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Section 1: A summary of the main points in this episode

1. Small talk is much more than talking about the weather — it's about building relationships.
2. Good small talk can lead to friendships, jobs and unexpected opportunities.
3. You don't need perfect English to connect with people.
4. Confidence comes from practice, not from waiting until you're ready.
5. Starting conversations can be as simple as introducing yourself, making an observation or giving a compliment.
6. The key to good conversation is genuine curiosity about other people.
7. Look for shared interests and topics that people are passionate about.
8. Listen carefully, ask follow-up questions and share things about yourself.
9. Be sensitive to the situation and respect other people's boundaries.
10. The real goal is to make people feel comfortable, valued and interested in continuing the relationship.

The overall message is that being a good conversationalist isn't about knowing the most impressive words or always having something clever to say. It's about having the confidence to approach people, the

curiosity to take an interest in them, and the social skills to turn simple interactions into meaningful connections.

Section 2: Phrase Bank

Here are some things you can actually say when you find yourself standing next to a stranger with a cup of coffee.

Starting a conversation

- Hi, I don't think we've met. I'm ...
- How's it going?
- How's your day going?
- How's your week been?
- Is this your first time here?
- Have you been here before?
- How are you finding it so far?
- What brings you here?
- How do you know [name]?
- Do you mind if I join you?
- It's pretty busy in here, isn't it?
- This is a nice place, isn't it?
- I wasn't sure what to expect, actually.

Easy questions that don't feel too intrusive

- What do you do?
- Whereabouts are you from?
- Do you live around here?
- Have you lived here long?
- Are you here for work or pleasure?
- Are you working on anything interesting at the moment?
- Have you got much planned for the weekend?
- Are you doing anything after this?

- Have you seen any interesting talks?
- How did you get into that?
- What's that like?
- How are you finding it?

Showing interest

- Oh, really?
- No way!
- That sounds interesting.
- That sounds great.
- That must be nice.
- That must be difficult.
- I can imagine.
- I know what you mean.
- That makes sense.
- Fair enough.
- Right, I see.
- Go on.
- What happened?
- How did that go?
- What was that like?

Following up

- How come?
- In what way?
- What do you mean?
- So how did that happen?
- And how long have you been doing that?
- What got you interested in that?
- Do you enjoy it?
- Would you recommend it?

- Is that something you've always wanted to do?
- What about you?

Picking up on something they said

- You mentioned that ...
- You were saying that ...
- You said you're from ...
- You said you work in ...
- Going back to what you said about ...
- That reminds me ...
- Speaking of [topic] ...
- Actually, you mentioned [topic] — ...

Finding and marking common ground

- Me too!
- Same here.
- So do I.
- Neither do I.
- I'm exactly the same.
- I know exactly what you mean.
- I've had that too.
- I've been there.
- That's funny — I was just saying the same thing.
- We've got that in common, then.
- It's a small world!

Sharing something about yourself

- Actually, I ...
- I'm a bit like that myself.
- In my case, ...
- I had a similar experience once.

- That happened to me too.
- I've never done that, actually.
- I'd love to try that.
- I'm not really into that myself, but ...
- The closest I've come to that is ...
- That reminds me of something that happened to me ...

Keeping the conversation moving

- Anyway, ...
- So, ...
- By the way, ...
- Actually, ...
- Speaking of which, ...
- On a completely different note, ...
- That reminds me ...
- Before I forget ...
- So what about you?
- What have you been up to lately?

Bringing another person into the conversation

- Have you two met?
- Do you know [name]?
- This is [name].
- We were just talking about ...
- [Name] was just telling me about ...
- You two should talk — you've got a lot in common.
- What do you think, [name]?
- Have you ever done that, [name]?

When you don't understand

- Sorry, I didn't quite catch that.

- Sorry, what was that?
- Could you say that again?
- What do you mean by ...?
- I'm not sure I know that expression.
- Sorry, I've completely lost you!
- So, do you mean ...?

Dealing with an awkward silence

- So, what brings you here?
- Anyway, how are you finding it?
- So, have you got much planned for the weekend?
- By the way, where are you from?
- I meant to ask you ...
- Oh, actually, there was something I wanted to ask you ...

And importantly, **you don't necessarily have to fill every silence.** A few seconds of silence isn't a conversational emergency.

Reacting when you need time

- Hmm, good question.
- Let me think.
- That's a tricky one.
- I've never really thought about that.
- Off the top of my head, ...
- I'm not sure, actually.
- It depends, really.

Politely changing the subject

- Anyway, ...
- By the way, ...
- Speaking of which, ...

- On another note, ...
- That reminds me ...
- Before I forget ...
- Changing the subject slightly, ...

Ending the conversation naturally

- Well, I'd better be off.
- Anyway, I should probably get going.
- I'll let you get back to it.
- I won't keep you.
- I'm going to grab another drink.
- I'd better go and say hello to a few people.
- It was really nice talking to you.
- It was lovely to meet you.
- Great to meet you.
- Hopefully I'll see you around.
- Maybe I'll see you later.
- Enjoy the rest of your evening.
- Good luck with [the presentation / new job / project].
- Take care.

Creating the possibility of meeting again

- Are you on LinkedIn?
- Shall we swap numbers?
- Do you want to exchange details?
- It'd be good to stay in touch.
- We should grab a coffee sometime.
- Let me know how you get on.
- Maybe we can continue this conversation another time.
- Hopefully I'll see you at the next one.

Section 3: Full Episode Transcript

Introduction

Hello listeners, welcome back to Luke's English Podcast. Here's a brand new episode for you. Let me introduce it for you.

And I've decided to set myself a little challenge in the introduction to this episode. The challenge is that I'm going to try to do this introduction with no editing at all, and also no reading from a script. Okay, I've got a few notes written on a piece of paper in front of me.

But other than that, I'm going to try to kind of improvise this entire introduction. No editing, no script. Let's see if I can do it.

So let me tell you about this episode. Are you ready? Are you ready to listen to this? And you're thinking, yes, Luke, of course I'm ready. That's why I pressed play on my podcast player of choice or YouTube or whatever.

Okay, good, good. I'm glad that you're ready and you're up for this. So in this episode, you're going to hear a conversation about small talk, a big conversation about small talk, a big talk about small talk.

Yes, I made a sort of joke there. I'm sure you're very impressed. A big talk about small talk.

Right. So what is small talk? And what can you expect from this episode? Small talk basically refers to those moments when you have to make polite, informal conversation with people. It's probably, it could be strangers, like people you don't really know or acquaintances, people you know, but you're not really sort of fully friends with them or co-workers or something.

Generally, we consider small talk to be making polite, informal conversation with people in slightly awkward moments. For example, you're standing, waiting for a lift or you're standing and you've got coffee, it's coffee break or something. And you need to kind of fill the silence with some form of conversation.

That's what we consider small talk to be. OK. Yes.

Now, we use it to break the ice. We use it to prevent awkwardness. We use it to try to make situations a bit more comfortable.

Now, maybe that's cultural. So I don't know where you are, but perhaps in your culture, small talk is not really the done thing. I don't know.

You might have a different cultural perspective on this. But certainly in the UK, it is normal and it's polite to kind of have some level of conversation with the people around you rather than just standing in silence or sitting in silence, staring at your phone. I mean, it depends on the situation, of course, in a doctor's waiting room.

You don't strike up. You probably wouldn't strike up conversation. So why are you here? Why are you here? How sick are you? What's wrong with you then? You know, we probably wouldn't do that.

But anyway, it is generally the done thing to kind of have a bit of polite chat. So there's one question. Is this something that is normal in your culture or not? How do you feel about those moments? How do you feel about doing small talk in English? Are you OK with it or does it make you feel nervous? Does it make you want to run away, run screaming from the building? How do you feel about small talk in your first language? Do you feel like you're totally fine with that in your first language? What is it that makes small talk potentially difficult, especially

difficult if English isn't your first language? What's the issue there? Is it because you feel like you don't have the words, you don't have all the right words, that you don't have sufficient control over grammar and pronunciation, that you feel that your English is not ready yet? Is that the problem? It's a lack of vocabulary and lack of control? Or is there maybe some other factor at work here which might be preventing you from feeling totally comfortable about doing small talk? Also, is small talk just totally kind of pointless, really? I mean, is it just to fill the silence? Is it sort of meaningless or can small talk actually be a great opportunity to open the door to something else, right? Small talk might just be a starting point, a foundation for something much more interesting, much more enriching for your life.

For example, an opportunity to build friendships or to develop your business network, to form fruitful business partnerships, or simply just the opportunity to have an interesting conversation with someone that you don't really know very well. So these are all questions that I'd like you to consider, and also specifically that idea of how do you initiate a conversation with someone that you don't know? What is involved in your approach, your mindset for doing that? Confidence. What is confidence, really? Is confidence just a thing you have or don't have, or is it something you can develop? And to what extent is confidence a question of your mindset and your approach to things in general? What are the benefits of stepping outside your comfort zone? And even if it's a little bit awkward, even if you feel like your English isn't perfect, what are the benefits of stepping outside of your comfort zone just a little bit, even just a little bit? What are the benefits of doing that? And what can you learn about the right approach to engaging in small talk with other people in English from this episode? I think there are a lot of things to get from this episode.

It promises to be an enriching, enlightening and entertaining episode. I really believe that. I think it's a great episode.

I'm joined in this one by Ray Adam, making his third appearance on the podcast. I think it's his third appearance. Most recently, he was on the podcast talking about debating skills in English.

I don't know if you heard that, but it was a great episode, and Ray brought a lot to the conversation in terms of advice and strategies and methods and approaches for having discussions, having arguments and debates with people in English. I think it was a really useful episode. So, Ray is back.

If you don't know, Ray Adam is an English teacher from Glasgow in Scotland. So, Ray does have a relatively mild Scottish accent, which is a fantastic thing. I'd like you to try to notice his accent as you listen to this.

I think it's really important to hear a diverse range of different accents in English. You've got to hear different accents. You've got to hear English spoken in a variety of different ways.

It's really, really important. The more different accents and things that you hear in English, the better. I mean, not that Ray's accent is particularly strong.

It's not. It's not really a big deal. But I did want to just flag it up just so that you can notice.

Ah, okay. All right. I see Ray pronounces that slightly differently.

Ah, okay. That's because he's from Glasgow. Right.

So, that's something great. Also, yeah, so Ray, he is an online teacher mostly. You can find more information about him by following the links in the description.

You'll find a link to his Instagram there. You will also find a link to Ray's Preply profile, where you can book one-to-one English lessons with him if you want to. You can also find a link to his online school website, which is called Elevate English.

That's where, if you want to, you can access his courses and join live group sessions to practise English with him and develop your soft skills. He's got courses about small talk, about debating skills, about using humour in English, and about storytelling in English. So, he's spent a lot of time working on these things and building courses in soft skills in these areas.

So, he's got plenty of things to share and lots of useful things to say, and also lots of little stories. The episode is kind of filled with various little anecdotes, and it's great. I think that Ray's approach to telling us about these things is really interesting and entertaining.

And he kind of did most of the talking in this episode, which was great. It was for a change on my own podcast. I was able to sit back a little bit and do plenty of listening, and you can do that too.

So, I hope you're ready to do listening. Yes, you are. Okay, good.

Right then. Well, that's that. There, I did it.

I did my introduction without any editing, I think, and without having to read from a script. So, that was good. That was a little challenge for myself, and I'm glad that I did that rather than just writing this out and then reading it from the script, which somehow feels like cheating.

I don't know why. Anyway, enough of my rambling. Let's get into this conversation.

This is a big talk about small talk with Ray Adam, and here we go.

Conversation

People have this massive misconception about small talking. Also, the word misconception, it's a C1 word for anyone who doesn't know, which means a misunderstanding.

People have this massive misunderstanding about small talk, and that misconception is they think that it's arbitrary. Arbitrary is another word maybe people don't know, which just means they think it doesn't really matter. The type of small talk a lot of people have is they don't want to sit in awkward silence.

So, instead, they have an awkward conversation, questions like, oh, the weather's quite nice, isn't it? And they have these little filler conversations which don't really achieve anything. Yes, trivial. Yeah, trivial is a great adjective to describe it.

The small talking that I would like to discuss here today is actually a lot wider than that. What I'd like to discuss today is how you can start a conversation with someone you don't know, someone you hardly know, or someone you would like to know. How do you, therefore, get into a meaningful conversation, which is an enjoyable or edifying for all people involved? Also, edifying, another C1 word, which means like uplifting and intellectual or moral or positive in some way.

So, how do you have these positive conversations that people want to be a part of? Then how do you conclude that by exchanging contact

information and setting up interactions for future conversations? Because when these skills are used correctly, they should be used to create bridges with people. These skills should be used to open opportunities and create friendships. I've mentioned before, like, I have courses on many subjects.

I have a course on how to ask job interviews. I have a course on how to be funny in English. I've got a course on how to debate in English, which was the subject of our last discussion.

And then I've also got the one on small talking. And all of these skills, like, they weren't natural for me. I needed to learn them and practise them myself and slowly become good at them myself before I was ever able to imagine teaching it or coming on a podcast and talking about it.

And of all of the skills that I've learned, none of them have been as impactful on my life as being a good small talker. And if students learn the skills that we talk about today, they're going to be able to enter conversations easily with people, make new friends. I've known people to use these skills to meet their spouse.

