



“last word”

by Janine Adamson

Networking unspoken torture

Now, what I'm about to discuss could be viewed as contradictory to my previous column which explored overcoming loneliness. But never mind, I'll press on.

Networking – does it put the fear of God into you? I think some people are simply better equipped to walk into a hubbub of folk, whereas for me, it brings me out in a cold sweat. And given my profession, I ought to take out shares in antiperspirant.

I try my best to disguise this shortcoming but it never seems to grow any easier. I'm the type of girl who immediately seeks out a job to take on at a party or event, simply to keep my hands busy and to avoid looking despondent in a corner. Weddings especially! But

overall, it makes my toes curl more than sandwiches drying out on a buffet table.

Why is it so difficult to strike up a conversation with someone new? If I think back, as an only child, this is something which has literally plagued my entire life. I recall my step father receiving very funny looks during a family holiday when he approached a young girl to ask: "Will you be friends with my daughter?"

I mean, you have to laugh. Thank goodness it was the 1990s or the outcome could have been very different. Luckily, said little girl did speak to me and my parents were free to enjoy their sunbed holiday without me clinging on like a limpet.

It's not that I don't want to speak to people, I very much do. In fact, it's what lured me into journalism — a natural curiosity for the perspectives of others. I love nothing more than hearing about people's lives and presenting it accordingly; investigative documentaries are my favourite type of television especially a 'Louis' (Theroux).

But in a busy room or unknown territory I seem to freeze. I start over-thinking my opening gambit, I scan the horizon for the most welcoming, friendly face, an outfit I can complement, pray there's

someone's dog I can pet. At conferences I awkwardly clutch the agenda, hover relentlessly by the refreshment station and make a point of proudly displaying my lanyard, in hope someone might recognise my name.

Despite rinsing and repeating this for the past 15 years or so (someone once said the more networking you do, the easier it becomes), I'm still a complete melt. I think I'm better one-to-one or in small groups, and that's okay, isn't it?

Actually, wait a minute, is this why I'm lonely?! Okay I jest; as my mother once proclaimed — I'm just not very good at mixing. She often regales when the ladies at the nursery school pulled her aside to say they were gravely concerned because I'd only play in the Wendy house when no one else was there. Guilty as charged.

From a professional level, being more of a thinker means I don't always offer the best bang for the buck at conferences, press launches and alike. I prefer to muse things over and thoroughly consider my questions and responses rather than speak off the cuff. I don't feel as though I can compete for the air space because by nature I'm a quieter person, albeit with a honey badger inside (that's another story).

Yet ask me to present to a room full of delegates and I thrive — I can adequately prepare and there's an element of performance involved. At the ripe old age of 25 I was lecturing students at Harper Adams University, admittedly it was in one of the graveyard slots.

The reason why I excel in this type of environment which others might fear, is because in mother's quest to help me to mix better, she enrolled me in childhood dance lessons. I soon learned to love the stage and the individuals on it.

'On with the show' coupled with a deep intake of breath and I feel as though I can take on anything. Although worryingly, am I almost pretending to be someone else? In short, I don't think so. Maybe it's enacting my alter ego — a shiny sociable being who can converse with anyone.

But yes, back to networking. It's not my favourite if I'm truly honest. Conferences are bread and butter for journalists and here I am, cringing at the thought. I'm hoping in my new role as CPM's editor people might look favourably on me and proactively entice me from my isolated lair.

If not, at least you know I can write a good story, with or without the small talk.

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