

Breaking small talk with big words



by Carly Travis

There's nothing more mind-numbing than a conversation about the weather. Unfortunately, it happens all too frequently.

Take the "awkward teacher conversation," for example. It's that moment when you're accidentally stuck walking to class with your teacher and you have nothing to talk about besides the fact that it's snowing or storming or sunny.

Small talk is one of my biggest annoyances and I catch myself engaging in it far too often. That's probably why I'm so reluctant to call my grandparents; first there's the "how's school?" spiel, then, as if the conversation couldn't get worse, I'm almost forced to inquire about the weather or if they've "seen any good movies lately."

Besides being monotonous, small talk is never interesting. No one's learned anything from a person based on the fact that they like The Beatles (everyone likes The Beatles).

In other words, holding conversations about boring, obvious topics just to fill the silence never reveals anything about the other person. In a way, I feel like when I resort to small talk, I'm a bad conversationalist.

Think about it: when you walk away from an amazing conversation, it feels good; you somehow feel accomplished and dignified. It's like aching a serve, only to make your opponent want to play with you again.

Great conversations are usually ones that both parties equally shared their thoughts or stories around an interesting, possibly out of the ordinary, topic. However, this only happens some of the time.

I've found that the people I encounter who have no inhibitions are the best at avoiding small talk. In other words, they put themselves out there and don't over analyze every detail of what's flying out of their mouths.

I sometimes catch myself concentrating harder on my posture, hand gestures, and the direction of my legs than the conversation. Or, even worse, I'll have a talk with someone, be it a teacher, friend, or stranger, and immediately after think of something smarter, wittier, or cooler to say.

This social anxiety was illustrated perfectly in an article written by Lucas Kavner for the New York Times titled, "A Neurotics Guide to Small Talk." Kavner demonstrates just how cringe worthy the common small talk topics can be.

I think the reason people resort to small talk is because they're afraid to ask the hard hitting questions. Talking about how cold it is, while safe and neutral, lacks creativity and will probably result in a short conversation (the weather

topic never lasts a passing period).

On the other hand, it's likely that people you're just getting to know don't want chat about anything particularly deep or intimate. In fact, those conversations tend to be more awkward than small talk.

The key is to find a neutral territory question that will lead to a great conversation. Asking "do you have anything you're looking forward to," is the perfect balance between interesting and intimate without being overly nosy.

For example, if someone were to ask me that, I'd respond with, "My cousins wedding, she just got engaged." This way the conversation can easily take many turns; my cousin, weddings, and engagements are all fair game.

Another neat trick is to ask for advice. People love feeling needed and when you put yourself in the position of wanting something, people will feel apt to respond in a positive way. The point isn't to receive sage advice (although it can unexpectedly happen), but to jolt some mindfulness or originality into the discussion.

According to Google search results, people are more concerned with avoiding small talk than avoiding Ebola. Having a great conversation with someone you know well or not at all can be boring but doesn't have to be. In order to be a great conversationalist, it's important to bring interesting ideas to the table that promote thinking and engaging with those around you.

Calling all stars to the stage



by Camille Baer

If you are someone who dislikes all plays and musicals, or theater in general, you might want start changing your mind—especially if you might see one of your favorite actors or actresses up on stage.

Over the past couple years, there's been an increasing presence of famous Hollywood stars making their debut on Broadway. During the 2015 season, there were more A-listers in debuting shows than Broadway had ever seen before.

Vanessa Hudgens launched her Broadway debut last year as the role of Gigi in the musical adaptation of Colette's famous 1944 novella, and since then landed the challenging role of Betty Rizzo on Grease Live! alongside Julianne Hough, Keke Palmer, and Carly Rae Jepsen.

Another Hollywood star who made his debut in both acting and writing, was none other than the hilarious Larry David. "Fish in the

Dark" was an immensely anticipated show to debut last year, so much that "its advance sales shattered Broadway records," according to Ticketmaster Insider.

Some other actors who made appearances as major roles on stage last year included Keira Knightly, Jake Gyllenhaal, Sienna Miller, Elizabeth Moss, Jason Biggs, and Carey Mulligan. Broadway is already full of glitz and glam, so by adding these well-known stars into the mix, it elevates the expectations of the cast's performance level, generating excitement from the audience.

Initially, I was skeptical of the presence of Hollywood actors and actresses on stage, perhaps for a relatively biased reason as well. Starting at the young age of five, I grew obsessed with the idea of becoming a star on Broadway after seeing my first show, "The Lion King."

