



FOREWORD BY
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Book
EXCERPT

DO
talk
to
strangers

HOW TO **CONNECT**
WITH ANYONE
ANYWHERE

KERRIE PHIPPS

with **Jane Pelusey**



Do Talk To Strangers
How to Connect with Anyone, Anywhere

By Kerrie Phipps with Jane Pelusey
Create the Life Club Pty Ltd and Pelusey Publishing

Cover design, internal layout: Nathan Shooter, Thrive Media
Illustrations: David Hooper

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First Edition: 2014
Reprinted: 2015

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

Creator: Phipps, Kerrie Louise, author.
Title: Do talk to strangers : how to connect with anyone, anywhere
Kerrie Phipps, Jane Pelusey.
ISBN: 9780994157300 (paperback)
Subjects: Interpersonal communication. Social interaction.
Other Creators
/Contributors: Pelusey, Jane, author.
Dewey Number: 153.6

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TESTIMONIALS

“At last someone has said it: the test of whether we’re serious about our human destiny as social creatures; the test of whether we even get what social capital is; the test of whether we know how to create a civil society is not how nice we are to family and friends, but how open we are to the needs of strangers. How else will they know that we take them seriously as fellow human beings?”

- Hugh Mackay, social researcher
and author of *The Good Life* and *The Art of Belonging*

“Do Talk To Strangers is an engaging and refreshing read, jam packed with valuable life lessons from cover to cover. With Kerrie’s infectious enthusiasm, simple messaging and authentic use of real life examples, this book is a coaching aid like no other. It will enable you to learn more about yourself and give you the tools to connect; enabling you to gain a best friend, a mentor or simply unlock the doors to a fulfilling life journey.”

- Kelly Howlett, Mayor of the Town of Port Hedland
and passionate environmentalist.

“The generosity, kindness and understanding that Kerrie’s messages promote makes this book a must read for each and every one of us that hope for a more tolerant, peaceful world. I for one will now be more mindful of making the time to talk to strangers!”

- Rabia Siddique, Retired British Army Officer, Humanitarian,
Speaker and Author of *Equal Justice*

“This book is so relevant and essential for our time. Kerrie has a unique talent of demonstrating how much we may have forgotten or never realised, about the value of connecting with strangers. ... when I travel, I find I connect more freely with strangers. Kerrie’s words have been a sharp reminder of the need to bring the same to my everyday life.”

- Justine Waddington, Founder, Encounter Travel,
Author, *The Solo Traveller’s Compass*

“Insightful, engaging and a game-changer. In this book, Kerrie Phipps has given us a significant tool that we can use to boost joy, learning and success in our daily lives by nurturing new connections. Follow this book and see a whole new world unfold with every person that you meet. It all begins with taking that first step - talk to strangers.”

- Jessica Sespene, Author of *7-Year Bliss*,
How to Turn Your Deepest Pains Into Your Greatest Victories

“Kerrie’s message and methodology is outstanding and she communicates it in an authentic and real way. I recommend her for any conference, training or coaching. This book will challenge your psychology and disrupt your thinking. It is one of the best books written for customer service and sales teams.”

- Sam Cawthorn - Author of *Bounce Forward*,
Speaker, Philanthropist

“Kerrie’s book is so delightful and refreshing in a busy world, where there is mistrust and skepticism of those that are different to ourselves. It is brilliantly written in the context of ‘safety’ but with such transparency and authenticity... to find so much ‘hidden treasure’ in those that enter and pass through our world. Knowing Kerrie for many years and her commitment to invest in others, she has become much richer for that life approach and as a psychologist I fully recommend this genuine, transparent and relationally enjoyable treasure.”

- Ray Andrews PhD PACFA CAPA

“This book threatens to broaden your horizons and make you smile. In an age of indifference, loneliness and isolation, Kerrie Phipps encourages us to be truly human and to connect with each other. Her stories are real and radiate hope. As Kerrie suggests, a smile and a kind word can lead to so many possibilities.”

- Hans Kunnen, Senior Economist
and Author of *Borrow and Build*

THE 'ASKING' MODEL

There are six essential components that make up the skill base behind how to really cultivate this skill that can seem almost like magic. I share this in the framework of ASKING.



You know it's true from experience that many times 'you have not because you ask not' – so let's have a closer look at asking. You have to 'ask' or gain permission to have a conversation anywhere. People are often closed off to conversations or connecting because their brain is engaged elsewhere. We don't know what is going on in another person's world, so we need to give people an opportunity to shift gears in their thinking and refocus. This is the essence of permission – it's not merely being polite – it's engaging another person's brain and giving them a chance to respond.

Permission is the fastest way to connect with people and there are so many ways to 'ask'. It might even be a questioning look – WITH A SMILE – and making eye contact. In a noisy environment there may be no need for words, but making eye contact with someone and smiling and glancing at the space you'd like to squeeze into could be all

that's needed for them to be open to welcoming you.

To enter someone's space you either ask permission or you are given permission. It's only 'their space' because they were there before you, for example, a waiting room or a train. When entering a train there might be one space available to sit down. It is an empty seat so you have a right to it. You are approaching people so make eye contact if you can, although they are sometimes engrossed in a magazine or a phone. There's often an unconscious permission given or you can just squeeze in there and stare at the floor. It is very subtle but makes a huge difference.

There is an opportunity to ask permission such as "do you mind if I sit here?" It is not necessary but is a great opportunity to connect when you have to sit next to a stranger. You can just wriggle in there, or do it with a smile and make eye contact, which will make you and everyone else around you more comfortable to have further conversation if the opportunity arises. If you are the person already sitting, you have an opportunity to connect, by smiling and making room. You connect because you feel there is permission to or because you create the sense of permission for the other person.

