

Episode 5 – Emotion at Work Talk – Negotiating Identity in Conversation
Chatting with Georgie Nightingall (@GeorgieNight)

Phil: Welcome to today's episode of the Emotion at Work podcast and today we are looking at how emotions and identities are explored in conversation. Often the interactions that we have can be quite ritualised and almost pre-defined and today's guest wants to change that and give people both a safe, but also explorative and playful place to talk in a different way and today's guest is going to be someone that is going to be new to most of our Emotion at Work podcast listeners but a voice that I am really fascinated to talk with and I am excited to spend some time with today, so I would like to welcome to today's podcast, Georgie Nightingall. Hi Georgie.

Georgie: Morning.

Phil: How are you?

Georgie: I am good actually this morning. Really good and yourself?

Phil: I am very well thank you apart from me having a bit of a husky voice which I said when we were talking off air, it might actually be better for the podcast but we will wait and see on that one. In my introduction I talked about how you are looking to play with the idea that interactions that we have can be ritualised and pre-defined and that's something that we would explore as we go but I know that what you're really interested in is the way that people go about conversation and the stimulus that people can respond to, so what I would like to do is rather than do the usual, the help out the listener by telling us a bit more about you, so instead I would like to ask you to share a question that you might ask at one of your events and we will tell the listener a bit more about what your events are later, but if you start with one of the questions that you would ask at one of your events and then we will both answer it and then we can see how we go from there. Does that sound okay?

Georgie: Yeah, that sounds absolutely fine.

Phil: Fab.

Georgie: Okay cool, I will talk more about the structure of my events later but this is a canopy question. So it is like an icebreaker question which people would usually have about five minutes to answer with somebody they don't know and it is, "What have you craved in the last week?"

Phil: Oh, what have I craved in the last week? So I have craved sleep. Sleep has been something that I have not, no that is not true. I have craved quality sleep. So quality sleep is something that I have not had that much of in the past week. What else have I craved in the past week? I think I have craved some help actually. So some help and support from other people, so I am conscious in my head I often have lots of things that I want to do. I have got lots of ideas or lots of opportunities or possibilities or that I want to be doing and there's only so much of me that goes around and so craving some help and some support with some of the things that I want to do is something else that I have been craving this week.



Georgie: In terms of managing your time and trying to structure what it is you want to do and work out what is feasible and the time you have or for people to actually do stuff for you?

Phil: A little bit of both but mainly people to help me with stuff so it is mainly, so for example, I have got some work I want to do in playing with some of the deception work that I get involved in more and thinking more about how do I share some of that stuff and how can I explain the language and the way that I go about doing that in a way that people are going to be interested in. Part of me is about helping me do some thinking with that but it is also helping me articulate that in a way and then also pull a proposition together and make it quite clear in what it is that I am trying to do. So it is a bit of both really. And what about you, what have you craved in the last week?

Georgie: Coffee (laughs). So there is a story behind this. I woke up on Wednesday morning and decided that I was addicted to coffee and I need not to be addicted to coffee so I stopped drinking it that day.

Phil: Oh wow.

Georgie: I mean, I only drink one cup a day which imposes the rule but it is still a significant amount if you think about how strong, how much caffeine it has and I was just becoming dependant on it. I needed it for my inspirational boost and my energy levels were all over the place and I think it was kind of controlling me and so I just stopped and then had a good six days of headaches and nausea and unproductivity and generally just feeling a bit rubbish but I am getting there. I am now on day eight now actually and I have coped. I have managed to go without coffee all that time and I am feeling quite good about that fact that I have been disciplined and that I have managed through the worst part. I actually woke up this morning and felt okay. Just not like ahh, I am craving for my coffee cup so yeah, I am glad I have done it, but I will drink it again, but I don't want it to be a thing that I have to have.

Phil: Oh right okay, that makes sense. So you mentioned a canopy question and we will come to what that means in just a second but I am also interested in the question itself because that is what have you craved in the last week because that is quite an emotive word because crave is almost synonymous to a desire and sometimes it maybe even a dark desire I suppose. Was that part of the thinking in terms when you put that question together?

Georgie: So it is a great question because it is both very generic and specific because you're invited to talk about something that is very relevant to yourself and as you say crave could literally be anything from your deep most desires or something like, "Oh I just needed a coffee". It invites people to tell a story about themselves and also open up and be vulnerable about a need they have in some respects which you know is a very human need mostly. So it is a great way to build trust and also it always invites further conversations and you tell somebody it is something that you needed that week and they're next questions are usually, "Why" or "Tell me more" etcetera, etcetera so it is a great conversation opener. You can say as much as you like or don't want to as well so that is quite good.

