

# THE ART OF TALKING TO STRANGERS

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**Peter Spalton**

The Art of  
Talking to Strangers

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## **The Art of Talking to Strangers**

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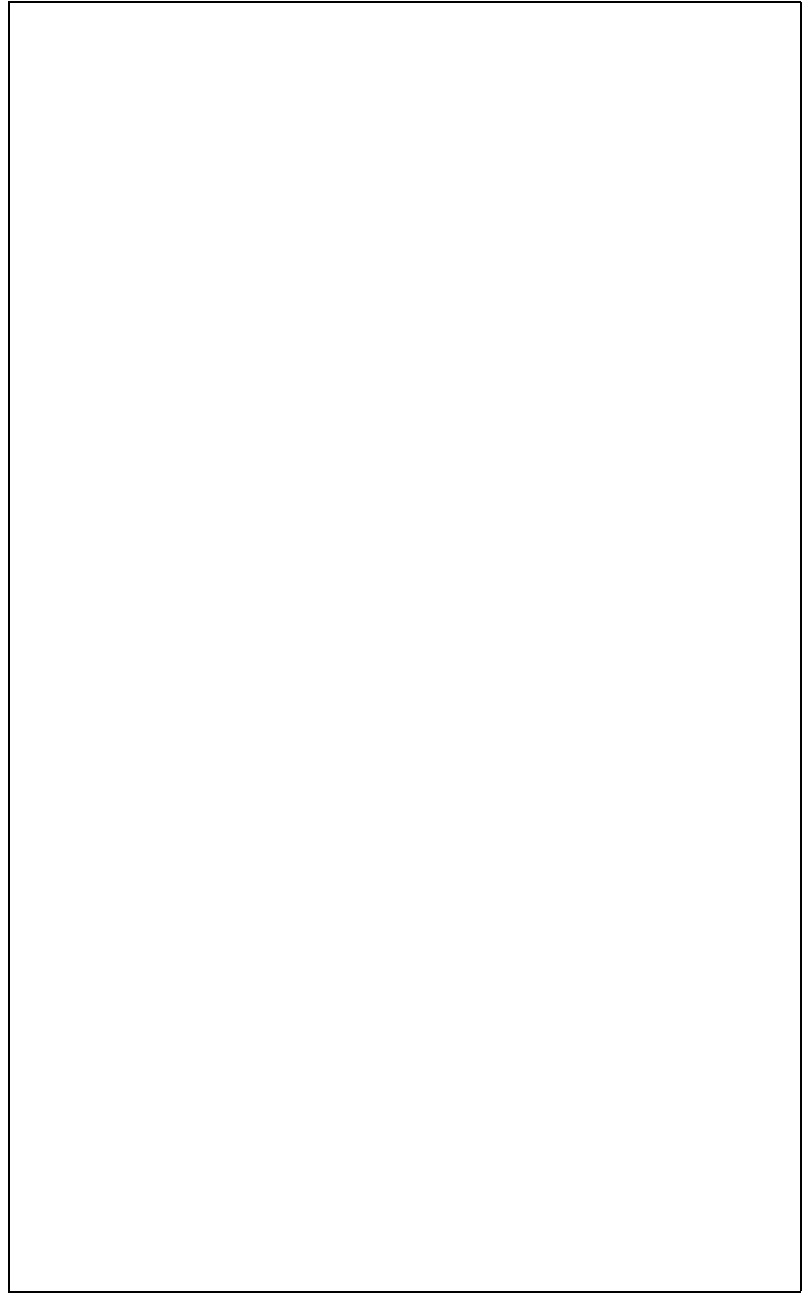
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# Foreword

Way back in 1989 I was made redundant from Nokia and embarked on a new career as a freelance sales and marketing consultant. When I first started I had to force myself to go and talk to people at business events, because that was the best way to get work. Within a very short time I had mastered how to connect with strangers, engage them in conversation for three or four minutes, ask for their contact information and leave. But most importantly, I learned to keep my eyes open and grasp any opportunities to meet new people.

I had one of those life-changing moments when I met Liz. She was about thirty-six years old and I first saw her in early summer. She was wearing jeans, a black T-shirt and brown boots and was just about to step on the escalator in Selfridges. By chance I followed her down and when she got to the bottom I went up to her and said, 'Excuse me, your label's showing. Can I put it back?'

She laughed and said 'yes', so I did. We started to chat about clothes as her T-shirt was from a major fashion chain. After a few minutes I suggested that we have a coffee together and she agreed. We ended up talking for about half an hour. She was also self-employed and worked as a graphic designer. Six

months later I started a marketing project for a major company with her partner, Neil.

That opened my eyes to the opportunities of meeting people in public places as opposed to business meetings, conferences, social events or parties.