We are so fearful of rejection. To engage someone's brain, you require permission with the simplest question. It doesn't mean saying "Can I have permission?" It is much more subtle than that. You will see examples of permission throughout the book. Even in some of my questions, I am asking permission to think these concepts through. Permission is not a one-time done deal for communication, unlike a school permission note. When we are talking to others, we are gaining permission for a deeper level of communication and connection. It is one level to ask the time of day, but another to ask about someone's family. The ASKING model is not just a cool acronym. It is about asking questions, about asking permission, little by little increasing the

connection with other human beings.

We influence and affect each other so much more than we realise. Scientists can demonstrate through all kinds of testing that suppressing emotion affects those around them to the point of raising another person's blood pressure. But you probably knew that – you've felt it, at least subconsciously. Have you ever asked someone "Are you okay?" and they say "Yes I'm fine" – but you feel like something is not quite right. And of course you can think of times you've thought someone was down but they were focused, didn't see you, then broke into a big smile when they caught your eye. You feel relieved and happy, influenced by a momentary connection.

To notice how easily you're influenced by others, think about how you felt last time you saw a policeman in uniform, or someone in a car behind you blasted their horn, or when you saw a child skipping down the street. All of these people can be complete strangers, yet their appearance, behaviour or demeanour can influence you in a split second, sending you into a stressed state or putting a smile on your face.

Awareness



We don't make significant progress with any goal without a good awareness of the situation. In terms of talking to strangers (or anyone you want to connect with) we need to be more aware of them. It's so important to increase your self-awareness too. How are you responding or reacting to those around you? How can you focus on others and

servicing them, while not losing your sense of self, but becoming more self-aware and others-aware.

I believe that people are important, whoever they are. It's not all about me and what's going on in my head. I can get caught up in thinking about what I need to be doing. Everyone else has stuff going on for them too. When I look beyond myself to focus on and help others, the answers and help I need usually appear anyway. I can ask for help too. I've learned this from challenges I have faced and through helping others. When you give to other people, you do so because you want to and choose to.

Being self-aware and others-aware, self-focused or others-focused, is not a balance thing or an either/or thing. There's no perfect sweet spot that fits every scenario. For example, when someone dives into an icy raging river to save a child, they are completely focused on another and aware of their situation. Their own self-interest is forgotten in that moment, but of course not forever. The extreme situations aren't sustainable.

Being focused entirely on yourself and your goals will cause your network to diminish rapidly. People refer to a 'self-made millionaire' but I wonder how there can be such a thing. They may see themselves (or be seen) as very independent, but surely they had parents – present or absent – who had an impact that was positive or negative that could have contributed to their success. They had customers of some kind, whether the relationship was good or not. We can't do life without other people – and if we connect well we make it easier on everyone!

“A man wrapped up in himself makes a very small package”

– Benjamin Franklin

If you're aware of yourself and what's going on for you, you could be focused on what you want and/or need to get done, but you may not be

as others-aware as you could be. Or you may think “it’s not all about me” and turn the tap off to your own life. We can try to fill our own life but then not know when to give. Similarly if someone wants to give to you don’t be a martyr. Accept the offering.

Assess: How’s your self awareness?

Do you know yourself, what lights you up and energises you? What drains you? Do you know what it is to ‘listen to your body’? When I was told in 2003 by Dr Ray Andrews (psychologist and friend) to listen to my body I was in a deep dark hole of burnout, and so focused on getting stuff done and ‘helping others’ that I didn’t have the self-awareness (clearly in denial and ‘too busy’) to recognise that I was very unwell. Until he said that, I hadn’t seen – or I’d ignored – the warning signs of extreme stress; stomach cramps, tightness in the chest, insomnia and thinking through to-do lists at 3am. When I became aware of these symptoms I could make the necessary changes and recover my health. There are so many checklists and tests available through doctors, other health practitioners and coaches and they all can be useful in raising your awareness. Check out the resources at www.kerriephipps.com for support in these areas.

How’s your others-awareness?

Do you expect others to be like you, think like you, want what you want – or do you recognise that every person is unique? The maps of networks in every brain are different, just as every map of every city in the world is unique. Do you see people as you pass them by? Do you see opportunities to make eye contact and smile? Do you know that people ask themselves sometimes, “Do I matter?”, “Does anyone know I exist?” or “Do they care?”

Being aware of others is not only kind and respectful, it’s essential

for making the world a brighter place. The essence of this book is **AWARENESS – OF SELF AND OTHERS** – and the journey we'll take together though these pages will raise your awareness and your world will enlarge in a beautiful way.

Being present is about awareness-of-self-and-others. I think I would have called myself others-aware, but see now that I wasn't really. I may have been 'others-focused', but I was still on autopilot, responding and reacting to what I saw on the surface. That is, hearing what people said, or what I thought they said, and not really being present and hearing between the lines. Not hearing the 'still small voice' within me.

Being present means not being anywhere else in your thinking, not being on autopilot, and thinking about the other things going on in our lives. When on autopilot, you may think you are present, but you are not thinking about anything else. You are not thinking of others or yourself on a more conscious level. Being present is a practice of slowing down, taking notice of what is going on within and around you.

There are many networking events in any major town or city you could attend. You might observe people in suits looking altogether professional, polished, and sometimes pretentious, and be daunted. But there is a real person underneath and that is who you want to connect with. The networker's intention might be to gather and give out lots of business cards and be remembered for being the most impressive. People can seem full of their own importance and desperation for more clients and another sale. This does sneak through in unconscious ways and may be glaringly obvious to others, despite the efforts to cover it up. You can't judge someone else's intention, or know exactly why you sense the vibe that you do, but you can choose your own intention and let go of the pressures that may drive you.