I've known people to use these skills even to meet and work with famous people. I've known people to use these skills to get higher salary jobs. So it's not just the conversation you might have at the bus stop.

It's the way that we create relationships with each other. So hopefully in today's discussion, we'll talk about how to do every step of that in some depth. And hopefully we can cover some stories of really good small talk and how it's helped people and compare that to a terrible small talk and what things people should avoid.

And yet hopefully by the time people leave this podcast today, they're going to feel a lot more comfortable to get into conversations with people. Absolutely. It's always important, I think, when we're talking about this sort of thing to give context and to give examples of situations.

So I was just thinking about different contexts in which we do small talk. So let me just sort of mention some of those things. So listeners, you can just imagine these situations, right? And how do you feel about these situations? And how would you deal with these situations? So for example, you've started a new job and you're in the office on your first day, or maybe it's your first week and there are other people sitting around.

And for some reason, nobody has introduced you to the rest of the team. So you're just sort of sitting there, maybe in an open plan office, people are working, maybe it's sort of lunchtime or it's about to be lunchtime. And it's a bit awkward.

You haven't been introduced to everybody yet. So there's that. And you feel like you should probably get to know everyone.

There's one. Another one, you're at a business conference, let's say, one of those big meetings where there are different talks going on in different parts of the building. So you're at a conference and people are standing around.

It's between talks. It's coffee break time. People are just standing around with coffee in their hands.

And you've got like maybe a bunch of business cards in your pocket. Another one, you've gone to a yoga retreat, let's say. I mean, it could be anything really.

But let's say you've gone to a yoga retreat with your partner and you end up in a group with about eight other people who will be spending the next day or next week with you. So there's another one. It's your first day learning English at a language school in London.

It's break time and your classmates are hanging around in the coffee room and everybody is new. You don't know anyone yet. Or you've been invited to a party by a friend and you don't really know a lot of people.

So those are just some situations. Or, you know, one that strikes me, that happens to me all the time, is that I arrive at work and I work in a fairly large building. You know, there's like the school where I work and there's a few other sort of institutions that have their offices there.

And I arrive and I get to the lift and I press the button and there's like a few other people standing around and we have to spend like two or three minutes either waiting for the lift or being in the lift together. Well, everyone just pulls out the phone and then looks down at it and that's the way they follow silence. We all feel bad when we do that, though, right? We all know we shouldn't just get our phones out and just hide in our phones.

And so there's a decision that we have to make. It's like, should I say something or should I just bury my head in my phone? So there's lots of different situations. You mentioned the kind of, maybe the more professional side of things, which is using small talk as a way to network and to meet people and build relationships.

You know, people, it's not different in the business setting. It's not different in the general setting. What we're doing here is we're making and building relationships.

Once you know these techniques, you could use it anywhere with anyone. What people should understand after this is how to build relationships, how to have meaningful conversations. And like, you know, you're going to follow, whether it's business or whether it's general, you're going to follow a same type of trajectory.

You're going to have an introduction. You're going to say something to initiate the conversation. You're going to ask the right questions to get in a conversation, which is meaningful and enjoyable.

You're going to exchange contact information and you're going to try and lead this on so it has future interactions, which either lead to friendship or it leads to opportunities in any sense. But it's about being able to go places and create positive impacts and influence on people. So they want to continue talking to us.

You mentioned a lot of really great places. I mean, small talk can happen even, you know, especially for the students listening to this, because I'm guessing a lot of the students who are listening, they're probably, many are not in their home country. Many of them have moved country or they're in a new job or a new city.

But even like me being here in my home city, constantly when I go out, I'm being exposed to people that I don't know. Like if you think when you leave the house, majority of the people that you're actually seeing are people you don't know. So there's plenty of opportunities in every situation to use these skills to network and to make friends and to widen your community and your network.

Yes, absolutely. You also mentioned earlier that sort of potentially meaningless or trivial kind of small talk, which is maybe where you see your neighbour, you know, you're taking out the bins and your

neighbour is there and you, you know, you kind of just say filling the silence, which I think is also a really important thing to do. But that's an interesting sort of cultural one as well.

And we'll come on to the sort of more professional things that you mentioned, but the culture of small talk and different countries and different cultures, I think have a different way of thinking about these moments. Sure. I mean, see those things where like, even if, you know, I'm saying to use this professionally or to use it personally, or in any case, you're still going to have these cases where you bump into these people in the stairwell or you bump into these people at the left, and that's not going to be a big, long, meaningful conversation.

That's just going to be a, oh, how's it going? Da da da da da. And then you're out of the conversation. So we're still going to have these as like gap fillers, as snacks to the main course.

But the main course is how do we actually get into a real conversation with people and how do we make friends wherever we go? Can I mention some of those cultural differences? I was thinking that in my experience, you know, just from teaching people from around the world and meeting people from around the world, I think that there are some cultures that don't really do small talk in the way that is quite common in the UK, for example, you know, where the cliché is that we talk about the weather or we talk about things like that. I think in some cultures, that's not really the dumb thing. And some people might see it as kind of shallow or even fake or pointless to have those sort of conversations that don't seem to go anywhere.

But I think that it's still like, certainly in the English speaking world, I think it is really common to kind of just, you know, just fill the silence, not completely fill the silence, because silence can be fine. But it's just

a question of almost like politeness or just friendliness and establishing good relations. So it might appear to be pointless, but it certainly isn't.

It can be, as you say, the basis of a beautiful friendship or a fruitful, you know, business relationship or something like that. In terms of from the perspective of a language learner, small talk might seem very intimidating. And I say that from experience, because I live in France.

And obviously, you know, I have to speak French sometimes and the prospect of having to make conversation with someone I don't really know, you know, in French is very intimidating. And it makes me want to run screaming from the building, to be honest with So I do understand the reluctance that a learner of English might have when it comes to those sorts of situations. I think we shouldn't avoid them.

I think we should, you know, we should grasp the nettle, which is an interesting idiom. Listeners, if you don't know that one, a nettle is a kind of a wild plant that if you touch it, it stings you and it gives you a nasty little sting. But you can actually, if you grab the nettle quickly and confidently with your hand, it won't sting you, which is a funny thing.

So to grasp the nettle is to kind of like take initiative and to grab a situation and take control of a situation. And then you actually don't get hurt by it. So, you know, a sort of a proactive approach to these situations can actually be the best way to avoid, you know, being embarrassed or coming away from it, feeling bad about yourself or something like that.

Yeah. Yeah, 100%. Something just to add to that is even for native speakers in their own language, many of them struggle to small talk and to make friends.

Sometimes students come to me and they're like, teacher, you know, I'm in a new office, new job, or, you know, I'm struggling because they all speak English as a first language. And I think I need to learn some more idioms and phrasal verbs, then I can be confident to have conversations with people. And I'm like, all right.

I said, so see when you're in your native language, if you were to start a new job, or you were to see someone that you wanted to talk to in a coffee shop. So I'd say to them, if you saw someone in a coffee shop, you want to start a conversation with someone at the canteen or at work, the ability to go over to them to start a conversation, to develop a conversation in a sort of productive way. And to leave that conversation with this person being your friend, do you feel like you can do this quite well in your own language? And quite often they're like, actually, no.

So it's not just like a language issue. It's also a skill issue. And you mentioned about this anxiety, right? Anxiety is so good for you in moderate amounts.

So we all know this idea of homeostasis or the comfort zone, right? And some people tell you, but you need to go outside your comfort zone and live on the edge. But when you go too far out of your comfort zone, then you start to panic and there's anxiety and there's stress. And the first thing you want to do is return back into your comfort zone.

But I read it once in a book, it said the best relationship to have with your comfort zone is one foot in and one foot out. So you're constantly challenging your limits. There's something that I just want to bring up now because it's relevant, but I didn't actually come prepared to talk about this today.

So I'm going to struggle to explain it. But as test was done on highly successful people, and they found that a part of their brain was more

developed than ordinary people. And this part of their brain, which was more developed, was related to doing things that you don't want to do.

So for example, like maybe cold showers. It's funny I use this example because my students tell me to try it and I've never tried it and I don't want to try it. But people who have cold showers, like doing this stuff that you don't want to do, it develops that part of your brain.

Like anytime you feel anxiety and you don't want to do something, doing it actually develops. Like doing these things is good for you. And now some of these listeners might be thinking, I'm 100 million miles away from ever being able to start a conversation with a stranger, get into a conversation and leave with him being my friend.

That's too much for me. I say, okay, it might be too much for you. But what you can at least start by is walk down the street and ask someone for directions.

And then maybe the second or the third person you talk to, you can say, ask for directions and then tell them, I'm actually new in the city. Is there anything you recommend? And then once you start, because a lot of what anxiety is, is you're living in the future and you're having these preconceived notions of what the future might be. And the anxiety is painting the worst scenario possible.

But the way that we change beliefs is one, we need to, like there's a great book. I think I referenced it the last time I was on the podcast called the 33 rules of business in life. In the book, he talks about changing beliefs.

A lot of people don't change their beliefs because one, they don't believe in the source of the evidence, or they don't believe in the credibility of evidence. For example, if you go to your mother, for

example, and say, oh, I'm shy to talk to people. I think they won't like me.

And then your mother says, you're such a wonderful boy or a wonderful girl. They'll love you. Just do it.

That doesn't necessarily change our opinion because we know that our mother has a positive bias to us. But see, once you go out there and you start having a couple of conversations and people are like, oh, and they're actually positive and they're happy to help you or they're happy to get in a conversation, it totally changes your belief. Because before I was good at these techniques or before I applied them, I thought that what I was doing was a little bit weird or slightly strange or illegal.

I thought people would be giving me dirty looks or thinking that I'm an odd person. But since I got good at it and I've done it and I've now had experiences where I've met great friends from it, I'm now at a point where if I'm starting a conversation with a stranger, my thought is I'm not doing anything weird. I'm not doing anything illegal.

I'm simply here and I'm stretching out my hand to say, hey, I'm in this place. You're in this place. You seem like a nice person.

Let's talk about a couple of subjects and see if we vibe. And if we don't vibe, it's fine. And see if having these totally honest intentions to network and to get to know people, if someone thinks that you're weird or you're a bad person for that, I'd actually say they're the weird person.

What we're doing, we're not doing anything illegal or wrong here, right? So once you start getting outside your comfort zone and you start feeling more comfortable with what was uncomfortable yesterday and you start realising there's nothing to be afraid of, there's so many opportunities to be unlocked. Yeah, that's great. And yeah, you don't

need perfect English to make connections with people, right? And I've seen that many times, right? I've seen, I'll use examples of students again, right? So I've seen students of mine interacting in a language school in lessons, but also in social moments.

And I've seen students from advanced classes who absolutely aced their paper test when they first arrived at the school, their level checking test, because there'll probably be a paper test to test grammar and vocab and then a spoken interview, you know? And they were the ones who've got brilliant grammar on paper and definitely have advanced English, but are absolutely appalling when it comes to building relationships with people. I remember one particular student, I won't name him or where he came from, but he was happy to announce to the class that he was an expert in international relations. And then over the course of the next two weeks, he alienated everyone in the class by being sort of cold, antisocial, unpleasant, you know, and it was quite stunning really to see how bad he was at social interactions.

Whereas I remember another student who was definitely in a sort of pre-intermediate level and he was incredible. It was just like the most gregarious person who, despite his relatively basic English, made such good friendships with the other students at the school, including a group of Chinese guys. He then did a business deal with these Chinese guys and ended up doing some sort of really successful contract with them.

It was actually quite impressive to observe it happening. So it's not about English, it's more about mindset approach and just the willingness to kind of make connections with people. I think there's something I just want to add to that, which is interesting.

When I was younger, I played guitar and I remember in the first podcast you and I ever did together, we spoke about it. You were a Telecaster

player and I was a Stratocaster player, right? And I spent years playing the guitar. And see, when I was playing in private, I was amazing.

When I was playing with my friends, I was amazing. The skills that I could do as a lead guitarist, the guitar solos I could do, all the effects pedals I had, I was something incredible. I could talk about it all day.

Then I remember one day I went on stage to perform. This was the first time I'd ever been on stage and anxiety was crippling. And see, after I came off the stage and people spoke to me about it, people came to me afterwards and were like, yeah, it was good, but you just need to practise guitar more.

And I thought, and I knew it wasn't correct, because at this point I'd already spent like four or five years practising the guitar. And I was like, what more can I practise before I feel confident on stage? And then afterwards, another guy went on the stage and he was playing an acoustic guitar and he was playing some very simple chord progression. It was like one of these songs.

It's like C, D, G, A minor, something like that. That was it, right? He was smiling. Everyone was, people were dancing.

The audience were singing along with him. People came to him afterwards like, wow, you're so good at the guitar. It's amazing.

And I was like, he's great at the guitar. So that was something quite eye-opening for me, because it's like, I realised, and you could make a comparison here to the C1 level learner, who on paper is great and has a great level of English and who has practised, but they're not feeling confident to have these small talking situations or interviews, and they think they need more vocabulary, more grammar. But then you get students at the B1 level, A2, B1, and they're just ready to talk.

So it's not just like, people are identifying that there's a problem, but they're prescribing the wrong solution. And even I, as a teacher of many years, I'm still a student of English. Regularly I hear words that I don't know, and I like to make an effort to learn them.

Sometimes there's, like, I hear someone make a really grammatically advanced sentence. I'm like, oh, I need to think about that for a second. And I'm like, oh, maybe I can turn that into a class.

