

# **Case Study: How a Spy Helped Keep the Lights on in America**

**Note from Jason:** The following is an excellent case study about “the takeaway” sales technique. In other words, if you are trying to pick up a woman at a bar, you wouldn’t go and hit on her, you’d hit on her friends and make her jealous.

**Notice in this case study the planning that went into selling this guy on helping America.**

**This is written by my good friend and former CIA Officer, Michael D.**

I sat at a large conference table in a meeting hall with comfy chairs around the table and less comfy chairs lined up against all of the walls. The Deputy Director of Research and Development sat in the command seat. A few other officers flanked him on both sides. As the solo operator for this mission, I was seated at the table about midway down from the deputy director.

It gave me the best vantage point to listen, ask questions and discuss the operation with the support team. The meeting director (or some silly title like that) started off by telling us he was going to perform a roll call of all of the key support staff and then present the operation. As he rambled on for about 10 more seconds, the deputy director said “Yeah, we got it. I’ll take it from here”.

He looked at me and said, “Here’s the deal. (name, title, and reputation) is being allowed to go to (city in Europe) for a rare invitation-only awards ceremony. All of these geniuses will be jabbering about how they are smarter than everyone else. He’s not even going to talk to you, but this is a tasking order from the highest levels of government. It’s been years since he has been allowed to step foot out of (facility in city). See if you can get to him and get him to talk to you. That’s it. That’s all you have to do. Think you can handle that”?

He went on to say that this guy was a one-of-a-kind genius and that he had spotted every undercover operator every Agency had sent in the last 20+ years. He knew every face, every published paper and every name even remotely associated with his field. He could spot a spy as soon as they arrived on the grounds of the institute.

Next thing I knew, I had the mission briefing package and I was gearing up for the roll out. Then it struck me, I get to go to a (European city) for a two week, all

expenses paid trip and my only tasking was to see if I could say “Hello” to a world-famous mathematician. I thought to myself, “yeah, I think I can handle this.”

Okay, the real truth is that I felt an incredible rush of eagerness to accomplish what no American spy had been able to do in over 20 years and I knew that if I failed (which was very likely), no one would notice or even care. I wish I could tell you that I developed an ingenious, foolproof plan. Well, what I actually had was a two-week U.S. taxpayer vacation in (City) and a hope that I could pull-off a Hail Mary.

In this case, my cover was that I was attending on behalf of my colleague (real person, real achievements and international recognition – but he owed Uncle Sam a favor) from (Company Name) Lab. I was posing as his friend and peer who had accepted the invitation due to the original invitee not being able to attend.

The Agency had already arranged for me to piggy back on the identity of an actual world-class scientist who was a close acquaintance and fellow brainiac of the Lab’s invited guest. I arrived a few days early to case the critical areas and develop a solid AFAM (Area Familiarization). On the opening day of the awards conference, I strolled in and started getting my bearings. Low and behold, not twenty yards ahead was a large circular standing table where about six men stood and talked.

It didn’t take long to spot the eccentric hair and fashion choices that revealed my target. I strutted right through the crowd, excusing myself as I moved them aside while showing little regard for their individual sense of being uncrowned royalty. I wanted to come across bold and focused, but not deranged and dangerous. The little chippering sounds of the crowd drew the attention of the mighty men at the standing table. They watched as I continued to approach them. When I arrived at their table, I interrupted and introduced myself as (name), the American who is supposed to talk to “you” and then pointed directly at (Name, title and reputation) (Hereafter Man A).

I said, “No cause for concern my friends. I am here to check out (city) and enjoy a two-week vacation courtesy of my fellow American tax payers. So, if/when anyone asks, please tell them I came right up to you, you told me to buzz off and I did. The other thing that you guys might be interested in is that I have way too much expense money to spend. So, when any of you want a drink, meal, or whatever, let me know and me and my fellow Americans will pick up the tab. Thanks guys. I hope you guys have as much fun over the next couple of weeks as I’m going to have. See Ya”.

I walked off and went straight across the room to a table where the gorgeous conference hostesses were milling around. After a few minutes of warm up, we began having the most boisterous laughs that room has probably ever heard. I sent a round of drinks over to the brainiacs and raised my glass of grape juice to them.