For example, if you're going to a function and are desperate for a sale

you will drive people away from you. I'm sure you've been on the other end of someone's desperation and it's not nice. You draw back. But you've done business with people who've been there for you, hearing what you want. Be the listener, the one who is focused on others – you won't go without. Know what you're passionate about, what you're good at, and how you can serve others, and your opportunity to make your sale will come.

If you're caught up in a sense of desperation - let's be honest, anyone in business or employed to make sales has felt this at some point - notice it, let it go. Even if you have to talk it out with a coach or mentor, write it down, screw up the paper, and let it go physically and mentally and walk in with a clear, positive, service-focused intention.

Why have you connected with some of the people you have? Think about what reasons you have to connect with people? Think about the last 24 to 48 hours. Have you connected with people, and what was your reason for doing so? If you're struggling to recall a recent encounter, think about your last holiday or weekend trip when you were away from home, more relaxed perhaps. Who did you connect with? Sometimes it isn't to get anything. You might not have purposefully been compassionate or wanting to give, but you just brightened someone's day. You simply connected, and it was not difficult, so it was probably an intuitive response. You were being present, in the moment, not feeling nervous.

Some of the reasons for connection can be about getting more information. It could be for people in business or just looking to help others. Your reason might be to gain a new client or to expand your network. It could just be for the joy of connecting or the joy of learning.

However, when you're really attached to specific reasons for connecting you lose the joy of it and I see this at almost every business event. When

you carry the joy of connecting into a business scenario you open more doors for yourself and others. Often, we put so much pressure on ourselves. If you are going to a business event and you want to promote your business, there is added pressure, so choose another reason. Decide you are going to connect with people tonight because you just want to get better at connecting. You might want to express an interest in people. You might want to enjoy yourself. You want to take the pressure off and just connect and be present.

Make a list of your own reasons for connecting with people you come by. Then come up with a list of other reasons to connect with people but were possibly too afraid to try. If you might have thought, “Yes, I don’t really talk to people in shops because I want to get in and get out”, then you might connect with curiosity in other places or you might connect with caring or wanting to lift someone’s day,

When you make your list of reasons to connect, make two columns. List the reasons that you currently have for connecting. It doesn’t matter if it’s business, or managing boredom, just passing the time, or anything. Write down the reasons that you actually do connect for and then, in the other column, the possible reasons that you could have. We can choose to be curious, or to learn more, or to be more adventurous, or to be more focused and more intentional. You might find yourself connecting in ways that get you stuck in a lengthy conversation that you don’t really have time to be in. That conversation is a few pages on from here for people who ask – How do we ‘get rid of people’ in a respectful way? How can you connect in a way that is respectful and yet succinct?

Everyone’s lists are going to look different, and as you look at yours, be aware of the conversation in your head and the reasons that you connect. Explore your thinking with curiosity, not judgement.

COACHING CORNER



I currently connect:

- To ask directions
- To check the time
- To pay a compliment
- To grow my business/network

I could also connect...

- To share the joy of something, such as a gorgeous day!
- To find and give a sense of connection
- To encourage someone
- To put a smile on someone's face

Choosing your focus everyday is helpful in the process of talking to strangers. It is very easy to put your head down, busy yourself, and not to talk to strangers, but you are missing out on a world of amazing connection and experiences.

Actually I had a moment of being so focused recently that I didn't connect as well as I could have. I was focused on finding a restaurant recently at the Opera House in Sydney and I walked right around to the far end (as Google maps told me that our destination was right up there), conscious that my husband Lyndon and his mum were following me at a distance. As I passed a number of offices at the back of the Opera House I came across two young men sitting in the dark against the wall, and it didn't seem that there were any public entrances. I assumed they might have worked there and popped out for a break.

Instead of breaking the ice and gaining permission with something like "Hello! Can I ask ...", I simply said "Do you happen to know your way

around here?” I didn’t get much of a response from the one nearest, but the other stood up and asked what I was looking for and was helpful in suggesting where the restaurant might be. It ended well because I was immediately aware that my approach could have been more relaxed and friendly, so I changed my tone, expressed my gratitude, and wished them a great night.

There’s always an opportunity for learning! If you notice that you’ve rushed into a conversation with stress or uncertainty and set the tone with it, it’s never too late to pause, shift gears, and take the conversation to a more relaxed, lighter or happier space. And be open about it. If you say “Sorry, I’ve been rushing. Can I start again?” you’ll probably find the other person more interested in you, leaning towards you with empathy rather than leaning away.

Notice your energy. If you’re stressed, tired, cranky or worried, people aren’t as likely to engage with you – unless their ‘empathy radar’ is on. Learn to choose your focus, your attitude and shift your energy. A positive energy will bring walls down, sometimes in practical ways like people offering you their place in line, or giving you an upgrade or other acts of kindness. Really, if you worked in a hotel would you want to make someone’s day when they’re rude to you compared to someone who is friendly and energised? Unless you’re on a mission to lift someone’s spirits, you might amplify the positive energy of others. Or let the energy of others amplify your own.

A great way of increasing your self-awareness is to notice the conversation in your head. The first time I became aware of this concept was when my colleague Mary Britton from New Zealand asked me, “What was the conversation in your head at that moment?” The moment she was referring to was about half an hour earlier when I was supporting her in a training room with new coaches. I felt that I’d let her down by not being as concise as I could have when she and I were

demonstrating a succinct conversation. As she asked me the question, I reflected and realised that the conversation in my head was one of self-criticism. In fact, I'd spent the next 10 minutes until the coffee break beating myself up in my head about how I could have and should have done better.

You might be familiar with this internal conversation of “Why didn’t I say...” or “I should have said ...”. This kind of conversation takes you right out of the present moment, keeping you stuck in the past, or thinking about your future conversations and how you might be able to redeem yourself in the eyes of others. Once Mary highlighted my thinking – increased my awareness – I was able to let go of the unhelpful ‘conversation in my head’ and be focused in the present moment.