But I'm still learning the English language. I wouldn't say I've mastered the English language by any stretch, but you don't need to. Because what is the job we're trying to do here? Are we trying to learn English to become better communicators, to open doors, to make friends, to travel? Or are we learning English to be perfect at English? Because if you're learning English to be perfect at English, then that's like a journey which is never going to come to an end.

Yeah, absolutely. And also sometimes the best, most effective English is the simple English. You know, sometimes the advanced approach is to keep it simple.

You know, once I told a friend of mine that I'm learning Arabic, and I'm pretty good at Arabic. And he said, you don't even speak English yet. And I was like, what do you mean I don't speak English? And then he made a sentence to me, which I had to write down.

And I didn't understand what that sentence meant. I'll tell you what the sentence was. He said, notwithstanding the obfuscation prevalent in contemporary discourse, a percipacious interlocutor cognisant of the multifaceted paradigms can elucidate the exogenesis.

And I was like, holy crap, I don't even speak English. I can't believe you remembered that as well. I mean, that sentence is arguably so wordy, and complex that it's it's bordering on meaningless.

You know, I mean, like, in terms of practical application of English, I mean, that's a very impressive sentence. And we could break it down and understand. 99% of situations 99% of people, if you said that to they would be mystified.

Only I don't know who we really would be able to unpack that except like, you know, some sort of, I'm just waiting for the right day. I'm at the right dinner or in the right interview. And I can just drop that sentence.

And everyone can be like, Oh, my God, this guy's English is amazing. Yeah, but I don't know how. I don't know how often that would work.

Because I think most people would just be like, what on earth are you talking about? And also, that's just pretentious, you know, it like it's the it's so complex, and complicated, that the impression it will give is much more likely to be negative than I think. Yeah, sure. Sure.

But my general point here is the goal is not to just become better and better and better at vocabulary. Like, by the way, as an English teacher teaching vocabulary, idioms, phrasal verbs, this is our bread and butter, bread and butter, little idiom for anyone, which means that's how we make our money, right? But sometimes the goal is not just to learn more vocabulary and grammar. Sometimes there's other, in fact, seeing communication, only 7% of communication is language.

But people think that 100% of communication is language, and they invest all this time into learning English without learning these other skills around their English language, which is actually going to help

them become better communicators. Yes, yes. I mean, there's so many aspects to it.

And just grammar and vocabulary are just like one, one of those sort of criteria, let's say. And there's all sorts of other things, including, you know, the way you deliver what you say, the kind of communicative competence you have, which is kind of what we're talking about. We must try to get into some specifics here about Smalltalk.

It's a fascinating conversation, I think, about, you know, one's approach to communication in general. But how do you start? If you're in one of those situations, I don't know, let's say you're at the business conference, right? And everyone's standing around with coffee, and you think, right, I need to do something now. How do you actually start? What are some natural, normal ways to get started? Let's talk about it.

But if it's okay with you, I'd like to make a request. I just want to tell one story first, because I want to give a story of an overview of how good Smalltalk can make a huge difference in your life, right? And I think this story illustrates it really well, but I'll try and keep it fast. I've got a friend who's a GP, that's a general practitioner, you know, the sort of doctor you go to, yeah, the kind of doctor you go to if you have a rash, or a headache, or an STD.

You know what I'm talking about. Yeah. STD, that's a sexually transmitted disease, everyone.

And, you know, you should go to the doctor who deals with this sort of stuff. I don't know if he has STDs, but he's your family doctor, the guy you go to when you've got some kind of minor health problem. He was a huge fan of Tyson Fury, who- The boxer.

Yeah. For anyone who doesn't know, he was the undisputed heavyweight champion. Undisputed, another great C1 level word, which means no one disagrees.

Everyone agrees that this guy is the champion. He was the number one boxer in the world. And my friend, Osman, was a massive fan of his.

Now, Tyson Fury has more than 10 million followers online. If you want to get in touch with him, it's almost impossible. It's like winning the lottery because of how many messages he gets.

But he noticed that Tyson Fury was regularly posting and appearing with this other guy. And Osman found this guy on Tyson Fury's following. It was someone from his team.

Now, this guy only had one or 2,000 followers, so he's significantly more reachable than Tyson Fury was. He sends him a message. Oh, by the way, I should mention, at this point, Osman was just starting his own podcast.

I don't know if he had had any guests yet. I don't think he had anyone, but he wanted to start a podcast. Anyway, he messages this guy, and you know what he says? He says, please, please, please, please, please, can you put me in touch with Tyson Fury? I want him to be in my podcast.

It'd mean the world to me. Please. Of course, he didn't say that.

I'm joking. He didn't say that. If he did say that, he would have been blocked, right? So this is a part of, you need to reach out, but there's appropriacy.

Now, I don't know what he said exactly, but if it were me, it would have been something along the lines of, hey there, hope this reaches you well. My name's Osman, and I'm a GP. I'm in the process of starting my own podcast, and I'd love to invite you to be among the first guests.

I noticed that you work with Tyson Fury. I find that really inspiring and interesting, and I'm sure that people would love to know what you have to say on these topics. If you can spare some time for me, it would mean a lot, but either way, I really appreciate you taking the time to read this.

Kind regards, Osman. That's how I would have made the message. Yeah, it's the best you could do, I suppose, right? I mean, the chances of getting a response are still fairly low because of the fact that you don't already have a relationship with the heat.

Osman didn't already have a relationship with this person, but I think under the circumstances, it's probably the best you could do, he could do. So, well, as things transpired, and transpire, for anyone who doesn't know, it means as things happened. So as things transpired, he came on his podcast and he had a discussion, and Osman asked the right questions and developed the conversation in a productive way, both in the podcast and outside of it.

And then he exchanged contact information, and he kept the relationship developing. And then when this person had their child, Osman sent him a really generous gift basket. Anyway, so he made an effort to develop his relationship with him, and he never mentioned about, I'd really, can you please introduce me? Nothing like that.

He was just being nice. Now, what happened sometime later was Tyson Fury needed a COVID test. So, and this guy was with Tyson Fury at the time.

And you know what he says? He says, oh, I actually know a doctor who's a fan of yours. He has his own podcast. I've met him.

He's a really cool guy. You could, I'm sure he would be willing to come. So they contact Osman.

Osman gets the notice to go to Tyson Fury's house and give him a COVID test. And he was there in a heartbeat. Also, to do something in a heartbeat is another little nice idiom, which means he did it instantly.

He went over, and Tyson offered to pay him, Osman, for the test, and Osman refused it. And he said, look, I'm already a doctor. I do okay.

I don't need the money for the COVID test, but I am a huge fan of yours. And it would mean a lot more to me if I could be involved with your training or your camp, or if there's any other way I could offer myself, even voluntarily. I'd just love to be involved with you.

Anyway, because he was a good small talker, he was good at asking the right questions and developing the conversation in the right way. And because he was patient and he waited for the right opportunity to develop the relationship, he went on to be Tyson Fury's personal doctor. He would travel out to Tyson Fury's fights.

He would sit ringside. Ringside, those seats cost thousands. He would fly first class.

He'd stay in the nicest hotels to be Tyson Fury's personal doctor. He went on to become the doctor of his younger brother, Tommy Fury. Some people might remember that Tommy Fury was supposed to fight Jake Paul, and it was cancelled.

That was actually cancelled because of Ousmane. He cancelled the fight because he said that Tommy Fury wasn't well enough to fight at that time. Now, Ousmane is the doctor for many superstars in the UFC and in boxing.

And how did that all start? It started with him sending a message. Now, see when he sent that message, do you not think Ousmane had thoughts to himself? Like, you know, I've not even started my podcast. I haven't had any guests.

Maybe I my first 10 guests. Maybe I should get 1,000 subscribers first. Maybe I'll do it when this happens and when this happens.

You know, maybe I'll apply for that job when I've got more vocabulary, when I've got more grammar. Maybe I'll meet this person after this happens and this happens. But he didn't.

Against the odds, he still was willing to make an effort to reach out. And just one other really short story is I have a family friend, and he's about 15 years older than I am. And I know him because he went to university with my uncles.

He went to the same university as them. He did similar courses to them. But his salary is about four or five times more than anyone else that I know.

He's really successful career-wise. And I asked him, how come your salary is so much higher than all of your friends? And he said, I apply for two jobs every single day. He says, every single day, I go onto LinkedIn and I find people who inspire me.

I find people who are ahead of me. I find people who I want to be in their position. And I send them a message and I say, hey, I appreciate what you do.

I find it interesting. I've got some questions for you. Could I treat you out for a coffee? And he says, and a lot of the time, no response.

You know, if someone's in a really bad mood, maybe they'll say, get lost. That almost never happens. But see, when people do read the message, a lot of them are willing to meet up and have a coffee with you.

And he says, because he's constantly making friends, constantly trying to show himself in a positive light to people, constantly practising communication, it opens doors. To open doors is to open opportunities. I mean, like people ask me when I said that I've been on your podcast.

That's my third time. They're like, oh my God, how did you get in his podcast? As if like, you know, my team emailed your team. And then there's some bureaucracy, back and forth emails.

And then someone was sent some 50,000. No, it's nothing like that. Like it's simple.

I sent you an email and I was like, hey, my students love your podcast. I appreciate what you do. This is who I am.

This is my background and my skillset. I thought it'd be interesting to talk to you about these subjects. If you're interested, we can arrange that.

And then, you know, we made it happen. So yeah, I think people need to be willing to put themselves out there because if you're waiting until

you're ready, if you're waiting until the sun and the moon are in the right positions and your grammar and your confidence is feeling better, you know, you can make excuses to put it off forever. You know, that's why you're seeing some people that are less talented than you, less educated than you.

Their English is not as good as yours, but they're succeeding and they're making relationships and they're travelling and they're making money. So it's not to undermine learning language. It's not to undermine vocabulary and grammar and phrasal verbs and all of that stuff.

But we need to be real about what's the goal and how do we devise a strategy which actually leads to you achieving that goal? Yeah, absolutely. So I just want to like clarify three things. So one is what I mentioned before about the student I saw who I thought was quite bad at small talk or just generally social situations and the student who was good at it.

And you know, those are two examples, fairly extreme examples. But then there's a third, I guess, error, which is just not doing anything at all. And I mean, obviously everyone's free to do whatever they want.

But I guess it's not just a question of alienating people and being rude to people and saying the wrong thing, which can happen. And we can look at sort of ways not to do that. But also just simply staying in your comfort zone completely and burying your head in your phone and not being to take initiative and start conversations at all.

That's also a way to fail in this context. Right. Yeah.

So it's not just saying the wrong thing and doing the wrong things, but simply not doing anything as well can be very disadvantageous to you. Also, we make mistakes all the time. Like I'm sure in this conversation, if

someone listened to it slowly, they'd find, definitely me, I've probably made some grammar or vocabulary mistakes somewhere.

But the thing is, for us, it doesn't matter when we make mistakes. It's kind of like when you take an experienced driver who's driving in their manual car and they stall. See an experienced driver, they'll stall the car and they could be mid-conversation.

Stalling the car, it won't even stop them from talking. They'll still continue the conversation. They will restart the engine and they'll keep driving like there was no mistake.

But see with a beginner driver, when they stall the car, they'll go, oh my God. Yeah, sorry. Immediately panicking, oh, the other people, all the other cars behind me hate me.

Yeah. Oh dear. And yeah, you get easily flustered.

Yeah. So it's just about being in the moment and not worrying, having all these anxious thoughts. Because for me, it was quite liberating.

See when I was in school, I wasn't good at these techniques at all. I remember in school, there was a guy called Dylan and probably everyone knows a Dylan. Dylan was the kind of guy who could just go up to a group of people or an individual and immediately everyone would be smiling, happy to talk, laughing, positive conversations, can so easily just walk up and slip in and out of conversations with anyone.

For me, if I went up to an individual or a group and they looked at me like, what do you want? I'd be like, can I borrow a pencil? Okay, sorry. I'll bring it back. And it was super awkward.

So what's that missing ingredient? Well, part of it is the experience of pushing yourself out of the comfort zone and realising that there's nothing actually to be afraid of, because what's happening is we're finding things to be afraid of, which are ghosts. They don't exist. Yes.

Yes, absolutely. Okay. So how do you start a conversation with someone then, right? When you're at the business conference, you've got the coffee in your hands and now what? Yeah, well, by the way, it's not complicated to start a conversation with someone.

I'll give you a bunch of different ways you can start a conversation with someone. But I just want to say that we have something in common with everybody, right? Like, find me someone who doesn't like travelling. Find me someone who doesn't like going to a nice restaurant and eating food.

Find me someone who doesn't watch TV or series. Find me someone who doesn't like music. Find me someone who doesn't like video games.

If you have any one of those hobbies, you probably have something in common, or someone who doesn't go to the gym and like sports. Find me someone who doesn't like anything from that list that I've just mentioned. And then I'd say, okay, you have nothing in common with this person.

But realistically, you probably have something in common with everyone on earth. And see, even if you don't have something in common, even if someone is totally different from you, that's still good, because you can get to know them. So you can connect with people by showing interest in what they're interested in, which you're unaware of, or by connecting on the things that you have mutually.

But I believe that, you know, we've got stuff in common with pretty much every person alive. Most people want to live, you know, like in most workplaces, I mean, there's always some small group of people who like toxicity and drama and backbiting that those people exist. But most of the people just want to earn their salary and get by life and make friends and for things to be easier.

