

TheWORD

A Fresh Language Experience

- [HOME](#)
- [ABOUT US](#)
- [SUBSCRIBE](#)
- [FAQ](#)
- [ARCHIVES](#)
 - [November 2012](#)
 - [October 2012](#)
 - [September 2012](#)

Gift of the Gab



It's a sunny day and you and a friend are **strolling** through a park. You come across a man, sitting at a table. There's a large sign next to him offering 'Free Conversations.' Do you stop to chat?

Taylor Baldry, a self-described brainstormer, artist-designer and large-nosed person, is the person waiting to talk to you. His project, called [The Conversationalist](#), invites people to stop a moment and **engage** in some 'live' dialogue.

"When they first sat down, most people wanted to know why I was hosting free conversations in a park. Was I doing it for a school research project? Was I doing it for money? Was I in a cult?" Mr Baldry told *The Word*. "After I explained that the purpose of the project was to remind people what it was like to have a conversation with a stranger in the digital age, people were **eager to open up**."

Email, Facebook, Twitter, instant messaging – most people have eagerly embraced and use daily or even hourly some type of social media. But how social can it be if you can't see or hear the person you are 'talking' to?

The word 'sake' has two close but different meanings. The first is benefit: 'We should exercise for the sake of our health.' The other definition means purpose and often has a negative connotation: 'He's only saying that for the sake of argument.' or 'Some people say a lot of modern art is art for art's sake.'

"We are connected 24/7 in this technological world. We text, we email, we live a pretty rushed lifestyle, and taking the time to converse and discuss **for the simple sake** of getting to know people better, to understand or to learn from each other, can be nearly viewed as a waste of time," Louise Howland, co-author of [The Art of Conversation](#) told *The Word*. *The Art of Conversation* is a set of 300 cards filled with questions designed to start and build conversations. Ms Howland designed it with retired Australian rock star Keith Lamb as way to help people connect with others.

“Relationships are, for most people, the most important part of their lives,” she said. “And the way to keep our relationships good and strong is to communicate well; in other words, to develop the art of conversation.”

If I’m to think of glamorous periods in conversation’s history, I think of 19th century Paris and their salons. I’d also be the first to admit, conversation is not one of my strong suits. In a roomful of strangers, where the purpose is to meet and **mingle**, you’ll find me looking nervous, off to the side. I have a friend who is brilliant at connecting people via conversation; a skill I’m quite jealous of. At some sort of function whose purpose I forget; she, knowing of my love of photography, introduced me to another attendee – a photographer. Having an instant topic of conversation to discuss got us past the banalities of the weather and ‘what do you do?’ The Art of Conversation serves a similar purpose; you are given a topic to get you started, often the biggest **hurdle** when having to make conversation. Mr Baldry did the same thing – participants could choose from a menu of options – ranging from hobbies to dinosaurs.

There’s something else about conversation that makes it significant – personal contact. Body language and other **visual cues** can sometimes give more meaning to a person’s thoughts than simple words alone.

“Conversation is more than just communication – it’s about understanding who we are, what we believe in,” said Mr Baldry. “It’s facial expressions, emotions – things that can’t be conveyed via text or emoticons.”

What is more enjoyable than sitting down with an old friend for a good long **heart-to-heart**? The ability to reconnect through speech is beautiful, but just as enjoyable is the opportunity to connect in the first place through conversation.

“It is fantastic to have a balanced, meaningful connection with others, to genuinely laugh together, **bond** and get to know people on a deeper level,” Ms Howland said.

Tête-à-têtes via technology aren’t going to go away any time soon, but neither Ms Howland nor Mr Baldry think of conversation as a dying art form.

“Conversation isn’t dead or dying – technology has just temporarily **driven** it underground,” Mr Baldry said. “It’s still around – I think it’s just living in its parents’ basement until it gets back on its feet. There will be a conversation revival, I think.”

Art doesn’t only mean painting and sculpture. We can use it for any field or pastime which requires a deep appreciation. For example the philosopher Alain de Botton wrote a book called *The Art of Travel*.

Conversation, like any other art takes practice – to get better you must do it. To become a better conversationalist do things like ask **open-ended questions**, sincerely **flatter** someone and chat about something you really enjoy. And ask others to do the same. Conversation is a dialogue, not a monologue.

“Conversation is about listening, and I mean truly listening to someone – not just waiting for your turn to speak,” Mr Baldry said. “Social media gives anyone a platform to share their thoughts and ideas but is anyone listening?”

Jacy Meyer –Phoenix, Arizona

Gift of the Gab Quiz: Spicy

Get Started!

Leave a comment