Phil: The relevance and the meaning that you find in it, or you find in the question whether it be something, you know you had a coffee or it could be something else entirely and I guess are there risks for people then do you think? Is there a risk that they could overshare or overexpose themselves in response to that because they might find a relevance that is deep and dark and therefore go with that? Is there risk that they might overshare?

Georgie: I mean I am not sure how I feel about the word risk because in the event I create it is a safe space. People are encouraged to be open and honest and vulnerable and to say what they want and to think the beauty of talking to strangers is, I'll come on more to the structure of my events, but people talk to strangers and have these questions is that you don't necessarily have to see that question again so you are sharing something about yourself but actually you can leave it at that. You can have a conversation and then move onto the next one and nothing more needs to be said so you can actually tell them your life story or your deep and darkest most fears, wants and desires if you want to and then actually I find though that yes, okay it is vulnerable to share, but once you have shared something about yourself which is quite meaningful people usually feel the need to respond in the same way and therefore you have both risked but actually you have gained at the same time as well. Most people who are interested in having those kinds of conversations actually want to be in the situation where they can be honest and they can be open so they are framed that they are ready for it. So actually I don't think there is such a thing as oversharing in that respect.

Phil: Okay we have alluded to the fact that we will talk more about the events and so we mentioned the canopy questions. I wonder if for the benefit of the listener it might be worthwhile talking a bit more about what it is you are up to. So you founded a thing called Trigger Conversations. Do you want to tell us more about that?

Georgie: Sure. Trigger Conversations are events that I run currently in London, monthly and also special events and they are for strangers to have me from conversations and real connections. I think that a lot of our conversations are very superficial with strangers. We often go into a room full of strangers, if you are networking for instance and all people will do for example is say, "Oh what do you do?" "Where do you come from," etcetera and then you repeat this elevator script. In your head they go, oh, interesting, mmm and they ask maybe one question and then the conversation closes and it is just the social norm. My events I have forbidden the question what do you do and I have replaced it with a selection of questions that are more interesting and encourage people to be open and to share stories or to talk about something else basically, some other facets of their personality and the events are structured into a conversation menu, so like in a dinner party you would go through course and each course is obviously going to be lighter or heavier, same with this. It is a metaphorical dinner party. You will have questions, the canapes are quite light, they're icebreakers between three and five minutes each and then you move through starters which is getting a little bit longer which is ten minutes and then you go to the main. So the main course is my favourite conversation course. It is 15 minutes long and you get three choices. So you can either have meat, which is deep and thoughtful conversation or you can have fish, which is controversial conversation or you can have vegetarian which is nourishing conversation and then after meat, you have dessert, sweet and delightful conversation. Cheese is a task, it is more playful and a game and then you finish the evening with coffee which is warming, reflecting and revitalising. So there is a number of courses to go through. You speak to a different person for each course and you randomly



matched, so you don't have to go find somebody necessarily and the idea is to get strangers together but also get people to have real conversations. Conversations where you aren't trying to go anywhere. They don't have an agenda. A lot of people talk because they feel like they need to get some information out of the other person or they need to advise or negotiate and they are very goal oriented. Whilst the joy of having an intrinsically valuable, a real conversation is that you don't know where it is that you are meant to be going. You are just enjoying that moment and you are connecting with somebody and it's playful and it's organic and it's spontaneous and you will probably go off in tangents but you'll learn something. It is an opportunity to be playful and intimate and adventurous. Those are the kinds of conversations that my events promote.

Phil: And I guess that might be hugely different from your standard network event?

Georgie: From events that I have been too I think it is from what I have spoken to other people about. I think it is difficult in network events because you know you are there to get something. You are looking for clients or collaborations or business in some respect so you want to find out something meaningful about what they do and find whether it is relevant for you, but at the same time you also don't want to do it that is too much hard sell so you are trying to build relationships by building rapport with people. I think from my events people have networked through them and people have also built new relationships. Friendships and beyond as well which is not the intention but it comes out of having a conversation where you are actually connecting to somebody in a real way. You find that there is some sort of chemistry and that is the foundation to any good relationship, whether that is networking or is a friendship.

Phil: So where did your interest or your passion for this come from then?

Georgie: It came from boredom.