So it's like what we're doing is just facilitating that to happen. Now, as for how do you start the conversation, right? Yeah, starting the conversation is like opening the door to the car before you start driving. You need to open the door, but it's not the main thing.

Like you could actually say something, see starting a conversation, it could be as easy and as simple as going over and saying, like, what did you say, a business conference or a networking event? Yeah, business conference, break time, coffee in the hands. The easiest, most easy peasy lemon squeezy piece of cake way that you could do this is actually just to go over and say, Hey, my name is Rehan. I'm totally new here and I don't know what I'm doing.

What's your name? It's nice to meet you. What do you think of this event so far? It's easy and see a lot of the time in these like, because I've been to a fair number of these like conference networking events, there's people just standing there awkwardly with their coffee or on their phone or whatever and see when you start a conversation with them, they're actually like, Oh, thank God someone's talking to me, you know? So a lot of people are actually quite grateful for you to be the one to initiate the conversation. Can I just comment on that approach? So you go up to someone and say, Hi, my name's Ray.

And I don't know what I'm doing. Right. I mean, that's great.

That's funny. That's funny. That's a good disarming, using humour.

But also in there is, is the fact that you are sharing something already. So, you know, we could talk about the fact that when you're meeting people, as people always say, you ask other people questions. So you show interest and you ask other people questions.

And that's great. And we'll talk about different types of questions you can ask. But you have to be a little bit wary of doing that too much because it can start looking a little bit intrusive and you're just asking questions and questions and questions.

And what is very important is to also share something about yourself, you know, to be willing to share a little bit, not too much. You shouldn't be oversharing, but just a little bit. And what you did there.

Hi, I'm Ray. It's my first time. And actually, I don't really know what I'm doing.

What about you? That's great because you've been willing to share something about yourself. You're being self-deprecating. And then the other person is going to be going to feel much more comfortable to, you know, express some level of anxiety or something about themselves as well.

There's no perfect way of doing this. Of course, some people will be thinking you can't go and just say that you don't know what you're doing because then people are going to have a bad impression of you. Well, yeah, OK, maybe you've got to judge it right.

But at the same time, I think that can be a really charming way of doing it. And it opens the door then to that for that person to feel comfortable to share something about themselves. You know, I'll tell you a funny story of a time that exactly happened.

I was visiting my friend in Greece. He's actually a priest. I'm not like it's from the same religion as him, but he's a very good friend of mine.

I wanted to go and visit him. Priest from Greece? Priest from Greece, yeah. Well, he's from Greece, but he works in Australia and he travels back and forth.

But he was there for, I think it was some kind of conference. I won't describe it because it's a little bit difficult. And it's all Greek to me, right? Literally.

Yeah, literally. So anyway, after the conference, we went to this hotel and there was a lot of people who were there for the conference. And I was sitting next to this, another priest who was Greek and I was sitting next to him.

And I was like on my best behaviour around these people, dress smart and stuff. And they brought, it was like one of these, I don't know, Michelin restaurants or something. It was extremely fancy food.

It was like five different plates. And one of the plates they brought to us was basically like, I don't know how to describe this. It was like a pile of lettuce and like salads and stuff.

And I'm just looking at this thinking, how the hell do I eat this? Like, am I supposed to like put my fork in it and cut pieces off and put it in my mouth? So I'm kind of looking at this thinking, what do I do? Maybe I'll watch how other people eat it and I'll copy them. Now there's a totally different priest beside me. And, you know, being around people who are like highly educated or older than you or someone who's a priest and there's a little bit of a feeling of like, oh, I need to be well behaved around them.

Then he turned to me and he something I thought was so funny. He says, he just turned to me and he says, I have no idea how to eat this. And then he said, if no one else was here, I would just pick this up with my hands and I'd eat it like a burger.

And I just thought, you know, so sometimes being honest that like, you know, there's no shame in that honesty that I'm feeling a bit awkward here, you know? Yes, that's right. And you take the person into your trust when you do that. And you say, I don't know how to eat this.

Then immediately you've got, yeah, you're kind of allowing them into your trust. That's very nice. Right.

So what about asking questions, though? Let's talk about that. If you like, I can give a couple other ways that people can start a conversation, maybe just another two or three ways. I'll keep it brief, right? So I'd say you can start a conversation with one, just a very simple introduction, or there's another two or three ways, right? I'll just quickly explain.

You can start with a compliment, a funny comparison, or an observation. I'll quickly give an example of the three of them. And then people will have a good idea of the basics of different ways they can start a conversation.

Compliment, right? When I was at one of these networking events, I remember there was a guy who was giving a presentation and it was amazing. And after this presentation, everyone went over to him and shook his hand and was like, that was fantastic. That was really interesting.

That was good. But I didn't want to just give him the same compliment that everyone else had. Now, something I noticed about this guy was that I could tell he was extremely muscular.

He was wearing very baggy clothing, like he was wearing loose clothing, so he wasn't trying to show off his physique, but it takes one to know one, right? Because I'm also- You could see he was muscular, right? And you thought it takes one to know one. So you thought, I'm muscular. I recognise another muscular man.

I'm going to go and talk about his muscles. Okay. Yeah, go on.

That was a very nice and accurate summary. Thanks. So I'm a bit of a unit myself, so I walked over, the lats pumped out.

I'm joking. So I walked over to him and I said, hey man, that was a good presentation. And he was like, yeah, thanks, blah, blah, blah.

And see if I just left it there, he probably wouldn't have remembered me. But then I said, you know, and with big arms like those, I bet you've got a huge bench press. And then he was laughing like, oh, ha, ha, ha.

I try not to dress the way people can see and stuff. And then- Wait, wait, wait. We're going to just repeat that.

With big arms like those, I bet you've got an incredible bench press. Yeah. He's got huge arms.

I thought, I bet your bench press is massive. I bet you can bench press like 200 kilogrammes or something. This guy was- You're talking about lifting weights.

Yeah, lifting weights. So the bench press is the exercise where people are lying down on the bench and then with the bar across their chest, they're just pushing up, pushing forward. So I could tell this guy, the size of his chest, his shoulders, his arms.

I knew this guy had a huge bench press. So I said that to him and he burst out laughing. And then from there, we very easily got into a conversation because we were working for the same company.

So we got into a conversation about working for this company while simultaneously exercising. And then we got into like, like we'll talk momentarily about how to develop the conversation, but that was the opener for us to have quite a personal conversation, which finished with us exchanging contact information and maintaining a friendship. In that case, I never- He was part of an organisation.

I won't say the name, but it could have opened up opportunities for me, which I did consider at one point. But it's being able to create networks like this with people, it opens up opportunities. Now you've got someone from that organisation where you can text them and be like, hey, I'm looking for this.

Can we catch up and have a coffee? And then it opens up more opportunities. So I'm just emphasising the importance of when you meet people and you show interest in people and you create these bridges, it opens up more doors for you. Showing interest in people, certainly.

Yes. And a compliment, paying someone a compliment. This is great.

A little moment or a moment of self-deprecating humour. I don't know how to eat this. Or compliment.

With arms like those, I bet you've got a fantastic bench press. Quite disarming. Yes.

Okay. I'll show you another two quickly, and then we'll get into the discussion itself. An observation.

I remember when I was working in retail, customers would come in. Now, see when people love something, they often wear something to represent it. So for example, if you love a band, quite often people will wear that band on their clothes.

They wear a t-shirt of it. Or if they like a video game or a movie, or if they like something, they'll have a tattoo of it, or a necklace of it, or something related to it. I remember once I was in an interview, and the interviewer had a pen that had the Millennium Falcon on it.

And I remember we got into a conversation about that. And then instead of having an interview, we're largely just talking about these things. And he says, I like having you around.

I'll give you a call later. So sometimes, because see these people, when they wear these things, they're even religious people. Religious people will wear some type of item of clothing, which represents their religion.

They're basically showing to you from the way that they dress, this is what's important to me, and this is what I enjoy. And we can connect on these things. And if you're observant, and you realise these things, you can realise these signs that people put out about, hey, I like these things.

And you can, one, if you know about those things, you can talk about it. But if you don't know about those things, you can say, hey, that's an

interesting t-shirt, or an interesting thing. Does it have a meaning? Oh, really? I've heard of that.

And then you can get into a conversation from there. Yeah, you did that with me, actually, the first time we spoke. You noticed a guitar on the wall behind me, and you said, actually, wait a minute, is that a Fender Stratocaster? And that was great.

That allowed me to talk about my guitar that I love. And yeah. And we got into quite a conversation that day.

I think that was before the recording started. I think we got into quite a conversation about guitars and stuff. And we realised it's something that we connect in, and it's a mutual interest.

And then see all the people that you're walking past on the street, or the people in your office, you probably have tonnes of mutual interests with them, but you just don't realise because, I'm not saying you specifically, but the audience in general, we don't realise because we don't know how to initiate a conversation. Recently, I saw, or not recently, when I was doing my retail job, this was some years ago, that a girl came in, and she was wearing a necklace. I went over to her to say, hey, do you need any help finding a laptop or something? And she was like, no, I don't need any help.

And I could have just left it at that. But then I said, that necklace, is that the Triforce? And for anyone who doesn't know, by the way, do you know what the Triforce, do you know what that's from? You're a legend of Zelda, man. A legend of Zelda, of course, yeah.

Yeah, good. I've played my fair share of the Ocarina of Time. Are you looking forward to the new release that's coming out in next month? We're going off on a tangent now about Zelda, but that's fine.

But no, I haven't played Zelda since the days of the Nintendo 64, because these days, I don't have the time. You're missing out. It's so many games.

Oh, yeah. I'm sure it's incredible. But geez, I just don't have the time to get into games like that anymore, unfortunately.

But no, I love Ocarina of Time. That's my one. And I still like listening to the music from that, actually.

Fantastic. So in this case, I was like, oh, you're a Zelda fan? And she's like, yeah, I love Zelda. So the conversation that could have ended when I said, do you need help, it could have just ended there.

But I said, oh, is that a Triforce? Are you a Zelda fan? Then we get into conversation about Zelda games and comparing and contrasting. That opens up the doors for other conversations about other video games or media that we enjoy. And then you're in a conversation, right? So I've mentioned compliments, observations.

I'll mention just one more, right? Like a funny comment. Yeah. Using humour is a little bit more difficult.

It takes a little bit more practise. But let's say it's extremely hot in the office. You could say something, like, oh, my God, it's like a sauna in here.

I feel like I'm going to melt. And then you're like, ha, ha, ha, ha. And then they'll continue with what you've said.

So just by commenting in a funny way on something which is maybe it's extremely noisy, or maybe it's extremely quiet, or maybe it's extremely

hot, or it's extremely cold. This is where we can use exaggeration humour. Like, man, it's so hot, it's like a sauna in here.

Or it's so cold, you could probably say something quite funny. We're trying to keep it PG and polite. It's like the Arctic in here.

Yes, absolutely. I mean, you've got to be a little careful because you don't want to end up inadvertently criticising or, you know, if you're saying that to the person who is responsible for that room, they might feel like, oh, I'm terribly sorry. Oh, the air conditioner isn't working.

You know, they might feel like it's a criticism. But obviously, you've always got to read the room and, you know, understand who you're talking to. But okay, we've kind of been through a few different things then, which are very important in terms of approaches to initiating conversations with people.

We had self-deprecation. I've got no idea how to eat this. And the other person goes, I don't know, I think you're supposed to cut it with a knife and fork, but I don't know either.

Compliments, you know, paying someone a compliment, you know, I really thought that was interesting. Or that was a great presentation. By the way, you know, with arms like those, you must have an excellent bench press.

Showing interest in general, just being curious about the other people, noticing things, being observant, noticing little signs and using those as opportunities to start conversations in ways that you imagine the person will be happy. Because if someone's wearing a Legend of Zelda t-shirt, you can say, oh, Legend of Zelda, are you ready for the new game? It's coming out soon. And then bang, you're off on a fantastic conversation about obviously a subject that you both love.

And any time you're always looking for things you have in common, which is a sort of a basic approach that when you're meeting someone for the first time, you're just asking, you know, the usual questions. And by the way, listeners, on the PDF for this episode, there'll be some sort of PDF for this. I'm not sure exactly what it's going to include, but definitely in there, I'm going to include a big list, a big sort of phrase bank of sort of useful questions that you could use for doing so many things that we're talking about here.

But when you're having those conversations and you're getting to know someone, you're always looking for things that you have in common with the other person, as we've just been talking about. And every time you find something that you both have in common, that you both share, you kind of flag it up or you make a point of identifying it in the conversation. So it's, oh, you too.

Me too. You know, like, oh, you like Legend of Zelda? Yeah, me too. Or something like, oh, where are you from? Oh, you're from London.

Oh, whereabouts? You know, like any little detail that you both share, you sort of celebrate it in a way by saying, oh, really? Or wow, that's fantastic. Me too. Things like that.

Commenting on shared things. So things that you and the other people you're talking to share together. And that is neutral stuff.

Like, as you said, the room that you're in or the weather, which is fine. I mean, it is fine to talk about the weather, but certainly the room, the things that you're both experiencing. If the room is very hot, you can say, oh, it's sweltering in here, isn't it? It's like a sauna in here.

Or if you're in some fantastic new conference centre, you can say, this building is fantastic, isn't it? You know, look at this. And you can just sort of comment on something that you both are sharing. And exaggeration.

