

Say the good thing out loud

A short book about thinking well of people and never
telling them

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First edition

Written by AI with human guidance. It can
contain mistakes, which later editions correct.

Contents

1. Before you start
2. The thing you thought on the stairs
3. Why it stays in
4. "They already know"
5. "It'd be awkward"
6. "I wouldn't know how to put it"
7. "It'll sound like flattery"
8. "I'm not that sort of person"
9. "They'll think I want something"
10. "It'll go to their head"
11. "They'd only brush it off"
12. "I'll say it when it matters"
13. "It'd be odd after all this time"
14. What you're guessing from
15. Why one good go doesn't fix it
16. What the drawer costs you
17. What it costs them
18. The people you'd never think to say it to
19. The detail and the effect line
20. Within the hour
21. At home

22. At work

23. The decision

24. The ex, the colleague who'd take it wrong, families that don't say it, the person who's died, and when it's more than shyness

25. When you went quiet again

26. The stairs, again

27. Notes

Before you start

This is a short book and you can read it in two or three sittings. It's about one habit, which is thinking something good about a person and keeping it to yourself. Your partner handled a bad phone call well and you noticed. A colleague's slides were the clearest in the meeting and you noticed. Your friend's garden looks better every year, your dad is patient with the grandchildren in a way he never was with you, the woman on the platform has a coat you'd have chosen yourself. You thought all of that, clearly, sometimes in a full sentence, and none of it left your head.

I'm going to argue three things. The first is that keeping it in makes sense from the inside. Saying it feels awkward, you don't know how you'd put it, it might sound like flattery, they probably know anyway, and you're not that sort of person. The second is that nearly every one of those reasons rests on a guess about how the other person will take it, and that guess has been tested, in a lot of experiments over the last few years, and it's wrong in the same direction for almost everyone. People underestimate how good a compliment makes someone feel, overestimate how awkward it'll be, and judge their own wording while the other person is hearing something else entirely. The third is practical. A good thought said out loud has two parts and takes ten seconds, and the best time to say it is within the hour. Chapters 18 to 22 cover how.

This isn't a book about thanking people for what they've done for you. That's a different habit with a different fix, and an earlier book, *Thank them now*, covers it. This is about the good opinion

itself, the one that has nothing to do with you. It isn't a book about flattery at work, and it won't ask you to say anything you don't think. If you don't think it, this book has nothing for you to say.

Two cautions.

If the silence isn't a habit but a fear, if you worry before, during and after most social situations, avoid them where you can, and it's been like that for a long time, the NHS says that's more than shyness and worth seeing a GP about. You can also refer yourself to an NHS talking therapies service. An earlier book, *Go anyway*, is about turning down invitations out of nerves and may be the one to read first.

And if you've felt low most of the day, most days, for a fortnight or more, and the quiet is part of that, see a GP. This book will keep.

The notes at the back give my sources and their limits. Where I'm giving my own reasoning and not a finding, I'll say so.

The thing you thought on the stairs

It's a Tuesday evening and your partner has just come off the phone with the school. The call was about your son and it wasn't a good call, and you listened from the kitchen. They didn't get defensive. They asked two questions you wouldn't have thought to ask, they got a date for a meeting out of it, and they said thank you to the teacher at the end in a voice that meant it. You thought, on the stairs, that was handled really well. I'd have lost my temper by the second minute. Then you went up to find a towel and the thought went wherever those thoughts go.

Or it's the meeting on Thursday. A colleague you don't know well presents eight slides, and for once you can follow what's being asked and why. You think, that's the clearest thing anyone's shown us this quarter. The meeting ends. You say nothing, not because you decided not to, but because there wasn't a moment, and then there was a different meeting.

Or it's your sister on the phone, telling you how she dealt with a customer who was shouting. Or your dad on Sunday, on the floor with the grandchildren, more patient at seventy than he was at forty. Or a stranger on a platform in a coat you admired for the length of a train. Each time, the same thing. A clear, favourable, true thought about a person, formed in full, and then put away.

These are invented, but I'd guess you have your own. Some words. **The good thought** is the favourable thing you think about a person. **The drawer** is where it goes when you don't say it, and I'd guess yours is full. **Saying it** is the act, and I'll talk about **the said**

version and **the thought version** of the same good opinion. **The guess** is what you predict about how it'll land. **The squirm** is the awkwardness you feel in advance. **The landing** is how the other person actually takes it, which you rarely get to see. **The wording** is the worry about how to phrase it. **The brush-off** is what they say when they wave it away. **The detail** is the concrete thing you noticed, which chapter 18 is about. And **one a day** is the rule, which chapter 22 is about.

Before you go on, do one thing. For three days, keep a note of every good thought you have about a person, however small, and mark whether you said it. A word on the phone will do. At the end of three days you'll have two numbers. I'd guess the first is a lot bigger than the second, and the gap between them is what this book is about.

Why it stays in

Nobody decides to keep their good opinions to themselves. It isn't a policy. It's what happens by default when saying it would cost something and not saying it costs nothing you can see. It's worth being honest about what the drawer gives you, because a habit that gave you nothing wouldn't be a habit.

It gives you safety. A good thought kept in can't be misread, can't land badly, can't be laughed at and can't be thrown back. It gives you the evening without the squirm, which is real, and which arrives the moment you imagine opening your mouth. It gives you a relationship at the temperature it's already at, with nothing new to explain. It saves you the wording, which is work. It means nobody thinks you want something. And it keeps you as the person you think you are, which is somebody who doesn't gush.

Underneath those there's a set of beliefs, and they're the chapters that follow. That they already know. That it would be awkward. That you wouldn't know how to put it. That it would sound like flattery. That it's not your style. That they'd think you were after something. That it would go to their head. That they'd only brush it off. That the big things can wait for a big occasion. And that after this many years it would be strange to start. Each has something true in it, and each is doing the same job, which is making the drawer look like the only safe place for the thought.

I want to be clear about what this book isn't. It isn't about thanks. When someone does something for you and you say nothing, that's a different habit, and Thank them now is about it. This is about the

opinion that has nothing to do with you, your dad's patience, the colleague's slides, the coat. Nobody did you a favour. You simply thought well of them, and the thought stayed where they couldn't see it.

The drawer is an answer to a real question, which is what happens if I say this and it goes wrong. This book isn't going to tell you the question is silly. It's going to look at what the research says about the answer, which turns out to be a lot less alarming than the guess. Then it'll look at what the drawer costs, you first and then them. And then it'll give you a way of saying the good thought that takes ten seconds and doesn't need you to become a different person.

"They already know"

This is the belief that empties most of the drawer before anything else gets a look in. Your partner knows you think they handled it well. Of course they do. You've been together eleven years. Your colleague knows the slides were good, because the meeting went well. Your dad knows you can see him with the children. It's obvious. Saying it would be like announcing the weather.