Phil: (Laughs) okay.

Georgie: And frustration as well. I was working a full-time job as a project manager. I was quite enjoying my work, it was quite hard but I was learning something new every day but the issue was I would come back from work and go to events either to see friends or meet new people and the only question that I would be asked is, "What do you do?" or "How was work?" And I just thought I have just spent the whole day at work. I don't necessarily need to repeat this and also I felt very boxed, like all people wanted to know of me was what I did and in some situations I found that people weren't actually satisfied with what their job was and that the conversations themselves didn't make me feel very good. They were very unfulfilling. I didn't feel like I actually met anybody and it was difficult to actually build any relationships further from these events so I was basically did some experiments to make things better so I ran some parties where you had to bring a friend. So I tried to change the dynamic by changing the people and that was good, I did some new rules as well. So you had to play host. Every time someone arrived you were the next host, so that changed things around. It was good and it was fun but I felt like we were still stuck in these rigid structures of going back to social norms. You know, what was expected of you to ask other people, so I realised from that that I needed to create an event with new rules, with new structures. I needed to be direct and say to people this is what we are going to talk about, this is what we are not going to talk about and

my friend came up and said why don't you have a conversation menu. And I thought okay that is great, well what does a menu include? It is a metaphor, kind of questions that I thought might be relevant. Just pitched it and put it out there on Facebook in October and at my first event I had ten friends and ten strangers and it was a huge success. I just thought okay, I have to carry on and see where this goes.

Phil: Okay, I know that we met through mutual studying when we were both doing our MSc in Emotion Credibility and Deception but I know you have also got a further academic background in philosophy as well so it makes me wonder that part of what is driving you is a bit more than just the boredom and the frustration. Is there something more to it as well?

Georgie: Yeah so I am definitely philosophically minded. I really like to learn and I really like to unpack things and get to a deeper more meaningful level. I wasn't getting that after I had left university because I was in the working world but and I feel like at least for me the capacity to learn is something that should be there throughout your whole life basically and if you are not getting those conversations at work and you are not getting any of that at home you can feel very...I can't think of the word but very non-energised and non-enthused in some respect. So I am not sure, I think, yeah definitely my philosophy has impacted this and some of the questions are very philosophical in nature especially when you get to the main course. You can choose not to have those kind of questions but I think that it has impact why I am doing this.

Phil: So I know we started with a canopy and in part of the planning for the podcast I hadn't suggested this and the idea has just come to me as we have gone, so part of me wonders whether we should play with some of those other questions as we go. Whether we should play with some of the other courses as we work our way through the podcast to see how that...to give the listeners an example of the sorts of questions that can be asked and some of the discussions that goes with it and I will put that to one side for a second. I think that would be interesting to see how that goes but if I bring us back to why you do this then and then why I have been really interested to get you on the Emotion at Work podcast, so in terms of the role that emotion plays in those conversations, through trigger conversations you're asking these different questions that are opening up different conversations that are happening between people and how are you seeing that working at an emotional level with the individuals that take part and the individuals that are taking part in it in the conversations that are happening?

Georgie: So I think in a standard conversation, I am going to go with that. That is describing a conversation where, with a stranger you don't know them and you're sitting in small talk territory. You don't reveal much about yourself necessarily. You talk about external factors, like the weather or where you live, maybe there is something around that area and you are trying to find a mutual connection but I think that what they don't do therefore is they don't invite you to talk about things that are about you and about how you feel and how you think about particular issues or particular things that have happened in your life so they are not emotional and if we're not talking about things that are not emotional we can have distance and we are also not really connecting. We are not recognising each other as a human being. Everyone has ups and downs, life is hard you know and the superficiality is just not, it doesn't allow us to get to a human level, so I think that it's really important in a conversation to share something of yourself, to let someone know you are human

and that you are interested through that and that also recognising that makes you feel better and makes the other person feel better as well.

Phil: And I know you have been playing with the...well the Trigger Conversation events so far have been happening from a public perspective. So you liken them to people get networking benefits from them so far. Have you played with doing any of this sort of stuff in the workplace yet?

Georgie: So I haven't yet run these sessions yet in the workplace but I have been speaking to some organisation that are interested in doing this sort of thing, because I think that the issues are still there as well in organisations where people are working with each other but don't seem to actually have any conversations where they get to know each other. They are always about the task at hand and the work and therefore they haven't built the strong relationships that are required when you want to have strong teams. I think this is especially important in project teams where you meet people quickly and you are required to work together intensively for a short period of time to achieve your own goal so this is something that I am considering. So taking this Trigger Conversations into organisations as a workshop or an after work drinks setup. Invite people to get to know their co-workers.

