

Small Talk That Actually Works

Openers, open questions, and exits that keep you warm

EPISODE 7 • LEVEL B1-B2

Episode summary

- Small talk is not about the weather — it is about connection. “Nice day, isn’t it?” means “I am friendly and I noticed you.”
- Interested beats interesting: you do not need clever things to say, you need interested questions.
- The four safe starters: the situation, the weekend, food, the place or event.
- The two formulas: comment + question to start; react + detail + return a question to continue.
- Open questions get stories, closed questions get “yes”: swap “Do you like it here?” for “What do you like most about living here?”
- Exit gracefully with appreciate + reason + future — and follow up the next day to build the connection.

What’s inside this PDF

20 key words • 4 safe starters • Say It Better upgrades • 3 practice exercises

Key Vocabulary

20 words from this episode — learn them, then use them this week

1. mingle

to move around a room talking to different people.

> At the networking event, she mingled for an hour.

2. icebreaker

a first sentence that starts a conversation.

> “Have you been here before?” is a perfect icebreaker.

3. rapport

the warm feeling of connection between people.

> They built rapport in five minutes over coffee.

4. chitchat

light friendly conversation about simple things.

> We had some pleasant chitchat before the meeting.

5. common ground

something you both share.

> They found common ground in their love of hiking.

6. follow up

to contact someone again after meeting them.

> Send a short message to follow up the next day.

7. opener

the first line that starts a conversation.

> Prepare one friendly opener before the event.

8. awkward

uncomfortable or embarrassing.

> There was an awkward silence before he answered.

9. observation

something you notice and comment on.

> Start with an observation: “This coffee is excellent.”

10. exit

the way you leave a conversation.

> A warm exit leaves a warm memory.

11. genuine

real and sincere, not fake.

> Ask one genuine question and people open up.

12. comfort

a relaxed, easy feeling.

> Comfort first, biography later.

13. rally

going back and forth, like in tennis.

> Conversation is a rally, not a speech.

14. monologue

a long speech by one person.

> Do not turn your answer into a monologue.

15. rescue sentence

a phrase that saves a dying conversation.

> “Tell me more about that” is the perfect rescue sentence.

16. graceful

smooth and polite.

> Leave with a graceful exit: appreciate, reason, future.

17. solo

alone, by yourself.

> Two solo people make the easiest conversation.

18. networker

someone good at meeting people at events.

> The best networkers collect five good hellos.

19. detective

in this episode: listening closely for one interesting word.

> Listen like a detective — pick one word and ask about it.

20. warmth

friendly feeling toward someone.

> You are not exchanging information. You are exchanging warmth.

The Small Talk Engine

two formulas that run every conversation

Comment + question (to start)

“This music is lovely. Are you a fan of jazz?” — the comment shows presence, the question opens the door.

React + detail + return (to continue)

“Oh, nice. I came for the marketing talks myself. Which speaker did you like most?”

Open questions

“What do you like most about living here?” — stories, not one-word answers.

“Tell me more about that”

Four words that rescue any dying conversation.

Appreciate + reason + future (to exit)

“I really enjoyed talking to you. I’m going to grab some water. Hope we chat again.”

Say It Better — 10 upgrades

☐ “What do you do?” (in the first minute)	☐ “How are you finding the event so far?”
☐ “Good.” (to “How are you?”)	☐ “Pretty good. I finally finished a big project this week. How about you?”
☐ Firing questions like an interrogation.	☐ React first: “Oh, Portugal. That sounds amazing. What was the best part?”
☐ Talking only about yourself for five minutes.	☐ “But enough about me. What about you?”
☐ Standing frozen in the corner.	☐ Walk to one solo person: “Hi, I don’t think we’ve met. I’m Leo.”
☐ Escaping without a goodbye.	☐ “I really enjoyed talking to you. I’m going to grab some water. Hope we chat again.”
☐ Meeting someone and vanishing forever.	☐ Next day: “Great meeting you yesterday. Loved our chat about design.”
☐ “Do you like coffee?” (closed)	☐ “What do you like most about this café?” (open)
☐ Silence after a one-word answer.	☐ “Tell me more about that.”
☐ Planning your next sentence while they talk.	☐ Listen like a detective: pick one word — “Portugal? What was the best part?”

Practice Time

3 exercises — do them today, not “someday”

Exercise 1 — Fill in the blank

Word bank: icebreaker • rapport • mingle • follow up • common ground

1. A _____ is a first sentence that melts the awkwardness, like “Have you been here before?”
2. Small talk is not about information — it is about _____.
3. At the event, do not stay in one corner — _____ and meet five people.
4. They discovered both love hiking — they found _____.
5. The event starts the connection; the _____ the next day builds it.

Exercise 2 — Start it better

Rewrite each weak opener (answers below):

1. You walk into a party and ask a stranger, “What do you do?” in the first minute. > Say it better:
2. Someone says “How are you?” and you answer “Good.” > Say it better:
3. You have talked about yourself for five minutes straight. > Save it:

Exercise 3 — The three-chat challenge

This week, start three real conversations: one with a neighbor or shopkeeper, one with a colleague you rarely talk to, one with a stranger. Use comment + question to start, and react + detail + return a question to continue. After each chat, write down one thing you learned about the person.

- A neighbor at your building entrance.
- A colleague from another team.
- A stranger at a café or event.

Answer key

Ex 1: 1 icebreaker • 2 rapport • 3 mingle • 4 common ground • 5 follow up

Ex 2: 1 “How are you finding the event so far?” 2 “Pretty good. I finished a big project this week. How about you?” 3 “But enough about me. What about you?”