I'd ask what they know it from. What your partner has is eleven years of what you've said, and what you've said, if you're reading this, is mostly not this. They have the sigh at the bins and the question about the car. They don't have the sentence you thought on the stairs, because it was thought on the stairs. Your colleague has a meeting that went well, which could mean the slides were good or that nobody was listening. An earlier book, *They can't read your mind*, is about expecting the people close to you to know what you need without being told. The same mistake works the other way. They can't read what you admire off you either.

Xuan Zhao and Nicholas Epley, two psychologists who study how people misjudge each other, ran nine experiments on this and published them in 2021. They had people write a genuine compliment for someone and then predict how the recipient would feel, how happy and how awkward. Then the compliment was delivered and the recipient reported how they actually felt. The people writing the compliments consistently underestimated how good it would make the other person feel. If the recipients had

already known, a compliment would have told them nothing and moved them very little. It moved them more than the writers thought it would.

I read that as the "they already know" belief tested and failed, and I'll say what I'm adding to it. If your partner knew, in full, what you thought on the stairs, hearing it would be mildly pleasant at best. The reason it lands harder than you expect is that they didn't have it. They had the thought version, which is nothing, because the thought version lives in your head and nowhere else.

Here's the plain form. People know what's been said to them. They don't know what's been thought about them, however obvious it is from inside your head, and the more years you've spent not saying it, the more sure they can be that it isn't there.

"It'd be awkward"

Even if they don't know, there's the moment. You picture saying "you handled that really well" and your whole body objects. It sounds stilted. There'd be a pause. They'd look at you. One of you would have to say something afterwards, and neither of you would know what. That's the squirm, and it's real, and it arrives before you've said a word.

The question is whose it is. Zhao and Epley measured this too. In the same nine experiments, the compliment writers predicted how awkward the recipient would feel, and they overestimated it. The recipients felt less awkward than the writers expected. Erica Boothby and Vanessa Bohns ran five studies of their own, published the same year, and found the same thing from a different angle. Compliment givers overestimated how bothered and uncomfortable the recipient would feel. In one of their studies, the givers still overestimated it after the compliment had been given, looking back on it. The squirm didn't just distort the guess in advance. It coloured what people thought had happened.

There's a detail in the Boothby and Bohns work that I think matters most. They asked people who weren't giving the compliment, third parties looking on, to predict how the recipient would feel, and those people got it about right. The people who got it wrong were the givers, and what drove them wrong was their own anxiety and their worry about doing it well. The squirm isn't a reading of the room. It's a reading of you.

So here's what I'd say the squirm is. It's a feeling you have about a thing you're about to do, and it's loud, and it belongs to you. It doesn't cross the room with the words. What crosses the room is "you handled that really well", and what the other person does with that is feel better than you expected, by a margin that turns up in study after study.

That leaves the pause. Yes, there might be one. They might say "oh, thanks" and look at the floor, and you might not know what to say next. I'd suggest you don't need to say anything next. You said the thing. The pause is the sound of it landing, and it's a good deal shorter than it feels from your side.

"I wouldn't know how to put it"

Suppose you accept that it'd land better than you think. There's still the problem of what to say. "Good job" sounds like a manager.

"That was amazing" sounds like a teenager. "I admired the way you handled that call" sounds like something out of a book about handling calls. You go round the options, none of them sounds like you, and the moment passes while you're still choosing.

Both sets of experiments looked at where this worry comes from and where it points. Zhao and Epley found that the writers' low expectations were driven partly by underestimating how competent their compliment would seem to the recipient, and to a lesser extent how warm. The givers were marking their own wording. Boothby and Bohns found the same, that givers' concern about their competence at giving the compliment was part of what threw their prediction off. In a fourth experiment, Zhao and Epley told people to focus on the warmth their compliment would carry rather than on how well it was put, and that alone made them more willing to give it.

Think about the last handwritten letter you got. You didn't grade the handwriting. You read what it said and noticed that someone had sat down and written to you.

That's the whole of the wording problem, I think. You're judging the compliment as a piece of writing, and the other person isn't reading it as one. They're reading it as a piece of information about what you think of them, and the information is the same whether

it comes as "that was amazing" or "I admired the way you handled that call". The clumsy version and the polished version carry the same news, which is that you noticed and thought well of it.

So the standard for the wording isn't "does this sound like me at my best". It's "is it true and is it specific". Chapter 18 gives a shape that gets you there in two short parts, but I'll give the short version now. Name the thing you noticed, then say what it did for you. "You didn't get defensive with the teacher, and I'd have been shouting by the second minute." Nobody grades that. They hear it.

"It'll sound like flattery"

There's a version of the squirm that's about character rather than nerves. You don't want to be a flatterer. You've met the people who tell everyone their haircut is wonderful, and you've watched what it does to the value of anything they say. If you start handing out compliments, you'll be one of them, and the people who matter will hear the good thought as noise.

I'd separate two things that this belief runs together. Flattery is a compliment with a motive attached. It's said to get something, a favour, a good mood, a place in someone's regard, and it's said whether or not it's true. A good thought said out loud has no motive. You thought your dad was patient with the children. You aren't after anything. You're reporting what you saw. That's the difference, and it's a difference in the speaker, not in the words. The same sentence is flattery from one person and a report from another.

There's an odd piece of evidence that bears on the fear, though it comes at it sideways. Roos Vonk, a Dutch psychologist, ran experiments in 2002 on what she called ingratiation, which is flattery in the researchers' vocabulary. She found that people who were flattered gave the flatterer more credit and liked them more than onlookers watching the same flattery did, and that this held whatever the target's mood, motive or spare attention. Even flattery, in other words, lands better with its target than the people watching would predict. I'd hold that lightly, and I'm not

suggesting you flatter anyone. But if a compliment with a motive doesn't get thrown back, a compliment without one is not the risk you're treating it as.

The person you're afraid of becoming didn't get there by saying true things. They got there by saying untrue ones, and saying them to everyone. You're in no danger of either. Your drawer is full of specific, accurate, unrepeatable observations about particular people, and the only thing that stops a specific true observation from being flattery is that it's specific and true. "Your haircut is wonderful" to everyone is flattery. "You asked the two questions I wouldn't have thought of" to one person about one call is a fact.

If you want a rule, here's mine. Never say it to get something, and never say it if you don't think it. Keep those two and you can say as many good thoughts out loud as you have, and none of them will be flattery, because none of them will be doing flattery's job.

"I'm not that sort of person"

Somewhere behind all of this there's a picture of who you are. You're reserved. You don't gush. People who know you would say you're steady, private, not one for big declarations, and you're comfortable with that. The people who say the good thing out loud are a different type, warmer and louder and a bit embarrassing, and if you started doing it you'd be putting on a costume.

I think there are two things tangled up here, and only one of them is you. Reserve is a style. It's how much you say, how loudly, how often, and how much of yourself you put in the room. That's yours and I'm not asking you to change it. Silence about what you admire is a habit, and a habit isn't a personality. It's a thing you've done so many times that it's stopped feeling like a choice. The two got confused because they happen in the same body, but plenty of reserved people say the good thing, and they say it in a reserved way.