Phil: Yeah the idea of conversation being ritualised, that is something that I agree a lot of conversation is ritualised, it has, we could both get incredibly geeky excited about some of the conversation analysis and the discourse analysis work that happens around how ritualised conversations are, almost to the point where, with a high degree of accuracy, you can almost predict somebody is going to respond to a question or a statement because of its ritualised nature and I think there are certain activity types, like networking as an example, you are right, the scripts just run...so what do you do..ahhh...you can almost script out how that conversation is going to go and then both parties go and be complicit to that and off they go, but I do wonder though, maybe even more so in the workplace, are there certain activity types where that script will run. So let's think, one to one discussions with your line manager or as you were saying, initial discussions or interactions between project teams that need to come together or even in team meetings, so I can imagine that breaking some of those conventions or some of those rituals would make for very different and actually quite interesting and maybe meaningful conversations.

Georgie: Yeah I think that is right, you mentioned rituals and I think it's important to recognise that in the workplace as a new activity, as a new context there are different rules, there are different rules to what you might get in your family setting or your friends setting or a strangers setting, in that people feel they have to be professional more than anything and also they feel like they are, in some way time pressured especially in a meeting. You have got to get to the point and that means that there's no invitation to actually do something to find out about people and to invest the time in the relationship building and people feel as well that they want to come across as good as they can, so they want to be professional and that means that being professional not necessarily recognising weaknesses or vulnerabilities and telling people about them because they might not get promoted or they might not be given a task or something. People will therefore be more likely to give superficial answers or not answer questions which are not personal or intrusive because they feel like that makes them come across negatively and it is probably reinforced by the fact that organisations are quite rigid in that respect. Quite hierarchal and the norms exist for people actually

enter the organisation and everyone knows they are there so they reinforce them because of this. If they don't do it then the next person doesn't do it. There's no real invitation for people to actually break the rules basically and it's the status quo and rule breakers are not necessarily appreciated in an organisation. You don't want to come across as weird so no one does it.

Phil: So for me we are talking about a couple of different things here. If listeners want to look into or investigate some of the concepts George and I are talking about here, we are talking about two things really, we are talking about Stephen Levinson and his work on Activity Types and his notion that there are certain discreet types of activity that have sets of rules and often unwritten rules or expectations that sit around them and then also we are talking about the concept of a reliable contribution, I can't remember off the top of my head who came up with the idea of reliable contributions. I should remember that but I have forgotten, but again the idea being that in certain context, certain people, or certain individual may or may not be allowed to contribute and take part but one of my favourite examples is, I was part of a board meeting and when the activity type changed the allowable contributions changed, so initially everybody was arriving, we were meeting and greeting, there was the usual small talk happening, there was certain individuals that were there. There was a secretary there, there was also a facilitator, who wasn't me actually for a change, it was somebody else and then there was the board and me as an individual with a task to do at the meeting but when the context changed from that initial meet and greet the secretary was a huge part of that conversation. It was both in introducing people to each other, really engaging, very talkative and very animated within it and as soon as that activity changed once the meeting began she wasn't allowed to contribute in the same way. So her contributions were much more to do with or allowed to be about the agenda points, so making sure the actions had been recorded accurately and I find that fascinating. Just that small shift in context completely changes. What's allowed and who is permitted to speak and not speak and I love the way that you are trying to play with some of that stuff I think. Okay, so shall we ask one of the questions from one of the courses to see how that goes? Shall we go for a main course? You said you quite liked those, didn't you?

Georgie: I did, which one do you want to go, meat, vegetarian or fish?

Phil: The playful part of me wants to go fish because you said that was controversial.

Georgie: It can be quite controversial. Let me find one that is less controversial...I don't know...hang on a sec.....

Phil: I've got visions of you flicking through your conversation cards.

Georgie: That is exactly what it is...okay, here is one I think will be alright. So it's fish which is controversial. What are or what would be your thoughts as a parent?