Then I asked the ladies if they would like to meet the stars of this international event. They smiled and nodded. I took the entire cadre of beautiful hostesses in what must have been the sexiest procession any of these pocket-protector, black rimmed

glasses wearing, geniuses had ever witnessed to their table. When I got the girls to the table, I began introductions. I bragged to the girls about each prodigies' achievements and then told the prodigy the name of the beauty now standing at his elbow.

I ordered a round of drinks for the table and then excused myself. Not my target, but one of his close colleagues, asked me where I was going (clearly concerned that they may not have the charisma to keep this bevvvy of hotties hanging around). I told them I was off to tour the city and that if they needed more drinks or anything, they could have the concierge track me down. I didn't return to the gathering until several hours later.

That evening, there was a semi-formal dinner. I wasn't shy about getting up from my table and going over to sit with the hot chicks. They all giggled and the room made this kind of "grumble rumble" sound. Many of the attendees looked at me in deep disgust, but I didn't care about them. I only cared about how one man would react. I caught his eye and saw him make a very small smile and kind of chuckle. I avoided any direct contact with him that night and focused on entertaining the ladies. At the end of the evening, I left early to go set up. I wanted to see him when he left and see if I could tell which of those other five men at the table with him might be his true friend. And there it was, he came out with all five and then he and the fellow who had been on his right at the standing table (Man B) seemed to send the other four away to bed and engaged in what appeared to be an earnest chat.

I didn't care what they said, what they were talking about or even where they were going. I already had what I needed: my future warm introduction. As the conference chugged ahead for a few days, I made it my singular task to find ways to make Man B run into me on breaks, in the restroom, at snacks, etc. The only way this works is if you can predict where he is going and when he will be there so you can already be there and have him think he ran into you. I would only smile and offer a half-hearted wave to Man A. His reply smiles began to be warmer and often included a slight head-nod.

It was about the seventh or eighth day of the conference when I arranged to run into both Man A and Man B at another "members only" soiree in the conference hall. I brought over a tray filled with wine glasses. I put them down in front of Man B and said, "These are for you if you promise to quit following me around" and I smiled, laughed and patted him on the back and then I walked away. He called at me to come back, but I pointed to the table with the ladies and expressed the idea "what, and pass up on these hotties? No stinking way."

Then I beckoned him to come with me. He looked to Man A for permission and as soon as he got the smile from Man A indicating his approval, Man B trotted over to me. I took him to the table and became his instant wingman and we charmed those ladies (whose job it is to appear charmed by anyone) and gave him his choice of wines.

We bonded pretty easily. I helped him out to the taxi and asked him if he would consider skipping a part of the next day's conference and come with me into town for a

little mischief making. He was very eager to engage in some non-scientific experiments. That afternoon while we cruised around town having fun, I never asked him anything. We never talked about his work, his family, his interest or anything. I wanted him to be very comfortable with me so that he would drop his guard.

Whether it was coincidence, luck or an outright success, Man A asked if he could go with us the following night. I acted a bit apprehensive. I explained that if someone saw us together, he might catch some grief for hanging around the American. And if the wrong person saw me with him, they would want some kind of report and that is exactly what I wanted to avoid. I am on a secret vacation, I don't want to spend one minute writing some silly contact report that will sit in a file cabinet for years.

We agreed that it would be best if Man A didn't go with me and Man B tomorrow evening. The next evening, I laid it on heavy! Man B got the experience of his life. Everywhere we went, we took charge. We charmed the proprietors, the wait staff, our fellow customers and several wives of pissed off mini-men. He didn't want to go home. In his world, this was a once-in-a-life-time experience. I convinced him that tomorrow night would be even better.

The next day at the conference luncheon, Man A came and sat down with me, Man B and a few of our hottie-hostesses. Man B relived almost every moment from the previous night complete with wild embellishment and altered facts. I just agreed and let him ride that train all the way to glory town. Man A virtually insisted on going with us that evening. I looked at them and made them promise not to tell anyone, ever. I told them how I had cased the city before the conference and found some really interesting places we could go.

