

A note from a friend...

Every time I catch up with Kerrie Phipps in person, I am fascinated about her ability to connect people. I have met people all around Australia through Kerrie and her “network”. It seems like a natural gift.

The most interesting connections come from her ability to “Talk to Strangers” in a way that is so warm and enthusiastic that the stranger is immediately anything but a stranger anymore.

I personally use Kerrie as a mentor in this area and aspire to learn her amazing skill.

As an example, Kerrie and I were presenting at the Byron Bay Writers Festival. As we wandered around Kerrie chatted to people: festival attendees, festival volunteers and festival writers all equally and with authentic warmth and interest. I remember sitting in an audience with Tim Ferguson, Elizabeth Gorr, and Charlie Pickering on the panel. Kerrie’s ability to “Talk to Strangers” meant that Charlie’s girlfriend (who she had just spoken with in the greenroom) felt comfortable to sit with us. Because of Kerrie we became friends with many other talented authors during the event.

Kerrie’s ability to connect also means she has extracted stories of “Talking with Strangers” from others. From each of these stories, both Kerrie’s and from her networks, she has found lessons and learnings that can improve our lives and make the world a more friendly connected place.

The following are extracts from Kerrie’s upcoming book “Talking with Strangers”. It includes some amazing stories and positive outcomes from chatting with people that are strangers.

In the book there will be lessons that we can all apply to our lives.

After interviewing Kerrie about this innate skill here are the five tips I have picked up for Talking With Strangers

1. The benefit of talking to strangers is great friendships resulting from reaching out with true interest and openness. That is how Kerrie and I are now friends who catch up all over the country.
2. Do not judge the people you talk to. One of Kerrie’s stories is about meeting an older gentleman on a train. After a quick chat a connection was made and this CEO of a charitable foundation put other CEO’s in touch with Kerrie and great projects resulted.
3. Set a goal to help others have a better or great day. If you say hello to a stranger and you get the Mondayitis grunt, decide to try and make their day a better one.
4. It isn’t about you. If you try to chat and the response is not the best, remember it isn’t about you. You don’t know what is happening in their world. Give them some slack and don’t take it on board.
5. Be open for others to talk to you. If you want to be open to opportunities and the connections with others you must be open to just that.

Jane Pelusey (Author, Book Mentor and friend of Kerrie)



Jane and Michael Pelusey have attended six of Kerrie’s Conversations With Entrepreneurs events across four different states and know the value of Extraordinary Conversations.

Jane says “Inspiring conversations are a great way to connect with new people. That is what we have experienced at Kerrie Phipps’ Conversations with Entrepreneurs. I met Kerrie on Facebook. It wasn’t until she came to Perth and ran the first Conversations with Entrepreneurs that we really connected.”

These events, have highlighted the value of facilitating conversations where strangers connect and share inspired, and inspiring thoughts, all leave feeling better about themselves and more connected to others around them. Great friendships and business partnerships have resulted from these connections.



Extraordinary Conversations is an e-book that gives a sneak preview of the upcoming *Why It's Great To Talk To Strangers* by Kerrie Phipps.

Extraordinary Conversations can be just a breath away and provide unique learning that can improve our lives and make the world a more friendly connected place.

Learn how to open doors and discover a world of possibilities, positivity and making a bigger difference.

People might imagine, if they've seen me with celebrities, journalists, authors and entrepreneurs at classy events that my extraordinary conversations might all take place in those settings, with those people. Sometimes they are, but often, they take place unexpectedly, on a train, plane, ferry, or in the supermarket or public toilets.

In *Why It's Great to Talk To Strangers* I share stories from a multitude of places, including some unlikely connections. Sometimes a brief interaction leaves a lasting impact and I think about them from time to time. There is always learning.

A recent train station connection began with a discussion near me at peak hour, and I heard a young woman's frustration with notifications popping up on her mobile. I heard her friend say she didn't know how to fix it, so I stepped closer and offered to help her, as I'd just recently learned how to turn them off.

Talking with Strangers Tip

It can be a little awkward to confess to overhearing someone's challenge and then offer to help, but I think it's always worth it to make a connection and offer. Even with little things. Thankfully the girl could see that it wasn't my intention to run off with her phone (in a crowded train station) and she handed it to me, I showed her the settings and fixed it.

The train arrived and the girls boarded the carriage behind the one I stepped into. It wasn't till 40 minutes later that I saw one of the girls again, the friend of the one with the phone issue. She exited the train when I did, and commented that she'd seen me through the carriage doors enjoying a conversation with someone. She asked did I know the man I'd been speaking with.

My "talking with strangers" nature was discovered, and I said that we'd had a great conversation. The man actually offered to introduce his hairstylist fiancé to me and she'd do my hair as a gift because he so appreciated the conversation that brought him clarity and answers.

I walked out of the station chatting with her and I asked if she had far to go, wondering if we'd be walking in the same direction. She was on her own; her friend who I'd helped in the city had left the train earlier. It was after dark, and I only had 2 blocks to walk. She had friends meeting her in a car and I actually had the audacity (or prompting) to ask, "Do you think your friends would mind dropping me off down there at the end of the street?"