I’ve since met Dr Daniel Siegel, author of *Mindsight: The New Science of Personal Transformation*, at Neuroleadership Summits and learned more about noticing and changing the conversation in my head. There are so many neuroscience books available now about the social brain and what’s happening when we’re making connections with others. Neuroscience is a fascinating field that informs the way we interact, how we connect and disconnect, how we make decisions, and the conversations that we have, so I’ve listed more great resources at the back for further reference.

Start small ... smile and scare yourself a little



Once you have made the decision to talk to a stranger or connect with someone who you may have thought about, and you've chosen your focus, the next step is to connect. The initial connection is very small. It can be a matter of eye contact, then a smile, and say hello. There it is – the three steps to connect:

- Make eye contact
- Smile
- Say hello

And if this is terrifying – scare yourself in a small way. A tiny but significant way...

Develop your curiosity and awareness of the world around you

This is easily done, and is so rewarding. Step outside, perhaps go for a short walk, and pay attention to the world around you. Look at the colours, search out your favourite ones, and notice similarities and differences. Look for the beauty in your environment. If you are looking for beauty, creativity and uniqueness, you'll shift your brain into a more positive, engaged state where you literally become clearer in your thinking and more creative and happier.

When you notice colours, shapes and things that you like, you'll see things about people that you like. You'll notice a pleasant demeanour, a lighthearted walk, a ready smile. (By this I mean a pleasant face that may not be smiling, but there's a smile ready to emerge as you make eye contact.) You'll notice colours on people – you might even feel like saying "Oh that's a lovely colour".

The three connection points above are not set in stone. Connections can happen in many ways. One way to find connection points is paying

compliments such as:

- “Hi, just wanted to say I love your earrings – I have similar ones and love wearing them”.
- “Cool shoes!”
- “That’s a great suitcase, where did you find that?”
- “You were thinking ahead about the weather, bringing such a great jacket”.
- “Can I ask you where you got such a unique piece?” (luggage, jewellery, clothing)
- “You seem to know your way around – can I ask you a couple of questions?”
- I’ve often asked “Do you know the area?” or “Are you a local?”

For people who just want to connect better, whether it’s for business or whatever reason, practice. We can make someone’s day in the meantime, while you’re practising connecting with people. Notice interactions at checkouts, on trains, in taxis. Notice how much eye contact there is. See how many people you can make eye contact with. If you are going to look someone in the eye, be relaxed and have a smile. Be the first one to smile. Without eye contact you will not pick up on so many cues such as whether they are relaxed, intimidated or preoccupied.

It’s important to be okay with an awkward moment. It doesn’t mean you lack intelligence or aren’t socially savvy enough. It just means you’re having a go. The important thing is to let go of pretense. It’s really not helpful to anyone to silently be trying to look cool. You’ll look uncool. If instead you say, “I feel a bit awkward asking this” or “I wondered if I can ask you about such and such”, you could get a very different response. If you confess to feeling a little awkward or nervous, the person you’re talking to will want to put you at ease. They may well

say, “Oh that’s okay, please ask” or “No, don’t be nervous!”

Notice public speakers, especially new ones. There’s nothing wrong with someone confessing to start with that they feel nervous. It actually connects them to the audience, as many people in it will be glad that it’s not them up there!

At the Neuroleadership Summit in San Francisco we heard from the Human Resources executive of Twitter, Janet Van Huysse. One of her opening statements was that she was nervous, as this was her first time speaking at a conference like this. She then went on to deliver a brilliant presentation, in tandem with neuroscientist Carol Dweck. What she did by expressing her nerves was actually let them go. If she’d tried to hide them in order to ‘look professional’ we would have felt (consciously or unconsciously) that she wasn’t being completely authentic and we wouldn’t have been so engaged in the presentation. She came across as very professional and with great credibility anyway! Many of us went to talk to her after the session to acknowledge her presentation and I’m sure she went home encouraged and more confident about speaking.

The fear of awkward moments

The fear of awkward moments stops so many conversations that could be truly amazing. Here’s a few that might stop you from engaging with others. It’s really fear of rejection, fear of what others think... let it go!

“Fear is going to be a player in your life but you get to decide how much”
- Jim Carrey

What if they don’t look at me, or just glance and look away?

Don’t take it personally – they’ll have things on their mind that have nothing to do with you. Feel free to leave them be. Your brain might be telling you that it’s your fault, that you’re not worthy of a conversation,

that you don't matter – but that's just your brain's default setting to warn you of danger. It's not actual danger, so thank your brain for watching out for you and tell it that it's overreacting. Get on with your day and find someone else to smile at. And they may not even be ignoring you – if they're preoccupied they didn't even see you, even if they appeared to be looking at you!

What if I say something stupid and look like a complete idiot?

Ah, we've all had these moments. We expect perfection of ourselves and let others off the hook saying, "You're only human!" We're all going to have moments of being vague, saying something inappropriate or irrelevant, and feeling the sense of disconnect. I still do. The important thing is to be able to let it go. Don't beat yourself up for it as that will only inhibit clear thinking even more.

What if I have no idea what to say in the first place?

Perhaps there's no need to say anything, but if you want to connect, if you sense that you like this person, or that they have an answer to something you need or want, just step out and say something. I did this one day when I had noticed a tall, elegant redhead at a conference and didn't know what to say, but wanted to make a connection with her.

In a crowd of 20,000 people at Hillsong Conference at Olympic Park in Sydney she stood out to me. I had nothing intelligent to say but I caught up with her as she was walking to a bus and said, "Hello! I just wanted to meet you" (feeling a little sheepish). Then I said, "I'm Kerrie, I'm from Dubbo". She replied, "Oh my goodness! Perfect timing – my friend Paula is moving to Dubbo next week and doesn't know anyone!" This was the start of a beautiful friendship with Paula and my family. Lucinda, the beautiful redhead I wanted to meet, was the connector. Perhaps a simple hello is more intelligent than we assume.

