#Hello My Name is....?

I caught the morning news today and saw a short report on a young GP who is battling terminal cancer. Dr. Kate Granger has experience of being on both sides of the fence and I guess her condition has allowed her to have a different perspective. Following a recent bout in hospital she felt compelled to comment about her experience on her blog\(^1\):

*During this admission I made some observations on the quality of my care. Perhaps the starkest of these was that not every member of staff who approached me introduced themselves.*

*As a healthcare professional you know so much about your patient. You know their name, their personal details, their health conditions, who they live with and much more. What do we as patients know about our healthcare professionals? The answer is often absolutely nothing, sometimes it seems not even their names. The balance of power is very one-sided in favour of the healthcare professional.*

*I have always been a strong believer in getting to know people’s names as part of building good working relationships with both patients and other colleagues. I think it is the first rung on the ladder to providing compassionate care and often getting the simple things right, means the more complex things will follow more easily and naturally.*

To spread the message she started a hashtag on twitter *#hellomynameis* to encourage fellow health professionals to introduce themselves to all patients. Dr. Granger is encouraging professionals to think about a one line sentence that they would say to patients at first introduction; her example is “Hello. My name is Dr Kate Granger. I’m one of the senior doctors who will be looking after you on the ward while you’re with us. How are you feeling today?”

I was hit by the simplicity of her idea but also the fact that in today’s ‘always on’ 24/7 world that some of us are seemingly so busy, that we can’t even introduce ourselves to a fellow human being that we are about to care for or interact with. How many of our workplaces, meeting spaces and

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\(^1\) [https://drkateganger.wordpress.com/2013/09/04/hellomynameis/](https://drkateganger.wordpress.com/2013/09/04/hellomynameis/)

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travel spaces have got like this? I suspect that being diagnosed with a terminal illness brings home the fact that every interaction is precious and every opportunity to meet someone is unique.

It doesn’t seem so long ago that people were formally introduced at gatherings and calling cards announced someone. The correct title was used to introduce an individual and everyone was made to feel a little special. There was a clear order and etiquette. It can be useful to remind ourselves of the right way to do this. Some people can find this type of exercise a little stuffy, but I like to think that it reminds us to be clear on whom we are, what we are doing, and it pays respect to all involved. To recognise someone’s seniority isn’t the same as deferring to someone. Good manners go a long way.

The following excerpt\(^2\) explains the correct way of introducing people:

\textit{ALWAYS} say the most important person’s name first. In business rank and status are the primary determinants to who takes precedence over whom. Gender and age are typically not factors.

\textit{NEVER} use the word "meet" when introducing people. For example, read the following sentence and tell me who’s the CFO and who is the newly hired staff member. "Jane Doe, I would like you to meet John Smith."

Which person is the most important person in this sentence? Who sounds like the most important person? Is Jane or John the CFO?

We just learned the most important person is the first person. Yet by the way this sentence reads, it appears John is the more important person of the two. So who’s the CFO?

When you use the word "meet" to introduce someone, you will always throw the emphasis off toward to the wrong person, thereby falling out of protocol for a proper business introduction. In my mind, throw that "m-word" out of your default brain and mental dictionary of proper introductions.

Rather, for an informal introduction, use the words "this is" as the bridge between saying the most important person’s name first and then introducing the second person. "Jane Doe this is John Smith, our new staff member. Jane Doe is our CFO."

Being reminded of this got me thinking about how lazy we can be about something as simple as an introduction and a brief exchange. There is an order and a proper way of doing things that prompts us to be respectful and to slow down and listen. I do wonder whether this more formalised route has fallen by the wayside because some people feel it’s outdated or because we’re not taught the correct way of doing things. It is like grammar, which seems to have lost ground in schools to be replaced by text speak or key words. Key words relates to the fact that the sentence structure doesn’t seem to matter as long as the key words are there.

Have we speeded up to the extent where we are in danger of losing all meaning and abandoning common sense? I suspect that we’re getting closer. In communication terms, the opener sets up a

\(^2\)http://www.advancedetiquette.com/newsletter/july_issue.htm

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great potential for the rest of the conversation. I particularly like Dr. Granger’s opening line where
she directly introduces herself, states her reason for being, and then asks the patient how are you
today? This last element hands the control of the conversation back to the patient and invites a
response. It creates a human connection and assumes an equal level of conversation. I suspect that it
also reminds Dr. Granger that the patient experience can be as relevant as any numbers on a chart.

These little interactions can be profound in a hospital setting, as they can be anywhere. I came
across a lovely link on twitter the other week where someone had shared a story of thank you to a
stranger. The person had written to the free Metro newspaper thanking the stranger who had lent
them 20p towards a parking meter payment. Unbeknown to the stranger, they were parking up to go
visit their father in hospital and the stranger’s kindness had enabled them to park nearby without
worrying about a ticket on return. They got to see their father just before he passed and they had
wanted to communicate to the stranger what a difference the 20p had made. The smallest things
can make the biggest difference.

Too often, I think that we have forgotten the simple power of conversation and the need to
remember it’s a two-way street. Do we invite the other person into the conversation? Do we treat
them as an equal, or do we naturally assume some form of hierarchy? I’ve seen doctors, professors
and CEOs make the mistake in assuming some form of seniority in the wrong setting. If we remain
open to asking questions and listening to the response of the other person, we could quite literally
amaze ourselves. Be interesting by being interested in the other person. It’s a real skill.

Regular readers will know that each Think Paper has an exercise built in. This time it’s in two parts:

**Exercise 1: What would your #hellomynameis be?**
If you were to go to a networking meeting or be introduced to someone at a business event, write
down below what your line could be (don’t forget to hand the conversation back to them at the
end):

Hello, my name is........

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**Exercise 2. Find a piece of etiquette around introductions and communication and share it
with us at info@knowanddo.com or even better learn from it and apply it and help you
and your team grow as a consequence.**

Finally, hasten slowly, and add a little more meaning in your introductions and communication
exchanges. You’ll be glad you did.

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