Phil: What are or what would be my thoughts as a parent? So I can go with what are, rather than what would be...so one is patients, so I am less patient than I should be, or than I would like to be. Especially when any of my children, but when my eldest in particular doesn't do as I have asked, then my tolerance and my patients levels are a lot shorter than they should be, than I would like them to be and I think my second one is going to be attention. So there are times where I am

incredibly attentive, so where I am wholly, fully present in whatever it is we are doing, whether that be playing games, whether it be chatting but there are other times where I can let work and especially, some of my devices, whether that be my phone or my iPad, there are times where I can let that interfere, where I think actually I don't need to be checking twitter or checking my emails or writing down that particular thought that I just had about this thing that I could do. I can put that away and just be more present. There was an article published, I think by the BBC this week about some research that had been done asking children about the impact of parents device usage and that might be why that one is particularly front of mind because I read the piece this week and thought, yeah, I can see me in that. I can see my relevance in that.

Georgie: I think most parents can probably, in our current world, it is very difficult to not be plugged in all the time. In fact even just not as a parent, even as a friend or any kind of relationship you are seeing your family to not look at your devices and not check on email etcetera and to not have rules around not doing it at particular times of the day or not working, especially for instance yourself, obviously you define your work and your time when you do it so the structure, the boundaries are not necessarily there in the same way and I think in this world as well we are probably going to be moving more towards that where it is not necessarily certain where the line is and work and play might even become the same thing so I totally get that. It must be a real struggle. I am not yet a parent but I think when I am I will struggle with that element of spending time with my children. I know from previous relationships that I can get into something I call task mode. Well my ex used to call it task mode which is where I am incredibly productive and I will just bam through my to-do-list and go through work and get a real hit out of doing that and sometimes it would just come and I would just want to do it and that meant of course that any time we spent together wasn't really spent together because I would be doing something else. I wouldn't be present and with him and actually enjoying the relationship at that given moment. So I think there is definitely a risk for me that that would transfer into my children especially if I continue to work self-employed because the division between playing and work isn't necessarily there. I also think that I have very high expectations of myself and of others as well and I think that especially with children you have to love them unconditionally and it is not to say that I wouldn't, but I think that you have to be appreciative of the fact that everyone makes mistakes and it takes a number of times to get something right. Maybe similar to you in that sense of inpatients in some respect. I quite like teaching and helping people learn. I think it is important I take that view with my children that it is all just part of the learning game, really.

Phil: Yeah, I can empathise with some of those. There was something that happened on the weekend when my eldest made a choice and I was like, wow, that's not the choice I would make and that's the choice that has got a lot of risk to it and I did nothing about it because as you know, she needs to learn that. If there is going to be lesson to learn she needs to learn that lesson on her own. There are some things that you just need to learn taking the choice not to get involved was quite challenging. I found that quite difficult to do.

Georgie: Did she learn the lesson?

Phil: I don't know, we'll have to wait and see how it plays out of overtime. So it is a choice that she made in the moment that has potential ramifications in the future. The lesson wasn't to be learned

there and then, it was a lesson on trust. She shared some things with some people and yeah, whether that trust will be honoured is the lesson that may or may not be learned as a result of it but bearing in mind we are talking about ten year old girls. Will that trust be held, I don't know, we have to wait and see.

Georgie: I guess it might be hurtful but actually that is the only way she can discover that and in life it is a very good lesson to learn at the age of ten years old, so you are very much doing her a favour.

Phil: I hope so. That's how I framed it in my head anyway.

Georgie: That is how I see things when I make terrible mistakes. I at least think, well at least I have made them now, but before ramifications were actually too high.

Phil: There's some general narrative that we played with a little bit. We've introduced a couple of times so far around the humanness of what you are trying to achieve in terms of create more of a human and personal connection and it came back to me because of what you were discussing there around the boundaries around work and home and how they are getting more and more blurred. You are right as a self-employed individual we get the opportunity to decide when we work and when we don't work and we have got quite a lot of freedom in that whereas some people who work in organisations might feel they are more nine to five or eight until six but there is a growing trend I guess for that to be blurred. Some of the work I do in terms, some of the thinking around presentism as a thing, the idea that to be busy and to be credible you need to be at your desk doing stuff whereas there is a shift, I don't know if that is too big a word but there's certainly a change in terms of actually should we look at people's output. Once we have agreed what it is they are there to do, where they do it, how they do it, what time of day they do it, does that really matter as long as the work gets done and in a way that is appropriate and doesn't alienate people. Yes the work is done and is also done in the right way but actually when it is done and whether somebody does it from home or the office, does that really matter. So how I am then linking it back to the conversation we are talking about then in a way building that deeper more personal relationship and having more of a human relationship with others actually it is going to be more important in the long run, because what those sorts of conversations do or those relationships do is help build trust. Do you think that is a fair summary?