Yes, when you're commenting on something, that can be a good way to be humorous. You know, like just exaggerating. As you said, it's freezing.

It's like the Arctic in here is a form of exaggeration, which can be a good way to introduce humour into the situation. Yes. I wanted to mention questions.

What kind of questions should we ask people? Direct or indirect? What's the difference of an indirect or a direct question? So a direct question would be, where do you live? And an indirect question is, do you live far from here? Or how did you come here? Is direct. And did you have a good journey? Is indirect. Okay, I gotcha.

So I mean, I would get the conversation. You mentioned like finding things that we have in common. It's a great idea.

Really useful. Also, anything that that person is passionate about, even if I don't have it in common. Like, see, for example, there was a time that I went to one of these networking events.

And I love what I do. I love the job that I have. I love that.

Like, for example, I help students with general English, business English, fluency, vocabulary, confidence, soft skills, passing the IELTS exam. I do group classes. I do individual classes.

I do podcasts. I do some content creation. But see, when most people meet me, and they're like, what do you do? And I'm like, oh, I'm an English tutor.

They're like, oh, that is that he is an English tutor. But it's so much like if you're to ask me in my life about being an English tutor, or you in your life about being an English tutor, it's totally different stories with different job responsibilities and different parts of it, which are important to us. So it's for as at one of these networking events, and the guy's like, so what do you do? And I'm like, oh, I'm an English tutor.

Oh, where do you teach? Oh, well, I'm self employed. So all you mean ESL, what type of students do you have? How did you even get started in that? What does someone need to be good at to get into something? No, he's asking me about the right topic. The topic is what I do, because I love what I do.

So for me, that's a great and easy topic for me to just keep talking about. But oh, well, actually, da da da da da da, and he can keep developing the conversation. Or for example, my wife has, she sells jewellery online, like, you know, she buys rare stones, and she makes the setting and then she sells it.

When I was in Greece, one of the priests said to her, so what do you do? And she says, Well, I sell jewellery. And with a lot of people, they've just stopped the conversation there. But oh, that's cool.

But he was like, Oh, what type of stones do you work with? And now that's an opening for my wife to start talking about what she does and what she loves. So we want to find things that we can connect with other person on things that are interesting to them, or things that we've got in common. So we want to get the conversation.

For example, saying like, How was your day today? You might get Oh, it's good. It's all right. Or the weather's quite nice, isn't it? Yeah, it's good.

It's all right. And I'm not saying don't use these questions. But what happens is people ask these questions.

And then they'll get like a one word response. And you'll be like, Oh, I need to think something else. Well, what about this? Oh, it's good.

Oh, but what about this? And you just keep getting short responses. So really, I want to work the conversation towards something where I can find out what is interesting to you? What what do you like to do? What are you passionate about? That's not literally the question that I'm asking. But that's what I want to learn.

Because even I learn what's important in this person's life, I can then create conversation around it based on mutual experiences and develop the conversation around that topic. Yeah. And also simply just because other people are fascinating.

And, you know, that can be a great thing to remember that you just sort of take the focus off yourself and stop worrying about being self conscious. And how well are you performing in this situation? And just think, I just would love to know more about what these people do and and how they do it. And so if I met your wife and I'd say, oh, apparently you make jewellery.

That's that's interesting. What kind of jewellery? How did you end up doing that? And you just just being genuinely curious about the people you're meeting can be a great sort of driving force in in creating a good conversation. But yeah, those conversations that can be a bit dry.

That's a bit of an issue. And I see that a lot. Again, I'll use my students as an example where I'm always trying to encourage a good rapport within the group of students.

And, you know, I sit them down, they sit down at a table and I say, OK, here are some questions that you can start on day one to get to know each other. And they'll ask their question and the person answers. And then that's the end of the conversation.

And really, like both people are responsible. And like the analogy I used just yesterday with my students was I want you to keep the ball rolling, keep the ball rolling. Right.

So you roll the ball over to the other person and they catch it. Or maybe tennis is maybe a better example that you hit the ball over the net. The ball comes to you.

You don't just keep it. You know, you hit it back again and you keep the ball moving. So that takes both parts.

Both people have to be part of that. So, you know, you say, oh, so you make jewellery. That's interesting.

And then a follow up question. What kind of jewellery do you make? And then the other person has to respond and has to be willing to give a bit more. So it's like being willing to give and being willing to to to be interested.

You know, you're just building a conversation together. And I think that that's that's probably a mindset that's going to produce something that is enjoyable and helpful to everyone. Other great questions you can ask are, what religion do you follow? Why do you follow that religion? Why

don't you follow that religion? What do you think of Donald Trump? I'm joking.

These are the worst questions. I was going to say what? He's joking, listeners. He's joking.

Of course, you shouldn't ask those questions. How much money do you earn? How much money is in your bank account right now? Can I have some? Yeah. Can I have some? When can I have some? Where do you live? Actually, I used to live in Liverpool.

Right. Right. And I had I mean, Liverpool's a funny place.

But I lived in a when I was a student, I lived in quite a rough part of Liverpool. And I used to walk to the university from the student house that I lived in. And I'd walk through this park.

And during the daytime, you'd find like some often there would just be people in the park that didn't have jobs and stuff. And they'd come over to you. And like scousers from Liverpool are very sort of friendly, but also sometimes I don't know how to put it.

They might be sort of borderline criminals, or at least the ones in this park during the day were. Anyway, so my experience would be I'd walk along the walk, be walking through the park, and then some guy would come up to me and go, yeah, mate, mate. And it was always a mate.

Are you a student? And I was like, yeah, I am. And the next question, where do you live? Which is like, whoa, whoa, whoa, that's just far too direct. It's so, so friendly in one way.

But also, why are you asking where I live? Like, are you a student? Meaning you've probably got a television, you've probably got a

PlayStation in your house. Where do you live? I don't know. It's the maybe I was being very distrustful.

But I always found that it's quite suspicious. Yeah, I would also find it a bit strange for someone to be so direct as well. But yeah, coming back to like some of the questions that we can ask people is there's a number of questions which are really productive.

So by that you mentioned like the conversation being like a game of tennis where we're hitting the ball back and forth. See the best people to practise this type of conversation with are actually people who are not very talkative. Because what happens is see when you're talking to more introverted people, it's like you might say some stuff about yourself.

So for example, how is your morning? And you might say something like, oh, my morning was good. This morning I went out for a jog, came home made a smoothie and a really nice breakfast, did a little bit of work on the computer. And now I'm here.

And see someone who's not good at conversation, they'll be like, oh, OK. All right. Was it good? It's something like this because they don't know how.

But like someone who's more conversational can latch on and be like, oh, he went for a jog. And if you're also a jogger, if that's interesting to you, you can talk about, oh, where do you go jogging? Do you have any routes you can recommend? How often have you been training? Do you do any other type of training? And you know, it can get into a conversation about sports, health, diet and lifestyle. Or I mentioned that I work.

Oh, what type of work are you doing? Do you work around? You know. But see, when you're dealing with people who are more introverted, they're not very good at developing the conversation. So see, like it's practise.

If you can make conversation with introverts, you'll be able to make conversation with anyone because, you know, they don't really give you a lot about themselves until you really warm them up. With some people, you need to warm them up quite a lot before they start getting comfortable to tell you a little bit about themselves. But until because you can even, you know, if like I say, oh, what are your hobbies and interests? And they're like, oh, I like reading.

And you and I can say, oh, I love lots of stuff. I love working out and training. I love travelling and seeing different places.

I like video games. I like movies. I like cooking.

I love all of these things. And then I've given them so many different things you could start a conversation with. And they were like, oh, OK, good.

And then it's actually if you want the conversation to continue, you'll need to be the one to develop it with more questions. If you can develop conversations with these people, then when you actually talk to people who are more communicative and, you know, they can talk and they're answering questions and they're asking questions. And now it's like you're dancing with each other.

You know, you're flowing. It's much easier to have a conversation with someone who's, you know, kind of good, even just at least a little bit good at being conversational. But if you can do it and you can do it with

quite introverted people, if you can do it with them, you can do it with anyone.

Yes, definitely. With my students, you know, I'm always trying to bring them out of themselves. And I find that often what I have to do is tell them something about myself first.

So if I'm sometimes if I'm sitting there with a group of, let's say, just five people and I'm trying to it's like day one or the first week of a course or something, and I'm just trying to get them to talk about themselves and try to create the right atmosphere. If I'm just sort of like interrogating them with all these questions. So where do you live? Do you live near the British Council? How far is that? How do you get here? Do you come here by train? How was your morning? How's your week going? What did you eat for breakfast? You know, it's just like so many questions.

Sometimes what I have to do is tell them about myself as well. And once I kind of set the tone or share something about, all right, we've made this point already, but it's worth making it again, that once you have shared something about yourself, the other person is probably more likely and more willing to do the same thing, you know, so yeah. See, even though that they might be a little bit reluctant to ask questions back, I would still feel like before you ask them the next question, because it can just turn into an interview, they're still getting a habit of giving them stuff about yourself, even if they're not asking questions on it, because it's going to help them get out of their comfort zone.

Because a lot of people, they're not not engaging because they're rude. They're just not engaging because they don't have the experience. But again, if you can get talking with people like this, and for, you know, I don't want to say particular countries, but some students from some

Asian countries, it's a little bit more like this small talking and networking.

It's not so much in their culture. So especially if you can help people, and you can show, ask them the right questions and give some answers. And even though they didn't really ask it like a little bit give and take, it starts helping warm them up to be more comfortable with being more communicative with you.

Yes. I mentioned indirect and direct questions earlier. The reason I mentioned that is because there is a slight difference in the tone of a direct question, like, for example, where do you live, which is obviously very direct, or even just something like, how did you come here? And you just want them to talk about their journey to, you know, to the school, or their journey to the to the conference, because it maybe it was a bit complicated, or maybe they had to take public transport, or they found it difficult to find a parking space, you know, those are the sorts of things.

So how did you get here? Or how did you come here? Versus did you have to travel far? Or did you have a good trip? So the one, how did you get here? Where did you? How did you know? Where do you live? Where did you park? You know, those are sort of questions the police might ask, because they're very direct questions. And so that feels like an interrogation. Whereas indirect questions, all they are, they are more polite, like, did you travel far? Did you have a good journey? Was it very busy? Was it difficult to find a parking space? Because it was for me, I had to drive around for 10 minutes.

And those indirect questions, although they are, in a sense, less open ended, did you have a good trip? Actually, it's much easier for the person to answer, you're requiring less of the other person, because technically, the answer is yes, I did or no, I didn't, you know, it's just

two options. So it's less demanding for the other person. Obviously, the understanding is, did you have a good trip? Yes, I did.

Obviously, the understanding is that they then probably will tell you a bit more. Or you say, I had a horrible trip here, because I took the metro and it was so crowded, I couldn't get on a train. And then when I did get on a train, I was all squashed.

It was a nightmare. You know, you share something. So instead of like, how did you come here? Did you know? Did you take the metro? Or did you drive? Somehow is a more polite question, and less likely to feel like an interrogation.

There's also so see what would like in order to get into so see what these questions, it's good just to stimulate the conversation, but see for developing and in working on what's important in this person's life, we can then get into questions such as, so let's say it's a long trip. Let's say they're travelling for two or three hours, or they're doing a day trip or something. I might ask a question like, what did you do time? What did you do to kill time while you're travelling? Because see, now I'm going to start getting into their interests.

And maybe they have a Nintendo switch or a games console that they were playing. Maybe they're reading a book. Maybe they're writing in their diary or writing a story.

Maybe they're doing something hobby based. Maybe not. Maybe they're just flicking through TikTok, and there's not too much to talk about.

But potentially, they're going to give you something which you can be like, oh, that's something important in this person's life. See when I'm talking to people, one question I might like to ask is, what are your plans

for this weekend? And even if they say not much, but I can get a couple of things out of them. Spend some time with the kids or the wife.

That's something. This person's married. Oh, how long have you been married? And how did you meet your wife? That people love talking about their kids.

Or they might tell you that they're going to exercise or gym or movie or something, because any one of those things could turn into a really enjoyable and profound conversation where you match on things that you both like. So some questions I like are, do you have any holidays planned? Because when someone has a holiday, you put a lot of thought into your holidays. Why did you choose this country and not another country? What do you want to see or plan to do in that country? Have you ever been to that country before? Have you ever been to that continent before? What type of things do you like to do there? It opens a whole conversation about travel, if you're a person who's interested in travel.

Or if they tell you that they're watching a series, that tells you that they like that genre. Maybe you've seen some good films in that genre, and it opens another conversation. But understanding what people do in their free time.

Sometimes what people do in their work, some people are interested to talk about that. Some people are interested to talk about what they do in their free time. But I'm fishing for things like, what does this person enjoy? And are any of these things unique? Will this person enjoy talking to me about these things? Or do I share things in common with this? Or do I have some experience with it? There was a point in my life where I was really focused on self-improvement, and I tried cutting out TV and video games and all of this stuff.

But now I've got no problem watching the most popular TV shows. Not to excess, but it gives me something to talk about with people because other people are watching it, or following the news, or travelling, or exercising. Recently, I started doing more cardiovascular exercise, whereas I was always lifting weights, as you can clearly see.

But why are you laughing? Oh, no. No reason. I can't actually see your guns.

I mean, your arms from this angle. But I'm sure that you're extremely muscular, and you must have a fantastic bench press. Trust me, bro.

I don't. I don't at all. I never go to the gym.

