



How to Jumpstart Anything

A strong start makes success more likely—in life, love, or business. Learn to hit the ground running

BY STEVE CALECHMAN • ILLUSTRATIONS BY ISTVAN BANYAI

SPIELBERG KNOWS IT. SO DO SPRINGSTEEN and Federer. Successful men know that a strong start boosts your chance of success, whether you're editing a movie, opening a show, or playing a match. It works on a larger scale, too—look at Mark Zuckerberg. He focused early on nailing the principles of his little Web startup, and that turned out pretty well. Starting strong requires assessing the situation, planning wisely, and setting a tone. Not a film director or rock star? Doesn't matter: Everyday life presents lots of starting points, and each offers an opportunity to excel. Start here.

A party conversation with strangers

Music is playing, right? Ask your new acquaintances about their first concert experiences. That's a double-hulled icebreaker of a question: The answers require no thought and come with smiles and laughs. The stories reveal personalities, what makes people happy, whether they can laugh at themselves ("Kenny Rogers. I blame my parents"), or what their passions are. You may even touch off a deep discussion of all things Journey. Jeff Bostic, M.D., a child psychiatrist at Massachusetts General Hospital, says the stories will probably be offered with abandon. "People will be less self-censoring, since others may have picked the concert," Dr. Bostic says. "It's the jumping-off point that can be anywhere between fun and funny."

Building credit

If you have no credit history, don't wait to start building your "bragging rights," as Dayana Yochim, a consumer finance expert at the Motley Fool, puts it. Apply for a credit card through your current bank or credit union—they know you and want to keep your business, she says. (Ignore random mail solicitations, or T-shirt offers at the ballpark.) Use the card at least once a month, and pay at least the minimum—ideally the whole balance. If you have credit but it's shaky, focus on timely payments and chop down the balance of your most maxed-out card to less than 35 percent of your credit line for that card. Six months of discipline will begin to establish a responsible pattern. Don't apply for new cards, but don't close existing accounts, either—that'll shrink your available resources and send up a flare in creditland. And keep using your cards. "You want to have a pulse in the credit world. No news is bad news," Yochim says.

A tennis match

Keep balls in play to find your rhythm and to discover what your opponent can't handle. Resist the temptation to try risky winning shots—they provide little information. "The

first 10 minutes sets tactics for the rest of the match," says Mats Wilander, a seven-time Grand Slam winner. On your serve, let loose on the first two points when you're most relaxed. When you have a lead, throw in an off-speed serve. You can afford to lose the point; whatever happens, you've planted doubt. When receiving serve, show different looks to see what he does. This testing helps you decide what to feed him the rest of the way. If that doesn't jibe with your favorite shots, fine: "It's not about feeling good," Wilander says. "It's about making him feel bad about his game."

A love note

Steal. Open with a line from Shakespeare, or the Avett Brothers, or Ray LaMontagne. Borrowing is an honorable device in the quest for nakedness. Bonus points for borrowing from someone you both like, or for using a line that relates directly to your romance. After your pilfered preface, follow up with the phrase "Let's go . . ." David Lehman, Ph.D., a poet and a coordinator of the New School Writing Program, says it leads to action: "It's a conspiracy of two. 'Let's go' is one of the great American sentences." Another winner is "You are . . ." It puts the focus on her. Then add affectionate

details: the way she eats breakfast, laughs, is always 12 minutes late. Being specific, Lehman says, means "I've been paying attention, and I distinguish you from others."

Your home movie

Patience, Mr. Scorsese. Don't bring the camera out at the start of an event; people freeze up. Wait until they're looser, and you'll increase your chances of capturing a grabber of an opening shot—a vomiting child, a tipsy aunt. Remain unobtrusive and avoid experimenting, says Sacha Gervasi, director of the acclaimed documentary *Anvil! The Story of Anvil*. Go easy on the zoom and close-ups; medium-range shots have a more natural, connected feel. Vary what and who you're shooting. Do all this and keep the running time under 5 minutes. "Understand that no one gives a damn, so try to make it interesting for other people," Gervasi says.