Picture it. A quiet person, the sort who speaks once in a meeting, turns to the colleague afterwards and says "those slides were the clearest we've had this year", and goes back to their desk. No warmth in the voice beyond the words. No follow-up. That's not gushing. If anything it carries more weight than the same words from the person who says it about everything, because everyone in the room knows this person doesn't say things they don't mean.

That, I'd argue, is the reserved person's advantage, and the drawer is throwing it away. Your good opinion is rare currency. When you do say it, it's believed at once, precisely because you're not that sort

of person. The habit has taken the one thing your reserve is good for and made sure nobody gets it.

There's also a quieter question, which is whether "not that sort of person" is describing you or protecting you. I don't know the answer for you. I'd only point out that it's a very convenient trait to have, because it excuses you from every awkward moment in advance, and traits that convenient are worth a second look. If it's really who you are, the plain version of saying it, one sentence, no performance, will feel fine. If the plain version still feels impossible, it probably wasn't the style that was stopping you.

This is my reading, not a finding. But I've never seen a reserved person made ridiculous by one accurate sentence about someone else, and I've seen plenty of drawers that stayed shut in the name of a personality that would have survived opening them.

"They'll think I want something"

This one is about the reading. You say to your manager that the way they handled the restructuring was fair, and you watch them wonder what you're after. You tell your neighbour that their front garden is the best on the street, and now you're the person who's softening them up before asking about the fence. A compliment, in this belief, is an opening bid, and everyone knows it.

Some compliments are opening bids, and people can tell. What they can tell it from is what comes next. If "the restructuring was fair" is followed by "and about my hours", it was a bid. If it's followed by nothing, it was a report. The reading you're afraid of depends on the ask, and you don't have one. The thought about the garden came with no fence attached.

There's evidence on which way people actually read an unexpected kind word, and it's from a close cousin of the compliment. James Dungan, David Munguia Gomez and Nicholas Epley ran four studies, published in 2022, on messages of support, the "thinking of you, hope the week's been all right" sort of message. People who sent them to someone they knew, or expressed support to a new acquaintance in person, underestimated how positively the other person would respond, in the same direction as the compliment studies. The reason they found was a gap in what each side was attending to. The sender was thinking about how competent the message looked. The recipient was reading it for warmth. Nobody on the receiving end was scanning it for the angle.

I'd take from that something specific. When you're deciding whether to say the good thing, you're imagining a suspicious reader, and the suspicious reader is you, checking your own motives. The actual reader isn't doing that. They're doing something simpler, which is noticing that somebody thought well of them and said so.

Two practical notes, and these are mine. First, don't attach anything. If you have a request for the same person, keep it for another day, because the compliment and the request in the same breath will be read together, and rightly. Second, don't over-explain. "I'm not saying this because I want anything" puts the idea in the room. Say the thing and stop. A compliment with nothing after it is its own proof of what it was.

"It'll go to their head"

The last defence of the drawer is that saying the good thing would do harm. Your teenager would coast. Your colleague would stop trying. The person under you at work would think they'd arrived, and the next piece of work would be worse. In this belief, a good opinion kept in is a standard kept up, and praise is what you give people when you've stopped expecting anything.

Let me look at what the evidence says about what a kind word does to effort, because it points the other way. Deci, Koestner and Ryan, three researchers on motivation, published a meta-analysis in 1999 that pulled together 128 experiments on rewards and what they do to people's interest in a task. The headline was that tangible rewards, money and prizes, tended to reduce how much people did a task when they were free to stop. But positive feedback, being told you'd done well, did the opposite. It raised both how long people kept going by choice and how interested they said they were. One caveat from the same paper is that the effect was weaker for children than for students, and I'll come back to children in chapter 20.

There's a workplace version too. Christiane Bradler, Robert Dur, Susanne Neckermann and Arjan Non ran a field experiment, published in 2016, with more than three hundred workers hired for a three-hour data-entry job. In some groups, after two hours, workers unexpectedly got public recognition for their work. Performance in the third hour went up. The part I find most

interesting is where the rise came from. Most of it came from the workers who hadn't been recognised. Recognition in the room lifted the room, not just the person it was aimed at.

I'd be careful with both. A lab meta-analysis and a three-hour data-entry task are not your teenager or your team. What they rule out is the mechanism the belief needs, which is that a good word makes people stop. Across a lot of experiments, being told you'd done well made people do more, not less.

The word doing the damage here is "praise", and I'd drop it for adults. Praise is a grade, handed down. A compliment between adults isn't a grade. It's one person's report of what they saw, and nobody stops working because a colleague said their slides were clear. What people coast on, in my experience, is not knowing whether anything they do is noticed at all. The drawer doesn't hold a standard up. It just makes sure nobody can tell what the standard is.

"They'd only brush it off"

You may have tried once. You said something good to your partner and they said "don't be daft" and changed the subject. You told a friend her garden was the best on the road and she listed three things wrong with it. The brush-off is real, and it's discouraging, and after a few of them the drawer looks like the polite option. Why hand somebody a good thought they're only going to bat away.

Denise Marigold, John Holmes and Michael Ross published three studies in 2007 on exactly the people who bat compliments away, partners with low self-esteem. Those people, they note, doubt their value to their partner and tend to resist positive feedback from them, and that resistance is bad for the relationship and had been hard to shift. In their studies they tried something small. They asked people to describe a recent compliment from their partner in terms of what it meant and why it mattered, rather than just what was said. The people with low self-esteem who did that felt as good about the compliment, about themselves and about the relationship as people with high self-esteem did, and the effect was still there two weeks later.

Two things follow, and I'll separate the finding from my reading. The finding is that the brush-off isn't the compliment failing to land. It's the compliment landing on someone who doesn't yet trust it, and the mistrust can be worked with. My reading is about what that means for you. First, the brush-off is not a reason to stop. If anything, the person who says "don't be daft" is the person who has been given the fewest good thoughts to work with, and needs more of them, not fewer. Second, the detail does the work. "Your garden's

lovely" can be brushed off because it's a verdict. "The way you've got the roses going up that wall" is harder to argue with, because it's a fact about roses.

And if you want to borrow the researchers' move, you can. After the brush-off, ask a question. "What made you think to ask the teacher that?" That makes them describe the thing, and describing it is what turned the compliment from noise into something the low self-esteem partners could hold. You're not pushing the compliment on them. You're giving them a minute with it.

The brush-off tells you something about them and nothing about whether to say it. Say it, add the detail, and let them wave. The wave isn't the landing. The landing is whatever's happening underneath, and the research says it's happening.

"I'll say it when it matters"

There's a kinder version of the drawer, which is that you're saving it up. You don't say the small things because you're going to say the big thing. At the wedding, in the speech. In the card at Christmas. At the retirement do, or the fortieth, or when there's a reason. The good thoughts aren't lost. They're being kept for an occasion that deserves them.

