

Rachel: Hey, it's Rachel. And in this conversation with Paul Sanders, we're going to talk about how to have conversations with people that feel really good. I know a lot of people out there that feel like they're not good at small talk or they even wear this as a badge of honor, like I used to, about not liking small talk because they want to have deep conversations. And the thing is it's actually really important, I think, to know how to be able to small talk because there's going to be people that you want to be... And not everybody will be able to.

I mean, if you're at a party or something, you can't get in an instant deep conversation with somebody all the time. So being able to have that scale where you can bridge from smaller conversation to getting into deeper conversation is really powerful. This is going to make it so that you don't miss out on befriending people who you'd like to become friends with. So Paul and I are going to talk about that. In the beginning, I feel like the conversation might have been a little bit slow in the beginning, and then it gets really good.

We have an impromptu conversation where I have Paul basically act as if we're in a new situation together, and I ask him to talk to me how he would talk to me if he was trying to create a conversation. Then he goes back and he dissects that. So that's pretty interesting if you want kind of real world experience on how you can talk with people for the first time. We talked about what to do if you're in a situation that might not feel the most welcoming, how you can behave there, how you can create instant connections with people, different types of conversation starters, how to find common ground. So all types of things. And this is going to be part one.

So in the next session, in part two, we're going to talk about how you can end up creating friendships with people. So everyone says you're the average of the five people you're closest with, so we're going to talk about, in the next conversation, how to develop the kinds of friendships you want in a way that feels really natural for both of you and it's fun the entire time. So there's so much here to cover, so let's get into it.

Okay. So thank you so much for being here, Paul.

Paul: Thank you. I'm happy to talk to you here in your podcast.

Rachel: Likewise. So to kick this off, the intention behind "A Better Life" is to show people that if they have a choice, they can choose a better life. So in that spirit, can you take a minute to share with us some of the things that you're most proud of in your life?

Paul: Yeah, okay. What I'm proud of is the fact that I created my book, the first edition, then the second edition. The book is called "[Get the Friends You Want](#)." I did it in 2014 for the second edition. And then for 2015, what I'm proud of is that I created an advanced social skills training and I'm really proud of the results that my readers have been getting for their social life. Like a few years back, we used to have reviews from people that have good conversations or they were able to have a couple of friends. But with time, now the reviews we have in the feedback is that people start to really manage their social life, and when they look back, they find that we really made a difference. And I'm really happy about that. That's what I'm proud of.

Rachel: Well, congratulations!

Paul: Thank you.

Rachel: That's definitely something to be proud of. So one of the reasons I've been so pumped to talk with you is because I just feel like you have such a fascinating vantage point. I mean, you've been spending seven to eight years studying social interaction, human behavior. I know you've imported these underground books from Austria that are not on Amazon, like all kinds of just social interaction knowledge. So there's a bunch of different things I'd love to talk about, mostly around just having conversations and then we'll jump into how to make friendships. And the first thing that I'd love to know is, how do you make a conversation? How do you start a conversation with a stranger? And this doesn't necessarily even need to be like in the context of making friendships, but just how do you talk to somebody that you don't know?

Paul: Okay. If you want to talk about it outside of the context of trying to make friends, especially, I can tell you that the best way to start a conversation is talk about something you agree with the other person, like finding common ground even if it's something really, really stupid like, "Oh, my god, this line is too long." You know? You never know where you will be so it depends a lot on the situation. But as a rule of thumb, start with something that you both can agree on. That's the most basic thing you can do to start a conversation no matter where you are.

Rachel: What if it's a networking event? We all do too much, like business stuff, but just let's say, you're in around a hotel and you're just standing by yourself and you want to talk to somebody, what would you do?

Paul: Yeah, okay. So is this, for example, during the networking event or before and after?

Rachel: Yeah, during sounds great.

Paul: Okay. During is very easy. All you have to do is walk up to anybody and just stick your hand and say, hi, my name is so and so. How are you? So is this your first time coming to this sort of event or do you always do this stuff? You know what I'm saying? Something like that would be fine if it's just about starting conversations. You can do just that. I always advise my readers to talk about the theme of the event. This is the easiest way to start, you walk up to somebody. Because when you talk about networking events, you have to remember that people are there to meet you, actually. So you're supposed to go and introduce yourself. This is what I advise people to do, is go to places where other people are there to meet others. So even if you're a little shy or you're hesitant or something, you can handle it because people expect you to walk to them and say hi and introduce yourself, what you do, etc.