How do we 'get rid of people' in a respectful way?

We need to have boundaries. A boundary might be a limit you put on your time and energy, simply by being clear on what your focus is. I think people forget that they can say, “No thank you”. You are not compelled to stay in a conversation, to buy something or commit to anything. You can excuse yourself respectfully. It’s okay to say, “I need to close my eyes for a while, I’ve had a big day. Will you excuse me?” It will leave the other person feeling good, not like they’ve been a bother if you can acknowledge or thank them for something.

Perhaps it would be relevant to say, “So nice to hear about your family, thank you for telling me about them. Would you excuse me? I need to collect my thoughts about a presentation I am giving soon”. Be honest, because if you get caught out you will make them feel insulted – and no-one likes to feel deceived.

I can remember someone being caught out many years ago when not very many people had mobile phones. A business man was standing in line at the bank appearing to have a conversation on his mobile, when suddenly his mobile phone rang, revealing his dishonesty. Oh cringe! Now we can only guess why he may have been pretending to be on a call as he walked into the bank, but I can tell you that public opinion dropped in that moment. If he’s pretending to be on the phone, in what other aspects of business is he pretending?

Be respectful and understand that not everyone is like you, whether you are the chatterbox or the listener, and no-one thinks exactly as you do or sees the world as you do.

Suspicious

When a stranger speaks to you, your natural tendency might be to be

suspicious. It could be your intuition, noticing whether or not you are in a safe place. Many public places such as malls, hospitals and universities have security guards. It is okay to ask them to walk you to your car or share any concerns you have. The small chance something could go wrong can keep you from so many amazing adventures. Fear of falling off playground equipment can impact on a child, and fear of rejection can deprive you of not only fun, but valuable, learning experiences.

Even if you don't have much energy or time to connect, start small. Take a few minutes, once a day or once a week, if you want to start smaller! Be open to connect with someone.

Keep going with quality questions



This is not about learning a list of quality questions – people sense your heart and the attitude you ask in. So let's look at the heart and science of quality questions, because whether you're on a train or a plane and you want to have more connections with people, consider how you actually do that. How do you ask questions that don't seem confronting or invasive? I was thinking about a couple of blokes that I was working with who wanted to be better connected in both life and business. However they worry about being judged as trying to pick up women when they simply want to connect and get to know more people.

I could be talking to someone my age or younger, perhaps a man on a train, and you might think that I'm 'hitting on to him' or 'making

advances', but I know I'm not. I'm happily married and love meeting new people, but strangers don't know that. How do you have a conversation and ask questions and engage someone without them thinking there's an ulterior motive? How do you have a lovely stranger-to-stranger connection without being judged? We can prepare for that, but we can't always know how it's going to go. People have their own frame of reference and might decide that anyone who talks to them has ulterior motives. You might be able to turn that around with some great questions that create a positive response.

It's also about being acknowledged as another human being, just to be seen and noticed. It really can make quite a phenomenal difference. All that happens when we get ourselves out of our own way. That's when we have the powerful conversations, powerful connections.

Many people are uncomfortable about walking into a room where there are groups of people already chatting to each other. You walk in on your own and you think, "Which group am I going to go to?" What do you say when you get into the group? Make eye contact with someone and smile. Be ready to listen. Then the attention is not on you. It's on them. You might notice that someone's on their own, a little to the outside of the group. I was often isolated when I was young so I notice people in the same position. One of the ways that is easiest for me to connect when walking into a room is to find people on their own who might be having trouble connecting. If you are already in a group you can introduce people who are on their own into that group. "Ah! Have you met this person and that person?"

I experienced this kind of welcome recently at Brendon Burchard's Expert Academy where people were in groups of five, each sharing their stories for two minutes. I couldn't see a group of four to join, so I stood on the edge of a group of strangers who had started sharing and very quickly one pulled me in saying, "Join us!" Being a little unwell I

had less energy to connect so I didn't mind being on the outside, but I was so touched by her welcome. Then after everyone had shared they turned to me, even though the time was up and they could have gone to get coffee.

Becky Cashman's welcome had made me part of the group and they all said "Share your story!" As we took our seats ready for the next session she asked me if I'd have dinner with her that night. We ate downstairs with a few others who Becky had invited and it was really cool to be reminded of how good it is to be welcomed and included.

If you're not ready to jump in, whether you consider yourself an introvert or an extrovert, you can watch what's going on for a moment and see the dynamics. I think some people feel like they always have to be part of a group, whereas with natural curiosity you can sit back now and then and see what's going on. It's very hard to do that if you're desperate to be in the middle of another group. If you keep to yourself for too long though, you can appear distant and uninterested or detached, and people will feel less inclined to include you because they might expect rejection from you.

Be your authentic self. Connecting in this way becomes a key that unlocks possibilities that you may not have imagined. Insincere people merely tolerate others, while genuine connections build trust and ultimately become great relationships.

Rather than wondering if your questions are 'quality enough' remember that there are no silly questions ... they might just seem silly to you. Just ASK. This relates to getting to really know people who are already known to you, but not well. Be curious. Know that there's more to that lady you pass in the street, or sit near at church, or see backing out of the driveway next door to you. Everyone has a story, stuff that matters to them, stuff that lights them up. It's okay to say, "I just wanted to say

hi. I see you around but we've never had a conversation. How are you?" It doesn't always go well but it can be turned around. Be curious instead of easily offended, as we might learn something of ourselves and at the same time support that person more than we could realise. If you come over as confident it may highlight in others their own feeling of intimidation and suspicion. What is going on here? What is it that the other person is feeling? Is it uncertainty?