I'd ask two things about the occasion. The first is when it comes. For most of the people you think well of, it doesn't. There's no speech for the colleague with the slides. There's no card for your sister's handling of the shouting customer. The occasions come for a handful of people a handful of times, and for everyone else the backlog waits for an occasion that isn't on the calendar. Which is the funeral, and I'll come to that in chapter 23. The good things people say at funerals are, very often, the things nobody said before, and everyone in the room can feel it.

The second is what the occasion does to the thing said. A compliment at a wedding is a performance. It has an audience, a form, a slot in the running order. The person it's aimed at hears it through all of that, and hears the occasion as much as the words. A compliment on a Tuesday, in the kitchen, with no reason for it beyond the fact that you thought it, has nothing in the way. That's why the small said version outweighs the big saved one. It's a direct line, and the occasion is a bad one.

There's also a matter of exchange rate, and this is my reasoning rather than a finding. A good thought is worth most on the day it's true. "You handled that call well" on the night of the call is about that call. Six years later, in a speech, it's about your memory of them, which is nice but different. The detail goes stale. The verdict is all that's left, and verdicts are the part that gets brushed off.

None of this is against the speech. Give the speech. But the speech is where you say the things you've already said, in front of people, for the pleasure of saying them again. It isn't a savings account for the things you never said, because those don't keep. By the time the occasion comes they've lost the detail that made them true, and the person has spent years not knowing you thought them.

"It'd be odd after all this time"

The longer the drawer's been shut, the harder the belief that opening it now would be strange. You've been married fourteen years and you don't say this sort of thing. Your dad is seventy-three and you've never once told him you admire anything about him, and if you started on Sunday he'd think you'd been to the doctor. Silence has set, and breaking it is now a bigger act than saying the good thing would ever have been.

I'll grant part of this. The first one after years is noticeable. Your partner will register that you said something you don't usually say. What I'd question is what they'll make of it, because the belief assumes they'll find it suspicious or strange, and I've given you two chapters of evidence that people find kind words warmer than the speaker expects. Noticeable isn't the same as odd. The first one is noticeable because it's rare, and rare good opinions are the most valuable kind, as chapter 7 said. Your dad won't think you've been to the doctor. He'll think you noticed him with the children.

There's a practical way round the size of the first one, which is not to make it big. Don't sit anyone down. Don't say "I've been meaning to tell you". Say the small true thing about today, in passing, and move on. "You were good with them this afternoon." Then talk about the football. The first said good thought after fourteen years should be the same size as the ones that'll follow it, because that's the point. It's not an announcement. It's a change in what you do with the thought on the stairs.

The same goes for the people you've drifted from, and here there's a related habit that an earlier book, *Ring them first*, deals with, which is waiting for other people to get in touch. If there's a friend you think well of and haven't spoken to in a year, the message that reopens it doesn't have to have news in it. "Saw a garden on Sunday and thought of yours" is a message, and it's a compliment, and it needs no reply beyond whatever comes. Dungan and colleagues' support messages, in chapter 8, were of this thinking-of-you kind, and they landed better than the senders expected.

Odd after all this time is a guess like the others. And the alternative to odd now is odd later, or never, and never is what the drawer has been quietly voting for all along.

What you're guessing from

Ten chapters of this book have come down to the same thing, which is that the guess is wrong in one direction. You expect less pleasure and more awkwardness than there is, and you judge your wording while they hear your warmth. It's worth asking why a guess that's wrong so consistently doesn't correct itself, because you've been making it for years and it hasn't budged.

Nicholas Epley and four colleagues, Michael Kardas, Xuan Zhao, Stav Atir and Juliana Schroeder, published a review in 2022 that pulls the compliment findings together with a lot of similar ones, on talking to strangers, on expressing thanks, on small kindnesses, and gives the pattern a name, undersociality. People are less social than would be good for them and for the people around them, because they expect their overtures to be received worse than they are. The review suggests three reasons the guess stays wrong, and I'll put them in plain terms.

The first they call differential construal. You and the recipient aren't looking at the same thing. You're looking at your compliment as an act you're performing, and grading the performance. They're looking at it as news about what you think. Two people, one sentence, two completely different objects.

The second is uncertain responsiveness. You don't know how they'll respond, and when people don't know, they assume the worse case and act to avoid it. So you don't say it, and because you didn't, you never find out that the worse case wasn't coming.

The third is asymmetric learning, and I think it's the one that keeps the drawer shut. You learn from what you do. When you say the good thing and it lands well, you get a data point. When you keep it in, you get nothing, no landing, no evidence, no correction. Every unsaid compliment leaves the guess exactly where it was. And the rare time it goes badly, the brush-off or the blank look, that's the data point you remember, because it confirmed the squirm. It's like an archer who never sees where the arrows go and only hears about the one that missed.

That's the machine, and I'd say it's why understanding matters here rather than resolve. You can't correct a guess you never test. The only way the guess gets better is by saying the thing and watching the landing, and that's what the second half of this book is for.

Why one good go doesn't fix it

Suppose you say it. Tonight, in the kitchen, you tell your partner the call was handled well, and it lands, and you can see it land. The guess was wrong and now you know. Job done, you'd think. The drawer's open and the habit's gone.

I'd like that to be true and I don't think it is, and there's a recent finding that says why. Stav Atir and Nicholas Epley published three experiments in 2026 on what happens to people's expectations after a conversation with a stranger. Conversations with strangers, like compliments, go better than people expect. And having one did move people's expectations, made them more optimistic and more accurate, especially about talking to the same person again. But the correction was fleeting. Within one or two weeks, expectations had drifted back to the same pessimistic baseline as people who'd never had the conversation. The good experience didn't stick. The guess reasserted itself, like a tan.

That study is about talking to strangers, not about compliments, and I'm extending it. I think the extension holds because the guess in both cases comes from the same three mechanisms in chapter 13, and nothing about a compliment makes it easier to learn from. But it's my extension, and you should hold it as one.

Here's what follows, if it does hold. One good go proves the point for about a week. After that the squirm is back at full strength, telling you it'd be awkward, as though the kitchen never happened. You'll have the memory of it landing and you'll still not do it,

because the memory has stopped being a belief and gone back to being a story about one Tuesday. That's not weakness. It's how the correction wears off in the experiments too.

So the fix can't be a single brave act. It has to be a standing arrangement that doesn't ask the guess's permission, one that runs whether or not you currently believe it'll be fine. That's why chapter 22 gives you a rule rather than a pep talk. One a day, said regardless, and the guess gets tested every day instead of once. The guess doesn't need convincing. It needs outvoting, daily, by evidence it can't keep up with.

That's also why this book is longer on what stops you than on what to do. What to do takes ten seconds. What stops you has been reinstating itself every fortnight for years, and it'll go on doing that until saying the good thing is something you do rather than something you once did.

What the drawer costs you

The case for the drawer, as chapter 2 laid it out, is that keeping the thought in costs nothing. No risk, no squirm, no wording, no pause. That's true of each single thought. I want to look at what it adds up to, starting with you, because I think the drawer's first casualty is the person holding it.