Of course, I had pre-selected the remote destinations and planned Surveillance Detection Routes and cover stops to get there. We agreed to a secret rendezvous at a spot that I had pre-selected on the Institutes campus. That location would allow us to slip through a damaged section of the stone perimeter fence and put us right where I had parked a rental car that was waiting for us. Yes, they had figured out that I was an American Spy, but instead of them being my targets, they genuinely felt that we had become friends and I was going to take them on a spy-like adventure. And I did.

It was even more fun with the three of us. Again, I didn't ask any questions and if they brought up some comment that could be related to their work, employer, etc. I reminded them that I would take us all home if they screwed up this vacation for me. We laughed incessantly. About 3am, Man A decided he wanted to drive my rental car to the next destination. I had been doing all of the driving because I don't drink alcohol and was the designated driver. But, I wasn't on this mission to keep my targets morally straight, I wanted them to fall in love with me.

He got behind the wheel and in no more than two hundred yards, we wound up on the pedestrian path instead of the road. I kept telling him, but he ignored me. We were all laughing so hard as he tried to avoid the trash cans, benches, sign posts, etc.

He actually thought he was on the road and kept cursing the idiot who would put benches in the road. Man B must have been about to the point of peeing in his own pants until Man A drove us right into a pedestrian barricade. No injuries, drunk Man A was only driving at about eight miles per hour so that he could thread through all of the obstacles on the walking path.

We fell out of the car laughing. Man A, reverting to his more natural state of conservatism and in a bit of a panic asked "what we were going to do?". I simply said, lets drag it onto the road and keep going. For those of you not familiar with European cars, just know that two very drunk men and one secret agent can drag one of those tin cans just about anywhere.

We did it and clanked all the way back to the hotel. The next morning, none of us could look at each other without laughing. The conference was coming to a close. Many of the attendees were already packed and leaving for the airport. And that was the case for my target Man A (and Man B). But, before he left to go to the airport, Man A hugged me goodbye and slipped me a scrap of paper. It had a phone number and a mailing address. Nothing else. He asked me if I would be willing to give him my contact info. I was happy to do so since the Agency had already provided me with a fully back-stopped set of contact info. But as we shook hands, he leaned forward and whispered a name, an adversarial country, the specific institute and a peculiar phrase, something like "Senegal Red". It didn't mean much to me.

When I got back stateside, I headed for the secret rendezvous where a blacked-out vehicle would pick me up and get me into the Agency unseen. When I got into the conference room, we all sat down around the huge conference table and I shared a brief version of trip. At the end, I shared the info about exchanging contact info. I concluded with providing them the information that he whispered into my ear.

At my mention of the peculiar phrase, almost everyone in the room looked and behaved stunned. It turns out that they were all aware of an imminent cyber-attack on one or more of America's infrastructure systems. It just so happened that the very individual that he outed to me and the exact institute for which he worked, were near the top of our cybersecurity threat matrix. While the information that he provided to us was very useful, it was really just a kernel that helped the cyber teams prepare and execute preemptive maneuvers and even design failsafe protocols.

There was a massive cyber-attack on our power grid about three days later. The combined work of many technical experts within and without the US Government colluded to thwart the malicious assault before it even began. It was only a few days later that I was summoned into the Deputy Director, R&D's office. He had a few of his senior leadership and a couple of his experts with him. He told me that Man A had initiated some very rudimentary communications using our pre-established low-observable communications plan and that his hostility towards America had ratcheted down.

They had quickly upgraded his communications to full covert comms. I later learned that using his covert comms, he had told one of our senior cryptographers that getting to know an American and become friends with him made it virtually impossible for him to not warn America about planned attacks against our citizenry. Americans became people to him and not just power-hungry fools bent on world domination.

Did Man A help us keep our lights from going out? Frankly, I am not sure. But, I do know intelligence officers do their best every day to protect our national infrastructure. However, since foreign adversaries are often targeting our power grid, please make sure you are prepared for an extended period of lights out. This means generators, batteries, propane heaters and stoves and plenty of food to cook on these stoves too.