

Why People Like You More Than You Think | How to Live a Good Life, Part 2

English learning resource · EN

Full episode script · English

345 lines

Study task: Listen again and notice the expressions you studied.

I went to a barbecue on Saturday.

Thirty people.

And I came home certain that every single one of them disliked me.

Every single one.

The woman in the green jumper did not laugh at my joke.

The host looked bored when I talked about my work.

A man asked me where I was from, and then he went to get a drink and never came back.

And how do you know they disliked you?

I just know.

That is the problem.

You do not know.

Nobody does.

What do you mean, nobody?

I mean there is a whole area of research about this, and it says something very strange.

After a conversation, almost everybody believes the other person liked them less than they really did.

Everybody?

Almost everybody.

And that little mistake, repeated a thousand times, is one of the main reasons people feel alone in a city full of people.

Welcome to Your English Toolbox, the podcast that trains your English while you live your real life.

I am Martin.

And I am Julia.

This is the second conversation in our series about how to live a good life.

Four conversations about happiness, relationships, purpose, and the small choices that improve our quality of life.



Last time, we talked about an eighty-year study, and what it found.

Relationships.

Not money, not fame.

Relationships.

And today we go to the very beginning of a relationship.

The first thirty seconds.

With a stranger, a neighbour, a colleague you barely know.

Because the science says something wonderful.

People like you more than you think.

And by the end of this episode you will have three sentences to prove it.

So, the research.

Go on, because I want to hear how thirty people secretly loved me.

In two thousand and eighteen, a team of psychologists did something simple.

They put strangers together, in pairs, and asked them to talk for a few minutes.

Just talk?

Just talk.

Then they separated them and asked each one two questions.

How much did you like the other person?

And how much do you think the other person liked you?

And?

People consistently believed the other person liked them less than the other person actually did.

So both people walked away thinking, well, that went badly.

Both of them.

While in reality both of them had enjoyed it.

That is absurd.

It is absurd, and it has a name.

The liking gap.

The liking gap.

The gap between how much people like us and how much we think they do.

And how big is the gap?



Big enough to matter.

And it does not disappear after one conversation.

They checked with university students sharing a room, and the gap was still there months later.

Months of two people thinking the other one was just being polite.

Exactly.

Okay, but why?

Because while we are talking, we are also watching ourselves.

We remember every awkward pause, every word we could not find, every joke that did not land.

And the other person?

The other person does not notice half of it.

They remember that you were friendly and that the conversation was pleasant.

So we come across better than we feel.

That is the phrase.

To come across as friendly, as confident, as interesting.

How you come across is what the other person sees.

Not what you feel inside.

Now tell me this does not apply to English.

It applies to English more than to anything else in the world.

Because our listener has a conversation in English, and afterwards they replay it in their head like a football match.

That word I could not find.

That verb in the wrong tense.

The moment I said thanks you.

And the other person remembers none of it.

None of it.

They remember a nice person with an interesting accent who asked about their weekend.

So the first lesson is very simple.

Stop marking yourself after every conversation.

You are a terrible judge, and the research proves it.

I want to tell you about Lena.

Please.



Lena is from Bratislava, in Slovakia, and she has been in Dublin for two years.

She works as a healthcare assistant in a hospital.

Night shifts, day shifts, all of it.

So she sees people all day.

All day.

At twenty to seven she says good morning to the bus driver.

At seven she says hello to the security man at the hospital door.

On the ward, she says how are you to eleven colleagues, and eleven colleagues say good, you.

At two o'clock she eats lunch in the canteen, alone, looking at her phone.

At ten in the evening she is home, and the flat is silent.

That is a lot of people.

Forty conversations a day, if you count them.

She is in four WhatsApp groups.

The ward group, the flat group, a hiking group she has never gone hiking with, and one for a course she finished last year.

And yet.

And yet nobody in Ireland knows that her mother is called Zuzana.

And nobody knows that Zuzana had a stroke in April, and that Lena calls her every night at nine and does not know what to say.

So is Lena alone?

No, she is never alone.

That is the strange part.