The most direct evidence is small and comes from the compliment studies themselves. Boothby and Bohns, in their fourth study, found that despite the anxiety people felt at the prospect of giving a compliment, they felt better after they'd given it. The squirm went one way and the mood went the other. Kory Floyd and colleagues, in a lab study published in 2007, put people through a set of standard stressful tasks and then had some of them write a letter to someone they loved saying what they felt about them, while others thought about the person without writing, or sat quietly. The letter writers' cortisol, a stress hormone, came down faster afterwards. It's one small study and I wouldn't build much on it. But it points the same way. Saying the good thing does something for the person saying it.

The NHS lists giving to others among its five steps to mental wellbeing, and the examples it gives are small, saying thank you, asking how someone is and listening to the answer. I'd put the said good thought in the same list. It's giving, at no cost, and the research suggests the giver gets some of it back.

Now the part that's my reasoning. Think about what's actually in your drawer. It's a running record of everything you admire about the people in your life. Your partner's patience, your friend's eye, your dad's late-arriving gentleness, your colleague's clarity. That's a good record. Most people would be glad to have thought all that. And you've had the pleasure of thinking each one for about four seconds, on the stairs, before it was filed. The said version lasts longer. It gets a face in reply. It becomes a thing that happened between you and another person, rather than a thing that happened in your head on the way to the towel.

There's also what the drawer does to how you come across, and I'd guess you've not thought about it much because it's invisible from inside. The people around you don't see the drawer. They see what comes out, and what comes out, if the good thoughts stay in, is the rest. The question about the car. The sigh. You can be, on the inside, the most admiring person in the house and, on the outside, someone who never says a kind word, and the second one is the one everybody meets.

What it costs them

Chapter 3 made the point that people know what's been said to them. Here's the other half of it. They live on what's been said to them. Your partner's picture of what you think of them is built entirely from the said version, and if the said version is the car and the bins, that's the picture.

Sara Algoe, Barbara Fredrickson and Shelly Gable published a study in 2013 in which couples came into a lab and expressed gratitude to each other, one thanking the other for something. The researchers then followed the couples for six months. What predicted the relationship getting better over those months was how responsive the person on the receiving end felt their partner had been in that exchange, how understood and cared for. And that prediction held separately from two other kinds of emotional conversation the same couples had in the lab. Being on the receiving end of your partner's good opinion, in other words, did something that other close conversations didn't.

That study is about thanks, which is book 42's ground, and I'm extending it to the compliment. I think the extension is reasonable because what the receiving partner was responding to wasn't the deed being thanked for. It was the sense that their partner saw them and thought well of them, and a compliment carries that as directly as thanks does. But it's my extension.

Now think about what the drawer does at the other end, and this is my reasoning rather than a finding. Your partner handled the school call and heard nothing. Not criticism, nothing. From inside

your head, nothing meant "that was so obviously good it needs no comment". From inside theirs, nothing means nothing. They don't know if you noticed. They may assume you didn't, or that you'd have done it differently, because that's the shape of what you do say. Over fourteen years of nothing, a person can build a fairly complete picture of not being seen, out of nothing but the absence of the sentences you thought.

Chapter 10's brush-off comes in here. The person who says "don't be daft" when you finally say it is often the person who's built that picture. They've had so little of your good opinion that they don't recognise it when it arrives. That isn't a reason to give up. It's what years of the drawer look like from the receiving end, and the only thing that changes it is more of the said version, said plainly, over time.

The colleague with the slides has a smaller version of this. They'll present again. Whether they think it's worth the effort of being clear depends a bit on whether anyone said anything, and nobody did. You had the sentence. It would have taken ten seconds and cost you nothing, and they went back to their desk not knowing it existed.

The people you'd never think to say it to

So far this has been about the people you're close to. There's a whole second drawer for everyone else. The woman on the platform in the coat. The man at the deli counter who's cheerful at eight in the morning. The bus driver who waited. Your neighbour's front garden. The stranger's dog. With these people you don't even get as far as the squirm, because it would never cross your mind to say anything. Compliments are for people you know.

I'd question that on two grounds. The first is that the stranger is the easiest case there is. There's no history, no fourteen years of silence to break, nothing at stake and no ask you could possibly be softening them up for. You'll never see them again. Every reason the drawer gives for keeping the thought in is weaker with a stranger than with anyone else, and the compliment studies included plenty of people who barely knew each other, with the same result. Recipients felt better than the givers guessed.

The second is what these small exchanges do for the person having them. Gillian Sandstrom and Elizabeth Dunn published three studies in 2014 on what they called weak ties, the acquaintances and near-strangers on the edge of a person's life. Students were happier and felt more belonging on days when they'd interacted with more classmates than usual, and in two further studies covering all of a day's interactions, contact with weak ties went along with wellbeing in the same way as contact with close ones. That's about interaction generally, not compliments, and it doesn't show which way the cause runs. But it suggests that the platform

and the deli counter aren't nothing. They're part of the day's social weather, and a good thought said out loud there changes it a little for both of you.

Here's the practical part, which is mine. The stranger's compliment has to be about a thing, not the person. The coat, not the figure in it. The garden, not the gardener. The dog. Keep it to what they chose or made, and keep it short, and keep walking if that's what you were doing. "That's a great coat" as you pass is complete. It needs no reply and usually gets a surprised one.

I'd use strangers as practice, honestly. If the kitchen is too big a first step, the deli counter is a small one, and the landing is easy to watch. Say one to someone you'll never see again and see what their face does. That's a data point for the guess, the kind chapter 13 said you've been missing, and it costs you a sentence on a platform.

The detail and the effect line

Here's the shape. It's two parts and it's short, and it's the answer to chapter 5's worry about wording. This is my method and I'll say so, though the reason for the first part comes straight from the research.

The detail. Say the specific thing you noticed. Not the verdict, the thing. "You didn't get defensive with the teacher." "Those slides had one idea each." "The roses up that wall." "You got down on the floor with them for an hour." The detail is what makes it true, because you can only have noticed a detail if you were paying attention, and it's what makes it hard to brush off, because there's nothing in it to disagree with. It's also what stops it being flattery, since flattery deals in verdicts and has no details to offer. The wording almost doesn't matter once there's a detail in it. The detail is the wording.

The effect line. Say what it did for you, in one sentence. "I'd have lost my temper by the second minute." "It's the first time this quarter I've understood what we're being asked." "It made me want to go home and do something with ours." "I never got that from you at that age, and it's lovely to see." The effect line is what turns an observation into a compliment. Without it, "you didn't get defensive" could be a note. With it, it's a person telling another person that something they did mattered, and that's the news, in chapter 5's terms, that the other person is reading it for.

Two parts, two sentences, ten seconds. A few things to leave out. Leave out "I just wanted to say", which makes it an announcement. Leave out "honestly", which suggests you're not usually. Leave out any comparison to someone else, "you're much better at that than I am", because it moves the subject to you. And leave out the verdict at the end, "you're brilliant", because it's the part that gets waved away, and by then you've already said the thing that can't be.