Georgie: I definitely think it is a good thing to say actually. An influence for me running these events etcetera was that I worked in some organisations where they spend a lot of time building relationships from the start. As soon as I arrived I got to know the team on one to ones and we went out and we did this stuff together and we had conversations that were not at all related to work. They were about finding out who I was and I was finding out about them and what that meant was that we were able to work very closely and very intimately and I felt able to approach them with questions about things I didn't know and to also feel like the team work I was doing was actually making a contribution. I was helping them out and then there were other organisations where it was kind of a given that you would just go up to people and you would be able to work together but I knew nothing about them and I felt like there was very much a divide between us actually and that we therefore were not necessarily required to do successful work. So I feel now actually being self-employed that I am very, very consistent in my personality. I try not to have a professional and

a personal me. I try and marry them together and I approach all people in the same kind of way, whether they are a vendor or if I am buying coffee...not buying coffee anymore (laughs)...

Phil: (Laughs).

Georgie: If I was buying coffee, let's go with green tea, or someone comes to my event or they are someone who I might be doing business with or collaborating with, I am always taking the approach of let's find out something about this person. Let's be curious, let's build the rapport, let's get to know them and from that basis things will happen and I found more and more of it, it just works. What I am doing at the moment is very much built on networking or building communities, getting to know people so for instance with these events 80% of people who come have already been to an event before or have been told to come by a friend. So it is all completely word of mouth. So it is through building those relationships and encouraging people to get to know each other actually that has brought about their success so I feel, I completely get it. Work and play we feel is kind of the same thing in some respect and it is the same with relationships as well. They shouldn't be these are my work colleagues and therefore I put them in one box and talk to them about a, b and c and these are my friends. I feel that there needs to be some kind of cross-over at some point between the two. Fine you don't have to tell your secrets at work but at least come across as a human. Be honest about what's going on in your life that is great or what's going on in your life that is a real struggle.

Phil: Yeah and I agree with you in a lot of that and also it is a real challenge. The amount of work that is needed to for someone to work with their identity in that way. So to be able to merge those two. I remember for a long time there was a home me and a work me. I even remember not so long ago, probably three years ago, I had gone out for tea, it was an afternoon tea and we had been to a café and it was a café that specialised in tea rather than a café that specialised in coffee and as we were walking across the road, everyone that I met, I'd met through Twitter, so I think one person I was meeting for the second time, somebody was sort of the third or fourth time we were meeting socially from Twitter and they said to me, so are we friends now? And I was like, you what, I don't know if we are because this isn't a way that I make friends so my friends haven't historically, up to that point hadn't come from meeting somebody on Twitter. Chatting with them, getting to know them online and then meeting the face to face. Thinking they were alright, meeting them again and continuing to have a relationship with them so it really challenged and really defined my view of friends, friendships and where friends can come from because my answer was no, in my current categorisation of friends we are not and one of the people that I was with we still have a bit of sort of fun with it where she will say to me so have you met any of your T.A.Ns recently, when we talk about your T.A.Ns we are using that as a three letter acronym for my Twitter Associate Network because I don't have friends on Twitter so I have T.A.Ns as she calls them but it really challenged my... at that moment in time that really challenged that definition of what friends were and I had to really think that and work that to say actually am I going to redefine my notion of friends and friendship is to include meeting others in this particular way.

Georgie: So have you? Are you going to call them friends or are they T.A.Ns?

Phil: I definitely have some friends that I have met, some really good friends that I have met through Twitter that have helped me both personally and professionally. So again there's that mix between personal and professional and I guess if I then put myself in the shoes of somebody in an organisation then maybe this could be a question for you from your experiences of when you were going in that project working role. How comfortable were you and or others in renegotiating those lines between getting to know someone as a person as well as a colleague?

Georgie: Yeah it is a hard one actually because there are certain expectations in those roles about again, we talked about what you can ask and what you can't ask and if you come out with something very obviously different like if you say, "Hey what is your greatest fear?" They might withdraw somewhat or just think what is going on here so I learnt and I am continually learning strategies to get in and ask things that are slightly more intimate but also come across as slightly more normal. So for instance rather than saying, "Hi, how was your weekend?" You can say, "What was your weekend, what was the most surprising thing that happened?" And with a slight change in the question because you are asking something very specific and you are inviting them to think about it in a new way and to give you information that is not beyond the, "Yeah, really nice, how was yours" kind of thing and my favourite way of doing this especially when I meet somebody new to use the external environment and use it as an invitation to ask some questions.

