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Small Talk Part 2

Small Talk is part of social competence. But many of us have difficulties starting conversations with strangers. "What should I say?" "What can I speak about?" "Can I venture to ask a question?" "To give a compliment feels strange!" "That kind of talk is just a waste of time and leads nowhere!" etc. There is, however, a lot more to talk about, ask about, or exchange ideas about, than the few topics which may pop up in our mind for the moment.

A month ago I took part in a brain storming session with 15 others. We split into five groups with the task to find out as many topics as possible, topics which can be used to start and maintain a conversation. We had 10 minutes. You will find the result below. All these topics can also be divided into a range of sub-topics. The interesting thing is, that each single group actually only came up with a few. It is already a step forward just to be aware that there are endless topics to talk about. However, try to remember at least part of them in order to avoid ever being stuck with tongue-tiedness. Here are those we found, in no particular order: **Art, music, film, theater, books, news, relations, vehicles, companies, food and drinks, clothes, geography, weather, personal interests, humor, economy, friendship, hospitality, holidays, internet, IT, design, history, housing, living, politics, religion, philosophy, sport, animals, education, general knowledge, travelling, hobbies, associations, environment, profession, goals and ambitions ... and much, much more! With sub-topics there are easily hundreds.** ,

It is a virtue to converse relaxed and naturally. That is why we should constantly practice it so that it becomes a pleasure rather than a pain. With pleasure comes the smile, which is almost always welcome. With the smile comes mutual empathy. The best communicators feel that way and they are also the ones who master the art of natural, often unnoticeable, transitions from one topic to another. That is an art but that too can be learnt.

We have talked about the way we start a conversation with others (see also part 1). But how do we react when we are comfortably conversing among a group of friends and a lonely stranger seeks contact with us? Do we scrutinize that person with a disgusted look and scornful smile, giving a short reply (if at all) and then turning back to our friends? Of course not, but it happens! No, we want to treat others the way we want to be treated. So we pay attention! We should always ask ourselves "how would I like to be received if I entered a room full of strangers?" I doubt that anybody would answer the question with "I would like to be received with ice cold callousness and arrogance". Hence, the opposite. If we wish to be treated with sympathy, then that is also our benchmark for treating others.

Good communication is an indispensable condition for social competence. Small talk is an indispensable condition for good communication. Conclusion? Well, it all starts with small talk hopefully gradually leading to big talk.

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