If you're stuck for a detail, you haven't got a compliment yet. You've got a warm feeling, and that's fine, but it isn't sayable. Wait until you can name the thing. It'll come, usually within the minute, because the warm feeling was caused by something, and the something is the detail.

Within the hour

Timing is most of it. A good thought said the moment after the thing is a different act from the same words said next week, and I'd argue the difference is bigger than the difference between saying it well and saying it badly.

In the room. If you're there when it happens, say it before you leave the room. Your partner puts the phone down, and you say it from the kitchen doorway. The meeting breaks up, and you say it to the colleague while everyone's gathering their things. The window for the said version is short because the detail is fresh, they know what you mean without explanation, and there's no build-up. Ten minutes later you'd have to go and find them, and going to find someone makes it an event. Within the hour is the outer edge. After that it's still worth saying, but it starts to need a preamble, and preambles are where the squirm lives.

The same day. If the moment's gone, use the evening. A message is fine. "Meant to say, those slides were the clearest we've had all year, first time I've understood what we're being asked." A message has one advantage over the room, which is that there's no pause to sit through, and one disadvantage, which is that you'll be tempted to redraft it. Don't. Chapter 5 told you why. Write the detail and the effect line and send it.

Not the card. Chapter 11 covered why the occasion is a bad channel. I'd add that the card is where good thoughts go to be generic. "Thanks for everything" and "you're the best" are what

people write when the details have gone stale, and they're read as what people write. If you want to put something in a card, put a detail in it. But the card is a supplement, not the place.

The morning after. If a whole day has gone by, you can still say it, and here's the trick. Don't apologise for the delay. "Been thinking about that call yesterday" is a sentence, and it's true, and it makes the delay into evidence that the thing stuck with you. That's a compliment on its own.

Why the hour, if I had to give one reason. Because the squirm grows with time. In the moment, the good thought is just a thing you saw and said. An hour later it's a thing you decided to say, and a day later it's a thing you've been meaning to say, and each of those is heavier than the last. The fastest version is the lightest, for you and for them.

At home

The people at home are where the drawer is fullest, because you see them most, and where it's hardest to open, because the silence has the most history. Some notes on each, and these are my suggestions except where I say otherwise.

Your partner. The good thoughts about a partner tend to be about how they are rather than what they did, and that makes them feel bigger to say. Keep them small anyway. The detail, the effect line, the doorway. "You didn't rise to it with him tonight. I would have." That's the whole thing. If you've been together a long time and the first one lands with a strange look, chapter 12 covered why, and chapter 10 covered the brush-off. Say the next one two days later and keep the size the same. What builds the picture over time is not the size of any one said thing but the fact that the said version now exists at all.

Your children. Here there's research, and it changes the shape a little. Mueller and Dweck published six studies in 1998 on what happens when children are praised for being clever as opposed to for their effort. Fifth graders praised for intelligence went on to care more about looking good than about learning, and after a failure they persisted less, enjoyed the task less and did worse than children praised for how hard they'd worked. The children praised for effort thought ability could grow. The ones praised for being clever thought it was fixed. That study is old and it's about one kind of task, and I'd hold it loosely. But it says the detail matters even more with children than with adults. "You're so clever" is a verdict and it comes with a cost. "You kept going at that when it wouldn't

come out" is a detail, and it's what they can do again. Deci's meta-analysis, in chapter 9, found that a good word did less for children's interest than for adults', and I'd guess that's because so much of what children get is verdicts. Give them the thing you saw.

Your parents. This is the drawer with the oldest contents and the most obvious deadline, and I'll be blunt about it. Your dad on the floor with the grandchildren is a thing you've noticed a dozen times. Say it once, this Sunday, in passing, as small as you can make it. "You're good with them. You've got more patience than I have." Then talk about something else. It'll be noticeable, and he'll pretend it wasn't, and it will have been said, which is the only outcome that matters when the deadline is the one it is.

One last thing about home. Thank them now is about thanks for what people do for you, and at home the two habits overlap, because the same person laid the table and handled the call. Do both. But notice that they're different sentences, and the drawer this book is about holds the second kind, the opinion with nothing done for you in it. That's the one that tells a person what you think they're like, and it's the one families most often go without.

At work

Work has its own version of every belief in this book, and a couple of its own. It's not your job to comment on people's work unless you manage them. It would be political. It would be read as an angle. And there's a whole machinery for feedback already, reviews and one-to-ones and forms, so anything said outside it is either redundant or improper. Some notes, and these are mine except for Bradler.

The colleague. The person with the slides doesn't report to you and you don't report to them, which is exactly why it's easy. There's no machinery. Nobody's grading anyone. You're one person telling another that their work made your morning easier, and that is not political. Detail and effect line, on the way out of the room. "One idea a slide. First time I've followed one of these." Then go. If you'd rather message, message, the same day.

The person under you. This is where "it'll go to their head" lives, and chapter 9 gave you the evidence against it. Positive feedback raised interest and free effort across 128 experiments. In Bradler and colleagues' field experiment, unannounced recognition raised performance, and most of the rise came from the people who weren't recognised, which I read as the room learning that good work gets noticed here. I'd draw two things from that. First, say it in the moment, not in the review. The review is where compliments become grades, with everything a grade brings. Second, don't wrap it. There's a habit of putting the good thing before the bad thing to soften it, and everyone who's been on the

receiving end of that has learned to brace when the good thing starts. Keep the good thought separate from any correction, by a day if you can. Let it be its own sentence.

The boss. This is where "they'll think I want something" lives. Chapter 8's answer holds. If there's nothing after it, it's a report. "The way you handled the restructuring was fair, and people noticed." Full stop. No hours, no request, not that week. If it still feels too exposed, pick the version with the least of you in it. Say what the team noticed rather than what you did.

What not to do. Don't say it in the team channel where it becomes a performance. Don't say it about someone to a third person and assume it'll get back. Chapter 3 applies at work more than anywhere. People know what's been said to them, and the good opinion of their work that you expressed to someone else in the kitchen is, as far as they're concerned, not there.

The decision

You've read the case. The people around you know only what's been said, the squirm is yours and doesn't cross the room, the wording is the wrong thing to grade, a compliment with no motive isn't flattery, the guess is wrong the same way for nearly everyone, and one good go doesn't fix it because the correction fades. What's left is a decision, and I'd keep it small enough to make tonight.

The rule is one a day. One good thought, said out loud, to the person it's about, within the hour if you can, with the detail in it. Not a quota to exceed and not a target to feel bad about. One. Most days you'll have five or six good thoughts and you're only being asked to let one of them out, which leaves the drawer with most of what it's used to. If a day goes by with none, the day was short of them, and that happens. If one comes and you keep it in, notice that, because that's the habit, and the noticing is where the change is.

Three things to put in place, and they take a minute.

