

TLP Five-Minute Read Over Coffee – Dancing in the conversation



Some people I know think that you cannot train 'small talk' - it is just talking about stuff like your weekend or the weather! To some extent that is true - if you try to prepare a script as you might for a client-facing email or presentation you would come across as pretty robotic.

💡 However, as someone who has consciously improved my own small talk skills - it is something you can think about and get better at. So, imagine this context, you arrive back at the office tanned and healthy after a very good holiday. While making a coffee a colleague comes over for a catch up and asks about your holiday. Here are some tips when having that conversation in English!

Chucking(throwing) back the hot potato. I have some students who when I ask - 'How are you' - they respond in a super quick way - 'I am fine and you...?' There may be busy moments when passing each other in the corridor at work when that is all you have time for. However, often this super quick response can appear a little defensive or cold.

Talking too much. The opposite tendency is to give a detailed 'day by day' description of your holiday + supporting photos. This might not be what your busy colleague needs!

Find a middle way aiming to bring to life your holiday in a brief but fresh way. Examples below!

Toby - how was your holiday? I might choose two or three of the sentences below.

It was really relaxed/chilled. I spent two weeks on the beautiful south coast of England.

It was great to catch up with family and friends in some warm and traditional English country pubs.

I had a really good time, lots of swimming in the sea and hiking with my family.

We ate really well, including the best fish and chips you can find anywhere. My son (who is only 20 months old) already knows that you have ketchup and not mayo with chips! He is not yet ready for vinegar though!

It was a really good time. I disconnected from work and recharged my batteries (reenergized).

It was a very cool holiday. We stayed in a cozy boutique hotel and the staff made us feel very welcome. If you ever visit Dorset, I can recommend this place!

What about you...? (Always make it a two-way conversation!).

The phrase I really like in relation to small talk - is the idea of 'dancing in the conversation'. This means you stay 'light on your feet', don't overtalk and are really interactive in encouraging the other person to speak as well. Enjoy that often brief post-holiday 'energized feeling' and power for the week.
