asked to leave people's weddings.

I've been denied access into clubs and restaurants.

I've been asked to remove myself from group pictures.

Because I wear a nametag.

On the other hand, I've also built a career, been interviewed seven hundred times and invited to deliver presentations to tens of thousands of people in South Korea, Switzerland, Australia, London, Bhutan, Mumbai, Canada and Jamaica.

Because I wear a nametag.

I think it's worth the tradeoff.

It's not a nametag – it's a passport.

Trash.

So if you boil it down, my entire career came from something I saw in a trashcan.

That's pretty cool.

But it's not uncommon.

Most great ideas are the result of experiments, mistakes, accidents, errors or jokes.

John Pemberton accidentally added carbonated water instead of plain water to his medical recipe.
The result was Coca-Cola.

Charles Goodyear accidentally spilled a pot of boiling rubber in his kitchen while sneaking behind his wife's back. *The result was the tire.*

Chinese emperor Shen Nung boiled water outside when leaves from a nearby tree fell into the pot. *The result was tea.*

At the 1904 World's Fair, waffle maker Ernest Hamwi noticed a fellow vendor's booth ran out of dishes to serve ice cream. *The result was the waffle cone.*

The point is, when you look into a trashcan, you have a choice:

You can see trash, or you can see treasure.

It all depends on how big your thinking is.

On that fateful day in college when everyone else threw their nametags away, I looked into the trash and saw the latter.

And that moment, that journey down the path of why not, became the burning point of my life.
And it changed everything.

It all depends on what you see when you see things.

It's not a nametag – it's an oops.

Consistency.

And yet, most people have it all wrong:

I didn't just put the nametag on – I kept it on.

That was the difference maker.

In the beginning, we were all wearing nametags. But when the campus seminar ended, most people ripped them off, threw them away and got on with their lives.

I chose to keep my nametag on. For the next decade.

What could you continue that everyone else has abandoned?

That's the payoff of consistency:

Do something once, and that's a treat.

Do something twice, and that's a trend.

Do something every day for a decade, and that's a triumph.

People will notice.

Consistency is far better than rare moments of greatness.

It's not a nametag – it's a pattern.

Sculpture.

In the end, wearing a nametag didn't make me into somebody new.

What it did was surface the kind person I already was. What it did was accelerate my growth into the person I was born to become.

And if I do a little reflection, it makes a lot of sense:

I've always been a nerd.

The nametag just gave me permission to let him come out and play.

I've been creative, quirky and exceptional my whole life.

The nametag just gave me an outlet.

I've been a performer, an artist and a writer my whole life.

The nametag just gave me a canvas.

I've been a radical, a heretic and a leader my whole life.

The nametag just gave me a platform.

It's weird. The older you get, the younger you feel. The older you get, the more you remind yourself of the person you've always been.

But I do think people change – when they want to. When they decide to. And when the pain of staying the same is greater than the cost to change.

Still, we are all more or less the same as we were. If each of us traced our identities back to the beginning, we'd find shocking similarities between the people we started as and the people we became.

A few years ago, I gave a speech to the first graders at my old elementary school. My former teacher, Mrs. Firestone, showed a picture of the yearbook when I was a student in the very same classroom.

“Do you think Scott looks the same?” she asked. “Nooooo!” they laughed in unison.

But then, an energetic girl with brown curls stood up, pointed at my nametag and said:

“But you're still the same old you.”

Michelangelo used to say that the sculpture was already inside the stone. Maybe that's all life is. A chance to chip away.

It's not a nametag – it's a chisel

Risk.

And yet, I'm sure people will never stop saying:

"Wow, that takes balls."

That's what people tell you when you do something crazy, take the road less traveled and go your own way – that it requires balls.

Cujones. Courage. Moxie. The willingness to step up and stick yourself out there.

And I agree. I think it absolutely takes balls to do that. I think regret is the price you pay for having no balls.

But I also think that having balls isn't enough.

Think of it from a reproductive standpoint: Any fool with a pair can make a baby – but only a real man can raise that child as a father.

Risk gets you started, but regularity gets you success.

And life requires both.

It's not a nametag – it's a plunge.

Epilogue.

Speaking of sexual reproduction, you're probably wondering if wearing a nametag ever did lead me down the path of love.

Funny you should ask.

When I met the woman of my dreams, it wasn't at a bar. Or out at a club. Or somewhere in public in which my nametag caught her attention, stimulated her curiosity, drew her into my orbit and enchanted her into my vortex of mystery.

We actually met on an online dating site.

She didn't even know I wore a nametag.

Then we met in person. And I told her, "There's something you should know about me."

So I told her. And as a lifelong environmentalist, his response to my crusade was:

"I'm a little concerned about your nametag's paper usage."

I thought she was kidding.

But it wasn't her complaint – it was her constitution. Brittany never uses anything once. She wastes nothing. She doesn't like when things end. Sustainability is her nametag.

And that's how I knew she was the one:

Her objection was environmental, while every other date's objection was just mental.

Had it been any other girl, I probably would have brushed it off.

If she doesn't like it, tough. That's what the old me would have said.

But you should see the way she looks at me.

When Brittany walks in the door, the composition of the room changes. One glance, and I am reduced to jelly. One touch, and I am sent to heaven.

And after a few months of dating, two things happened:

1. She stole my heart and kept it forever.
2. I started saving my nametags.

Reusing them for multiple outfits, repurposing them as materials for art pieces and recycling

them as decorations for my office. I even had my workout shirts embroidered with nametags so I didn't waste paper when I got sweaty.

Isn't amazing what we do for love?

The best part is, now that Brittany and I are married, I forget that I'm even wearing a nametag.

And maybe that's what enlightenment is all about.

HELLO, my name is Scott!

MY HISTORY

I was born on Valentine's Day. That pretty much sums up my entire personality: A lover, a romantic and a touchy feely beta male who cries at everything.

MY ENGINE

I am motivated by a blank canvas, a captive audience, a daily ritual, an interesting problem and a meaningful contribution.

MY VALUES

Creativity is my gift. Commitment is my sword. Interaction is my fuel. Music is my religion. Sobriety is my drug. Laughter is my language. Love is my answer.

MY WORK

I wear a nametag 24-7. Just for fun. Been doing it since 2000. In fact, I even secured a world record in Ripley's Believe It Or Not. And yes, I got the [tattoo](#).

I wrote and published 25 books on human interaction, marketing and business strategy. You can download all of them for free, no strings, right [here](#), right now.

I performed my one-man show 600 times around the world. Never the same talk twice. Watch tons of clips [here](#).

I built an online television network. It's all about sticking yourself out there. Pun [intended](#).

I strategize with cool people and big companies. They pay me money to [rent](#) my brain.

I have an award-winning [blog](#).

I work at [POKE](#) New York.

I draw [thinkmaps](#).

MY PASSIONS

I am a [sentence](#) junkie. Words make me happy. I built a search [engine](#) of 33,000 phrases I've collected over the years.

I am a songwriter. Music was my first love. I recorded and released five [albums](#) under my own label.

I'm a yogi. I do Bikram every day. Greatest thing ever.

I'm a podcast nut. I listen to lots of them. I also [host](#) a few shows with my best friend.

Anyway, that's a snapshot of who I am, how I live and what I make.

If you need me, just google nametag.

— *Scott*