Phil: Okay tell me more about that?

Georgie: So again we'll turn to the coffee shop scenario, there's a great place. A testing ground because you are having a conversation with the vendor which is expected but it doesn't have to be transactional. It can also be relational as well so when they ask you what they want, say "Hi", they will usually say, "Hi, how are you?" And rather than say, "Yeah, good thanks," I usually say something like, "I am okay" or "I am amazing" and then before they can ask me what my order is, I will say, "And how are you?" And sometimes they are shocked by being asked, sometimes they expect it and they give me an answer but what is important next is to take their answer and ask them another questions about it, like if they say, "I am okay" and I say, "Why are you only okay?" So in that setting I am asking them something personal, I am not actually using the external environment, sorry, I said I would, sorry I will come to that in a minute...

Phil: No that is fine, that is okay.

Georgie: I am taking the normal script and I am just playing with it because there is a greeting usually, that is how we use that, "How are you?" But actually you can use it as an invitation for a conversation to find out about actually how they are and in other settings I tend to drop personal information so for instance if I am in Pret and it is the afternoon and I order a green tea, you know I say I am just here really because I need my caffeine kick, pretty tired and then I might ask them about whether they drink tea or they might comment and say, "Oh yeah, I get it, I also feel like that in the afternoon" and that will lead off in a talk about... Last one I had was in Pret, we were talking about different types of teas and the girl was from Italy and she was telling me how she was and English coffee and tea was rubbish compared to theirs and how they used to do shots of coffee everyday which lead into a conversation about her childhood in Italy. We were going for a good three minutes at least which is unusual for that kind of interaction but actually we jumped from, this

is a transaction where I am going to give you something to actually tell me something about yourself and actually not that this was the intention but I have got quite a few free drinks out of this, simply taking the script and even the weather. People think the weather is terrible conversation and really you can use it in so many ways because you can relate to people about their previous experiences, so for instance the fact that it is always raining in London. It is not actually always raining in London by the way...

Phil: Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's Manchester (laughs).

Georgie: (Laughs) you are right it is Manchester. What I usually say is, I say "Oh it is not as bad as Scotland" and I say, "I used to live in Edinburgh. Edinburgh used to be cloudy pretty much every day I used to wake up and think I can't do anything today" and then that invites the subject to move to, "Oh Scotland, what were you doing in Scotland?" Or bla, bla, bla so you have moved out of the small talk context and you have moved to something else which has more meaning to it. So it is really very doable in anyway. It is like the book they are reading or it can be the dog or if they are wearing an unusual top or whatever, there is always a way of taking the factors that already exist and to make them more personal.

Phil: I think it is brilliant, the work that you are doing Georgie because it is working with, I think sometimes the words emotions and feelings are used exclusive of each other and other times they are used almost in replace of each other and I think the way that you're playing with some of the ritualiseness of interaction to really try and get into more of what people think and also how they feel and what they feel about how they think as well and I think the way you are going about that is fascinating and again I love the way you have got some of the real core emotional aspects within some of the questions that you ask. As you said, first time you are meeting somebody you are asking them what their deepest fear is, but even just back to our appetiser, sorry our canopy right at the start in terms of what do you crave or what have you craved in the last week I think it is a really fascinating way of giving people both a framework and a mechanism to allow them to start to build deeper relationships and conversations and I think it is all very well saying break the script and ask a different question but sometimes one of the biggest challenges can be coming up with those questions and you have really helped do that, so yeah, it's brilliant.

Georgie: Thanks.

Phil: So some of the questions that we ask all of the guests that we have on the podcast then, so are there any books or videos or talks, if people are interested in some of the things we have talked about today or just in general any books or videos you would recommend people to explore?

Georgie: So they're not necessarily linked to our conversation today. I tend to read about ten books in one go at the same time and then of course don't finish half of them and I don't feel like I can necessarily give them yet but I may have some in the future, but two books that I have actually finished recently that I got a lot from, one of them is a book called the Artists Way. It is a creativity book, it is a course actually, kind of do it yourself creativity course over 12 weeks and what each chapter represents a week and I took the course last year actually and loved the book, learnt so much from it but actually what I learnt from it as well it invited me to be spontaneous, to stop

planning and be present and open to everything coming into my world and I think those are good lessons as well when it comes to conversations is to stop planning and to start listening and to start to be aware of everything that is going on around you that you can then respond too. I'm heavily investing in a lot more creativity stuff this year and I am finding it incredible and parallel, so I am starting doing improvisation in classes, yeah it will be really cool. It is perfect for conversations because it makes you be present and it makes you stop thinking and start listening and makes you aware. So the creativity side, The Artists Way.

