

What makes your day worth it?

Emma Beech¹

¹Australian Bureau of Worthiness

Now, to the mystery and the intrigue surrounding this Australian Bureau of Worthiness. I think we're about to de-mystify it. Now I've been onto my contacts at ASIO to try and find out who this Emma Beech character is, and it turns out that there's not that much mystery after all. In fact, she sounds like a really interesting person. Emma Beech trained at the Laban Centre in London in contemporary dance techniques. Since graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree, she's worked teaching, choreographing, and performing, within the north-east. Emma is one of the artists teaching on the Foundation Training Program for Dance City and also is a founder and co-director of Dance Factory Northeast. So may I now introduce to you, for hopefully more explanation, the Australian Bureau of Worthiness ...

In a couple more seconds. What I didn't realise was how long the boys needed to set up the props, but I don't think that's going to be much longer. Well, we're on the tail end of things now, bringing it home with a wet sail as they say, and looking forward to this final part of this afternoon's proceedings before we get onto the youth choir, who are going to perform for us shortly as well.

Emma Beech: Hello, everyone. [background talk] Hey. Hey. Get out. We're almost there. So before we reach that place of finishing, everyone, just really quickly. I'm not going to make you really do anything. Just stand up, just for a minute. Just stand up. Just turn to the person next to you. Just say hi. And then just turn around to the other person next to you, and just tell them what you're really looking forward to doing tonight. Really. Anything you're looking forward to doing tonight.

[Background noise]

Alright, everyone. Take a seat. I'm Emma Beech. I am from the Australian Bureau of Worthiness, the ABW. I am not, however, a dancer, though I always dreamed of being one, but I am a speaker, and I am a question-asker. Now we've been here, the ABW, for the duration of this entire conference, and it's been myself, it's been Jimmy. Whoa. It's been Tessa. And our honorary young and handsome member, Jock. I think a few of you have noted him, actually. Now we've been asking as many of you as we can what makes your day worth it? And now what we're going to do is we're just going to share a few of those stories with you that we've collected, and we're going to show you some of the drawings that those stories have inspired Jimmy to create, and he will be the man in charge of those drawings.

Hugh from E-Health: 'That is a profound question. I think a belief in your ability to make things better, a belief in being able to change things for the better.'

Leanne: So Saturday before the conference has actually begun, we're just finishing our tour of the conference centre, and we're out in the hallway, and Leanne asks us, Now, would we like her to send any interesting people our way? We say, 'Oh, no, no, no. Don't do that. Everyone's interesting, except the people who try and be interesting. Then we don't know why, but it just doesn't seem to work.' And she says, 'Sure, no problem. Well, you could always ask me.' No. And Jimmy says, 'Absolutely we can, Leanne. In fact, I think we should do that right now. Leanne, what is it that makes your day worth it?' 'Oh, well, well, this. This conference makes my day worth it.' Uh, it's a bit sad, isn't it? It's a bit of a get-a-life kind of an answer that one. Little did any of us envisage the party on Monday night the Bureau would be visited by a young, tall man dressed in a clown outfit with a big wig and a big balloon coming out of his head. Come over to the Bureau and say, 'Bureau, by the way, if you want to know what makes my day worth it, it's dancing with Leanne.'

The site near the registration desk: I'll show you. Well, I start by patting this one. And then, wait, wait. Then hanging out with these monsters, and there's a picture of these three quite beautiful boys. And then we ask, 'Where do you live?' I'll show you.

The security guard: 'That's a hard question to answer. Alright. When I was younger, like, I hated working. Oh, I just hated it. I just didn't want to do it. But then I met my wife, and then I just started to, you know, like working. No.' 'Working meant that I could do things. I could buy a house. I could have children. Yeah, I've got a little girl. She makes everything worth it. Yeah. Yeah, when I was younger, I just didn't want to do anything, you know. I wanted to lie down in front of the TV with a big bag of chips on my lap and just watch it. Not think. Nothing. You know, and I was living with my parents. So it was easy. It was a bit too easy. But then I met my wife, and she kicked me up the arse a bit, and now I really like coming to work. Yeah, I mean, I love it. So, yeah.'