Now I believe that every relationship – whether it's for business, for friendship, or for love – starts with a connection. And that connection can happen anywhere. As I repeatedly tell people, 'you don't know if the person behind you at the cash point queue is the one you're looking for. And the only way to find out is to turn round and talk to them.'

The trick is to grasp the moment and follow it up without any expectations or fear of rejection. And that's what this book is about. I have written it as a story, but it's based on actual incidents that have happened on my Flirting Safaris ([www.flirtingsafari.com](http://www.flirtingsafari.com)). I have run these for over five years and almost five hundred people have been on them in eight cities around the UK. Their feedback has convinced me that it's a much better way to meet a potential partner than in a bar or club. All I have done in this book is change names and locations to protect their privacy.

At the end of each chapter I've summarised the techniques which you need to put into practice. Practice makes perfect. And the more you practise, the more relaxed and confident you will become and the more successful you will be.

In this book I mention a number of retail chains and brands by name. In doing so I acknowledge that these are copyright trade names, but I use them for clarity and authenticity.

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## Chapter 1

# On the Starting Line

Rita stood waiting on Davies Street outside the entrance to Bond Street tube. It was a grey Saturday in October and she was about to go on a Flirting Safari. Oxford Street had started to fill up with shoppers looking for bargains. There was a chill in the air so most of them were wearing their coats for the first time since the summer. She glanced at her watch, it was 11:15, and she looked round at the coffee shop behind her. But before she could decide, she saw a tall man in jeans and a dark jacket walking down the street towards her.

As he came closer she recognised him from the website and smiled. He stopped in front of her and said, 'Hi, I'm Robert, your dating coach.'

'Hello, I'm Rita. I thought I recognised you from your picture.'

'I'm sorry I wasn't here to meet you, but I've been checking out a place where we can have some coffee.'

'That's OK, I'm always early and I'm dying for a coffee. How many are coming today?'

‘Five. Two men and two other women. It’s a good number because you’ll learn from watching each other and I’ll be able to give you some individual coaching.’

Just then two others arrived within a few seconds of each other and introduced themselves; Adrian and Suzie. Rita said hello and they stood there chatting as they waited for the other two.

Robert studied the group as they talked amongst themselves. Rita must have been in her early fifties and looked a bit tired. She was wearing flatties, jeans, a black T-shirt and a leather jacket. Suzie was well dressed in trousers, a designer top and a lovely red coat; she was probably in her early forties. On the other hand, Adrian was in his early thirties and dressed in jeans and white trainers with a fleece zipped right up to the top. He had a rucksack slung over one shoulder.

Robert was doing what everyone else does – making judgements about people based on a first impression – how they dress, how they stand and how they sound.

Adrian turned to Robert and asked nervously, ‘What actually are we going to be doing today?’

‘I’ll explain when the other two arrive,’ he replied. ‘They should be here in a bit and then we’ll go for a coffee and a briefing.’

The next to arrive was Sukhon, a smartly dressed Asian woman in a skirt, cream jacket and designer handbag. She looked in her early thirties, but was

probably about ten years older. Finally Edward, wearing black chinos, a white shirt, expensive-looking shoes and a blue jacket. He must have been in his late thirties.

Now that they were all here Robert asked them to introduce themselves by saying who they were and whereabouts they lived. It turned out that Suzie and Edward lived near each other in Battersea. She worked in banking and he was the sales manager for a computer company. Sukhon worked for an independent television company and lived near Notting Hill, whereas Rita lived in Clapham. Adrian had travelled the furthest as he lived in Maidenhead and worked in computer support for an insurance company.

Robert then began to explain what they were going to do. 'This afternoon we're going to talk to strangers.' They all looked worried as they realised it was about to start. 'I only have three objectives,' Robert continued. 'First, to open your eyes to the opportunities around you. Second, to teach you how to talk to strangers. And third, to have some fun.'

They laughed nervously as Robert carried on, 'We're going to hunt for people in the shops. And I want you to talk to as many as you can, without any expectations. Great, if it works out. If it doesn't, just shrug your shoulders and walk away. Say to yourself that if you don't have any expectations, you've got nothing to lose.'

They looked anxious and Adrian said, 'What if we meet someone we really like?'

'You ask for their phone number. I'll explain how to do that later. But first, let's go get a coffee and talk this through.' Turning, he then led them across the road and up Oxford Street to the narrow alley of St Christopher's Place. Not many tourists knew of this cut-through so it was reasonably quiet. In the sixties it used to be a red-light district, now it was full of designer shops and restaurants. He stopped outside the coffee shop where he'd already reserved a table.

## Learning Points

- Over 90 percent of your first impression of someone is based on how they look (a combination of their dress and body language) and how they sound when they say 'hello.'
- Have no expectations so you can shrug off the fear of rejection.