Phil: The Artists Way, wonderful and you said there was a second one?

Georgie: There is, so Tools of Titans by Tim Ferris.

Phil: You recommended that to me and that is on my bookshelf. I haven't got to it yet.

Georgie: You haven't got to it.

Phil: No I have got two books on the go which I am determined to finish before I start it.

Georgie: It is a beast. It is 600 pages which I did actually manage to get through in about three weeks but it was intense. Tools of Titans is by Tim Ferris and it's basically, Tim had a blog as well, sorry not a blog a podcast.

Phil: Yes he does, I subscribe to that podcast actually.

Georgie: Glad to hear, it is pretty good. What he has done is he has taken his most popular podcasts and he's put it down in a book so you can assess their knowledge and their thoughts, so he interviews anybody and everybody. Very successful people, not necessarily rich, but successful in some fields and he has asked them about their key learnings and some strange questions as well but it is very addictive to read and also I find that it was hugely inspirational and there was a lot of wisdom in some of the quotes. For instance there is one aspect we were talking about being busy, this is the common excuse of our generation and I am like, "Oh I am so busy" and "How are you?" "Yeah really busy" and we herald it around like it is a great thing to be actually, but I can't remember who it is now, they say busy equals out of control, which is a question of time and prioritise. We don't want to be busy and some of these quotes were very, there were moments and I read them and I thought oh my God, that's right, they were trans emotional in some respect and I am trying to use them to help me define how I should live my life at the moment so I definitely recommend that, although be prepared, you probably will be reading it for a while. It is a really good book.

Phil: You mentioned Tim Ferris to me then I googled him and I found one of his blogs on speed reading and I have been playing with that since then but I thought if I get his book I need to get more proficient in speed reading before I go. So I read one book recently and I read it in about a day and a half. Now granted it was when we were on holiday and I didn't have any access to any internet, so I had no devices to distract me but still I was able to apply the stuff that you talked about. So it allowed me to quickly, but not also affect any retention and so I found that I still retained the information that I read, it is not like I just skimmed over it and it's not gone in.

Georgie: I am glad to hear that. I am struggling. I did try some of his speed reading techniques but actually I quite like taking time to read and process and really think about what I am reading but I am not yet done over on that but maybe I need to give it more practise.

Phil: And anyone you would recommend us to get on the podcast? Any recommendations for future guests do you think?

Georgie: I had thought about this and I can't remember. I had somebody in mind and I have completely forgotten which is terrible.

Phil: That is fine. You can let me know at a later date, so part of the reason I ask is because it is to help me approach them and say, "Well Georgie said you would be a brilliant guest," so it gives me an extra in with them.

Georgie: Don't worry Phil. I will definitely let you know Phil and I can even introduce you.

Phil: Fab that would be wonderful. Okay is there anything else before I bring it together and close. Is there anything else that you are thinking, feeling, wanting to say?

Georgie: No I think we have covered quite a lot of ground actually. I think I have definitely said everything I wanted to say. I have really enjoyed it. Thanks Phil and I am looking forward to hearing what Emotion at Work is going to be up to over the next few months.

Phil: Well thank you very much for your time today Georgie. Really great to talk to you. So if people want to find out more, if this triggers people, our listeners to want to connect with you or find out more, what would be the best way to do that?

Georgie: So I have a website which is www.triggerconversations.co.uk and my email is also on there which is georgie@triggerconversations.co.uk so please do contact me. I am very happy to meet for not a coffee, for a tea.

Phil: Green tea.

Georgie: I might start having coffee by that point just not all the time. Yeah that would be great, would love to keep in touch with people through that. I also have a Facebook page, but email, website, best way to find me probably.

Phil: Wonderful and I will make sure we put links to both of those and if you can send me a link to your Facebook group we will put a link to that in your show notes as well if that helps so people have every way to get hold of you. Alright, so all that leaves me to do is to say thank you very much for your time today Georgie, really, really enjoyed both our unexpected questions and then also the conversation we had around that stuff. Thank you very much for your time today and thanks for your time at the Emotion at Work podcast. Thanks Georgie.



Georgie: Thank you.