She was quite happy to ask and her friends were happy to drop me at my destination. We jumped in the car and she introduced me to the girls in the front of the car, confessing that she'd just met me. They all thought it was great that strangers could connect like that and trust each other. It felt like a 'local moment' as if

we're part of a community of people just around the corner – a country town feeling of trust.

Talking with Strangers Tip

Trust your gut feeling about talking to strangers.

If you've learned not to trust, to not talk to strangers – you might like to have a closer look at your decision-making. (I will be going further into this in the book itself.)

Trains Planes and Automobiles

I was on a platform awaiting a train at 7.09am. I'd never been on that train line before, so I arrived a few minutes early, and sat alone on a bench. Minutes later, a well-dressed lady walked past me and looked so classy. I thought "wow!" and wanted to say "I love your suit! You look fantastic!". She was a little far away and it would be weird to call out. I might embarrass her if the whole platform heard, so I thought I'd tell her if she was on the same carriage. As I was thinking this, another well-dressed woman sat on the bench next to me.

I said "Good morning!"

She turned to me and said "oh, hello" – a little uncertain.

I asked, "How are you?"

She replied "Well, thanks" still a little uncertain.

"Do you normally travel on this line?" I asked her, adding "I haven't been here before".

She said "oh yes, every day. Where are you from?"

I said "Dubbo"

She relaxed and said "hence the friendliness!"

I explained that I was in Sydney for the few days between our coastal holiday and ANZAC Day and my Grandfathers 95th birthday. The conversation continued as we stepped on to the train, so we sat down and talked all the way into the city.

Talking with Strangers Tip

I like to discuss general life topics, like family, places, sunshine and other everyday stuff that has people feeling equal. Because I believe we are. If the conversation begins with "what do you do?" it can quickly alienate someone who feels inferior. If we can connect on 'ordinary things' then when work, business or education comes up, it's not such a threat. If you are introduced to someone with a great title it can be easy to feel intimidated. If you encounter them as another conversational human being first, then their role or experience is more likely to be interesting, or fascinating to you more than threatening.

Because this particular lady and I were discussing Dubbo, when she mentioned it was a long time since she'd been there, I could ask if she'd been there for work or with family or friends. She then shared that she'd been there when she worked as a lawyer, but now is in banking. When I asked her where she worked now, I realized that she is in the same building as an economist that I'd met and kept in touch with over the past year. It was lovely to make that further connection.

That conversation, prompted me to send an email to the economist, when I realized how close I was to their office. We met up later that afternoon for another thought-provoking conversation.

Another day, another train trip... I'd been on the phone with a journalist, chatting about 'talking to strangers' and the joy of it. I ended the call and there was a baby looking at me and clapping. Of course, babies open doors to conversation, especially when they're absolutely happy. Walls come down where people would normally keep their eyes on the floor or looking out the window.

We talked about how babies and pets make it easy to connect with strangers. The baby's mum, Naomi, told me that she is on maternity leave and it's so different to the everyday commute bubble that she'd been in. She now regularly engages with strangers in conversation and plans to continue this, even when she's back at work, commuting without a cute baby.

Departing the train that morning, I walked through a long exit tunnel from Central Station to UTS and heard a busker playing a happy tune. I had my hands full and kept being swept along with the crowd on the other side of the tunnel, then decided that his efforts should be rewarded. I went back, said thank you for playing happy music, and dropped some coins in. He lit up, absolutely delighted, and said to me 'keep smiling!' And I said 'you too!'

What a lovely start to the morning. These moments are so easily missed, but when we tune in to others around us, we can see opportunities to acknowledge others and put a smile – or increase the smile on their face.

If you find these stories inspiring and would like to explore what's possible when you talk to strangers, here's some learning from my experience...

How to have Extraordinary Conversations.

See the best in others.

This book could also be called "how to see the best in others". It's the essence of it. Look for the best. If you choose to develop this focus you might be surprised.

Be extraordinarily happy. It's hard to ignore happy people. Choose to be in an extraordinarily good mood by choosing your focus.

Be extraordinarily curious about the world around you. Again, it's a choice.

Look for someone who's not intensely focused on something or someone else, and wonder if they'd be up for a little chat.

Say Hello – with a smile and sense of enthusiasm. You're in an extraordinarily good mood remember 😊

Ask a question, pay a compliment, or share a happy thought.

Happiness is contagious. People might wonder about you, but they'll feel safer than if someone serious tries to engage them in conversation. If they're sitting on a train or a park bench, a waiting room or any other kind of 'waiting' zone, they could be in a reasonably serious mood. Happiness is like a novelty, and the human brain loves novelty. So don't be worried about being 'different'. If different is good; be different, be good.

Further thoughts on being in an extraordinarily good mood...
You can choose this. Moods don't just happen, they are the result of your thinking. Think about things that make you smile, things you're grateful for.

When you decide that you'll find good things to focus on, to give your attention to, write them down or acknowledge them out loud. For example – what kind of day is it?

- Sunny? Fantastic. It's a gorgeous day. This is true, even if we really need rain.
- Raining – great, we need the rain to freshen the place up. Let's celebrate the clear air or the rain.
- Is it ridiculously windy? Wow, just marvel at how the trees are bending.