I don't lift weights. All I spend my time doing is carrying bags of shopping around, typically, or a backpack loaded with things like a heavy laptop, and a bunch of other stuff. And then, no doubt, having to lift my son up the five flights of stairs in our building, and all that kind of thing.

So I don't need to go to the gym. Just my lifestyle itself requires a lot of heavy lifting. Sorry, I lost the thread of what we were saying there.

So questions, for example, about their holidays, or their plans, or what they do in their free time, this opens you up to knowing what's important in their life and what they like to do. Also, there's another question that I really like to ask. So if they say that they like something, for example, they like reading, and I could say, you know, I'm trying to get into reading, or I want to buy a gift for someone for a book.

What's your advice? What do you think? And I say this because Simon Cowell was on a podcast a while ago that I saw, and he said, everyone is wearing a sign that says, make me feel important. And when you

make people feel important, it lightens them up. You make people feel important when you ask them for their advice.

Some people go through their whole life, no one asks them for advice on anything, because no one really cares what they have to say. But when you're that person who's saying, oh, you do this, I care about what you think, I'm interested in you, what would you advise for me? People are very, like, if someone asks me, what's your advice on how I should do this? I'm like, oh, this person's asked me because they value my opinion. I'm happy to give, you know, my feedback on.

And see if you ask someone for their advice, and they're like, screw you, I'm not giving you my advice. That person's an arsehole. You know, it's not your problem, it's their problem.

A normal person is going to be very, like, delighted, like, to be like, oh, this person cares enough to ask me, you know. So what's your thoughts on this? Or do you have any advice for this? You know, or what's your favourite is a great question. Like, see if we're talking about video games, Legend of Zelda, what's your favourite Zelda? And you say, I've only played Ocarina of Time.

Or do you play other video games? What's your favourite and why? And then we get into a discussion about what we like. Favourite holiday destination and why we get into the conversation about travelling. Your favourite band or movie or whatever.

So what's your favourite? What do you think of this? These are great questions for knowing what's important to a person and developing conversations around things that they're interested in. Yes. Gosh, so much here, Ray.

I was just wondering, I was just wondering, actually, do you ever feel, do you ever worry that you might come across as being pushy, though, if you if you're sort of being, I don't know, even too calculating about these sorts of things? I mean, I would just say that, obviously, the way when we talk about this stuff, then it's it sounds a bit like it's been that we've kind of calculated it and turned it into a sort of science or something, which takes some of the sort of the humanity and spontaneity out of it in actual practise. It's a lot more natural and kind of friendly and spontaneous, right? I mean, it doesn't have to be this sort of calculated formula of like how to work your way into someone's affections. You know what I mean? But first, let's take you playing the guitar, right? You know, scales major and minor, pentatonic, mixolydian, whatever it may be.

All right. Maybe, you know, chords, right? You know, some chords and sometimes you'll be there jamming in your room and you're waving your hair around and you're having a good time and you're bobbing your head and you're really getting into the zone of the music and it's very expressive and it's real and it's raw and it's passionate. But you're still using like chords, you know, like someone couldn't pick up a guitar and do that if they'd never learned the basic structures of how to use the instrument.

So these basic structures, they're just like a guidelines, but there's so much room for having a nice conversation within it. Also, empathy and understanding and compassion is a huge part of this because see if I go up to, if I approach someone, I'm like, hey, is it all right if I take the seat? Or sometimes maybe I want to start a conversation with someone at the gym and I'm like, hey, is it cool if I sit in with you? Yeah, cool. You can sit in with me.

And I'm like, so how long have you been coming here for? And I'm doing my exercise and they're like, oh, just a while. Okay. I mean, I might feel like they just don't want to talk.

They want to be on their phone or doing their own thing. So it's if you've kind of got like some social skills to just, you'll be able to tell when someone's not talking because there's a difference and you learn to discern this. Discern, by the way, for the learners, another good C1 level word, which means you can notice, you can discern whether someone's not talking because they're having a bad day and they just don't want to talk to you.

Or maybe the person's an arsehole or maybe the person just needs a little bit of help because they are a little bit introverted, you know, but it's because these things we're talking about, you shouldn't remember, memorise it like a script. You shouldn't be thinking he's going to say this and I'm going to say this and running through the conversation because then the conversation is not actually going to pan out like that. Instead, we need active listening, you know, listen to what the person says and develop the topic from what they say.

And if it's appropriate and you feel it's appropriate to go a step in. Also, the stuff that we're talking about, what's your thoughts on this? Or what type of things do you like? What's your favourite restaurant around here? Oh, you like Japanese food? What do you think of, you know, like these aren't like, what's your religion? What are your political views? You know what I mean? Where do you live? What house number? What type of security system do you have in your house? Yeah, they're not really, really personal questions to an extent. But yeah, I guess it's all about what you're trying to achieve by doing it, right? And you have to keep that in mind.

Now, someone might be, obviously, some individuals that you meet might be suspicious and they might not want to share. And they might have that sense that if someone is, it's like, no one likes the feeling that someone is trying to sell them something. You know, when you detect that, when you say, I feel like this person is, what's this person's motivation? You know, when someone, you know, when you're accosted by a salesperson in the street or something and they start making conversation with you and you start to think, oh, okay, I know what you're doing.

You're trying to make a conversation with me and within 10 minutes, you're going to try and sell me something. And so I'm not interested, sorry. So people do have that sense of, you know, being suspicious.

But in these situations, you've got to remember what your motivations are and the motivations are to genuinely establish a sort of a friendly mutual, mutually beneficial relationship where maybe, you know, this could be, you might find someone who could be a friend or someone who you could work with or someone who can help you and you could exchange helpful information with each other, or simply you might just have a nice experience in that moment. And also your motivation might just be, it's just nice to, it's nice to connect with people. It's just nice to learn about other people and just to be, to be interested in the world around you, you know.

Yeah. But see the way that you're going to, where most of these conversations are going to happen, they're going to happen at work or in school or in university or it's going to, there's going to be a sort of context around it. So people don't feel like they're being sold something, but let's remove all of that context.

Let's say it's on a park bench and I approach the park bench and I'm like, hey, is it cool if I sit here? And you're like, yeah, okay, cool. I mean,

if the person said no, then I'm not going to ask any follow-up. Oh, well, what's your hobbies? You know, if they say I can't sit next to them, I'm not going to bother.

But, you know, so, so if they say, yeah, sure, you can take a seat here. I sit down and then I might say, oh, thanks. Any plans for today? And when I say any plans for today, they might say, oh, put down the news to, oh yeah, well, I'm planning this, this, this, this, this.

And they've given me an opening to have a conversation with them, but see if they're like, oh no, not really. And I'm like, they don't want to talk and they don't want to talk. I mean, all right, cool.

And then I'm still like, I didn't sit down on the bench just to have a conversation with them. I sat down on the bench because I want to make a phone call or I want to read something or I want to just get a rest. So like, you know, while I sat in there, I handed out an olive tree or an olive branch, whatever the idiom is, to basically say, oh, since we're sitting here, how's things going? Be interested in a small conversation.

And 90% of the time, the people will engage in a little conversation with you and everything will be fine. It's like, see, since I started doing this, I can't even think of a time that someone has been super rude to me or it's been like super weird or I've left it feeling awkward. Like, oh my God, why did I do that? Because the intention was always like, I'm just like in the same society as you or in the same office as you or I'm in the same community as you.

Like, see, for me reaching out to a total stranger even, it would probably be like me reaching out to you with a message and sending you a message and be like, hey, I love your podcast. Would you be interested in doing this? We could talk about these things. That's for me like the most outside thing.

But I always make my intentions clear. And then if people reject those intentions, for me, the intentions are so honest, there's nothing to be afraid about. I don't feel like the person's attacking me.

I feel like if the person, yeah, sorry, go ahead. I was just going to say, it might not be obvious though. I mean, sitting down and coming to a park bench, someone sitting there, sorry, is someone sitting here? Oh no, go ahead and you sit down.

And then you say, so have you got any plans for the weekend? I don't know. That just seems like jumping in pretty sort of quickly. Even though your intentions are honest.

Tonality matters. Let me give you an example, right? I sit down and I say, hey, is it cool if I sit here? Yeah, sure. There's also going to be subtle things like if they make eye contact with me and they smile at me and they seem pleasant, or if they don't, if they're just keeping their head down, then I sit next to them.

If I turn over and look at them, I say, your plans for this weekend? Then it's going to be a little bit like, oh my God, what the hell does this person talk about? Yeah, but if they look at me in the front, yeah, sure, take a seat. And I'm like, all right, thanks. And then I look over and I smile.

Any plans for this weekend? The context matters. So if you can make it in a way which it's natural, but again, see what comes out from what you say. It only comes from a place of intention.

So if you're coming with your intention of, I'm just sitting here on a bench and you're beside me and I'm just being pleasant, and you're just being pleasant by making a small conversation, because they might

say, oh, no plans. Yeah, not me either. I'm just going to enjoy the sun for a while.

All right, cool. And then that's the end of it. But if they put out a little bit more like, oh, plans for the weekend.

Can't wait to get away, do this with the guys, blah, blah, blah, blah. Now you're in a conversation. So you can just play it as it comes.

If the person doesn't want to have a conversation, you don't need to have a conversation with them. You know what I mean? But the difference is, I would just discourage people from not having conversations because they're worried about the repercussions or being awkward. Because a lot of the networking that I've done, it's been just from going up to people.

In fact, here's just another quick story. I was working in a retailer more than 10 years ago. And one day, my manager's manager was coming to the store.

And my manager was scared because he wanted everything to be perfect for that day. He said, when they come, heads down, do your work. Never be doing nothing.

If there's no customers, you're cleaning. If you're not cleaning, you're doing stock. Look busy.

So everyone was a little bit tense when these managers came in with suits and ties and all buttoned up shirts. See, one of my colleagues who was younger than me at the time, he was like 17 or 18 years old, he went up to those managers. And everyone was like, oh my god, what's he doing? And he went over to them and said, hey, I just wanted to welcome you to the store.

Thanks for coming in. He shook their hand. Is this your first time in Glasgow? Have you been here before? And then gets into a conversation.

Those managers sent him a £100 gift voucher for just making an effort and being a pleasant person in the store. And he got their email address. So imagine he's got the email address of his manager's manager's manager, the area manager, the top manager.

So see if he wants another job or an opportunity, he can so easily send them a message and be like, hey, it's me. We met. I really wanted to thank you.

I'm really enjoying my time working here and I'd really like to keep growing. Do you know of any opportunities? What would you recommend for me? Would it be possible that I could take you out for a coffee and get your thoughts on some things? Maybe they'll say it's weird. Maybe it's like, oh my god, if you go up and it's going to be weird and it's going to be awkward.

But all of the best things that come, they come from going out of your comfort zone and just making a conversation with the stranger. Yeah, you're right. I mean, for those people who would find it unbearable to go up to a stranger on a park bench and say, what are your plans? Do you have any plans for the weekend? I mean, obviously there are other ways of doing it.

As we've mentioned, you could sit there and comment on something. That's your olive branch. You comment on the situation.

Something like, I don't know, what would it be? What could it be? Just something like, I'm saying it, it sounds like you're a spy and you're

making contact with another spy. Like the autumn leaves fall silently on the grass in October. Yes, they do.

You're about your two spies making a transaction. I don't know. I have to say, I'm quite impressed by your willingness to do that, to go out of your comfort zone.

It's just an example, but you're absolutely right that you've got to jump over that sort of fear or that sense that you are going to do something unacceptable. This is kind of like a large feature of this conversation, isn't it? Just the mindset of, you know, we can talk about the English and stuff, but really this is a conversation all around just the general mindset and approach to the philosophy of small talk, isn't it really? But let's say you're too anxious to say to someone, any plans for the weekend? You know, in that type of tonality. Let's say you think that's too much.

You say, is it okay if I take a seat? Yeah, sure. You sit down. Having a nice day today? And then even just from having a nice day today, that's enough to get a gauge of whether they feel like talking or not, because some people, yeah, it's all right.

And they don't ask you back. Yeah. And you? Everything's good.

Any plans for the rest of today? You know, and then you could baby step into a conversation. You know, some people are more, you can just read from people kind of generally whether they want to talk to you or not. You know, there's a time where I was in the gym and there was this guy there who was like, he had the sort of body that I want, like the size, the definition.

I was like, this is something that I want to look like. And you could be as forward to go up to him and be like, hey, I just think that you're in great

shape and this is what I want to be like. Is it okay if I just ask you a few questions for advice? And I'm sure they would be happy to do it.

But see if you're anxious to do that, you could go up to him when he's doing an exercise and say, hey, is it cool if I sit in with you? Yeah, sure. Cool. And then have you been coming here for a while? And then you can baby step into a conversation.

But as I mentioned earlier, it's like opening the door of a car to start driving. The introduction is just the thing that you need to do to turn the engine on. But then you're going to develop a positive conversation, which is more so what the person is going to remember.

And then once you've, I mean, see awkwardness, right? If you can handle a little bit of awkwardness, you are ahead of 90% of people. Most people cannot handle awkwardness. If you can bear and tolerate a bit of awkwardness and be like, oh, that was awkward for five seconds.

I didn't die, you know, but I ended up a new friend. Like it's fine. The first time you meet anyone, the first time you do anything, it's always a little bit awkward.

