

English the Smart Way

Podcast Session 3:

English Success Story: Interview with Massimo from Italy

Show Notes: <http://englishthesmartway.com/session3>

Introduction

Ivan: Hey, what's up my friends, this is Ivan Ottinger from EnglishTheSmartWay.com.

Welcome to the English the Smart Way Podcast – session number 3.

Thank you so much for joining me today in another episode of English the Smart Way Podcast. I appreciate you being here and I am really excited because today's session is very special.

I had a privilege to interview my very good friend Massimo. He is a neurosurgeon from Italy. I met him months ago when he discovered English the Smart Way website and invited me to join the very special online English conversation group he is a member of.

The reason I asked Massimo to join us for this podcast is that he is a great English speaker and I am sure we all can learn from his English learning tips and experience.

So here is Massimo. Enjoy!

Interview

Ivan: Hello everybody, I am so happy and excited to welcome Massimo to our podcast. [So] hi Massimo and welcome to the show! :)

Massimo: Hi Ivan, thank you very much. I am really honoured and proud to be here with you.

Ivan: Yeah, I am glad you joined the interview and I believe that your ideas and your suggestions can help so many listeners because you are really a good fluent English speaker and I think it is a really good example for so many people. Maybe we can start with the introduction. So if you could tell us something about you, your background and your profession, career, your interests... so the listeners can know you better. :)

Massimo: Yeah, well, thank you for your comments and your compliments Ivan but. I'm just a person that is trying to get better in the second language.

I come from Italy and I really love English and in the last few years I tried to get better and better in my learning and I really found a lot of things.

As you said my name is Massimo, I'm 44 and I live in Udine, Italy - really small city in the north-east of the country. I work as a neurosurgeon in a hospital. And I moved here from Bologna - a typical, we can say, a middle age nice city due south from here.

Anyway, I'm married and I have a 14 years old boy, quite clever boy, let me say! I really love him!

I was born in Bologna as I said; there I got my childhood, my adolescence and afterwards my medium and high school. Also I got there my 6 years bachelor's degree... and... this is interesting because while I was going through university, I realised that I would be interested in central nervous system and, eventually, surgery of that part of human body.

So... therefore, I got my master's degree in Ferrara very near to the city I lived. And I took my master's degree in neurosurgery, accomplishing, after a while a quite scientific background.

I have to say today nowadays neurology came to be a really, really large science. [And] I'm really keen on movement disorders. It's a kind of... particular field of neurosurgery... it's not like oncology... [briefly], in a brief words I could say that I usually work with people like parkinsonian, Parkinson's disease I mean... and I usually put electrodes inside the brain of those patients.

What about my interests? I've always practiced many sports. When I was younger... I remember... I was laughing when I was thinking about it because I also did caving and repelling into the caves. Yes, my father brought me into the caves... it was really amazing.

And I like fitness, generally speaking... and I like attending my little own gym that I personally built where I live. In my cellar I built a little gym and I'm really keen on it.

Ivan: Oh, that's nice! You've got your personal gym at your home, right?

Massimo: Yeah, practicing weight lifting.

Actually my very deep passion is sailing. I love sailing boat... let me say it's my dream for the future.

We usually rent sailing boats. I usually... I like to steer my family on holiday usually in Croatia.

And finally English. English is one of my favourite hobbies. I have to admit this is true since 2013, since two years ago. I started 2 years ago to listen to English, to practice my English learning every single day. And every day I try to learn and grow. And English I discovered I found out that English is an amazing tool to get better in it.

Ivan: Yeah, thank you very much for so rich introduction! [so] you mentioned English is your hobby. It's one of your interests so what was your top motivation, you know, to improve English and [to] become a fluent English speaker? What was your motivation?

Massimo: Yeah. This is the most critical point I think. Let me tell you my story.

Now, as I said, having a strong scientific background, it goes without saying that I needed English a lot. Being updated and reading articles, requires English. Neurosurgery requires English.

But, unfortunately I studied English from medium school, in a very traditional boring way - a lot of unuseful things like grammar, and also since the beginning I remember a kind of unrealistic dialogs between... you know... actors that basically spoke a "non-language" [a "non-language"], not the

one that I would have met in real life... you know... I remember a lot of dialogs that really... it was so unuseful for me... but... everybody screws up!

