

COLUMN

Momentum Project

Change your seat

"Most people sit and expect life to come to them. Change your seat and you will come to life."

by **David J. Pollay**

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I think everyone in life should be known for at least one quote. I think I finally have mine. I'd like to share it with you, but first let me tell you a story.

Seven years ago I was in downtown San Francisco attending a three-day leadership conference. I had driven up from the Bay Area that morning. I was a senior director at Yahoo! at the time.

I arrived a few minutes early and there must have been one hundred people in the room. Lots of people had already taken their seats, and others were drinking coffee at the back of the room. But, all had staked a claim on a seat for the day. I grabbed a cup of coffee and headed for the only open seat in the room. It was four tables from the front, and the second seat from the left.

Like most seminars, the conference leader had us work in small groups, giving us a chance to meet the people around us. The session was good, and it was interesting to talk with the people around our table.

The second day of the conference I decided to leave the house a little earlier. I remembered that the day before, there was only one seat left when I arrived, so I figured I'd get there a little early so I could sit in another part of the room. The roads were pretty clear that morning, so I arrived about 30 minutes ahead of time.

I went up to the right side of the room this time, and put my bag down on the third table from the front, fourth seat to the right of the middle aisle. I thought it would be a good idea to meet some new people and get their perspective on what we were learning. I headed back for coffee.

I started chatting with different people as you do at conferences like this. With about fifteen minutes or so before the start of the session, I noticed that people seemed to be heading back to the same seats they were in yesterday. I thought it was a bit curious, but I kept to my coffee and conversation. Then with about five minutes to go I noticed that everyone I had sat next to yesterday was sitting in the same spot. A few minutes later I headed to my seat, sat down, and looked around. And guess what? Everyone in the room was in the same seat as they were on day one, that is, except two people: me, and a very unhappy young lady who was sitting in my seat from the day before!

Out of 100 people, I was the only one who changed his seat on purpose!

As I planned, I met very interesting people around my new table. I had another good day.

Day three comes and I stick with my plan from the day before; I leave early. This time traffic is pretty bad; I get caught in a bumper to bumper jam that eats up all my “arrive early” time.

With about five minutes to go I run up the hotel stairs and turn into our meeting room. And what do I see? Everyone in the room is back in the same seat they chose on day one, including the unhappy young woman from yesterday, who was smiling at me as I settled into my original seat. She had the grin of victory all over her face. I couldn't believe it! Everyone was so proud of themselves for keeping their original seat!

It was at that moment I learned something about most people. People seem to enjoy staying in the same seat. They don't like change. People would rather give up trying new things for the comfort of what they know.

So now it's time for my big quote. Here it is.

“Most people sit and expect life to come to them. I say, change”

your seat and you will come to life.”

Be willing to change your perspective. Be open to new ideas. Be interested in other people. Move around.

The most successful people I know are constantly challenging themselves. They talk to people with different ideas. They try new things. Unfortunately, a lot of people avoid exploring. They're like the guy who once told me in New York City, "I never eat below 14th street!" Can you imagine living in New York and excluding Greenwich Village, Soho, and Tribeca from your options?! A lot of people do this type of thing in life. They limit themselves.

So my question to you today is, “where are you sitting?” Better than that, “are you going to change your seat?”



David J. Pollay is the founder of the Momentum Project, an organization whose mission is to help leaders and their organizations build and sustain powerful momentum to achieve their goals. The promise of The Momentum Project is to enable leaders to mobilize their teams to reach levels of

performance never before achieved. The Momentum Project fulfills this promise by teaching leaders how to put into practice the principles of Strengths-Based Positive Psychology Leadership Development™.

David has led, spoken to and trained thousands of people in his career, and has personally managed hundreds. David's roles have ranged from chief executive officer to sports-team captain. He is best known for his focus on developing and utilizing the best talents and strengths of his employees and those in his client organizations.

David is launching the Young International Leaders Organization (YILO) in Applied Positive Psychology in 2006. YILO is dedicated to bringing the cutting-edge research of Positive Psychology to young leaders worldwide. YILO's membership will include leaders from every country around the globe. YILO's vision is to help Young Leaders shape a world in which strengths are valued and applied, and lesser strengths are overcome through partnership. Martin Seligman Ph.D, Fox Leadership Professor of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, former president of the American Psychological Association, and co-founder of Positive Psychology; and Christopher Peterson, Ph.D, world-renown Strengths Researcher, author, and professor at the University of Michigan; and Karen Reivich Ph.D, acclaimed Resilience Researcher, author, and teacher at the University of Pennsylvania, are three outstanding YILO advisors.

Prior to founding the Momentum Project and his work with YILO, David was the director of Learning and Development at Yahoo! Inc. in Sunnyvale, California. David introduced and led Yahoo!'s first management development program, working with the president and chief financial officer. He was well known for helping leaders and managers increase their performance through focusing and developing their employees' talents. David's team, known as the Yahoo! Talent Channel, was responsible for providing training and new-hire orientation to employees worldwide.

David joined Yahoo! in May, 1998 to initiate and develop Yahoo!'s Customer Care organization. David was successful as an early advocate for internet companies to provide outstanding service to their customers. Reporting to the president, he rapidly built a team of more than 130 associates worldwide, with an infrastructure capable of supporting customer service via email and telephone in more than 10 languages. His team responded to nearly one million email and phone calls per month. Known company-wide for developing talent, David helped promote forty of his Customer care associates into roles in marketing, sales, legal, and operations.

Prior to Yahoo!, David directed the Atlanta-based customer service center for Global Payment Systems, a subsidiary of National Data Corporation in Atlanta. He served in leadership roles at MasterCard International in New York, including director of planning and administration for MasterCard's Automated Point of Sale Program (MAPP), the most profitable division of MasterCard. David was also president and chief executive officer of AIESEC in the United States, the largest student-run business exchange program and management development organization in the world. He was recently inducted into the AIESEC International Alumni Hall of Fame at a ceremony in Agra, India.

David is a graduate of Yale University with a B.A. in Economics. He is currently pursuing his Masters in Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) at the University of Pennsylvania, the only post-graduate program of its kind in the world. He was recently chosen to serve as the first president of the MAPP alumni association. David directs the Momentum Leadership Program at the Village Academy, an inner-city elementary school in Delray Beach, Florida. The program teaches the principles of Positive Psychology Leadership Development to emerging leaders in the 6th and 7th grades.

David resides in Florida with his wife Dawn and their two young daughters, Eliana and Ariela. Email David your comments and stories at David@TheMomentumProject.com or call 561.265.1165
