

BEP 44 INT – Socializing: Striking Up a Conversation

Welcome back to BUSINESSenglishPOD! Today's episode is the first in a two-part series on the basics of social English: starting a conversation, keeping it going, and finishing it appropriately. Successful conversation is an important part of networking, the skill of building up a network of contacts and relationships.

In this episode, you'll be learning skills and language for starting and finishing a conversation appropriately. In the next, you'll practice how to keep a conversation going.

Today's listening takes place at the Asia-Pacific HR conference for Multi-Fresh, a major global producer of health beverages. A beverage is a drink.

You'll hear two dialogues. In the first, Penny, an HR officer from Malaysia, strikes up a conversation with George, the Asia-Pacific learning and development manager. "To strike up a conversation" means to start a conversation, usually with someone you don't know too well.

In the second dialogue, Pat, an HR officer from Australia, then tries his best to strike up a conversation.

Listening Questions:

- 1) What office is Penny from? _____
- 2) What does Penny think about the speech? _____
- 3) Have Pat and George already met? _____
- 4) Does George have time to talk to Pat? _____

Vocabulary

beverage: A drink, such as milk, juice, water etc.

networking: Building up a set of contacts or relationships that will be helpful in your career.

to strike up a conversation with someone: This is an idiom meaning to start a conversation with someone, usually someone you don't know very well.

HR: Short for "human resources," HR has mostly replaced the word "manpower" which is considered sexist, i.e. unfair to women.

to hit it off with someone: to feel like one is going to get along well with someone one has just met

to be within striking distance of something: to be close to something; can apply to something physical, for example "We are within striking distance of the gym." In this usage it is often ironic. More often, it applies to something abstract, such as targets or goals: "We are within striking distance of our revenue goals for Q1, so let's redouble our efforts."

Dialogue 1

Penny: Excuse me, Mr. Chow?

George: Yes.

Penny: We haven't met. I'm Penny Lin from the Kuala Lumpur office.

George: Ah yes.

Penny: It's great to finally meet you.

George: It's good to meet you too.

Penny: So, Interesting speech, wasn't it?

George: Yes, looks like we have a few challenges ahead.



Dialogue 2

Pat: Long time no see!

George: Ah, yes. Hi.

Pat: George. You're George Chow from the Singapore office, right?

George: Yes...

Pat: We met last year when you visited Australia.

George: Oh, of course. Yes, that's right. I remember chatting with you over coffee. And your name was...?

Pat: Pat. Pat McCarthy.

George: Good to see you again Pat.

Pat: Yes! It's been a while. So, which floor are you staying on?

George: Up on the twelfth. Great view up there. You?

Pat: I'm on third, right within striking distance of the bar.

George: Gosh! Is that the time? Sorry, Pat, I just have to make a quick phone call. It was nice running into you!

Pat: Oh yes, of course. See you around!

George: Yeah, see you later!

Debrief

So it looks like Penny's attempt to strike up a conversation with George was much more successful than Pat's, wasn't it? We can say that Penny and George "hit it off," which means that they seem like they are going to get along well with each other.

Let's first look at dialogue 1. How does Penny start the conversation with George?

Penny: Excuse me, Mr. Chow?

George: Yes.

Penny: We haven't met. I'm Penny Lin from the Kuala Lumpur office.

This is one easy way to begin a conversation with someone you recognize but haven't met or don't know very well. What are some other ways?

- You're Mr. Barnes, aren't you? Hi, my name is Sally.
- Excuse me, aren't you Baxter Gordon? Wow, it's great to finally get the chance to meet you. I've heard a lot about you.
- You must be Monica Childes. You have no idea how great it is to finally meet you. What a wonderful surprise!

What if you don't know somebody at all and you just want to walk up and introduce yourself? Conferences, parties, dinners—all sorts of networking events present you with chances to meet people you don't know.

- We haven't met. I'm Lin Jacobs. What's your name?
- I don't think we've met. My name is Abdullah.
- Hello! My name is Josh. What's yours?

Of course, if you already know someone, you can just say "Hello again!" "Nice to see you again!" or "Long time no see!" as Pat says to George in dialogue 2.

After Penny has struck up a conversation with George and they have made their introductions—"Nice to finally meet you. Good to meet you too"—what does Penny say next to get the conversation going?

Penny: So, Interesting speech, wasn't it?

George: Yes, looks like we have a few challenges ahead.