What we've seen, what we've heard: Tessa realises that she's trying to engage with people who are using technology, and I find that I'm attracted to people who are sitting alone. Those people who are in the spaces in between things. Jimmy, well, he's into the people who are giving away toys.

So where's the box? So where can we put the answers? Oh. Oh, we don't have a box, but, I mean, we can just talk to you now. Ah, no, no, no. You can't talk to me now. I have somewhere to be right now, but 3.00 pm, you can talk to me at 3.00 pm today.

Ah, hey, you're from the. I've been trying to find you. Ah. Where's your little booth? I wanted to sort of contribute to your worthiness. Ah, I said, 'Well, we don't actually, well, normally, we come and find you.' Oh. OK. We never had this conversation.

Are you guys fundamentalists?

Yeah, going down to the pub, playing a game of pool with my wife.

It's [inaudible]. I can guarantee you'll be interested.

Yeah. Earlier today I had to drop something off here, and, you know, I just thought to myself, well, I've got 15 minutes to spare, beautiful day. Might just go have myself a glass of wine on the riverbank. Oh, God. So middle class, aren't I?

What am I doing? I thought they were going to come and talk to us.

Well, waking up in the morning because the alternative is not so good.

Hey, hello. Hey, it's me. Oh, hi. It's Emma. I'm Emma. Remember? I'm Emma. You're Emma. We're great. Yes. Hello.

I go to the gym, but, I mean, that's a necessity. That's boring. There's no eye contact there. There's a whole lot of stuff out there that looks authentic, feels authentic, but when you stop to look at it, and question it, you find out it's not.

Megan from one of the booths: She asked if we were asking in a work context. I said, 'Sure. Sure.' And then she said, 'Well, when people are happy and have something to look forward to.' Yeah, but what's happy? I said, 'Look, I suppose the Bureau, we're really trying to find out what that happy is. So what is it in your life, I think, is what we want to know. What is it in your life that makes it worth it? Not just in a work context.'

We'll see how that goes. Oh, oh. Now she's not doing it.

We'll just let that go, shall we.

Oh, thank you, Frank. It's great.

OK. So I'm with Megan, right, and we're talking, and so I'm saying to her, so it's more, what is in your life that makes it worth it. I think that's what we're interested in. Not just in a work context. Oh, yeah. Yeah, I see what you're saying. That's really interesting.

And there's a really long silence, and I think, well, well, I'm going to go. Obviously, she's not going to answer that question. So I go to leave, and then she starts to say, 'Yeah, I went on a health retreat a little while ago. I don't do that. I don't do those sort of things. But I was there for five days. Felt like six weeks at that retreat. There's no mobile phones or anything like that, and, yeah, this might sound crazy, but I realised when I was there that I didn't actually know how to breathe. I don't think I breathed for the first 33 years of my life, I realised at that health retreat.' 'Well, what got you there?' I asked. 'Do you, I mean, you said you don't do that, but you did it? Why did you do that?' 'Well, because I hit rock bottom. I didn't know who I was. I didn't know what I was doing. I was exhausted. I was depressed. I didn't know what to do with myself, and so I talked to a friend, and she recommended this health retreat, and I thought, well, I mean, I don't have anything to lose, do I. So, you know, I went, and it changed my life. It actually changed my life, and, I mean, it's a shame that you have to hit rock bottom to do those sort of things, but that's what I did. I don't know why I'm telling you all this. Why am I telling you this?'

Morning tea on Tuesday: So by this time, I've started to get really interested in what groups are talking about. I'm done with the individuals. So I see a group, and there's two older women, probably in their 60s, and then there's a man who's in his 40s. Look, I don't know if you're in your 40s, if you're out there, but if you're younger, I'm very, very sorry. If you're older, it's a compliment. So the women were talking about their homes, family, helping, and then the man says, 'Well, you know, I'd like to say something like helping. I'd like to say helping an old person makes my day worth it, but look, it's just not true. It's more, like. No, no, it's not.' And then he just walks away. And then one of the women that I'm speaking to says, 'Well, I come from a town of 22 people, and I just had my 70th birthday, and the whole town came, but that's not unusual. We do do that in our town. We all have a list of everyone's birthdays, and then whoever's birthday that is, the whole town just goes around to their place and has a big piece of cake and an afternoon tea to celebrate.'

