

Start with Hello

How to convert
today's stranger into
tomorrow's client

LINDA COLES

WILEY

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*This book is dedicated to my hubby Paul, who is my constant
source of inspiration.*

Contents

<i>About the author</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
<i>Introduction</i>	xiii
<i>Opening story</i>	xv
Part I Why communicating with strangers is the key to business success	1
1 Is the internet limiting serendipity?	3
2 Action brings activity	13
3 Find the commonality	23
4 How behaviour determines outcomes	29
5 Sameness creates comfort, difference creates opportunity	37
Part II How to start a productive conversation with a stranger	51
6 Making a positive first impression	53
7 Networking freestyle—make the first move	61
8 Networking at events	75
Part III How to build effective business relationships online	97
9 Be web worthy	99
10 Digital etiquette and body language	115
11 Don't forget the telephone	129
Part IV How to understand and leverage behavioural styles	137
12 Create a strategy	139
13 Behavioural profiles	149
Part V How to boost and utilise your personal network	161
14 Networking socially	163
15 Mind your manners	179
<i>Conclusion</i>	191
<i>Index</i>	193

About the author



Hello! I'm Linda Coles, an international speaker and author with short spiky hair. I run a small company called Blue Banana and mainly work from my home office on a fig orchard in New Zealand. Paul is the love of my life, Stella and Monkey are my two cats and Daisy and Molly are my two goats.

My background is mainly in retail management working in some of the UK's biggest retailers, but life in the slower lane beckoned and so Paul and I moved to green pastures south of Auckland. The slower life never really happened, and I continue to work with some really great brands by helping them to build relationships with their customers online.

I speak a great deal and write about building relationships, an important part of being successful in business, and I wrote the book *Learn Marketing with Social Media in 7 Days* in 2011. I also write regularly as one of only 220 LinkedIn influencers, along with Richard Branson, Barack Obama and Arianna Huffington, which sounds very grand and I am very honoured to have been asked.

Mark Twain once said 'The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why'. And Albert Einstein said 'I fear the day that technology will surpass our human interaction. The world will have a generation of idiots'. I guess I have made it my purpose, my 'find out why', to keep people talking to each other, to help

them become less focused on their smart phone and more interested in what and who is around them at any given time.

This book is very practical and very easy to read. My goal is to make this book accessible to everyone and so you don't need an MBA to be able to understand the concepts and the ideas. Above all, I want you to finish it, use the information, then pass it on to someone else, maybe a stranger, someone you don't know yet.

Feel free to look me up and say hello.

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Introduction

Let me start with hello.

Businesspeople all over the world are looking for new and alternative ways to market themselves and their businesses. By going back to good old-fashioned small talk and saying hello to strangers, more business opportunities and business connections will arise. People buy from people they know, like and trust, so get to know more people!

Talking to strangers does not come naturally to everyone. That's where this book can help. It guides you through the key skills you need to learn to start building effective relationships.

This book is for anyone wanting to:

- build business and social connections today and in the future
- meet more people but find it hard to start a conversation with someone they haven't met before
- be inspired with real-life examples of others who have taken the plunge by simply saying hello to a stranger
- mix up their daily schedule a bit to see where a little serendipity takes them.

By developing the art of saying hello to someone you don't know and starting a brief conversation you will be able to develop productive, profitable business relationships easily.

Peppered with real-life stories of how chance conversations have led to business relationships and new opportunities,

Start with Hello will show you how valuable a chance conversation can be—and how lucrative the return on investment (ROI) can be.

Divided into five parts, *Start with Hello* offers productive, creative ideas on:

- why we have historically had an aversion to talking to strangers and some easy ways of overcoming this and starting to engage and communicate with strangers
- the practicalities of networking with others, how to start a conversation and some freestyle networking ideas
- how to network effectively online using the most popular social networking sites and services
- how to develop a strategy for successfully connecting with new people and how to determine what sort of person you are talking to, using behavioural profiles
- how to use the art of chat to connect with people and build personal relationships—because chance meetings are not limited only to business.

By the time you have finished reading this book, you will be filled with the confidence to make the first move and to start a credible conversation with someone you don't know yet.

So start with hello, and convert today's strangers into tomorrow's clients.

Opening story

I picked this story about Erwin to begin this book because it is such a good example of someone saying hello resulting in something great happening. Why, saying hello to a stranger and sharing a drink in a bar not only earned him a substantial fee on a project, but it was also a turning point in his life. How proud Erwin must feel when he passes The Hague and sees the fruits of his labour displayed there for many thousands of others to enjoy too!

La fleur qui marche

I was a member of the Industrial Club in Amsterdam, a business club with more than 1600 members. One evening I started chatting with a man at the bar and he asked me what I did for a living. I had just been made redundant after a global reorganisation so I told him, 'I can sell everything you want me to sell.' To make a long story short, he introduced me to his wife, who owned a gallery and had a piece of art to sell that wouldn't move.