Rachel: That's a good point. Yeah, that is a great point. Okay, so then you're talking with people, or you say hi, you stick out your hand, or you say, "Man! This line is long!" And then how do you keep the conversation going?

Paul: Okay, just to be clear, I'm not advising people to talk about something really random like the line or something when you're in a networking event. That was my answer for something really, really broad, like anywhere. But in a networking event, you focus on there. You introduce yourself and you go right there and you ask, "Have you always come to this sort of events?"

For example, let's say that you're on a networking event about web marketing, which is something you do. You say, "So do you have your website," for example, "do you work in web marketing?" That's a question about the theme again. You can say something like, "Do you work for an agency" or "do you have your own website?" You never know. The key is talk about the theme of the event, the subject of the event because this is what you agree on. Both of you came to the event because you're interested on that subject. You are interested, so it's the easiest way to start.

Rachel: That makes sense and I guess the theory being, common ground makes people like you faster.

Paul: Yeah. But we're just talking about first conversations here. We're not talking really about how to get people to like you. You're right, but we're talking about the first sentences that come from your mouth, and it's very easy when you talk about the theme of the event. It's like going to a private party and it's somebody's birthday. Okay? So how do you start a conversation with anybody there? You just say how do you know XYZ, I mean, so-and-so? How do you know them? That so-and-so being the person that has the birthday. Is that clear?

Rachel: Yeah, that's clear. And then if you're at the grocery store, because now that you're talking about the networking event, I'm realizing that is really easy now that you've mentioned it like that. So you're at the grocery store then and you can bond on the fact that the line is long, what would you say after that to hold the conversation?

Paul: Okay. If you want my opinion about something like that, I don't suggest to people to try to make friends at the grocery stores, you know? I really suggest that they go to meet-up groups or networking events. So things are easier and it's more appropriate to talk to people. It's also people have time to talk to you, they want to talk to you. They go to the networking event to make friends, and this is where you expect to meet new people. I don't really recommend that you hope that you're going to make friends in a grocery store. I don't think so.

Rachel: I don't necessarily mean just for friends. I just mean in the context of having conversations, like being able to talk with people.

Paul: Okay, great. Let's continue on the example of a networking event. When it comes to keeping conversations going, first of all, it's always about questions. You ask questions, again, about the theme of the event. And when you start asking questions like, "How long have been doing XYZ," XYZ being the subject of the event. When people start to go to questions like that, they start to talk about their life and the timeline of their life. It's like they're giving you a little story about their life. They start to share more about who they are, what they do, on what they have done before, or with, or

during what they have been doing about that activity. I hope I'm not that blurry when I talk about this stuff. Anyway, with your first questions, you start to talk about what they have been doing before and you get outside of the subject of the event. This is a good way to keep the conversation going is to get outside of the subject and go from subject to subject to subject, and not concentrate on only one subject. Is that a good answer?

Rachel: Yeah. And what is the rationale about going from subject to subject?

Paul: Okay. First of all, when you get outside of the main subject of the event, it becomes less formal, it becomes a real conversation. Because, for example, if you have a coworker and you only talk about work, it's not really a conversation that can lead to a friendship. It's formal. When you get out of that subject, then you get into the potential of building a relationship. That's the first thing. Secondly and most importantly, going from subject to subject to subject is exactly what small talk is. This is exactly it, and that is exactly what small talk is, going from subject to subject to subject without getting too deep, unless you have a commonality or something in common that is so unique that you have to get inside. But other than that, you just keep going from subject to subject to subject.

And what the rationale is, and why you do that is because if you do that, you're going to find if you have things in common, okay? This is the next step. And small talk is exactly what gives you the opportunity to know what you have in common with that other person. This is why small talk is very good. Some people don't like it. They think that small talk is something that is not deep enough. Many people prefer profound and deep conversations, and I agree with that. I love deep conversations that have more meaning. But when you're meeting someone for the first time, your purpose and one of your objectives is to find something in common or many things in common. And this is why small talk is very good, and it's a good skill to have. And when you go from subject to subject to subject, you find these things in common, and this is why you do it.

Rachel: Yeah, I think you bring up a really good point because I know, I've said in the past, I don't like small talk, and I've used it kind of as a badge of honor, like, "I like to have deep conversations." But you're absolutely right in that not being willing to have small talk with people you don't know, it just basically cuts out potential of making all kinds of cool friendships. So I think that's a great tool to have.