Penny is using a "tag question"—a question ending with "isn't it?" "wasn't it?" "aren't they?" "weren't they?" "don't you think so?" and so on. This type of question is ideal for starting conversations because it gives your partner an easy chance to respond.

Let's look at some more typical tag questions you can ask:

- Horrible weather, isn't it?
- Great hotel, isn't it?
- A beautiful day, isn't it?
- Great game, wasn't it?

- Splendid program, don't you think?
- The food here is really great, isn't it?
- Amazing team, aren't they?
- It's been a long day, hasn't it?

Can you think of any more good tag questions? I'm sure you can! Tag questions give you a great way to get the dialogue going.

Of course you don't just network at formal social events, such as parties or dinners. Many everyday situations provide you opportunities to meet new people—waiting in the hotel lobby, standing in line, working out in the gym, having a cocktail in a bar. Sometimes we skip over the greeting and move straight to the tag question, don't we:

A: Great game, isn't it?

B: Yes, amazing!

A: I don't think we've met. My name's Ronald. What's yours?

B: I'm Cindy.

In addition to tag questions, there are a variety of great wh-questions (who, what, where, when, why, how questions) that you can use to get the conversation going:

- Where are you staying?
- How long have you been in Singapore?
- How was your flight?
- Is this your first time here?
- What do you think of the food?
- When did you arrive?

So far, so good. You've studied how to open a conversation with various kinds of greetings and how to get one started by asking tag questions. Now, let's look at more skills in dialogue 2: What do you do when you don't remember someone's name? How do you end a conversation politely?

Remember, Pat greets George very friendly with "Long time no see!" This signals to George that Pat already knows him. But George doesn't seem to remember Pat very well, does he? How does he handle this?

Pat: George. You're George Chow from the Singapore office, right?

George: Yes...

Pat: We met last year when you visited Australia.

George: Oh, of course. Yes, that's right. I remember chatting with you over coffee. And your name was...?

Pat: Pat. Pat McCarthy.

George: Good to see you again Pat.

Of course if you don't remember somebody's name, a good thing to do is to mention where you met them or some specific time that you remember chatting with them, or perhaps some detail of what you talked about. Recalling details

makes not remembering their name seem less rude. What are some other ways to do this?

- Ah, yes... Of course. You and I met at the trade fair in Venice last year. You're a big Juventus fan, right?
- You know, I remember talking with you about the new marketing strategy last month very well, but your name has just slipped my tongue.

"It just slipped my tongue" is an idiom that means you temporarily can't think of someone, so it's an extra polite way to say you have forgotten someone's name.

So George does a pretty good job of dealing with not remembering Pat's name, doesn't he? What happens next? Pat tries to make a little bit of small talk about which floor they are staying on. Pat is staying on the third floor, right within "striking distance" of the bar. Strike means to hit or attack. "To be within striking distance of something" is an idiomatic expression that means you are close to something. You can say that you are within striking distance of a target or goal, for example, "Now that we are within striking distance of the sales target, we need to keep up our efforts and work even harder."

Now, let's have a look at the end of the dialogue. Does George have time to talk to Pat? It doesn't seem so.

George: Gosh! Is that the time? Sorry, Pat, I just have to make a quick phone call. It was nice running into you!

Pat: Oh yes, of course. See you around!

George: Yeah, see you later!

How does George finish the conversation politely? "Gosh!" is an informal expression of emotion; most people consider it very clean. It comes from changing the /d/ at the end of God to /sh/. Even cleaner (and perhaps more formal) is "Oh dear!" or "Oh my goodness!"

So "Gosh! Is that the time?" means George is surprised by how late it is. Then he makes an excuse for finishing the conversation suddenly—he has to make a phone call. What are some other ways to do this?

- Well, I'm afraid I'll have to be going. It's been nice talking to you.
- Would you excuse me a moment?
- Oh dear! If you'll excuse me, I must just go and check on something.
- Will you excuse me? There's something I have to attend to.

That just about does it for today's show. But before we finish today, we'd like to give you a chance to practice yourself.

Imagine you are at the HR conference with George. You haven't met him yet, but you'd like to. Start the conversation by saying, "Excuse me, you're George aren't you?" Wait for him to respond, then introduce yourself and ask him a tag question about the weather.

Are you ready?

Practice 1

Learner: _____
George: Yes?
Learner: _____
George: Oh, nice to meet you.
Learner: _____
George: Yes. I agree. Is this your first trip to Singapore?

Let's listen to a possible **answer**.