There is a risk of being misunderstood. I had this experience talking to a lady on a jetty along the beautiful Perth coastline. She said, "Have you caught anything?" I replied, "No, I am not fishing but our friend here has just started". She said, "Oh", so I could have stopped there but she had initiated a conversation. So I asked her, "Are you from around here?" I was a little surprised by her tone when she answered "yes" a little defensively or suspiciously. We don't know why people respond like this but sometimes they do. If she had assumed I was a local, she might have thought I was implying she was a foreigner or tourist and therefore unwelcome if that had been her experience before. Or she may have wondered if I wanted to know which beach house was hers, which would be too personal. Feeling the subtle tension I said, "I'm from New South Wales". She replied, "Oh really", and became friendly again.

Later that evening it occurred to me how important it is for people to feel the sense of belonging. My statement may have been similar to one she hears regularly with a darker meaning attached. It may have unearthed an insecurity or prejudice she faces. That is why I responded with where I was from to show I was the 'foreigner'. I was giving her back a sense of status. You could say, it is just one person so does it really matter? Does it bother me if a total stranger is offended? A different question is did I cause offence? So I want to take responsibility and leave her happier, not feeling confused or judged. It comes down to caring for people and fixing a mistake before it causes further harm.

People can take it to the extreme and to try to fix the other person's belief system or make amends for years of misunderstanding and judgements. You are only responsible for that moment and that conversation. In saying that you are not fully responsible because they make assumptions too, but if I can leave them in a better, happier place, that's great. If they are in the same place, that is fine also.

Some questions roll off the tongue, but they may not be useful and may be quite damaging. You want a question that results in a better conversation. Of course no two brains are alike, so a question that lands well with one person may not land so well with another because we have completely different neural networks.

For example, the "Are you a local?" question to a local who loves the area and has always lived there may fill them with a sense of pride and they joyfully say yes. To another person the same question with the same tone of voice and expression might have a negative impact if they would like to feel like a local but haven't felt included in the community yet. There could be a whole lot of pain associated with that. It could be like saying "Are you one of the 'in crowd'"? and it is painful to have to say no. This is why it's important to be present with the person you are talking to so you can feel the change, move with it and adapt.

Potentially unhelpful questions:

- "What do you do?"
- "Where are you from?"

Better questions:

- "What do you love to do?"
- "Are you from around here?"

Unhelpful questions may trigger a threat to our social brain and needs. A social threat can cause the same response in the brain as a physical threat. It can distract from the brain thinking clearly and focus the person on escape. The social threats have been well communicated in David Rock's SCARF model (Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness and Fairness). We can threaten someone's social needs, or they already come with preconceived beliefs and a history of these needs not being met, therefore creating hypersensitive reactions. We need to be aware of our social needs and how they can be threatened or safe and happy.

For our brain to be happy we need a sense of status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness and fairness. The emotional centre of our brain is on high alert, looking for threats in these areas. To look into this further, check out www.neuroleadership.com which I highly recommend.

Status

Where do we rank other people? Do we see people and ourselves as more or less important or clever or significant than others? It's very useful to see others as equals. We have different roles and titles, and varying levels of education and opportunity, but we're all human beings who want to love and be loved, who want to feel connected. Threats to status and feeling 'looked down on' might be caused by:

- comments that diminish someone
- the word **JUST** – “Do you just work here in the café?” or “Are you just a mum?”
- statements we make about ourselves that make us look important – you might be increasing your own sense of status but diminishing another's, which will cause a disconnect
- being ignored – walk into a café when the staff standing behind the counter are not taking any interest in you; the longer you wait

the more your sense of status decreases because the message you're getting is that they don't think you are important.

Certainty

There is no certainty in life but the brain craves certainty and likes to know what is going to happen. We want to know what time someone will turn up or if someone will do what they said they will do. Our need for certainty can be threatened by thoughts of:

- “Am I in the right place?” “Is this the right venue?”
- “Are they looking at me? Who is that? Should I know that person?”
- “What is expected of me?”

Autonomy

We want to have a choice and a sense of being in control. Threats to autonomy include:

- contradicting choices or imposing views of the world
- someone being bossy
- people jumping queues, even unintentionally.

Relatedness

This is a sense of connection with others around us. We desire that all of our emotional needs be met. Just like physical needs (shelter, food, water, air, safety) we prioritise them individually according to our own wiring. While all of these alerts to the brain are important to consider, I'll spend more time on this area because it is particularly relevant to connecting with others. Threats to relatedness can include:

- Not smiling – a neutral expression is read by your brain as a threat.
- Not having name-tags – trying to remember someone’s name after they’ve been introduced, and the more you try to remember, or bluff your way through, the harder it is to think straight.
- Looking around the room for someone else while you’re ‘listening’ to someone. I’m sure it’s happened to you – someone asks you a question and as you start answering you feel like they’re looking for someone ‘more important’ to enter the room.
- Being overdressed is something to be aware of. Personally I would rather be overdressed than underdressed, but people can be threatened by you ‘looking better’ than them.

Ways to address these threats – to minimise or eliminate them, or recover from the threat state – include:

- smile and be happy
- be open and curious, without being over the top
- look for something to acknowledge
- be natural – stop trying so hard as people feel it
- give your full attention to the person or people you’re with – be IN the conversation
- use people’s names:
 1. to remember their name, associate it with something if you can (does it rhyme with something, is it the same name as your mum/dad, cousin or friend?)
 2. repeat it, and clarify how it is spelt or pronounced because the more you think about it, the more you’ll remember it, and the more they’ll feel that they matter
 3. write it down, see it, and use it – introduce them to someone else if you can.