Paul: I can understand that. I'm not against deep conversations. I am an introvert, for example, and I love deep conversations. For example, let's say I meet you for the first time. I'm going to have small talk with you just to get comfortable. In N.L.P., neuro-linguistic programming, for example, they tell you to go from location to location and change places with people to become more comfortable. Small talk plays the same role, even if it's just conversation, going from subject to subject to subject without getting deeper, that's small talk and it gets people to become more comfortable with you.

For example, if we meet up, for sure we're going to make small talk. And then maybe we're going to sit for coffee, and then we talk in deep subject. For example, when I talk to my friends when we go to the bar, when we go to the restaurants and everything, we talk about deep subjects. But if I'm meeting someone for the first time, I'm going to

make small talk to get to know them faster and get to know the things in common that we have as fast as possible so we can relate more and faster.

Rachel: Right. I know a lot of people who teach dating, especially like pickup artist kind of stuff. They'll teach guys to take women, and I'm not necessarily endorsing this, but I'm just saying that they'll say to take women to different kinds of locations, like the more locations you can go on the date, the better because apparently that establishes more rapport and people feel safer with you. So it can be totally used in a not awesome way. But I'm just saying I get the rationale of just, the more different kind of situations or the more subject points that you've been with someone, the closer you can feel because you've been through a lot together already.

Paul: Yeah. And for the first encounter and the first conversation, as I told you, the main outcome is finding things in common.

Rachel: Right. Cool. I've read that you have a way to get people to feel an instant connection with you. Can you tell me anything about that?

Paul: Okay, great. Instant connection, what I suggest is exactly finding things in common. When you find things in common, what you do is mention it. For example, if you're talking to someone new and they say, I do this, I do this, before I did that, I lived in this city, and then I moved here, and this is what I did, and I moved to this city because I had a boyfriend or a girlfriend, and she had a job there, and I had to follow her – when they say things that remind you of things from your own life, you have to mention it just to contribute to the conversation and share how it worked for you, too. Share your own experience of the same thing.

For example, they may say, "I love to watch TV series," and then you ask which one do you like, which ones you don't like, etc. And maybe both of you still watch something old like "Seinfeld." I don't know if you watch "Seinfeld," Rachel, but I still do. I still really love it. So when I find someone that still watches Seinfeld, even if it's so old, that's an instant connection.

If we talk about the subject and I find that they have a particular opinion of something, for example, if we just mention politics and they noticed something, maybe I've noticed the same thing, I'm going to share it. I'm going to mention it because it's not enough to just find things in common and just have a mental note. You have to go beyond that and tell them that, hey, I had the same experience about that, this is what happened, this is what happened, etc. So this is the first layer of building rapport and maybe building a relationship. Because finding things in common is the first basis and it's the common ground on top of which you build a friendship.

Rachel: Awesome. Sometimes I go to different events and they have a vibe of, you know, I only want to talk to people who I think are going to be the most beneficial to talk to, so it's only going to be people who I think I can partner with or whatever. And so when you're going to places like that where people are kind of sizing you up, do you recommend trying and winning them over or just let it go, don't even bother. How would you approach that?

Paul: Okay. So you're talking about events where people are a little colder, a little... I don't want to use that word, but I'm going to use it, like a little calculating, a little bit at least.

Rachel: Yeah.

Paul: In that situation, what I would do is bring exactly a different vibe, bring a vibe of authenticity because it's exactly the opposite of that vibe that you don't like. And just know that you're not alone, that they feel that way. If everybody is calculating and sizing each other up, but you are the person that is bringing in a different vibe, a vibe of authenticity, a vibe of wanting to have partners but also wanting to meet them personally, and just assume that you're going to care about them with what they do in life. And if you have that vibe of really not expecting too much from the event, you're going to be more attractive than the people that are just hitting you with 100 different questions just to know if you're really viable.

Rachel: Yeah, that's a really great point. Do you have any tips around just working up confidence, to be the only one with a certain kind of vibe?

Paul: It doesn't really require really real confidence. For example, if you have a place where everybody is a little calculating, I'll just say be more humble, be more chill. And that actually requires no qualities. You're just too cool, I mean, not too cool for school, but you're just chill. You're not there just to take anything. You're just there to meet new people, and maybe someday, we'll work together, maybe in a month or two or anything. But it doesn't really require confidence. It requires actually, humility. This is what I would say.

Secondly, what I would add to this is if people are that way, what you can do is just get their contact information and move on. Don't expect to have a great time in that event. But just know that you will follow up later, and maybe you'll have a good time with them later. If they have a vibe that you don't like there, it doesn't mean that it's really who they are. Maybe it's just a facade that they're making for that event. You don't need to buy into that. Maybe they are really good people, really good and caring people that can look beyond what you can offer them, and also care about you.

