

CONVER - SPITTLE

There is a social interaction happening all over the world that I don't believe has ever been spoken of in an open format. Not in front of me anyway. It is a phenomenon that is creeping into a lot more daily interaction and communication and something I really believe we need to address as a community. A race. A bunch of people who shouldn't have to worry about drowning when simply speaking. This phenomenon is ...

Converspittle.

You meet a lot of characters in the alcohol industry. Take Barry for example. Barry is a bus driver (although I am pretty sure he is allowed to drive cars and possibly ride bikes recreationally) and a lovely bloke to boot. Always pops into see me when he is in the neighbourhood (which is quite a lot I might add. He is what you would call one of my 'staple' customers).

Barry has a problem though. He is a conversational spitter.

This isn't bad spitting. Not like some people who adorn our streets, inhaling from as far away as Tasmania and letting rip into our footpaths and gutters. Or those certain footballers on TV who always seem to be spitting something when the camera pans to them. (Seriously - there are some sports stars where you wonder how they have any spittle left to give. I mean the camera might be on them 20 times and 19 of those they are sending something from their mouth to the turf or fake grass).

Yes, yes ... not a very pleasant topic I know, but one that needs to be addressed, so bear with me here.

The conversation spitter (or as I like to say, the Converspittle-ist) hurtles fluid by accident.

Barry is like that. You'll be talking with Barry and you can see that he is getting a bit of a white build up in the corner of his mouth and that eventually something has to give. But you see - here is the social dilemma...

Is it rude to say to someone that they are gathering some spittle and you'd really prefer it if you: (a) weren't distracted by it and would prefer to concentrate on what they are saying as opposed to what they may soon be spraying; (b) contemplating bringing out a special range of 'Converspittle goggles and masks' that protect the listener from Converspittle; or (c) considering framing a market where people could bet what time Barry's first salivial attack took place and on what part of my anatomy it may land.

Anyhoo ... as Barry and I talked, a fleck broke away from the main white tribe inhabiting the corner of his mouth, and sure enough floated my way. I ducked, dodged and basically did everything in my polite power possible to avoid that bomb (without hitting the deck and yelling 'fire in the hole!')but

sure enough it landed on my cheek.

Here develops the second dilemma.

Barry is a nice man and I don't want to lose him as a friend or customer, but he knows, and I know that he has just accidentally spat (again!) on me. What is the etiquette and protocol here? Should I spittle back as a warning? Should he immediately apologise for this unfortunate, unsavoury incident?

Should he stop mid sentence and do his best to get the culprit off me? (Mind you I really don't want Barry licking a handkerchief and scrubbing the side of my head with it either!). Because I don't want to be rude and wipe it off while he's still talking and run the risk of upsetting him for something relatively minor in the grand scheme of things. Don't get me wrong - I really want to wipe it off, but...

Or do you just continue on like nothing has happened? This seems to be the way society goes in this situation (unless you know the person really well and can tell them straight out to stop it). Not like they mean it of course... I hope.

I didn't say anything to Barry in the end. Like always. He didn't say anything either. I didn't see him for a few weeks, then when he did come in he was fairly down.

I asked him what had been going on and he said he had been fired. I asked why, as you do (all the time thinking that they may not have wanted to install a windscreen wiper on the INSIDE of his bus windshield).

He said they made him have an eye test and it turns out they weren't good enough for driving and were quite simply amazed that he had never noticed. He showed me his new coke bottle glasses and then commented he wouldn't wear them anyway, because he didn't think 'they' were right in their assessment.

As he strolled out of the shop, and I wiped away the remnants of our conversation, I was glad I hadn't said anything to Barry about his Converspittle problem. If he couldn't see the problem, then there wasn't one obviously... unless you were listening.