I loved the grandeur and excitement of seeing shows, seeing the entire cast and crews hard work come together to develop into this incredible form of art and entertainment.

When I joked that I wanted to be on Broadway, my parents reminded me how insanely difficult it is to make something of yourself, let alone

make any money.

So, when I started noticing famous people claim the Broadway stage, I felt bad for all the other actors who had to push and shove for a minor role in the ensemble while these Hollywood stars simply had to ask for an audition and land a lead role.

However, after thinking about it, I realized that my view was too narrow and "uneducated" to make assumptions about why these famous actors were showing up in major Broadway shows, and I actually realized that perhaps this was actually a good thing. Bringing fame to live theater has brought publicity and attention from the public.

The art of theater has been around for hundreds of thousands of years; it is one of our oldest forms of entertainment. However, each year, I am pleasantly surprised by the new and exciting risks being taken to engage and entice the public.

From the Book of Mormon, a unique musical written by the same duo responsible for the TV show "South Park," to Hamilton, Broadway's new hit musical with an African American cast and contemporary music, theater has become something more than just song and dance.

Editorial

Make the most of Valentine's Day this year

Valentine's Day gets bashed unnecessarily. Sure, not everyone always has a significant other, but this isn't something to be ashamed of. Valentine's isn't a day for single-shaming, it's just a day for celebrating the special people in your life, whether a boyfriend, girlfriend, or a best friend.

This Valentine's Day, whether you are single or not, you should take the time to appreciate the people that are important to you.

For those dating on Valentine's Day, the commercialization of the "Hallmark holiday" may make it seem as if the only way to celebrate is through buying cards, candy and teddy bears. But your affection isn't measured by the value of the gifts that you give. A more meaningful, heart-felt gift will always matter more to someone than something expensive and cliché. And if they get upset that you didn't give them a fancy enough present, they might not be the right person for you. And don't feel pressured to buy a gift. If you haven't been dating for a while, don't make a bigger deal out of Valentine's Day than there needs to be. Those couples that exchange lavish gifts after being together for two weeks just don't seem natural.

Or if you aren't feeling the gift idea, try an activity or outing instead. Go to one of those Escape Room places that are becoming popular or go out for an evening of whirlyball. The fun times you have will be worth more in the long run than a box of chocolates.

Please just don't be mainstream and take your Valentine's date to a movie. That is the most predictable move ever and isn't cute or creative or special. Sure, movies are fun to watch, but sitting in a cold, dark room with 100 other people without speaking to each other for two hours doesn't exactly scream "I care about you a lot." Save that for a normal date, or really anything other than Valentine's Day. You're better than that.

If the nature of your Valentine's Day isn't a romantic relationship, you have even more options. You can follow in the footsteps of Leslie's Galentine's Day from "Parks and Rec," and get together with your closest friends. Go out to dinner and wander around the mall or stay in and bake cookies. Send them those one-liner Valentine's Day cards based on their favorite TV shows that Buzzfeed posts almost exclusively during the week leading up to Feb. 14. Tell them to check their front door and leave a fancy cupcake sitting outside. If you want to seriously show your appreciation for your BFF, find your cutest picture and get it framed (or turn it into a semi-creepy mug or blanket).

If these ideas are too cutesy for you, just write "One free Chiptole burrito" on a piece of paper and give it to your friend. Next time you're eating, the burrito's on you. Or if they drive you around frequently, just give them \$10 to put towards gas. Little gestures can mean a lot.

If you don't feel like participating in group gatherings on Valentine's Day, take inspiration again from "Parks and Rec," specifically Tom and Donna's "Treat Yo Self Day." Go on a spa day and shopping excursion, eat that thing with lots of calories, watch the entire season of a show of Netflix. Just go for it. Do whatever makes you happy.

Whatever you do, don't be that person who complains about Valentine's Day. No one wants to see your tweets about how the best part of Valentine's Day is the half price chocolate on Feb. 15 or the Snapchat story about how you're so lonely. Self-pity isn't attractive and won't make someone suddenly ask you out and give you the Valentine's Day of your dreams. Instead, take it upon yourself to make it a good day and spend the time appreciating your friends and family.

If you are in a relationship this Feb. 14, do keep in mind that not everyone is, so try to be respectful and keep the PDA under control.

So this Valentine's Day, instead of bashing the holiday, take it upon yourself to make it a great day, whether celebrating with your significant other, your friends, your family, or anyone else.

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