Rachel: Yeah, those are some great points. Actually, I had the idea while you were talking. I don't want to put you on the spot too much so let me know if you're not down, but do you want to pretend like we're having a conversation for the first time just so listeners can hear how you would approach finding common ground?

Paul: Sure. Just give the context and I'll do it. If you want, change the context or go to some other context and tell me what it is all about and I'll do it.

Rachel: Sure. Awesome. So I like to go and volunteer. There's a homeless shelter that I volunteer at and we help and we make sandwiches and we give out dinners and stuff for people there. So let's say I'm going to the event. This is my third time or something and you're going there for the first time.

Paul: Okay. So what, we are waiting in line? I'm just going to say, "Hi, my name is Paul. How are you? Is this your first time?" Oh, you want me to pretend. Okay, sorry.

Rachel: No, it's okay. I just kind of threw it on you. I thought it could be fun if you were down for it.

Paul: How are you? Do you organize these events or are you just volunteering?

Rachel: No, I'm just a volunteer. I saw about it on a Meetup group that someone was putting it together and I thought it would be fun. So I've been here a few times now.

Paul: Great! Do you like it?

Rachel: Yeah, I love it. I think it's really fun. I love the time. It works really well for me. And it's just really rewarding to come here.

Paul: Great! This is my first time. I just found out about it on [Meetup](#) as well. A friend sent me the link on Facebook and then I came. I just want to help. I think it will be something really cool to do. Taking time from my own schedule and coming here really, it's a very rewarding thing to do. And I think my mom would be proud of me, too.

Rachel: She probably would be.

Paul: So where do you live? Do you live too far from here or what?

Rachel: I live like 25 minutes from here, like Northwest Vegas.

Paul: Okay, great. I hope this is going to be fun. Have you ever talked to homeless people? Do you get any appreciations from them or anything?

Rachel: Yeah, I do. After we go and we make the dinners, we're going to all stand outside and there's a big table, and so people can come in. And we also, like you probably saw, that we each bring at least 20 items to give away to the homeless people, like toiletries or socks or whatever. So yeah, I love it. I love talking with them. There was a girl here last time, and she didn't like making contact with them, like she didn't like making eye contact or anything. In fact, she was getting kind of annoyed with them. Her mother made her come, which I thought was so random. But I think it's great. They're people, too.

Paul: Yeah, of course. I think it's a stigma about homelessness, that's all. I don't know if you know this, but if you... Of course, you know this. You're from New York. People in New York, sometimes they have jobs, they are clean, they have money, but they are still homeless because the apartments are so expensive. So homelessness is a stigma. A lot of people have been in homelessness, but they just don't like to talk about it. But yeah, as you said, they're people too, of course.

Rachel: Yeah, definitely. I guess it's especially hard here in Vegas because it's just so hot during the summers.

Paul: Sure, of course. Can we pause?

Rachel: Yeah.

Paul: Okay, great. So what I did here is I just rambled. For example, this made me think of something I saw on TV, a guy that was very clean and everything. He said, "I am homeless," etc. And he was from New York. So I was just trying to share stuff from the past, anything I hear, anything I watch on TV, anything I hear on radio, on a podcast or I read about or I saw online. All that content is my vote of confidence. I can share it. People will run out of things to say, and they say, "I'm having trouble finding things to say." It doesn't really make sense. You're just putting the bar too high, because all your life, you have seen a lot and you have heard of a lot of stories, a lot of things. You just have to allow yourself to go back to that content and share it, no matter where it came from. You don't have to share stuff from your own life. You can share stuff from other people's lives, too.

Rachel: Yeah, that's a great point. And I try to consciously, a couple of times, like not give you too much just to see what you would say, and that was really helpful to keep the conversation flowing.

Paul: Of course, I said pause, but naturally what I would do is ask you what you do. And every time you give me some piece of information, maybe it will remind me of something from my life. Anything can remind you of anything. This is another lesson for keeping conversations going. What people don't notice is that all subjects, all conversation topics are linked. They're all linked, either directly or indirectly. Anything that you talk about, there are other subjects that are linked to it, and you can bring them up.

Rachel: I'm trying to think... Can I give you something random to see what you could...?

Paul: Go ahead.

Rachel: Thank you. I'm really enjoying this.

Paul: Yeah, me too.

Rachel: Awesome. So I just started growing a garden.

Paul: Great, awesome! That's very good. Okay, that's how my mind works. I already have things to tell.

Rachel: Yeah, tell me.

Paul: Okay, great. So you're from New York originally, right?