There are three words in English that people mix up, and Lena is a perfect example.

Alone means nobody is with you.

It can be a choice, and it can be wonderful.

I spent last Saturday alone, with a book and a long walk, and I arrived at Monday feeling brilliant.

Isolated means you really have very little contact with people.

It is something you can measure.

And lonely is different from both.

Lonely is the feeling that the connection you need is missing.

And you can feel it in a crowded room.



Lena is not alone and she is not isolated.

She is lonely.

And here is what breaks my heart.

She is lonely because of the liking gap.

Explain that.

She has decided that she has no right to go past good, you.

She thinks her colleagues are just being polite.

She thinks that if she said one more sentence, she would be bothering them.

So the gap is not between Lena and other people.

The gap is inside Lena's head.

Exactly.

Now, we need to talk about the body for one minute, because this is not only about feelings.

Only one minute.

Only one minute.

Researchers have studied what happens when the feeling of loneliness lasts for months and years.

And?

The body treats it like an alarm that never switches off.

Worse sleep, more stress, and over the years, worse memory and a tired heart.

There is a famous comparison.

There is.

The United States Surgeon General's advisory said that lacking social connection can carry a risk to your health similar to smoking up to fifteen cigarettes a day.

That is a comparison between studies, not a diagnosis.

Exactly, it is not a prediction about you.

But it tells you how seriously researchers take it.

So seriously that in two thousand and twenty-three, the top doctor in the United States called it a public health epidemic.

And here is the good news inside the bad news.

If loneliness is an alarm, an alarm is a signal.

And a signal asks for an action.

And the action is much smaller than people think.



Right, so let's talk about your problem.

My problem?

Your problem with strangers.

Ah.

Yes.

I confess that I would rather miss the bus than talk to somebody at the bus stop.

Give me your reasons.

All of them.

Fine.

Reason one, they are probably busy.

At a bus stop?

Nobody is busy at a bus stop.

They are standing there, waiting, looking at a timetable that lies.

Reason two, they will think I am strange.

Strange for saying good morning?

In what country is good morning strange?

Reason three, my accent.

You have an accent, I have an accent, the bus driver has an accent.

This whole city is an accent.

Reason four.

Go on.

What if they answer?

What if they answer?

Yes.

Then I have to continue.

And I do not know how to continue.

Okay.

Number four is a real problem, and we will fix it in a minute.

But first, the train.

The train.



In Chicago, some years ago, researchers went to a train station and gave commuters an instruction.

On the way to work today, talk to a stranger.

That sounds like a nightmare.

That is exactly what the commuters said.

Before the experiment, they predicted the journey would be worse.

Awkward, uncomfortable, a bad start to the day.

And what happened?

The people who talked to a stranger enjoyed the journey more than the people who sat in silence.

More?

More.

And there is one detail that I love.

Nobody was rejected.

Nobody?

Not one person?

Not one.

Every commuter who tried to start a conversation found somebody willing to talk.

So my reasons one, two and three.

Dead.

All three.

Nobody was busy, nobody thought it was strange, and I promise you that at least some of them had accents.

And reason four?

Reason four is the only real one, and that is why we give you sentences.

But before the sentences, I want to explain where all this actually happens.

Where connection happens.

Yes, because it does not happen at home, and it does not happen at work.

Then where?

In what sociologists call the third place.

Your home is the first place.

Your work is the second.

And the third place is the café you go to every Tuesday, the gym, the library, the park where the dogs run.



The places where you see the same faces again and again.

And that is the secret.

Belonging does not come from talent.

It comes from repetition.

There is a lovely word for this.

A regular.

If you go to the same café every week, after a month you are a regular.

And the person behind the counter says, the usual?

And that tiny sentence, the usual, is the sound of belonging.

So to become a regular somewhere is a strategy.

It is the easiest strategy in this whole series.

Choose one third place.

Go every week.

Let the faces become familiar.

And you bump into people.

To bump into someone means to meet them by chance.

And you cannot bump into anybody if you are never in the same place twice.

Now, our listener has one more objection, and I know it because it was my reason three.

The accent.

The accent, and the imperfect English.