Learner: Excuse me, you're George aren't you?
George: Yes?
Learner: We haven't met. I'm Jo from London.
George: Oh, nice to meet you.
Learner: Nice to meet you to. Beautiful weather today, isn't it?
George: Yes. I agree. Is this your first trip to Singapore?

Good. Now imagine you have to leave. Make an excuse to finish the conversation politely.

Practice 2

Learner: _____
George: That's all right. Hope to see you later.

How did you do? Let's listen to an example **answer**.

Learner: Oh dear! Will you excuse me? There's something I have to attend to.
George: That's all right. Hope to see you later.

Great! So that's all for today's show. You've learned some great ways to get a conversation going and what to do if you forget somebody's name. You've also practiced how to finish a conversation politely.

In the next in this two-part series, you'll be studying ways to keep the conversation going after you've started it.

In the meanwhile, you should be sure to visit our website at www.businessenglishpod.com to study the learner's notes for this and other episodes.

At *BUSINESSenglish*POD you're always within striking distance of great learning materials! See you next time!

Language Review Questions

Match the tag questions with the answers below. The first one has been done for you.

A. Horrible weather, isn't it?	E. A beautiful day, isn't it?
B. Great hotel, isn't it?	F. Great game, wasn't it?
C. Splendid program, don't you think?	G. The food here is really great, isn't it?
D. Amazing team, aren't they?	H. It's been a long day, hasn't it?

1)	<i>It's been a long day, hasn't it? (H)</i>	It sure has. I'm really tired.
2)		Well, it was certainly intense. But we were robbed! We didn't deserve to lose.
3)		Do you really think so? To be honest, it's not everything I expected.
4)		Gorgeous!
5)		I know. It's supposed to be even worse tomorrow.
6)		One of the best. They really do have some great players.
7)		Yes. One of the best I've ever seen.
8)		I suppose so. I thought it was a little on the long side.

Learning Tip:

Think of a famous or important person you would like to meet, perhaps your idol or hero. If you saw him or her in the supermarket, what would you say? How would you start up an conversation with him or her? Practice the dialogue in your mind or out loud. Talking with yourself is a great way to practice English, a key strategy of successful language learners everywhere. And, who knows? If you practice enough during the day, you may just get a chance to meet your hero in your dreams. Dreaming in English while you strike up a conversation with your idol—now that's a great way to practice!

Useful Language

Starting a conversation with someone you recognize but haven't met or don't know very well:

- You're Mr. Barnes, aren't you? Hi, my name is Sally.
- Excuse me, aren't you Baxter Gordon? Wow, it's great to finally get the chance to meet you. I've heard a lot about you.
- You must be Monica Childes. You have no idea how great it is to finally meet you. What a wonderful surprise!

To introduce yourself to somebody new:

- We haven't met. I'm Lin Jacobs. What's your name?
- I don't think we've met. My name is Abdullah.
- Hello! My name is Josh. What's yours?

Starting conversations with tag questions:

- Horrible weather, isn't it?
- Great hotel, isn't it?
- A beautiful day, isn't it?
- Great game, wasn't it?
- Splendid program, don't you think?
- The food here is really great, isn't it?
- Amazing team, aren't they?
- It's been a long day, hasn't it?

Wh-questions (who, what, where, when, why, how questions) you can use to get the conversation going:

- Where are you staying?
- How long have you been in Singapore?
- How was your flight?
- Is this your first time here?
- What do you think of the food?
- When did you arrive?

Referring to a previous meeting and checking a person's name:

- Ah, yes... Of course. You and I met at the trade fair in Venice last year. You're a big Juventus fan, right?
- You know, I remember talking with you about the new marketing strategy last month very well, but your name has just slipped my tongue.

Polite excuses for finishing the conversation:

- Well, I'm afraid I'll have to be going. It's been nice talking to you.
- Would you excuse me a moment?
- Oh dear! If you'll excuse me, I must just go and check on something.
- Will you excuse me? There's something I have to attend to.

Answers

Listening Comprehension

- 1) The Kuala Lumpur office.
- 2) She says it's "interesting," though this may just be a way of starting a conversation with George.
- 3) Yes. They met each other last year in Australia, though George doesn't seem to remember Pat so well.
- 4) Apparently not. He has to make a phone call, though this may likely just be a polite excuse to end the conversation.

Language Review

- 2) F; 3) G; 4) E; 5) A; 6) B; 7) D; 8) C (perhaps also F)