Choose to be fascinated, not fearful – or annoyed at an inconvenience. Really? Does it matter, in the grand scheme of things? How many things do we let bother us when to do so just wastes our energy?

Gratitude or Adventure

Choose what most appeals to you

- developing a sense of gratitude or
- a sense of adventure?

They're not in competition, but choose one for now, as if it's a pair of lenses you'll look through.

Look at different scenarios with your chosen lenses.

The sense of gratitude will have you asking questions like "what can I be grateful for in this situation?" There's always something, even if it's the fact that you are breathing, that you are able to read, or write, or listen. It's too easy to focus on what you don't have, but you're reading this, so I know that you're open to choosing an empowering focus.

Your adventurous lenses might have you asking "ooh, I wonder what I can learn from this? I wonder what will happen if I just 'give it a go'.

I met Marco on a flight from Dubbo to Sydney. It's my local airport – 10 minutes from home, but it's a gateway to the world. I know I can be sitting next to someone from anywhere in the world, or someone who lives down the street from me. On a morning flight, they could be flying to Sydney and back at the end of the day after a full days work in the city, or they could be, as the passenger next to me was, beginning a series of flights around the world on a great adventure.

I'm not a morning person. I become more alert after a run, shower and breakfast – which doesn't all happen before a morning flight. I am better at thinking faster and conversing until all hours at night. So on a morning flight, I'm happy to get onboard, pull out my journal and make a few notes. I gather my thoughts about the trip ahead, or the few days behind me that I want to reflect on.

I don't usually expect a conversation, but I'm open to it. I had my journal in my hand, ready to write, but with a sense of good manners, when another passenger sat next to me, I said "Good morning", and asked if he was going to Sydney today or further on. He said he was going to Germany that day to visit family. He was then on to London for work. I asked more about the work he would be doing and he told me that he would be working at the London Olympics. I was curious of course, so inquired further. He had been asked by a colleague to run the restaurant for the USA athletes and other VIP's at the Olympics. I asked more questions and found that he lived in Dubbo, and consulted with well-known Chefs around the world on launching new restaurants, setting up kitchens and managing teams.

He asked about my reasons for traveling and what I do and he was delighted to hear that I coach leaders and entrepreneurs, as his wife, working in Dubbo was beginning a leadership coaching course that week. I asked more questions too... and discovered that he had previously worked in Buckingham Palace. My fellow passenger had fed the Queen, her family and her guests. I loved that we were having this conversation on a plane to Sydney. We weren't at a VIP event, we weren't surrounded by celebrities, but Marco had grown up in an entirely different place to me, and knew Jamie Oliver before he was a celebrity. I was fascinated. I also was delighted that this wouldn't be our only conversation. Following the Olympics he'd be back in Dubbo and I'd meet his wife and son.

Talking with Famous/Influential Strangers Tip

This was a conversation that had quite an impact on me as I know from coaching high achievers and some celebrities that sometimes people don't know how to handle what could be misunderstood as 'name-dropping' or exaggerating. Don't be overly surprised by what someone tells you, or squeal. A simple "wow" will suffice ☺

We connected again when he came home from the Olympics. His wife and I became friends too and swapped notes on leadership coaching. I loved hearing about his Olympics experience as his team leadership had to be amazing to deliver what they did for the crowds of athletes and other VIP's they hosted. Our sons, the same age, enjoyed playing soccer and climbing trees together, while we shared several afternoons in the sun – with some amazing cakes Marco created.

How to start more conversations with strangers

Notice what starts a conversation. Sometimes people connect with you because you're holding a product they love - an iPhone, a unique accessory, coffee or food, and this is a great way to break the ice. Notice people in your environment and see what you can comment on. Start with "excuse me" if you're squeezing in beside them on a crowded train, say "thank you" if someone moves over for you. Always start with a smile. Have one ready before you step out your door.

A simple practice can be saying hello, or good morning to every person, or perhaps one person each minute as you walk down a busy street. Look for opportunities to make eye contact, or your cheery "Good morning" might be the thing that prompts eye contact. Raising awareness of opportunities to connect will bring more across your path.

I hope you've enjoyed these thoughts and found them useful. There are plenty more to come!

For example –

How my portrait was painted for the Archibald Prize (Australia's "most important portraiture prize") because I'd connected with a stranger. I didn't know he was an artist, or a world-renowned artist – just that he had the best smile in the room. How his artist career and lifestyle developed because of a conversation on a train with a complete stranger.

How a simple hello to a gentleman on a train followed by a brief conversation resulted in me connecting country students to funding for further education.

How I was booked for a national conference overseas because I'd sat next to a conference organizer on a plane one Friday night when we were both tired.

How you can amaze yourself with the doors that fling wide when you connect and listen for potential.

If you have a story you'd like to share with me, and possibly my readers, please drop me a line! Kerrie@kerriephipps.com

If you'd like to see the buzz from some Conversations events – check this out - <http://kerriephipps.com/events/>

I look forward to connecting with you!

Cheering you on,

Kerrie



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