A therapy session

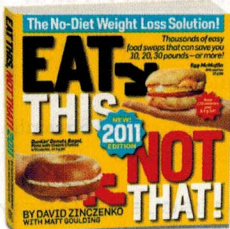
Dive right into whatever ticked you off during the week. (It worked for Tony Soprano . . . sort of.) The therapist will hear your frustration with, say, morning traffic, and help you find what's underneath. Small issues can reveal patterns, and recognizing those patterns can

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
let's talk turkey



Men'sHealth

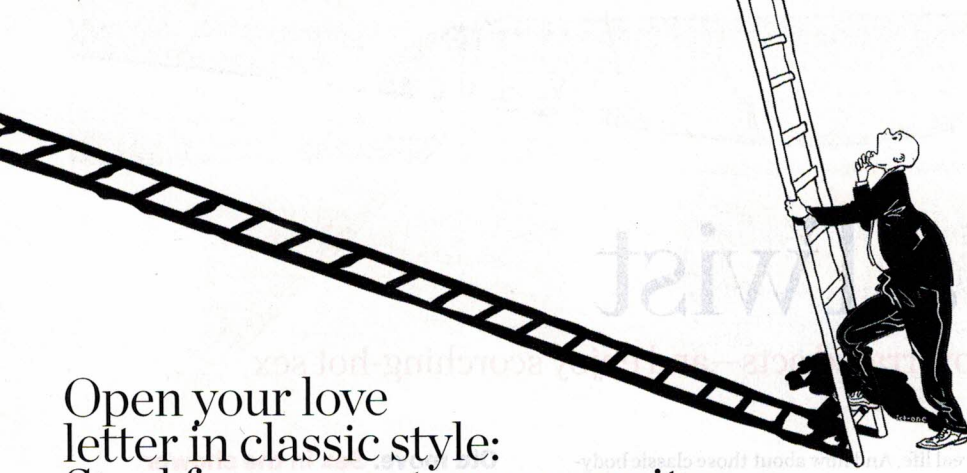


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Open your love letter in classic style: Steal from a poet or songwriter.

lead to relief. "One of the main goals in therapy is to learn more effective ways to deal with our daily stress," says Emanuel Maidenberg, Ph.D., an associate clinical professor of psychiatry at UCLA. This approach can work with your wife or girlfriend, too—whether it's you or her doing the talking.

Your fantasy football draft

Your first three picks: running back, wide receiver, running back, says Sam Hendricks, author of *Fantasy Football Guidebook*. Find young, proven studs who'll rack up the majority of your points. Resist big-name quarterbacks—wait until four or five are off the board

or you'll be overpaying. Last season, the difference between the first- and 10th-rated passers was only 50 points. With that foundation, find sleepers in the middle-late rounds: former high-draft-pick receivers in their second to fourth years; a number two guy becoming the go-to target; receivers for any 4,000-yard passers. Fill out depth with running backs—you can't be overstocked.

A round of golf

Spend 30 minutes on the range and putting green to purge nongolf thoughts. "People are always too wound up when they go to the first tee," says Matt Kilgariff, an instructor at the

Butch Harmon School of Golf. Start with a half dozen lag putts to gauge distance control; you'll face this shot early. Then sink some 3-footers to experience success, bunker shots to judge sand quality, and pitching wedges and 7-irons to fully loosen up. Finish your warmup with the club you'll tee off with—and consider pulling a 3-wood instead of a driver if the first hole is under 400 yards. Shorter and straighter may lead to an opening par, and that's a big confidence booster, Kilgariff says.

The office meeting

You're directing a taut drama: Think *The King's Speech*, with less stammering. If it's a strategy session, tell the group what's at stake for the company to give them a reason to act collectively, says Patrick Lencioni, a business consultant and the author of *Death by Meeting*. If it's a staff meeting, give everyone 20 seconds to share their top priorities, and within 3 minutes everyone will be engaged and seeing the bigger picture. And encourage good-natured disagreement, Lencioni says. Creativity can bubble up and everyone will leave feeling invested. "At the heart of every great movie is conflict," Lencioni says. "It's the same with a meeting. There should be conflict and tension." ■

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