Then let me say something that I believe completely.

For small talk, your accent is not a problem.

It is an opener.

An opener.

Think about it.

The first thing people ask when they hear an accent is, where are you from?

And that question is a conversation.

A native speaker at a bus stop has nothing to say.

You have a whole country.

So the thing our listener is most ashamed of is actually the thing that starts the conversation.



Every single time.

And one more thing, and this is the only thing I will say about phones.

Only one thing.

Only one.

The phone in your hand at the bus stop does not cut you off from the world.

But it closes the only door that was open.

Because nobody says where are you from to the top of somebody's head.

So for thirty seconds, a day, leave it in your pocket.

That is the whole sermon.

That is the whole sermon.

Right.

Reason four.

What if they answer, and I do not know how to continue.

I am going to give you three sentences.

I wrote them for you, and now they belong to everybody listening.

The kit.

The kit.

Each one turns two words into thirty seconds.

Listen, and repeat in the pause.

Sentence one, for anybody you see regularly.

How has your week been so far?

Sentence two, for somebody you have seen many times but never spoken to.

I do not think we have properly met.

My name is Lena.

And of course, you say your own name.

And sentence three, the most powerful of the three.

For somebody who told you something last time.

You mentioned you were moving house.

How did it go?

Now all three again.



How has your week been so far?

I do not think we have properly met.

My name is Lena.

You mentioned you were moving house.

How did it go?

Do you see why the third one is the most powerful?

Because it proves I was listening last time.

It proves you remembered.

And that is the exact opposite of the liking gap.

When somebody says you mentioned, you know they like you.

And when you say it, the other person knows you like them.

So one sentence closes the gap from both sides.

One sentence.

And that is our sentence of the day.

Ready?

People like you more than you think.

Give them the chance to show it.

People like you more than you think.

Give them the chance to show it.

One more time, with us.

People like you more than you think.

Give them the chance to show it.

So what happened to Lena?

Lena used sentence three.

Who with?

A colleague on the ward, Aoife, who had mentioned two weeks earlier that her son had a job interview.

And Lena had said nothing at the time, because she thought it was not her business.

And this time?

This time, in the corridor, she said, you mentioned your son had an interview.

How did it go?



And Aoife?

Aoife stopped.

Actually stopped walking.

And talked for ten minutes.

The son got the job, the son does not call, the son is twenty-three and thinks he knows everything.

Ten minutes.

Ten minutes of a real conversation, in a corridor, in a hospital.

And at the end, Aoife said, some of us go for a coffee on Thursdays after the shift.

Come.

And Lena said yes.

Lena said yes.

No new best friend.

No miracle.

One invitation, accepted.

And did she tell Aoife about her mother?

Not that day.

But she will.

And you?

Me?

You were given a script and a bus.

I was.

I said good morning to the driver, and then, because I was terrified, I used sentence one.

How has your week been so far?

And he answered.

He answered.

His name is Piotr, he is from Kraków, and he has driven that bus for eleven years.

Eleven years.

Eleven years of good, you.

And he said I was the first passenger in months to ask a question with more than two words in it.

So the stranger at the bus stop was as lonely as you were.



That is the thing nobody tells you.

The other person is waiting too.

Here is something to carry with you this week.

Remember the photograph of your life, twenty years from now, from our last conversation.

The people standing next to you.

Now look at the edges of the photo.

The people around you every day.

The driver, the colleague, the person at the counter.

They already like you more than you think.

The only question is how many of them you have given the chance to show it.

So here is your task.

One conversation of thirty seconds, this week, with somebody you see regularly.

One of the three sentences.

And when it is over, do not mark yourself.

Do not replay the match.

You are a terrible judge, and now you know it.

Next time, the people you already have.

Why friendships need exercise, and the small habits that keep them strong.

And each episode stands on its own, so start wherever you like.

Everything from today, the transcript, the vocabulary, and the three sentences, is waiting for you at yourenglishtoolbox.com.

With translations, flashcards and downloadable PDFs, completely free.

Thank you for spending this time with us.

Go and say good morning.

See you in the next one.