Fairness

We all know what it is like to feel something that is ‘just not fair’. We might hear that statement from children, but it is still important for adults. To establish fairness:

- when pouring yourself a drink, pour an extra one and offer it to someone nearby
- moving your bag off the seat – it is only fair to move it once the train is filling up - and it’s a welcoming gesture.
- wait in line when you can, and let someone else in ahead of you, especially if you arrive at the end of the queue almost at the same time.

Pressure or pleasure?

Are you creating a sense of ‘pressure’ or ‘pleasure’? 😊😊

These threats to the brain add pressure and you can’t think clearly when you’re under pressure. I’m sure you’ve had plenty of moments of trying to remember someone’s name as they walk towards you. You might say hello, but once they’ve gone and you’ve given up, their name comes to you. These potential pressures, when you’re aware of them, can be turned into an opportunity for pleasure. You can give people a sense of pleasure when you use their name, when you look at them and give them your full attention.

“Remember that a man’s name is to him the sweetest and most important sound in any language” – Dale Carnegie

COACHING CORNER



Think about how you can be your best self.

- Start by listing your qualities. (It might be a challenge to do this, and if it is I especially recommend it.)
- What have you been acknowledged for in the past? There will be some common themes.
- What would you like to be acknowledged for? If you would like to be acknowledged for being warm and friendly it's in you already or it wouldn't have come to mind. It may be buried under a sense of inadequacy.

Remember, we don't know what someone else has faced just before they walk into the room. Just as sometimes you've had other things on your mind that have nothing to do with the next event, others you meet could be dealing with any kind of crisis. If you're preoccupied, you may feel a bit nervous or uncomfortable about joining in on the conversation so what's needed is a fresh perspective. Reframe the situation – see it differently.

Consider how you feel as you enter a room full of people. Is it comfortable and exciting? What about when you turn up to a friend's party? Then think of another situation where you went to a function and felt uncomfortable or terrified. To look at the situation from a different angle you might choose to notice how nervousness feels similar to excitement – and decide that you're excited rather than nervous.

With a feeling of uncertainty, we could reframe that and see it in a more positive way. Instead of seeing uncertainty as a negative thing, it could be seeing it as a new learning experience or potential inspiration. Feeling nervous and feeling excited are very similar emotions, so we can

just switch those around. It's about being aware of it. So if you notice feeling a bit nervous, a bit anticipatory, then choose what you want to think. Those thoughts might be, "Okay, this is a bit unusual for me". This is different. I wonder what I'll learn today. Or choosing to say, "I will look for the spirit of adventure". It's about just having a visual or having some words that change it from discomfort to something that you are comfortable with. If you like learning say, "Hmm, I might learn something interesting here".

It's a 'growth mindset' as described by Professor Carol Dweck to choose curiosity. We can take things at face value and if it looks uncomfortable we can avoid it (a 'fixed mindset') or we can step forward with curiosity and think what can I learn here or what I can contribute. To choose to reframe something is about being curious and asking yourself, how else could I see this?

There is a great reframe example in the Lego movie song "Everything is awesome" in the line, "Lost my job, it's a new opportunity – more free time for my awesome community".

I recently ran a survey about how people feel when talking to strangers. The good news is that if you feel uncomfortable and nervous about speaking to one or many, you're not alone. Some people are more nervous with public speaking. They're happy to have a chat with people on the bus. They'll chat with a checkout person. They'll talk to anyone. They're good talking to small groups. But put them in front of a crowd, put a microphone in their hand, and it's like, whoa! That's terrifying.

Then there are others who are happy to do the public speaking and actually love it, but the one-on-one or small group situations are terrifying. The desire to be more confident about public speaking is similar to wanting to be more confident on a one-on-one basis because the nerves or confidence starts with the conversation in your head. The

best little piece of information I could share is that if you're nervous, it's because you're thinking about yourself, not your audience.

When we think about it, especially in the context of public speaking, someone says, "Let's welcome to the stage... (insert your name here)", then everyone starts clapping. The attention is on YOU so it's natural to feel some butterflies. If you shift that focus, perhaps towards your audience and what you're there for, the butterflies will settle. I saw this done beautifully by a high school student in Cambodia recently. She introduced herself as Thoeu and started by thanking everyone for coming and thanking us for supporting their scholarships. Her intention in speaking was to express her gratitude and she spoke from the heart. It was incredible. I thought 'that's the essence of great public speaking' and told her that afterwards as she hugged me with gratitude and joy (leaving a big imprint in my heart).

When you're walking into a room or dialing into a teleconference, ask yourself what your intention is in being there.

- Do you want to express gratitude?
- Do you want to bring a sense of curiosity?
- Do you want to come and learn something?

Our mind is often on autopilot, and unless we start noticing what the internal conversation is, we'll be reacting from nerves and discomfort and not connecting as effectively and authentically as we could.

One of the ways that I think we can start shifting our thinking is by reflecting on moments that we have done well, the times when we have been completely present and in the zone. We are very good at analysing and dwelling on the times when we didn't do so well. Don't beat yourself up, but be curious. Reflect on the moments where you have been completely present with an attitude of curiosity or a focus on others.

Have you ever connected with someone who might know you better than you know them? Perhaps you're in the papers or have an online presence. You may not remember or know their name. It's better to be honest and say "I'm sorry. I can't think of your name..." or "I'm not sure if we've met before". Sometimes, I think I have met someone and they say, "Oh, I don't think so". I say, "No worries – well we're meeting now!" I found that honesty helps, because otherwise we get more and more intense on the inside and put up all these inauthentic walls.

If you're public speaking, meeting someone or going for a job interview, you may be wondering "What is expected of me right now?" That puts so much pressure on you but refocusing helps. Choose to be present, honest, and willing to ask questions.

The pressure to remember someone's name, to look professional and other expectations you might have of yourself actually decreases not only your ability to be relaxed and present, but also robs you of creativity. This affects problem solving and memory recall, so it's even harder to solve the 'what is their name?' dilemma.

