



'We need human interaction': Meet the LA man who walks people for a living

A) Warm up

1. What do you believe are the main benefits of going for a long walk?
2. To what extent do you believe that people are becoming more lonely as a result of technology and social media?

B) Adapted Text - 'We need human interaction': Meet the LA man who walks people for a living

'We need human interaction': Meet the LA man who walks people for a living

Adapted from an article published in 2016 by The Guardian

As the digital age makes people more lonely, Chuck McCarthy has created a service to go for a walk with strangers – but the job is more a conversationalist rather than a walker.

Chuck McCarthy is an **aspiring** actor, recently auditioning as a biker for a TV show. Yet he is finding fame, and possibly a business franchise, with another role: Los Angeles' first people walker.



He walks humans for \$7 a mile around the streets and park near his home, **pioneering** an alternative to dog walking that requires no lead, just an ability to walk, talk and, above all, listen.

The underemployed actor initially **hit upon** the idea several months ago as a joke, an imaginary way to earn extra cash, until it became real. "The more I thought about it, the less crazy it seemed," said McCarthy, drinking a whole bottle of water – he now takes hydration seriously – and heading out into the sunshine for another walk, this time with me for company. A handwritten message across his T-shirt declares him The People Walker, low-budget, mobile advertising. "I've been doing walks almost every single day for the past week and I'm getting repeat clients, which is what you want."

A peaceful walk with this soft-spoken man seems to be exactly what the people of LA want, judging by the **traction** that he has **generated** on social media and the calls he receives from his home-made flyers: "Need motivation to walk?" they ask from lamp posts. "Scared to walk alone at night? Don't like walking alone at all? Don't want people

to see you walking alone and just assume you have no friends? Don't like listening to music or podcasts but can't walk alone in silence, forced to face thoughts of the unknown future, or your own insignificance in the ever expanding universe?"

For many, the answer to one or all of the above seems to be "yes". McCarthy is **bombarded** with hundreds of emails from the lonely, the curious and the adventurous, all seeking a stranger's company. Chuck is quickly **making strides** in his business both literally and figuratively.

"I try to listen more than talk," he said as we walked through some **sought-after** areas in LA, "it's mostly surface, small-talk stuff. But I think it's therapeutic even if they're not sharing their deepest emotions and insecurities." Complaining about traffic, for instance, felt better when delivered to an actual human ear rather than posted on social media. "Tweeting about it and getting no response just **exacerbates** your irritation."

Such an **abundance of** requests has led McCarthy to hire five other walkers to serve different parts of LA, though he will not take any cut from their earnings until he figures out a professional business model. Commenters on his social media are offering plenty of advice. "Charge more and **scale it up**. **Zero in on** the secret sauce, your niche – personality, being a supremely good listener, paying attention to inane chatter, etc – then train your walker bees accordingly."

The idea could quite easily **get off the ground** in other areas as well. A woman in Israel has copied the idea, someone in Britain wants him to do it there, and a guy in New York asked him to walk his eight-year-old son to the bus stop each day.

McCarthy, **relishing** the attention despite feeling a little **overwhelmed** by it all, is **contemplating** crowdfunding to hire someone to design an Uber-style app. The app would match clients with walkers who are currently nearby, and it would let walkers and clients rate each other for personability and walking speed.

According to McCarthy, paying to be walked does not mean that these people have a **dearth of** close friendships. It just means they cannot always coordinate leisure time with friends, a product of chaotic schedules in the gig economy, leaving them isolated. "We're on phones and computers constantly communicating but we're not connecting as much. We need that human interaction."

We also need exercise. McCarthy has slimmed down two notches on his belt since starting the professional walking. However, he stresses that he is not a personal trainer. "I'm more about motivating someone to leave their house and walk than being a football coach and shouting at them."

Could the daily treks up and down the streets of LA lead to a movie for the aspiring actor? Thinner material, after all, has made it to the screen. The people walker smiled. "Why not? Maybe (Jean-Claude) Van Damme will play me."

Link to the original article:

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/sep/14/los-angeles-people-walker-chuck-mccarthy>

C) Key Words from Context

Based on the context of the article, can you match the words in the box to the definitions listed below? Then add the word into the example sentence. You may need to change the form of the word to fit the meaning of the sentence.

aspiring	to pioneer	to hit upon	to generate traction
sought-after	to be bombarded	to make strides	an abundance of
to scale something up	to zero in on	to get off the ground	
to relish	overwhelmed	to contemplate	a dearth of

1. Feeling as if something is too much to manage: _____

"I am feeling a little bit _____ due to my heavy workload."

2. A very large amount of something: _____

"Our city enjoys _____ clean spaces."

"We have _____ clients in the local area."