Guess who walked out of the front door of the convention centre with her lunch, and she saw Jimmy chatting to some ladies. So she looked for a spot somewhere else. She didn't want to interrupt them. And it was quite busy at the front, but she saw a place between two young women, looked directly at one of them, and they moved some bags. So Tessa sat down, and Tessa and the woman, they started talking, just generally about the weather, etc. It was a nice day, but then the question did come up. So Tessa asked her, and she said, 'Oh. I thought you'd need a pen and paper. No? I don't know.' And then there was a long silence. 'You mean, like in a work context? Yeah, I don't know. What do other people usually say?' And Tessa tried to get to the point of thinking about her own days, not of other people's answers. 'Well, I guess if I thought about it in a work context,' and she went on, but this wasn't what Tessa wanted to know. 'Yeah. I, I never think about that question. I haven't ever thought about it. I think I need to think about that more, really.'

As I'm walking back through the foyer from afternoon tea on Tuesday, a woman is sitting over at the couch, and she makes eye contact with me, and she just says, 'Thank you. Thank you for asking me the question.'

So we've had a bit of a thought, the Bureau here at the convention centre, that there are similarities between here and an airport. The times, and there's people from all over the country, and there's movement in and out of hotels all the time, and wheelie bags going through, and we started to think about this. We started to think about the way in which we all inhabit this place. This space that we're in right now, and it's so different to how we are when we're in our own homes, you know. Our own towns or cities, and how this, it feels like a bit of a between or a temporary place.

So the Bureau had left some notes for people on the message board, and itself, it's a temporary way to contact people, but we got two responses. We got one from Todd of ISMS. 'Of course, the family makes it worth it, but it is the next project that gets me out of bed in the morning.' And then we spoke to Tanya, who is actually on her way to the airport to go home. 'Ah, nothing really special, I suppose. I just go for a walk in the morning. Yeah. I think that's it.'

Dr Mark and Dr Clark. Dr Mark: 'Do you want the philosophical answer or the professional answer?' 'I think we just want the answer that feels most honest to you.' Dr Mark: 'When I grow.' Dr Clark: 'When I see smiles on young people's faces.' Dr Mark: 'Yeah. I change my answer now. I change it to what he said. That was good. That was very good.' And Dr Clark: 'There's so many problems in our communities that seeing young people smiling, knowing that they're having a good time—it's important.'

To finish with this afternoon. A letter to a woman:

'Dear woman whose name I don't know. I want to thank you for the conversation we had the other day over morning tea. You were very articulate about your thoughts about what worth is to you. That you wouldn't enjoy life nearly so much if you weren't flexible and that, no, flexibility is definitely something you've learned. You haven't always been like that. But we have to be aware of what factors contribute to us feeling good and what factors contribute to you feeling not so good. That being supremely happy and joyous is not what makes life worthwhile for you. It has to have meaning as well. You talked about how you're not sure if your faith has contributed to your sense of worth, if at all, but that your career definitely has. We're here for a short time, not necessarily a good time, you had said. It's very clear, you went on, that the more you put in, the more you get out, and we see that all the time from inspirational people who do amazing things. And you left me by saying that you don't aspire to be, you know, a significant person, but you want to live a good, full life, which I really admire. Because sometimes, well, I think I do aspire to be significant and like trying to be interesting. It just doesn't work. I left thinking you were so clear, but you were almost too clear, almost too intellectual that the conversation wouldn't stand out for me amongst all the conversations I've had, and yet your words have rolled around in my head ever since, and I think that they're going to for a while. So thank you.

Yours, Emma from the Australian Bureau of Worthiness.'