Even when I come on your podcast, for the first 30 seconds, a minute, it's a little bit like, oh, getting back into it. But then before long, you're just talking and you're communicating. So yeah, people shouldn't be afraid.

The more you, it's like exposure therapy. You're exposing yourself to a little bit of discomfort. And then the more you expose yourself to discomfort, the more you can do things that otherwise would have been uncomfortable for you.

And the more things that you can do, which would have been uncomfortable for you in the past, the more you open yourself up to new opportunities. Yeah, it's true. It's true.

And, you know, again, it makes me think of something else makes me think of when you go swimming somewhere. For example, if you go swimming in a, in the sea, I don't know if you've ever swum in the sea off the coast of Scotland. Once or twice.

It's very cold. It's freezing, but I mean, it just, you know, it doesn't have to be in cold waters, but just anywhere, any situation where you're going to jump in the water to go for a swim, it's the initial jump into the water that is like the worst part. And sometimes you can stand there for ages thinking, oh God, I can't do this.

But once you've done that and you get over the initial shock, then you have a fantastic time in the water. It's a similar kind of thing, isn't it? You know, Will Smith said that once he was in Dubai and he agreed to go skydiving and then they were going to do it the next day. And the whole night he couldn't sleep thinking, why did I agree to that? I wish I didn't agree to that.

He's so scared and so much anxiety. He goes there on the day, he goes in the helicopter, he goes up into the sky, his heart rate is going crazy. He's feeling so much anxiety.

He's barely slept. He's feeling sick. He says, you know, he's attached to the instructor.

They get right to the edge of the helicopter and then he jumped out. And he said, see, as soon as I jumped out, I was alive. It felt great.

It's like all of that fear was just leading up to it. So most people don't even start because they're scared of what, they're just, their brain's thinking about what could happen. But see, after you skydive once and you're fine and you have fun, you want to do it a second time and a third time.

You know, coming back to Ousmane, he could have made a hundred million reasons not to message that guy from Tyson Fury's team, but he did. He had good manners. He had appropriacy.

He didn't come off as needy or just wanting to meet Tyson Fury. He came off as a guy who just wants to network, make friends, have interesting conversations. And then from there you open up all of these opportunities.

So yeah, life is short. You know, your grandfather or your great-grandfather, your great-great-grandmother, grandfather, they've lived and they've died and they've had all these worries in their life. And now it's 2026 and we don't remember any of it.

So it's so many things that we're worrying about just don't matter. So many people have lived before us. There's like 9 billion or 8 billion people alive in the world just now that are panicking about stuff.

The worst case scenario is someone's going to say, oh, some weirdo came and spoke to me in the park. Oh, what was it? Blah, blah, blah. Who cares? Next day, new problems.

You know? So for me, I think this is so innocent. Like I want to meet people. I want to make friends.

I want to have opportunities. I want to travel. I want to be able to offer value to the people around me in my life.

And if I meet the right people and that opens me up to opportunities, then that's great as well. That's as simple as the philosophy. I'm not like coming up to you like, haha, I'm going to get Luke.

I'm going to, haha, where does he live? What's in his bank? I'm not, you know, we're not, there's nothing to be shy about what you're thinking. Yeah. Very good.

Very interesting. And I don't know, should we make any, how can we kind of close this conversation now? How about a little role play, right? Yeah. Do you want to do a small talk role play? Okay.

Yeah. Let's do a small talk role play with what we've learned. See, in this case, I'd like you to be the one who engages me, but I'm going to be dry.

Like, and the reason I'm going to be dry, cause see if I'm really talkative, it'll be too easy. Like I'm not going to be impossible to communicate with, but I'm going to just make it like not super easy for you. So it's going to be more on you to ask the right type of questions.

If you ask me what I do or what my hobbies are or anything like that, I'm not going to be too reciprocal in giving you stuff just cause I want it to be like, I want to, I want to show the audience what a good small talker looks like. And you don't really see a great small talker if there's two people who are small talking, you know what I mean? Like you're only going to really notice it if one, like it's kind of like seeing a champion boxer fighting someone who's like nothing, who's very easy. You're not really going to get to see how good they are because it's too easy.

So I want to demonstrate like good small talking. I'll be a little bit awkward in this and I'll be a little bit shy, not impossible, but I'm just going to make it a little bit hard for you. Okay.

What's the scenario? Let's say we'd, yeah. Let's say park bench. Park bench.

Okay. All right. So ready? Here we, let's, let's go.

Oh God. This is going to, this could be difficult listeners. Let's see how I get on.

I've never done this before. Approach the stranger on a park bench like this, but I'm in the mood to start chatting to people. And Ray was very persuasive in that conversation that we had earlier.

So I think that now, oh, there's a man. Okay. There's a guy sitting at that bench over there.

I'm going to go and chat to him. Okay. Here we go.

Sorry. Do you mind if I sit down here? You weirdo. You want to sit next to me? What you're trying, you're trying to harass me or something.

Get away from me. No, no, no. It's just, I just wanted to find it.

I think that's what a lot, that's what a lot of people think is going to happen. You think it's going to be super weird. That's never going to happen in a million years.

Right? So I just wanted to make the point. That's what the anxiety is telling us is going to happen, but that's not a real conversation. That's never happened unless the person's a psychopath.

If the person's a psychopath, maybe that'll happen, but realistically. Get away from me. Who are you? No, I'm calling the police.

Okay. Let's try it again. Sorry, mate.

Is anyone sitting here? No, no. Go ahead. Do you mind if I just take a seat? Please.

Okay. I sit down. Awkward.

It's awkward. I have to say it is a lovely autumn morning, isn't it? Yeah, it certainly is. It's nice to just be able to sit down on a park bench like this.

The weather's a bit cooler. It makes a change, doesn't it? Are you trying to sell me something? No. No, I'm sorry.

I don't mean to bother you. I don't mean to disturb you. Are you hitting on me? I'm married.

No, no, no. I'm married as well. No, I just thought I know it's in London.

People don't just talk to each other like this, do they? But sorry to disturb you. You're reading your book. I'll let you get back to your book.

I do apologise. Sorry. I'm teasing you.

I'm being such a bad role-playing partner. I'm terrible. That's all right.

This is good. This is good. So I've said I do apologise.

I didn't mean to disturb you. I'll let you get back to your book. Okay.

Great. Let's carry on. I'll carry on.

Okay. So I'm just reading my book now, I guess. Well, yeah.

I suppose that's the end of that, though, listeners, right? Because he wasn't up for it. But I can have one more go. Either way, that's never happened to me before.

It's like, see how bad this role play is going. It's never been. I'm being awkward, like to be funny, but I've never really had an interaction where someone's been that awkward with me.

I can't even. I'm sure there's been some time where I was just like, oh, the person's not up for a conversation. It's fine.

But it's never been like something which I've been lying in my bed thinking about with my eyes open thinking, oh, my God, that happened. It's never been that bad. You know, I've never felt like I'm a weirdo.

No one's ever. I don't think anyone has ever had the impression that I'm a weird person because of small talking and being pleasant and friendly in these situations. But let's try it one more time.

Okay. Let's do it one more time. I mean, in that particular case, listeners, I probably would have just sort of left him alone because it was quite clear he didn't really want to talk to me.

I mean, I could have carried on and said, oh, what are you reading? And he would have just like, sorry, I'm trying to read my book. Okay, let's try again. I'll give you a tip, though, right? You mentioned it's a nice day or something.

And I said, yeah, sure is. He said, oh, it's quite a nice autumn morning, quite a cool breeze. Yep.

So it's two questions where the answer is just yep. Yeah. But it's not going to develop something.

So see if possible, try and ask me something about something that will open me up that you can find out something about me that you can converse about. So you notice I was reading a book, you could ask about that. Or you could ask me about what my plans are for later, you know, in a sort of subtle way, or any plans for the weekend, or maybe we're just after the weekend, did you have a nice weekend, try and get into something where you can find out about what I like to do.

Or you can make an observation in this roleplay, you could pretend that I'm reading something, or, you know, whatever, try and try and get into my world a little bit. Oh, you're reading the Lord of the Rings. Fantastic book.

Yeah, that's it's my first time. Can you believe it? Really? It's actually my favourite book. I love that I have to read it.

Like, you know, every couple of years, I'd like to read it again. But your first time you're I envy you. I've also never seen the movies.

I've never read the book before. So it's also totally brand new. Well, you're doing the right thing.

Because I think you should read the book before you watch the films. Because if you watch the films first, then you'll never get those images out of your brain. You know, so just read the book.

It's definitely the best way to kind of explore the whole world. Yeah. So you don't mind me asking, do you? Whereabouts are you in the book now? It's hard for me to answer that.

Because I actually haven't read the book. And I haven't seen the movies. I'm at the part where the the uncle died.

The uncle? What? I don't remember that. Well, you're there. God, you're right at the end of the book.

It's like the last chapter. Wow. Okay.

Yeah, yeah. I don't know if we should carry on with that. Let's try one right this time.

Yeah. By the way, see even if someone's been dragged. Let's just do this, for example.

Imagine you said to me, so what do you do yourself? And then I said, I've been working as a paralegal for six months. And I don't ask you anything back. I just say I've been working as a paralegal for six months.

How would you continue the conversation from that point? I'd say, oh, okay. Law. Fascinating.

That's great. What sort of part of law do you work in? Workplace law. Workplace law.

So employment stuff. Okay, wow. That's great.

There must be a lot of work in that area, I suppose. It's quite a dry thing. I've been working as a paralegal for six months.

It's something which a lot of people would struggle to generate a conversation forward, especially if they didn't ask anything back. So that seems like quite a boring thing to say. It's so boring to say, I've been working as a paralegal for six months.

What the hell do I say next? But see if you're creative enough with asking questions. They have actually made so many different opportunities for enjoyable conversations that you could potentially have. For example, oh, and what were you doing before that? I don't know what a paralegal does exactly.

Actually, oh, what is a paralegal exactly? And how did you get into that? Or what's your favourite part about your job? Or you could ask about a case in the news that was recently. Or what do you think about the, I don't know, the P. Diddy trial? So they've still made some room for opportunity for things that you can still talk about. If you get a little bit creative with asking questions, but see when you're following a script in your head and you're thinking this is the next question, this is the next question, this is the next question, I need to ask question one, two, three, then you might miss out on these things.

Instead, we need to be actively listening and think, oh, where can I go next to develop this conversation? And see even if someone's talking, right? So let's say I came to you in a park bench and you said something to me like, oh, I'm just going to work. I've got a podcast to record. Then I'm off to the school and just need to take my wife and kids home.

See, as I'm nodding and I'm listening to you, at the back of my brain, I'm still, I'm thinking about what's the most interesting thing that you said that I can generate an interesting conversation with. And if I was

someone who had kids and stuff, I might be like, oh, you've got a family. And then we talk about that.

Or in the case where like, you have a podcast, no way, what type of podcast do you have? And then I'm sure that's something that you and I could, if we were at a park bench, we could get into a good conversation about. So it's about finding the things which are important to that person. And also see like when people apply these skills at their university, at their work or in their life, and you meet people who, you know, for example, in my old job, I was 27 years old at the time.

And see my colleagues, I was the youngest colleague by quite a stretch. The next youngest colleague was 45, if you can believe it. So between me and the next colleague was a significant age gap, you know, about 18 years between me and the next guy.

And he was the baby of the office because above him, everyone was in their 60s. So you had a bunch of people in their 60s. You had one guy who was 45 and then you had me at 27 years old.

Also, like everyone at my office was like Scottish, like white, you know, British, like they were all from the same generation. They were all the same sort of background. They were all like, but then like me, I'm like half Asian, I'm Muslim, I'm like I'm much younger than them.

So there's more of a difference. And see if you allow your anxiety to one and you allow that voice in your head to say, you're so different, it's weird, blah, blah, blah, then you're never going to be able to make good relations. But I had great relationships with everyone in the office.

For example, I took the time to find out what's important to each person. There's one guy in the office, the 45 year old. He was a martial artist.

He enjoyed working out. He did kickboxing and fencing. He was also into the same type of movies as me.

There was another guy in the office who I'm still friends with. He likes travelling, travelling around Scotland specifically. He likes birdwatching.

Birdwatching is such a niche hobby that you're going to struggle to find people who are interested in talking about it with you. And I'm not a guy who does birdwatching. I don't really know anything about it.

And what I do know, I know from showing interest in him. And now if I meet someone else who says they like birdwatching, I actually have things to talk about because I've learned from being an active listener and asking questions and showing interest in what other people are interested in. There was one lady in the office who took care of the admin.

And this was a government job, and the admin was a bit confusing. People would always go to her and say, hey, can you help me do this? Can you do this for me? She'd say, get lost. I'm not doing it.

But see, when I asked her, she'd always do it. Why? Because I took time to build a relationship with her. She liked gardening.

She had grandchildren. She had children. I would talk to her about her grandchildren.

I'd talk to her. Also, grandchildren is a great topic. See when you're having a conversation with someone, it's like setting a fire.

Some conversational topics like, the weather's quite nice, isn't it? That's like putting a tissue paper into the fire. It's gone in a second. But there's

some topics, it's like putting a big, raw, dry wood in, which can burn for hours and have a lot of power in it.

Someone's grandchildren is a great topic, or children, because it's something which is changing every day. Like, see your experience as a father today, or being a father last week, or being a father two years ago. It's different.

Your kids are at different phases of their life. It's something which, if you're talking about it with other parents, you can always talk about parenting, and the conversation's always different. Sports and exercises like that, parenting's like that, work is like that.