3. To gain some momentum in becoming more popular: _____

"Our social media campaign is _____."

4. To get a continuous flow of information, requests, questions or criticisms:

"The course was extremely intense. We _____ with information from the very beginning."

5. To make good progress in something: _____

"You are really _____ in your English."

6. To increase production, capacity or availability of your services: _____

"It is time for us to _____ the business. We need to expand our services and hire some new staff."

7. A real lack of something: _____

"Unfortunately, there are _____ opportunities in the area."

8. To come up with an idea by chance, or to come up with an idea after brainstorming and weighing up several options: _____

"Let's brainstorm a few ideas and maybe we will _____ something really productive."

9. Directing your hopes and ambitions towards something: _____

"We aim to educate _____ leaders."

10. To direct all of your attention towards something: _____

"We are aiming to _____ our target audience more efficiently."

"The team want to _____ the most effective solution."

11. To be the first to use apply a new method: _____

"Our company are currently _____ new AI technology."

12. To enjoy something greatly: _____

"I would _____ the opportunity to work at your company."

"I am _____ the challenge of expanding the company."

13. To take time to consider a future action carefully: _____

"Due to the financial difficulties at the company, we are _____ making some redundancies."

14. Wanted by many people mainly because of its high quality or rarity: _____

"These retro products are extremely _____."

"Developers are really _____ at the moment, as there is a real lack of them in the market."

D) Comprehension

Can you answer the questions below about the text?

1. Based on the first paragraph, what do you think is the main reason that people hire Chuck McCarthy's services?

2. What impression do we get from the article about Chuck McCarthy's current success as an actor?

3. What 3 methods does Chuck McCarthy use to advertise his services and gain exposure?

4. What do you think the author means with the sentence “Chuck is quickly making strides in his business both literally and figuratively”?

5. What business advice has Chuck McCarthy received on his social media platforms?

6. How is Chuck McCarthy feeling about the attention he is getting since starting his new business?

7. What does the author say about the friendships that Chuck McCarthy’s clients have?

8. What other benefit has Chuck McCarthy experienced since starting the business?

9. In the final paragraph, what impression does the author give about the potential for ‘The People Walker’ to be made into a movie?

10. To what extent do you think that such a service would benefit people in your city?

E) Key Words in a New Context

Below you can find a paragraph. Can you fill in the gaps in the paragraph with the words from the box below? You may need to change the form of some of the verbs in order for them to fit into the sentence.

aspiring	to hit upon	to generate traction	
sought-after	bombarded	to make strides	
to zero in on	off the ground	abundance	
to relish	overwhelmed	to contemplate	dearth

From Chef's Whites to Food Truck Delights

After 5 years of working as a chef in the same Mexican restaurant in London, John found that his passion for food was starting to dwindle. He felt restricted by having to make the same dishes every day using the same recipe. It was on the day of his 5th anniversary of working in the restaurant that he decided it was time for a change. He needed to think very carefully about what the next step would be. He seriously _____ moving to a new restaurant, but that wasn't going to be exciting enough - he didn't exactly _____ the task of following someone else's recipe and working all day in a hot kitchen with no windows.

After weighing up his options for many months, he eventually _____ the thrilling yet risky idea of starting up his own food truck. This would allow him to focus on his own recipes, and change his menu as often as he liked in order to keep things fresh and exciting.

However, the journey from experienced chef to food truck owner soon became extremely daunting. The _____ businessman became completely _____ with the huge piles of paperwork that needed to be completed just to get the project _____. _____ with phone calls, contracts and general bureaucracy relating to food truck licenses, health and safety protocols, food standards permits, it didn't quite fit with John's exciting image of pop-up street food.

However, after 5 long months, John was ready to go. The food truck would sell Mexican cuisine, a cuisine that had always been close to his heart. His passion for the vibrant flavours and colours of Mexico fuelled his determination to share this culinary joy with Londoners. It was true that there was already an _____ of Mexican food offerings around London, including hundreds of restaurants and fast-food chains. He wanted to do something slightly different and to stand out among the competition. In order to carve out his own niche, he wanted _____ real authentic recipes that he had learnt on his many trips to Mexico, a refreshing change from the basic tacos on offer across London.

The first few months after the food truck opened were really tough. A _____ of customers after such a huge initial investment of time and money started to make John question whether he had made the right decision. However, John soon began to _____ in his marketing skills, creating an Instagram page with compelling, humorous photos, which soon started to _____. As his Instagram followers started to skyrocket, queues were starting to form outside his food truck and all the way

down the street. Suddenly, it became a real challenge to keep up with demand, forcing him to close the food truck early on some days after running out of ingredients. He was now making the most delicious and most _____ enchiladas in London.