The first is a plan in the form of when this happens, I do that. Peter Gollwitzer and Paschal Sheeran's 2006 review of a large number of studies found that people who tie an intended action to a specific trigger act on it more often than people who simply intend to. So write three. When I think a good thought about someone in the room, then I say the detail before I leave the room. When I think one about someone who isn't there, then I message it the same evening. When they brush it off, then I ask one question about the thing and let it go.

The second is the three-day count from chapter 1, kept going for a fortnight. Thought, said or not. You're not scoring yourself. You're doing what chapter 13 said the drawer stops you doing, which is collecting the landings. Each said one is a data point against the guess, and the guess needs a lot of them, because it comes back.

The third is the shape. Detail, effect line, stop. If you can't find the detail, wait until you can.

What to expect, and this is my expectation rather than a finding. The first few will feel exactly as awkward as you thought, in your chest, and land better than you thought, on their face. You'll notice the second thing less than the first, because the first is loud and the second is quiet and over quickly. That's the asymmetry from chapter 13 doing its work, and the count is there to correct for it. Somewhere in the second or third week, a said one will feel like nothing, just a thing you said, and that's the habit turning.

Phyllippa Lally and colleagues, who tracked people forming a new daily habit in 2010, found that it became automatic over weeks rather than days and that missing a day didn't set the process back much. Expect weeks. Expect the squirm to return at full strength after a few days off, as chapter 14 said, and expect the rule to carry you through it whether or not you believe it that morning.

One more thing to expect. Somebody, quite soon, will say something good back. Take it. Don't brush it off. You know now what that does.

The ex, the colleague who'd take it wrong, families that don't say it, the person who's died, and when it's more than shyness

The rule in chapter 22 is for ordinary cases. Some aren't, and this chapter takes them one at a time.

The ex. There's a good thought about someone you're no longer with, and you'd like to say it, and you're not sure whether it's a kindness or a door left open. My answer is that it depends what's after it, and the honest test is chapter 8's. If it's a report with nothing attached, and you can both take it as one, it's fine, and it may be one of the more generous things you do this year. If any part of you is hoping it starts something, it's a bid, and you know it, and this book isn't cover for it. And if the split was recent or the other person is still hurt, the kindest version of the good thought is the thought version. Keep it.

The colleague who'd take it wrong. Some workplaces have someone for whom any warmth is an opening, and a compliment from you would become a story about you by Friday. Chapter 17's rule works here. Keep it about the work and not the person, keep it short, keep it in the moment, and don't repeat it. "That was a clear set of slides" is unspinnable. If even that feels unsafe with this person, leave them out. One a day doesn't have to include everyone, and the drawer is the right place for a good thought that would be used against you.

Families that don't say it. In some families, and some cultures, nobody says the good thing out loud and never has, and doing it would be a departure from more than your own habit. I won't pretend that's the same as a reserved temperament. It's a shared rule, and breaking it is visible. I'd only say two things. The evidence in this book comes from people who were also sure it'd be awkward, and the gap between their guess and the landing was consistent. And the small version, said in passing, about a specific thing, is the one that survives a family rule best, because it can be received as a remark rather than a declaration. Start there, and go slowly, and let the other person set the pace of what comes back.

The person who's died. There's a backlog for someone who isn't here to hear it, and the funeral speech was the first time any of it was said, and you've been carrying that. I've no research for this and won't invent any. What I'd say is that the backlog isn't wasted. It's the clearest possible evidence of what the drawer does, and the plainest reason to open it for the people still here. If it helps, write the things down, in the two-part shape, detail and what it did for you. Not for anyone. For the record that you noticed. Then say one of the living ones today.

When it's more than shyness. If what's stopping you isn't a guess about one compliment but a fear of most social situations, if you worry before, during and after them, avoid them where you can, and fear being watched and judged much of the time, the NHS says that's social anxiety and it's more than shyness. It's common, it often doesn't go on its own, and treatments help. See a GP, or refer yourself to an NHS talking therapies service, which you can do

without a GP. Go anyway, an earlier book, is about the nearest habit and reads well alongside that. This book's rule is still usable, but it isn't a treatment, and I'd rather you had the treatment.

When you went quiet again

At some point, probably in the third or fourth week, you'll notice you've said nothing for five days. The count stopped. The good thoughts came and went to the drawer as they always did, and you didn't clock it until now. The temptation is to read that as the experiment failing. You tried, you're not that sort of person after all, and the drawer was right.

I'd read it differently, and I'd start with what chapter 14 predicted. The correction fades. In Atir and Epley's experiments the good experience of a conversation had worn off within a fortnight and the pessimistic guess was back. If that extends to compliments, and I think it does, then a quiet week three weeks in isn't a surprise. It's the guess reasserting itself on schedule, and the fact that you noticed it means you've now caught it doing so, which you never used to.

Lally and colleagues found that missing a day didn't materially affect whether a habit formed. A missed week is more than a day, and I'm extending their finding, but the shape is the same. The habit isn't lost. It's paused, and the way back is the smallest possible next one, not an assessment of your character.

Don't make the return a speech. The mistake people make after a lapse is to come back bigger, to make up for it, and to sit someone down and say a lot. That's the occasion, from chapter 11, and it'll feel like the wrong size because it is. Come back at the size you left.

One detail, one effect line, to whoever's nearest, today. "You were patient with her on the phone." Done. The count restarts from there and needs no explanation.

Then ask which belief did it. It's usually one. The quiet week often has a particular brush-off in it, or a landing you didn't get to see, or a day when the wording wouldn't come and you left it. Find the chapter and reread it. The beliefs don't go away because you've read about them once. They come back with the guess, and the answer to each is the same as it was.

And keep the count honest without making it a score. You're not counting to judge yourself. You're counting because the drawer's whole trick is invisibility, and a mark on the phone is the only way of seeing what it took.

The stairs, again

It's a Tuesday, a few weeks on, and your partner has just come off the phone with the school. It wasn't a good call. You listened from the kitchen. They asked the two questions, got the date, thanked the teacher. You're on the stairs with the towel and the sentence arrives, as it always did. That was handled really well. I'd have lost my temper by the second minute.

This time you come back down. You say it from the doorway, the two parts, in the plain voice you use for everything. "You didn't get defensive with her. I'd have been shouting by the second minute." Your partner looks up. There's a pause of about a second, which you notice and let be. They say "well, somebody had to keep it together", which is a brush-off, and you ask what made them think to ask about the timetable, and they tell you, and they're a bit pleased, and you go up for the towel.

That's all. It took ten seconds and you'll have forgotten the squirm by the time you're at the top of the stairs. What you won't have forgotten, and what they won't, is that the thought was said. It's now a thing that happened between two people rather than a thing that happened in your head, and it's the second one this week, and by the end of the month it will be unremarkable, which is the point.

The people you think well of are going to go on doing the things you think well of. Your dad will go on being patient. The colleague will present again. The coats will go by on the platform. Every one

of those will produce the sentence, and the only question is where the sentence goes.