You might find that you have some friends, and your whole relationship is built around one topic. So, I would always show, every day show interest to this colleague about her life and her children. Because of that, she was happy to help me in these types of situations.

So, I had one colleague who was interested in children, grandchildren, and gardening, and plants. I would ask for her advice on how I can look after plants. One guy into birdwatching and travelling.

I had another guy into martial arts. I had another guy into photography, videography, and he had lots of cats. So, I kind of had mapped out what people's interests are, and that gave me a huge advantage for being able to go into conversations with them, and interact on the topics that we found mutually interesting.

Okay, it's fascinating stuff. One thing I've noticed, Ray, throughout all of this, is the many stories, anecdotes that you've used to kind of illustrate all the things that we've been talking about. And I mentioned that because you'll be back on the podcast at some point to talk about another topic, and that is storytelling.

How useful storytelling can be in conversations, and presentations, and all manner of other situations. So, we will kind of continue this conversation, turning our attention to the role of storytelling in communication. But it's been really interesting to talk to you, to have this kind of, you know, fairly rambling conversation about the small talk, and the ways to approach it.

Thank you very much for all of the things that you've said to us today, Ray. It was very interesting. Thanks for hosting me.

I really appreciate it. I've had a lot of fun. Yeah, storytelling, that'll be a fun one.

I have a lot of stories I can share. I've almost been arrested a number of times. I've almost died a number of times.

I've seen a ghost. I've actually seen a ghost in my life. People love that story.

So, yeah, next time we'll talk about good storytelling, the effect it has, how to get into stories. But yeah, I really appreciate you hosting me, and I really appreciate that you're not bored of me yet, and you're happy to hear me another time and talk about another subject. So, huge thanks to you, Luke, for being such a great host.

Ending

Hello again. Right, you're still here. You're still listening.

Good for you. I'm now going to do what I did at the beginning, in the sense that I'm going to just kind of do some concluding things. I'm

going to do a little ending part here, but I'm not going to read from a script, and I'm not going to do any edits.

Let's see if I can manage this. Another challenge for myself. In the spirit, part of the spirit of this episode, which is to give yourself little challenges to push yourself out of your comfort zone.

This is a good thing. This is a healthy thing. This is how we develop as people.

Step by step, little by little, find the limits of your comfort zone, and just push the edges out a little bit. This is one of the ways that we can try to grow every day, isn't it? Challenge ourselves and challenge ourselves to do things that make us feel ever so slightly uncomfortable. This is how we gradually, bit by bit, increase our potential.

Not just our potential, but our ability to do things. Thank you to Ray for this episode. He brought a lot to the episode, and that was a great conversation.

One of the things that I liked about this, about the way that Ray did this, was all of those little stories. I mentioned it just at the end there. Little stories.

He kind of filled the episode with little anecdotes and stories in order to illustrate what he was saying. I think that's a really good communication skill. Storytelling.

It is a great way to communicate ideas. It seems that us humans, we like things being explained through stories, often personal stories. Illustrating the points you're making, demonstrating the points you're making through little stories is a great communication skill, and I think Ray kind of demonstrated that quite well.

Yes, he will be back on the podcast. I'm not sure when, but we'll sort that out soon. He'll come back on the podcast in a few, probably in a couple of months or so, to talk about the art of storytelling as a communication skill in English.

Not just kind of campfire stories or bedtime stories, but doing exactly what Ray did today, which is just using storytelling to illustrate your points and to communicate ideas. This is a really, really useful and good skill for good communication and good speaking. What else did I want to say? I wanted to say that there is a PDF for the episode.

I've mentioned it briefly earlier on. If you check the episode page or probably the show notes, you'll find a link for the episode PDF. Here are some things that you'll find on that PDF.

First of all, you'll find a quick summary of some of the main points that were made in this episode. Secondly, you'll find a phrase bank, lots of useful phrases, useful questions, useful bits of English that you can use when initiating conversations, having conversations, building conversations. Obviously, this episode was us talking around the subjects of small talk.

We didn't really get into the nitty-gritty, the specifics of vocabulary, phrases, questions that you can ask. Instead, it was more about the mindset for small talk and building relationships with small talk as a starting point. If you wanted the specifics, the actual English that we use for doing that, check the phrase bank.

You'll find some useful phrases, useful questions that can help you if that's what you're looking for. Also, on the PDF, you will find a full episode transcript. You can go through that and go and look for phrases and other expressions and things like that that you may have noticed,

including some of the ones that Ray defined as he spoke, like a misconception, for example.

He said there's a big misconception about small talk, a sort of misunderstanding. People have the wrong idea, a misconception that small talk is kind of pointless or that it serves no purpose other than to fill silence. The misconception is that small talk is arbitrary.

If something is arbitrary, it means that it's done without any kind of logical system to it. It's just kind of done randomly and therefore is kind of a bit meaningless. You could also say the small talk is trivial, meaning it's just unimportant.

That's the misconception about it that he was talking about. In fact, small talk can be a very important starting point and it can open doors. It can open doors for you, open up opportunities to help you build things which are very useful.

Small talk can be edifying. Conversations should be edifying. In fact, this conversation I think in this episode was edifying.

So edifying meaning it's uplifting, it's intellectual, it's good for your mind, it's good for your character. It's somehow positive for you, positive for your intelligence, positive for your spirit. You know, like a meaningful, a good meaningful conversation.

It's a beneficial thing for you, it's edifying. He mentioned bread and butter. Teaching English, teaching vocabulary, teaching grammar is the bread and butter of many English teachers.

This is how we, this is, you know, our daily work, this is what we do. But it's also important for English teachers and English learners to remember that being good at English is not just about knowing all the

words and having correct grammar, but it's also about how you apply yourself to communication, how you actually use those words and the general mindset of good communication. That's communicative competence.

It's also described as, what is it? Hold on. What's the word for it? So we have grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and discourse, discourse management, which is essentially the way that we approach the organisation of the things we say and the pragmatics of English, applying what we say to acts of communication. Undisputed was another word he mentioned, the undisputed champion of the world when talking about Tyson Fury.

Tyson Fury is no longer, I wanted to point out Tyson Fury, of course, is no longer the undisputed heavyweight champion of the world. I mean, you know, boxing, I love boxing actually, but I do find it confusing, like the number of different belts that they have. Obviously in football, it's cups, right? The world cup, the FA cup, the European cup and stuff like that.

But in boxing, it's belts and there are all these different belts, world heavyweights, all these different titles. And if you win the title, you become the undisputed champion. But Tyson Fury is no longer the undisputed heavyweight champion.

He was beaten, of course, by Usyk. What's his name? I can't remember his first name. I can't believe I can't remember his first name.

I am a fan of boxing, but his first name, is it Alexander Usyk? I think it is. Alexander Usyk, of course, the Ukrainian boxer, an absolute phenomenon. Anyway, don't get me, don't make me get sidetracked by boxing.

That's another question for another time. But anyway, there was an interesting story that Ray told about a friend of his who ended up sort of becoming Tyson Fury's personal doctor. And it all started with the way he applied himself to kind of chatting and setting up conversations with a member of his team.

Anyway, other words and phrases that Ray mentioned, you can, you know, you can search through the transcripts to find more examples of those sorts of things. Let me just summarise some of the things, some of the main points then, just to just to kind of tie up any loose ends to this episode. Right.

So small talk is much more than just talking about the weather. It's also about building relationships. I think talking about the weather is fine.

It's a safe topic. It's a neutral topic, but it's more than that. Of course, it's the starting point for friendships, job opportunities and other unexpected opportunities, or simply just an edifying moment in your life.

You don't need perfect English to connect with people. It's more about the way that you approach things. And I gave the example of students I've met before who have had excellent English, like a good range of vocabulary, excellent, accurate grammar, but were unable to use that to actually apply themselves to social situations in a positive and beneficial manner.

In fact, quite the opposite. One student in particular, I remember, alienated so many other members of the class by being rude, by being completely kind of insensitive by saying the wrong thing, you know, and it made me wonder if he was doing it on purpose. I don't think he was.

He just wanted to show everyone, he needed everyone to know how important he was, and he somehow expressed this through belittling

behaviour and rude comments and didn't seem to care that no one really liked him. That's just an example of applying yourself in the wrong way. Another wrong way you can do it is just by doing absolutely nothing at all.

Obviously, it's your life, it's your choice, but instead of burying your head in your phone and not really connecting with people around you, it might be better for you and everyone else in the room if you took an interest in people and so on. And confidence is the thing. People say I'm not confident enough, but how do you develop your confidence? It might not be just a question of knowing more words, but it could be a question of practising.

You can develop confidence through practise. It's not a question of waiting until you're ready. You learn to do it.

Some people call it fake it till you make it. This is where you just start acting like a confident person until you eventually just sort of like become natural at it. But other ways are, like I said before, edging your way out of your comfort zone little bit by little bit.

Ray mentioned the example, which I think he read in a book, which was someone first of all asking strangers for directions, and then after doing that a few times, then asking another question. Do you have any advice for things I could do in the area? And then pushing it a little bit further and a little bit further. So you don't have to jump all the way into being a super confident person.

You just kind of like do it bit by bit by pushing your boundaries slightly. And yeah, how do you start conversations? It could just be simply introducing yourself, making an observation about something that you both share, that you and the other people share, giving a compliment to the other person, making a self-deprecating comment like, you know,

this is my first time and I don't know what I'm doing anyway. Nice to meet you.

My name's Luke. That can be disarming. It can help other people put their defences down, to be disarming.

It means, imagine if someone's, people are defensive, they have weapons that they hold up, not really, but sort of metaphorical weapons. They're just holding up their defences. And if you make certain comments or say certain things, it can make them put those imaginary weapons down, you know, and then they're much more willing to share.

I liked what Ray said about noticing opportunities for meaningful conversations. People want to be, to feel important and people often will give you little clues and little signs as to the things that they find important, which you can then talk about and bond over. For example, if someone is wearing a t-shirt with a Legend of Zelda logo on it, or a band logo on it, or some other little symbol, that can be a great opportunity for you to talk about that thing.

Oh, is that, is that a Legend of Zelda t-shirt? Oh yeah, cool. And then you can start talking about your love of computer games together. You know, little things like that, little opportunities, being observant enough to notice ways that you can, you know, make friendly conversation with people in a way that's going to open them up a bit.

A lot of it's about genuine curiosity, being genuinely curious in other people and wanting to learn from them and, you know, understanding that other people have fascinating experiences that can be very enlightening. And there's that word again, edifying for you. Shared interests, things in common.

If you discover these things, you make a point of showing that you've, that you have those things in common and you sort of celebrate them. Not, you know, you don't have to, you know, open a bottle of champagne, but you just kind of make it clear. You, I keep struggling to find the word for this, but you flag it up.

That just means you do something that shows that you've noticed that you have something in common. You don't literally wave a flag, but it's something like that. Some sort of, it's sort of a metaphor that is.

So when you discover things in common, you kind of emphasise that a little bit. And it's a good way of, you know, building bonds with people. Listen carefully, ask follow-up questions, be prepared to share some things about yourself, but not too much.

Keep the ball rolling. Be sensitive to the situation, of course, respect other people's boundaries. But really your goal is to make people feel comfortable, to make people feel valued, to be interested in other people and to build something that is mutually beneficial.

So there's nothing wrong with that. So that shouldn't, you know, you shouldn't feel too awkward about it when you remember that your motivations are good, but you can always be respectful. I think it's probably a good idea for me to stop rambling at this point, except that I will again mention Ray Adam.

You can find out more about him. Check the show notes. You'll find a link to his Instagram there.

You'll find a link to his Preply page where you can sign up for one-to-one lessons with him, if that's what you're interested in doing. And also his online school, which is called Elevate English, where he has his various online courses to help you learn the soft skills of English

communication, including small talk, debating as we had before, using humour in English, storytelling. So check out the links in the description.

Thank you again to Ray Adam. And we look forward to having him back on the podcast to talk to us about small talk in English. And there's the possibility of another episode about using humour in English, which is of course a huge subject for me.

And I think that could be another really interesting conversation for us to have. Leave your comments in the comments section. I'd love to know your thoughts.

Show us what you think. Share your ideas and thoughts in the in the comments section and keep the conversation going there. And that's about it for me.

I think I've managed to do it. I think I've managed to do this little section without any need for editing and no script either. So that's good.

Check the PDF. All that stuff is there. And I look forward to speaking to you again on the podcast at some point.

I'm glad that I did this without a script. And I'm glad that I haven't edited for two. I'm glad for two reasons.

Reason number one is it is actually a little easier in the sense that there's less work for me to do. I don't have to edit and I don't, you know, that saves me time. But also I feel like I've said this many times.

Spontaneous speaking is always what I want to try to do on this podcast. Sometimes I write my introductions out word for word because it allows me to control what I'm saying a bit more and ideally be a bit more efficient. But what ends up happening is I feel there's a

difference between me speaking spontaneously like this and me speaking from a script I've written in advance.

I feel I feel like it feels different. And I to be honest, I sort of I like the spontaneous version. And that's always something I want to try to include in my episodes.

But I am now rambling. I think that we've achieved what we wanted to achieve with this episode. So I will just leave it up to you now to continue the conversation in the comments section.

Okay, thank you for watching. If you've been watching the video version, which you will find on YouTube and also Spotify. I've been uploading video versions onto Spotify these days.

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