

Meet the LA man who walks people for a living

Level 3 • Advanced

1 Warmer

a. Which is a correct answer to the question 'What do you do for a living?'

1. I share a house with two friends.
2. I work in a hospital.
3. My husband, two children and a dog.

b. Now, answer the question with information about yourself.

c. Complete the sentence so it's true for you.

I (often/sometimes/occasionally/rarely ...) go for a walk (in/around ...) ... with ...

2 Key words

Find the key words in the article and write them next to the definitions below. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. likely to kill someone or wanting to kill someone _____ (para 1)
2. a formal agreement for someone to sell a company's products or services in a particular place in exchange for a payment or part of the profits _____ (para 1)
3. a long narrow piece of leather, chain etc that you fasten to the collar around a dog's neck in order to control the dog _____ (para 2)
4. something written carelessly or in a hurry so that it is difficult to read _____ (para 5)
5. a slow walk for pleasure _____ (para 6)
6. used to describe a man who has a lot of hair on his face or body _____ (para 6)
7. a word that refers to walking _____ (para 8)
8. walking with energy and confidence _____ (para 9)
9. admitting to bad or embarrassing things that you have done _____ (para 10)
10. secrets told to someone _____ (para 10)
11. employed _____ (para 12)
12. a percentage or part of a total amount of money _____ (para 12)
13. confused _____ (para 14)
14. how near something is to another thing, especially in distance or time _____ (para 14)
15. how pleasant a person is _____ (para 14)
16. small cuts or holes _____ (para 17)

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

As the digital age makes people more lonely, Chuck McCarthy has created a service to stroll with strangers – but the job is more people whisperer than walker

Rory Carroll

14 September, 2016

- 1 Chuck McCarthy recently auditioned as a homicidal biker for a TV show but the actor is finding glimmers of fame and, possibly, a business franchise with another role: Los Angeles's first people walker.
- 2 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.
- 3 The idea initially struck the underemployed actor as a joke, an imaginary way to make extra cash, until it became real.
- 4 "The more I thought about it, the less crazy it seemed," said McCarthy, draining a bottle of water – he now takes hydration seriously – and heading out into the sunshine for another walk.
- 5 A homemade scrawl across his T-shirt declared 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."
- 6 A stroll with this soft-spoken hirsute hulk seems to be what much of LA wants judging by the response to his Facebook page and homemade flyers.
- 7 "Need motivation to walk?" they ask from lampposts. "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?"
- 8 For many, the answer to one or all of the above seems to be "yes". McCarthy is receiving hundreds of emails from the lonely, the curious and the adventurous, all seeking a stranger's ambulatory company.
- 9 "I try to listen more than talk," he said, striding past handsome houses in Los Feliz, a leafy neighbourhood near Hollywood.
- 10 Conversations with clients are seldom confessional but he respects confidences. "It's mostly surface, small-talk type stuff. But I think it's therapeutic even if they're not baring their souls."
- 11 Grumbling 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 makes you feel sadder."
- 12 So many requests have poured in that McCarthy has recruited 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.
- 13 It could grow fast. 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.
- 14 McCarthy, bemused and excited by the attention, is considering crowdfunding to hire techies to design an Uber-style app. In addition to ensuring proximity – he wants to stay local and on foot, not drive across town, let alone fly thousands of miles – the app would let walkers and clients rate each other for personability and walking speed. The latter is a key point for walkers since a slow pace, say two miles an hour, yields \$14, versus \$28 for a brisk four miles per hour.
- 15 "Awesome concept, plenty of screwed up lonely people out there," said one of his Facebook commenters, suggesting the job is more people whisperer than walker.
- 16 But according to McCarthy, paying to be walked does not mean people are friendless. It just means they cannot always coordinate leisure time with friends, a product of fluid 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."
- 17 We also need exercise. McCarthy has slimmed down two notches on his belt since starting the professional walking. "I try not to run because it could ruin my brand," he jokes.
- 18 Originally from Atlanta, McCarthy is serious enough about acting that he declines to reveal his exact age, beyond saying he is in his 30s. He has found bit parts since moving to LA a decade ago but no breakthrough role.

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19 "I grew the beard so I could play homeless people." And, potentially, homicidal bikers. He is hopeful of landing that role.

20 McCarthy stresses that he is not a personal trainer. "I'm more about motivating someone

to leave their house and walk than being a drill sergeant shouting at them."

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3 Collocations

- Match the words to make collocations from the article.
- Check your answers by finding the collocations in the article and reading them again in context.
- Describe what each collocation means.

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. business | a. neighbourhood |
| 2. repeat | b. role |
| 3. hirsute | c. parts |
| 4. leafy | d. whisperer |
| 5. people | e. franchise |
| 6. fluid | f. sergeant |
| 7. gig | g. clients |
| 8. bit | h. schedules |
| 9. breakthrough | i. hulk |
| 10. drill | j. economy |

4 Summarizing the article

Use the collocations in task 4 to summarize the article.

5 Three-word expressions

Use the words to make three-word expressions from the article. Then, use the expressions to complete the sentences.

a	bare	fame	glimmers	land	living
of	role	souls	for	the	their

- Although he's an actor, Chuck McCarthy is currently finding _____ in his new job.
- He walks with people _____.
- When out walking, some clients _____ to Chuck.
- He still hopes to _____ of a homicidal biker in a TV show.

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6 Discussion

- Would you consider employing a people walker for yourself or for someone you know?
- What would you want to know about the people walker before you employed them?
- Could you imagine this business model being successful where you live? Why? Why not?
- What business advice would you give Chuck McCarthy?

7 Webquest

You can find photos of the people walker here: www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/sep/14/los-angeles-people-walker-chuck-mccarthy.

Would you like to go for a walk with him? Does he look as you imagined he would?

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KEY

1 Warmer

a. 2

2 Key words

1. homicidal
2. franchise
3. lead
4. scrawl
5. stroll
6. hirsute
7. ambulatory
8. striding
9. confessional
10. confidences
11. recruited
12. cut
13. bemused
14. proximity
15. personability
16. notches

3 Collocations

1. e – a type of business in which you pay someone a part of your earnings in order to use their business model, advertising, apps etc
2. g – customers that use your service again after they have used it for the first time
3. i – a strong, large, hairy man
4. a – an area of a town that has a lot of trees and houses
5. d – someone who you can feel comfortable with and whose role is to listen to you and reassure you
6. h – a plan of activities or events that is constantly changing
7. j – a way of working in which people do a lot of small jobs rather than one full-time job
8. c – minor roles for actors in film and TV
9. b – the acting job that makes you successful
10. f – someone in the army whose job is to train soldiers to march and do other military exercises

4 Summarizing the article

Teacher's note: This can be a written or oral task.

5 Three-word expressions

1. glimmers of fame
2. for a living
3. bare their souls
4. land the role