# **In Defense of Small Talk**

**Zoe's avatar**

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Hi there!

Once, in college, I was on a date and, as is often the case on first dates, the person sitting across from me made a comment about hating small talk. (I am so not going to go into how the topic of hating small talk is *itself* small talk.)

I responded to her that I personally like small talk. I like those casual touch-points of conversation with acquaintances. I think that small talk is the bridge from strangers to friends. However, small talk is universally hated, so I thought it could be interesting for me to share some of my thoughts on the subject.

Think of this when your next Zoom call requires 5 minutes of obligatory small talk before you get started.



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First some housekeeping:

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Consider this the part of the newsletter where I share my credentials: in my current job, I work in a busy office, plus, living and working in the US South requires that you have some level of ability to make small talk. I wasn’t joking earlier about a Zoom meeting with an obligatory small talk period that can really last a good 10 minutes at the start of every meeting. That is a big part of the work culture that I exist in, and I assume many of you do as well.

Now, don’t get me wrong, small talk can feel pointless, especially when you are itching to get through yet another meeting. Trust me, I don’t always have patience for it. That being said, I think that the point of small talk is to establish commonalities within a group of strangers.

It has been rainy here recently — perfect small-talk fodder. Now you have something to say when you walk into a quiet room. Plus, there is not much that is better for bonding than showing up for a meeting soaked from the rain. One of my coworkers had a go-to joke this week about needing to take a boat to get from our homes to the office, and the giggles and camaraderie that joke created warmed the room and created a sense of unity within the group.

Alternatively, a good compliment also warms up an awkwardly quiet elevator ride. I was just leaving work this afternoon and a woman in the lift with me had on an adorable pair of shoes, and by my taking a second to comment on them, the tension in the otherwise silent elevator totally dissipated. My roommates are great at this one. They have a habit of, each time they see you, identifying one element of your outfit to compliment, which lifts spirits ever so slightly. I think that these moments make people feel seen, which is really important for our collective well-being as well as for nurturing our personal relationships.

In a much earlier newsletter, I wrote about how we should be striving to build friendships rather than networks. It isn’t a wild claim to say that asking someone about their pets is a better way to start a relationship than by adding them on LinkedIn. Small talk can help us to understand what is important to people, how they move through the world, and what can tailspin their day.

Again, I write this as a person who works in fundraising and is based in North Carolina. I am predisposed to value small talk in my professional life. I would be curious to know what small talk feels like and looks like where you all are based. I went to college in Massachusetts and grew up in Upstate New York and Singapore and each place had a wildly different approach to small talk. If you want to pipe in with your thoughts and feelings, respond to this email or join the conversation on Discord!

[Discord](https://discord.gg/N84WxemQ?utm_source=femme-futures.beehiiv.com&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=in-defense-of-small-talk)

I am ending with some final thoughts on small talk and vulnerability. To be totally transparent, I go through phases where I find it easy to disclose to people what is important to me and what makes me tick, and then I go through phases where the notion of that many people knowing me on that level absolutely terrifies me. I have my boilerplate small talk (I love dogs, I hate grey weather, I have the coolest sister in the world, and I love reading). I have my things that are safe enough for people to know about me.

Small talk is benefited by your ability to read a room and to know your own sense of comfort in certain spaces. (Easier said than done, I know). Vulnerability is *definitionally* about exposing a weakness. Not every stranger deserves to know your weaknesses. Vulnerability is also what creates connections. I think that the safest way to go about forming connections is through harmless small talk. Don’t reveal anything to a stranger that you wouldn’t post online with your name attached.

I want you to go forward curious about both what you learn about people through small talk and what they, in turn, learn about you.

Good luck!

Zoe



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**Femme Futures Cooperative Founding Principles**

💚 **Mission**: The mission of Femme Futures is to create a community space for young professionals who identify as over-achievers and activists to generate collective success by providing resources and platforms to thrive in challenging workplace environments.

💙 **Vision**: To contribute to a world where driven individuals are equipped with the tools, guidance, and connections to overcome systemic barriers, fully utilize their talents, and enact positive change in their organizations and communities.