A couple of days later I met her and the art piece turned out to be a very large sculpture of the late Fernand Léger called *La fleur qui marche* (The walking flower). It was in crates and had been stored in Geneva for the past four years after being exhibited and owned by the well-known Rockefeller Foundation in New York. That Thursday morning I signed a contract with her and when I drove back I asked myself, 'How on earth am I going to do this?'

When I got back home, I was sitting in my study and all of a sudden my eye caught sight of a magazine called *Quote 500*, the Dutch rich list similar to the *Fortune 500* list, and I thought, ‘Hey, these people must have money to buy a million-dollar piece of art.’

I started reading from the first billionaire down to number 25 on the list and soon had a picture of people interested in collecting art. Then I asked myself, ‘Who has the space?’ The list of 25 became a short list of 10. The next challenge for me was getting in touch with them. After an internet search I found the first one. Having never sold art before, I didn’t have a clue how to approach them but managed to get in touch with the personal assistant of my prospect, who asked, ‘Can you fax it to me, so I can show him?’ Was it that simple? I spent the rest of the day searching for the contact details of some of the others to call on Monday.

Monday afternoon I contacted the personal assistant of Joop van den Ende (co-founder of Endemol, a large media group estimated to be worth 1.6 billion euros at the time) and asked her if I could send details about the sculpture to him. The next day I got a call from him personally saying he was interested but at a lower price. That same evening I got back in touch with the owner to talk about the price and a counteroffer was made. On Wednesday Joop van den Ende got back to me and we met each other halfway on the price—a deal that had appeared to be impossible was done in less than a week.

I got my fee as soon as the transaction was done and the sculpture went on display next to Joop van den Ende’s new theatre in the sea town of Scheveningen, next to The Hague, where it still features today. When you search on the internet you find a lot of photos of tourists standing next to the walking flower and to be honest, that makes me kind of proud.

This all happened with a drink, talking to a stranger, loving a challenge and thinking out of the box. It was a turning point in my career.

Erwin Versleijen

Part I

Why communicating with strangers is the key to business success

Meeting someone new can be called luck, fate, serendipity—or in some cases plain old bad luck—but either way, you have both found yourselves in the same place, or doing the same activity at the same time, allowing you to connect in some way. Something, somewhere has lined up the variables to make a connection happen, no matter how obvious or subtle.

Read the following chapters to learn how to:

- put yourself in situations where you can meet people
- take action to increase your opportunities for making business connections
- discover ways of finding common ground with strangers to build new relationships
- behave to ensure you engage successfully with people
- mix things up a little to increase your chances of stumbling across someone or something new and exciting.

Chapter 1

Is the internet limiting serendipity?

A stranger is simply someone you have not met yet.

Anon

Before computers there were many opportunities to meet people and have chance conversations that could lead to unexpected pleasant surprises. Long before we had email, we may have met someone we knew on our way to post a letter, or we may have bumped into someone new on our way to use the photocopier at the library. These chance encounters could be useful as well as quite pleasant. Another name for this is serendipity, meaning a 'happy accident' or 'pleasant surprise'—but for these opportunities to happen, we must first be alert to the possibility of them happening.

Stranger danger

'Never talk to strangers.' That's what your parents told you, didn't they? From a very early age, it has been ingrained into our culture that anyone we don't know is a stranger, and we should steer well clear of them. No eye contact, no smile, no form of acknowledgement whatsoever—zilch.

But what does this do to our ability to connect with other people and start an easy conversation later on in life?

It certainly makes it much harder for us to communicate with others, particularly in business situations. We may become wary, shy even, maybe feel a little uncomfortable or come across as immature because we simply haven't had enough practice at talking to people we don't know. If we have been told all our lives to keep away from strangers, why should we suddenly expect to be able to change at the drop of a hat or be able to interact easily with them just because we're in business?

It's even more apparent when we meet someone who is higher up the 'food chain' than we are: the chairman of a well-known company, a famous thought leader such as Deepak Chopra, a well-known business entrepreneur such as Richard Branson and others of a similar ilk. They are all human, they all started out at the bottom, they are all like us in many ways, and yet they appear so high up and out of our reach to talk to.

But there are easy ways to start conversations with such people. You just need to know the best way to attract their attention and take action. (All of this will be covered in parts II and III of this book.)

When we started out as children going off to kindy with our packed lunch and big smile, we had very little awareness about how to behave or what good manners were. We learned how to socialise over time, using the skills taught to us. Social rules are ingrained into our culture from somewhere way back in time when someone or a group of people decided what was right and what was wrong. Like any culture or religion, the unwritten rules have been handed down through the generations, and so it came to pass that our society too has rules that we 'must' adhere to in order to fit in and be 'normal'.

So, as children, when someone came to visit, we would become shy because we were only used to chatting with our