Rachel: Yeah.

Paul: So I heard some investment guys, people that manage billions of dollars that are talking about, in the near future, like 20, 30 years from now, people who grow food are going to be the rich people, because food is going to be more and more scarce and we will be forced to grow our own food. Of course, the scarcity of water is going to a little

contribute to that. I don't know. What do you think about that? Does that register? Is that why you're gardening now? Are you going to grow your own food?

Rachel: You're good. That's awesome!

Paul: That's good. This is how we do it. Anything you hear can be something you talk about, even if it has nothing to do with you, nothing to do with your life, you can mention it. That creates conversation.

Rachel: Are you ever talking to people on your list or people that you're helping that are like, I don't watch the news, I don't pay attention to anything, I don't have that much to say. Do people ever say that?

Paul: I just insist that it doesn't matter what you watch, you watch something. You are on the Internet, you have a smartphone, you listen to podcasts, don't you? Come on. Of course, you listen to podcasts, you read articles online, even if it's something you've seen on [BuzzFeed](#), even that. I don't care. Anything you watch. You're not asleep all day and so you have content. You have just not been looking at it.

And I understand what you say because people have such a high standard. They think that they have to be impressive or cool or interesting. They don't. You don't have to. And actually, it's good to be interesting. But what happens is people put that standard so high, which creates an emotional tension, it creates friction. And that's why they run out of things to say. Of course, they have things to say. They are interesting people, often. They have a lot to say. And they recognize it.

For example, they tell you that I have a lot to say. But when I meet new people, I have nothing to say. My mind goes blank. And the problem is not content. The problem is that your emotions are tense, you're tense and you think that you have to be impressive, cool, you have to impress others and be original. That's a good thing. You can be original, you can be interesting or funny. That's good. But if you're going to put that pressure on yourself, what's going to happen is that you're going to run out of things to say because you're putting too much pressure on yourself.

Rachel: How do you not do that? Is it just like a practice?

Paul: It is a practice. But the first step is be aware of it. That's why I'm telling you, I'm telling you, I'm telling anyone who is listening about that, because you can see it. I'm trying to mention a metaphor for this, and I call it the filter. So if you're going to filter what you're going to share with people you just met, you're going to share only what's cool, only what's interesting, only what's impressive or only what shows you on a good light. If you put too many filters on yourself, there won't be much left. Okay?

Rachel: Yeah.

Paul: So just know that you don't have to put all these filters because when you put on yourself all these filters, there won't be much left in there. It will be too much pressure. That's one thing. But when it comes to actually doing it and practicing it, what I tell people to do is practice small talk in general so they can focus on just creating

conversation with anybody and about any subject, and make your subconscious mind realize that you don't need impressive stuff to say. You just have to go in that experience and go through it a couple of times or many times to really feel how you can talk about anything. It doesn't have to be very, very interesting. And I can tell you how I tell people to practice small talk if you...

Rachel: Yeah, please.

Paul: Okay. So what I tell people is you commute, you go back and forth to work and everything, I just recommend that you talk 5% more than usual wherever you are and whoever you're talking to, even if it's a taxi cab driver or an Uber driver, or you're ordering something, or you're at work and you're talking to your coworkers. Just focus on talking just 5% more than usual, like putting one or two sentences more than usual, more than you're usually comfortable with. The objective here is to push your comfort zone a little further. But it's just 5%, it's not much. And when you do this exercise, it forces you to just talk, say one sentence or two sentences. And with time, you'll realize how your comfort zone grows and it becomes bigger and bigger, and you'll realize that you can talk to people for longer and longer and longer.

Rachel: That's awesome I love that 5%. That's not hard at all. I think that's extremely achievable. And I was also thinking that for people who are listening, they could probably even find somebody who, like them, doesn't like small talk, because I think it's so trendy now, too, to say you don't like small talk, but who wants to, and just practice with them, too. I guess there's a lot of different ways that you could start to feel more comfortable. And I think we have covered so much. I'm thinking that we're actually probably just going to make a part one and a part two of this episode because I think people could just listen to this show alone and just get so much from it. I don't want to overwhelm them.

Okay. So that was section one of my conversation with Paul Sanders. And if you would like to learn more about Paul, sign up for his newsletter. His website is at GetTheFriendsYouWant.com and you can sign up for his newsletter and just reply and you'll be able to contact him. And then in part two of this episode, we are going to talk about, as I was saying before, how you can go and take these conversations and turn them into friendships, how you can make friendships with people that you would like to get to meet. So that will be coming here very soon. So I look forward to seeing you over there.

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