

Louis L'Amour, American writer, said, "Some say opportunity knocks only once, but that's not true. Opportunity knocks all the time, but you have to be ready for it. If the chance comes, you must have the equipment to take advantage of it."

Well, I can tell you one thing, you've got the equipment! I've served as a full-time faculty member at The Art Institutes International Minnesota since 2008 and during my time here I have been privileged to witness so many amazing students who take advantage of every opportunity that is presented to them. I'd like to share some of those stories with you today. In fact, if you don't mind, I'm gonna do a little bragging about you guys!

Twice a year I teach a course which allows students to travel to the largest retail trade show in North America – MAGIC in Las Vegas. Of course, many of my stories need to stay in Vegas, but I've got one that's totally appropriate for today. As part of the course, students are required to build their professional network and secure appointments with vendors. Anna had the equipment to take advantage of this opportunity. She did her research and shot for the moon by sending an email directly to Joseph Roisman, Executive Vice President of Perry Ellis International, a \$940M company.

I love to encourage students by telling them, "If you ask respectfully and respect the answer, what's the worst that could happen?" In this case, Anna nailed it! She got the appointment for her group and Mr. Roisman agreed to meet with us. He was so impressed with our students on that trip. Joseph continues to meet with my classes every time we go to MAGIC.

I love it! No...I Gotta Have It! (That's my new approval scale, courtesy of Cold Stone Creamery – "Like It. Love It. Gotta Have It." Have you every had the "Gotta Have It"? You gotta have like 12 friends help you – that thing is huge!) So, I "Gotta Have It". Anna took total advantage of the opportunity, which benefitted not only her and our class, but the entire Ai campus community.

Maxwell Maltz, motivational author wrote, "What is opportunity, and when does it knock? It never knocks. You can wait a whole lifetime, listening, hoping, and you will hear no knocking. None at all. You are opportunity, and you must knock on the door leading to your destiny. You prepare yourself to recognize opportunity, to pursue and seize opportunity."

I'm aware of the growing necessity to prepare students for lifelong learning outside of the classroom and therefore enjoy providing students with unique real world opportunities to practice their skills. Sarah is another example of a student who had the right equipment to take advantage of a great opportunity. Fleet Street, the manufacturers of Jessica Simpson Outerwear, partnered with my trends class. Students were required to forecast women's puffer coat trends at least one year out. Sarah's hard work and relentless research and validation allowed her to present a new idea to Jessica Simpson's people – the plaid puffer! To date, they had only offered solid colors to their customers. Let's jump to the end of the story - one year after Sarah presented her forecast to the Jessica Simpson Outerwear division - Macy's had a Jessica Simpson women's plaid puffer proudly displayed on their sales floor! And I heard it did really well for them.

Like it? Love it? Gotta have it, right?! Sarah's got a great interview story and I bet you've got a few too.

I share these stories with you today as testimony to your capabilities. So don't be intimidated by the future. Each and every one of you has already successfully knocked on opportunity's door. You've decided to invest in yourself with a college education. The latest U.S. Census statistics reflects an increase in Americans who are taking advantage of the opportunity to go to college and complete a degree – and your one of 'um!

Today we celebrate your success. Congratulations! You are college graduates! I ask you, "So, what's your next opportunity knocking?"

Thank you.