Say one today. Not the biggest one. The nearest one, to the nearest person, with the detail in it, and then talk about something else.

Notes

These notes give the sources behind the claims in each chapter, and say where I'm giving my own interpretation. The book isn't medical advice. If a fear of social situations is affecting your life, your GP or an NHS talking therapies service is the place to start. The examples throughout, the school call, the slides, the garden, the coat on the platform, the sister with the customer, the father with the grandchildren and the funeral speech, are invented to illustrate and aren't drawn from real people.

Studies were checked on 26 September 2026 by reading their published abstracts. None was read in full, and none carried a retraction or correction notice at that date. Most are experiments with people in the United States or Canada, often students, and I've tried to say where I'm extending a finding to a kitchen it wasn't run in.

Chapter 1. No sources. The terms are the book's own.

Chapter 2. No sources. The earlier book referred to is Thank them now.

Chapter 3. Zhao and Epley, "Insufficiently complimentary?: Underestimating the positive impact of compliments creates a barrier to expressing them", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 121, 2021, pages 239 to 256. Nine experiments. The abstract doesn't say whether recipients were friends or strangers,

and I haven't claimed either. The earlier book referred to is They can't read your mind. The reading of the result as a test of "they already know" is mine.

Chapter 4. Zhao and Epley, as above. Boothby and Bohns, "Why a simple act of kindness is not as simple as it seems: underestimating the positive impact of our compliments on others", *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 47, 2021, pages 826 to 840. Five studies. The claim that the squirm doesn't cross the room is my phrasing of their finding that givers' own anxiety drove the misprediction while third parties were accurate.

Chapter 5. Zhao and Epley, as above, for the competence and warmth gap and the fourth experiment on focusing on warmth. Boothby and Bohns, as above, for givers' concern about competence. The handwriting comparison and the standard for wording are mine.

Chapter 6. Vonk, "Self-serving interpretations of flattery: why ingratiation works", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 82, 2002, pages 515 to 526. Experiments on people being flattered compared with observers. The distinction between a report and a bid is mine, and the paper is not evidence that flattery is harmless or advisable.

Chapter 7. No research sources. The argument is mine.

Chapter 8. Dungan, Munguia Gomez and Epley, "Too reluctant to reach out: receiving social support is more positive than expressers expect", *Psychological Science* 33, 2022, pages 1300 to

1312. Four studies, 100 online adults, 120 students, 50 adult pairs and 300 adults. The practical notes are mine.

Chapter 9. Deci, Koestner and Ryan, "A meta-analytic review of experiments examining the effects of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation", *Psychological Bulletin* 125, 1999, pages 627 to 668, published with commentaries. 128 studies. Positive feedback raised free-choice behaviour and self-reported interest, with effect sizes of about a third of a standard deviation. Bradler, Dur, Neckermann and Non, "Employee recognition and performance: a field experiment", *Management Science* 62, 2016, pages 3085 to 3099. The description is from the working paper abstract. The distinction between praise and a compliment is mine.

Chapter 10. Marigold, Holmes and Ross, "More than words: reframing compliments from romantic partners fosters security in low self-esteem individuals", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 92, 2007, pages 232 to 248. Three studies. The suggestion to ask a question after a brush-off borrows their manipulation and hasn't been tested as a conversational move.

Chapter 11. No research sources. The argument about the occasion is mine.

Chapter 12. Dungan and colleagues, as above. The earlier book referred to is Ring them first. The rest is mine.

Chapter 13. Epley, Kardas, Zhao, Atir and Schroeder, "Undersociality: miscalibrated social cognition can inhibit social connection", *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 26, 2022, pages 406 to

418. A review. The plain-language versions of the three mechanisms and the archer are mine.

Chapter 14. Atir and Epley, "Fleeting generalization: how unstable belief updating keeps people overly pessimistic about talking to strangers", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 131, 2026, pages 422 to 443. Three longitudinal experiments on conversations with strangers. The extension to compliments is mine and is said to be.

Chapter 15. Boothby and Bohns, as above, for givers feeling better afterwards. Floyd, Mikkelsen, Tafoya, Farinelli, La Valley, Judd and colleagues, "Human affection exchange: XIII. Affectionate communication accelerates neuroendocrine stress recovery", *Health Communication* 22, 2007, pages 123 to 132. A single lab study, sample size not given in the abstract. The NHS page "5 steps to mental wellbeing", at [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk), read on 26 September 2026. The rest of the chapter is my reasoning.

Chapter 16. Algoe, Fredrickson and Gable, "The social functions of the emotion of gratitude via expression", *Emotion* 13, 2013, pages 605 to 609. Couples in a lab, followed for six months. The study is about expressed gratitude, and the extension to compliments is mine. The account of what the drawer does at the receiving end is mine.

Chapter 17. Sandstrom and Dunn, "Social interactions and well-being: the surprising power of weak ties", *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 40, 2014, pages 910 to 922. Three studies, correlational. The practical rule for strangers is mine.

Chapters 18 and 19. No research sources. The two-part shape and the hour are my method, and neither has been tested as a package.

Chapter 20. Mueller and Dweck, "Praise for intelligence can undermine children's motivation and performance", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 75, 1998, pages 33 to 52. Six studies with fifth graders. Deci, Koestner and Ryan, as above, for the smaller effect of verbal reward on children, which is their finding, while the reason I suggest for it is my guess. The earlier book referred to is *Thank them now*.

Chapter 21. Bradler and colleagues, as above. Deci, Koestner and Ryan, as above. Everything else is my suggestion.

Chapter 22. Gollwitzer and Sheeran, "Implementation intentions and goal achievement: a meta-analysis of effects and processes", *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 38, 2006, pages 69 to 119, for the when-then form. Lally, van Jaarsveld, Potts and Wardle, "How are habits formed: modelling habit formation in the real world", *European Journal of Social Psychology* 40, 2010, pages 998 to 1009. 96 volunteers, 82 with usable data. The rule hasn't been tested as a package and what I say to expect is my expectation.

Chapter 23. The NHS page on social anxiety, at [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk), read on 26 September 2026, for the description of symptoms, the advice to see a GP and self-referral to NHS talking therapies. The earlier book referred to is *Go anyway*. The other cases are my suggestions.

Chapter 24. Atir and Epley, as above. Lally and colleagues, as above. The extension from a missed day to a missed week is mine.

Looked up and not used. Kumar and Epley's 2018 experiments on letters of thanks are the evidence behind Thank them now and aren't re-cited here, though they point the same way. Kille, Eibach, Wood and Holmes, "Who can't take a compliment?", Journal of Experimental Social Psychology 2017, had no abstract available to me and isn't cited. Lambert and colleagues 2010 on expressing gratitude to a partner, and Williams and Bartlett 2015 on a note of thanks from a stranger, belong to the thanks habit and are used in the earlier book. Aknin, Sandstrom, Dunn and Norton 2011 on spending money on close and distant ties came up in the search and isn't relevant.