If you're feeling nervous about connecting with people, you can always say, "This might be a bit awkward" or "I'm a bit nervous to ask you this, but can I ask ... ?" Generally, when we confess something like that, people are most likely going to respond by saying, "That's okay". They then connect even more – because you've been vulnerable. Vulnerability is an amazing connector. As Dr Brené Brown, author of *Daring Greatly* says, "Vulnerability is the birthplace of all the positives like belonging, courage, love, creativity and innovation. Vulnerability opens doors of possibility and opportunity".

We interact with strangers all the time and often don't think about it. Consider your connections recently that went well and ask yourself how was your thinking in that moment? What was the quality of

It's important to note the tone of conversation, whether it's based in positivity or negativity. Notice – does it lift you up or take you down? Does it flatten you, even slightly? If it is based in negativity, which is often what you hear people start a conversation with, it won't go very far, and it won't go so well either. Here's an example – “Shocking weather isn't it?”

When the focus is negative it just takes you down and you start feeling more and more unpleasant. It only changes if you become aware and decide to change direction. This is when you begin to take charge of what goes in and out of your head.

When I was 19, a close friend I lived with at the time told me that I was the most negative person she knew! She explained that she no longer asked me how my day was as my response was usually a complaint. I was shocked. I never wanted to walk negativity into anyone's day, but I had been doing it unaware, processing my problems verbally, and not focusing on the best aspects of the day or being grateful for anything. The brain naturally tends toward a negative focus, and its ability to identify threats is a gift, but one to be aware of and used wisely.

Whichever way you're heading is the way that you'll continue to go unless you change course. Millions of little things can cause a shift. Walking out into the sun can move you further into a positive frame of mind, unless you have a headache – so you might choose chocolate, sleep, sunglasses or whatever works for you. Asking someone about the 'best place' they ever visited, or the most inspiring leader they know of, can shift a conversation from the 'worst place/person/thing' to something that makes them (and you) smile.



And it's best to be honest – don't try to manipulate the conversation. But if you need a segue, just say what you feel – for example, “I lose energy when I talk about politics, can we talk about something that makes us smile instead?” or “I'd love to ask you who or what inspired you to travel ...”



We ask better questions when we're in a more positive frame of mind. There's more on this in the chapter called Right Attitude, so for now, just consider what questions you might ask someone when you're happy, curious and carefree.

Perhaps you could go for a walk with someone and ask them to share what they notice. It's always useful to hear another perspective and see things with fresh eyes. One day I was walking with Lyndon and said ‘oh, that's beautiful’. He thought we were

seeing the same thing. I was looking at the house on the hill in the distance, while he was looking at two trees nearby. Those trees were actually exactly on either side of the house in the distance, creating a frame for my beautiful picture. Our view was then enriched by our shared perspectives.

Our views in life are enriched when we listen to each other.



Consider - *What is your favourite topic of conversation? For example, a hobby, interest or sport. Find where others with a shared interest might connect, and introduce yourself.*

CONNECT WITH KERRIE

ASKING Kerrie to connect with you and your organisation...

We are all wired to connect; the idea of Connecting with Confidence these days is more likely to be associated with a secure Wi-Fi than making a meaningful connection with people around you. But in the world of Kerrie Phipps, Connecting with Confidence is the message she brings to people around the world. Smile, take a breath and say hello. Sometimes that's all you need.

Her book *DO Talk To Strangers – How To Connect With Anyone, Anywhere* was inspired by the many people Kerrie connects with as she travels through life. With the ASKING model she shares her experiences, and her six essential skills to more effectively engage and connect with others.

Kerrie is the kind of person who feels the fear and does it anyway, and in this book she shares her philosophy around contribution – which is more than just giving. Contribution is about adding value, and making the world a little better one connection at a time. ASKING looks at how to build AWARENESS, START small, KEEP going, be INTERESTED in others, tap into your NATURAL CONFIDENCE and finally to show GRATITUDE.

Kerrie has a simple message: Your world grows larger with every person you meet. In her keynotes and workshops, she helps people in customer-facing industries let go of the need to sell, and engage with the desire to connect.

The message from recent cognitive neuroscience research clearly shows

that we are wired to connect. We achieve more in groups than alone; we create more; we stretch more; we contribute more. And yet, many of us resist connecting with others through fear, busyness, or sometimes plain old apathy.

To ignite this inbuilt desire to connect with others, invite Kerrie along to your organisation. At home as much in a boardroom as she is on stage, where there's an opportunity to encourage others and inspire them to connect more profoundly with those around them, ASKING is the key.

Described as having 'incredible energy on stage' Kerrie authentically models and teaches context-specific ways to connect with confidence both inside and outside the workplace. As a keynote speaker and conference culture specialist, Kerrie excels in bringing the best out in others.

Kerrie loves generating insights and conversations leading to new connections in the brain and ultimately new social connections. By ASKING Kerrie to speak with your team, you pave the way for new connections and business growth as she encourages others to:

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Connect - Remember to connect well online; keep it personal by including a note or a question (to demonstrate you're a real person) ☺

THANK YOU *Kerrie*

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"Do Talk to Strangers is a joy to read and a valuable resource."

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"If you ever get to meet Kerrie Phipps you'll realise that she is an encourager. By putting her life and ideas into print she can encourage and enrich so many more people. Her book is thoughtful, easy to read and will lift your spirits."

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KERRIE PHIPPS is widely known as an inspiring speaker, author and unique facilitator of strategic and inspiring connections across fields such as education, thought-leadership and entrepreneurship. Kerrie is passionate about what happens when people connect, and when neurons connect to make positive things happen. Kerrie lives with her husband and son in Central West NSW Australia.

ISBN 978-0-9941573-0-0



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