Therefore... I think... this is something that happens in many countries all over the world.

Ivan: Yeah, I agree!

After a while, congresses came, for... in my work, I had to go here and there, initially in Italy, I had to speak in front of an audience in Italy, not a problem of course. But, all of a sudden I had to get some public talks in front of an international [let's say] an international bunch of colleagues, from all around Europe, US and the world. Guess what? Tragedy! (Laughing) Ivan, I remember some very... I was sweating... it was really a tragedy for me!

And [I began], I remember a brain... my brain experience... because... I began to struggle to pick up from my own English knowledge in my mind. The ability to present my data and my surgical experience. So, it was weird actually because technical English was not difficult for me. I was able, I'm able and I was able at that time, I'm speaking about some... let me say a lot of years ago... I was able to read and understand whole articles and also understand foreign colleagues' presentations. But, the really troublesome, the weird thing was, the relationship with colleagues.

I remember one day, attending a congress, I did a first step ahead, I was in the audience, I was sitting in the audience and I started to think in myself: "*Why don't ask something from the audience?*" I was thinking... I will be brief, I will do my slow question, the speaker will answer me, and that's it... this would be something I was scared, because this would be an improvised English practice"... you know... so... that I did. I kept my word and I did.

It went fairly well. I remember this because somehow this unblocked me, a little step ahead.

But, as I said before [scientific] meeting was not only official presentation on the podium. This short breath-holding question from the audience, and sweating (as I said before) hoping that – you know - English native speaker on the podium, over there, would understand me "immediately" replying with the answer.

So the troublesome and also I have to say... the embarrassing thing was that I was [I was] wandering in the congress venue... try to imagine myself... I was strolling around like a ghost. [Right?] I wasn't able to interact with anyone, colleagues, salesmen, and friends from all around the world that I already saw. I just said "*Hello, how are you?*"... that's it... few words... I was craving to speak but I knew that I couldn't arrange more than a few phrases.

It was so frustrating for me... [I got to say] I got pissed off by that situation. I had to do something... [I had to] I said to myself, "*I studied English for so many years... Why?*" What really impressed me at that time. I remember... I have a clear view of this exact experience: first, the pronunciation, they were fast, they cut the words, plenty of idioms, friendly, easy way altogether they were spoken... and also grammar, there was nothing about grammar! Oh my God, where were all those rules and phrases that I studied?

And second, the language. Believe me Ivan, I was listening to a language that I had never heard in my life! My God...it was a trauma for me, something like a trauma.

And I was so angry that I almost beat my fist on the table when I thought about it! Eventually, I decided.

English offers a lot of opportunities in life. I was running my career, there was a very critical issue, and I realise this... knowledge of a real, handling and useful level of English. It was imperative for me. And then I started. I wanted it with all of my energy, from the deep of my heart in a few words, I wanted to master my English.

And then I scoured Internet and luckily I met a site: LearnRealEnglish.com that brought me up to a second one EffortlessEnglish.com.

Those really changed my life. I needed... how can I say... I needed fluency, real English practice, a new way to learn, and also... a daily program, in order to practice and practice over and over again!

And so I began to feel a huge deep enthusiasm, a desire of learning and improving. And the directors, those English teachers, that you already well know, they started to teach me some principles that I would never took into account. They strongly began to speak about words like motivation, enthusiasm... and also what...repetition, consistency, energy, fulfilling... just to mention a bunch of them. I don't know how it happened, they were able to boost me in a brand new "era" of mind, a new mind-set [was]... I was realising that a new mind-set was building in thoughts and beliefs.

This, basically, was my first motivation... but... you know what? [you know what?].... and this is the beautiful thing... After a while I found out the beauty and enrichment of internet. That massive sources of information, 99 % of them in English! And when I realised this, I got more and more motivated to learn from internet... and... it was an upward positive spiral... because I was learning English and I was growing and as I was growing I was learning English more and more. I left myself... I got into an upward positive "spiral" that brought me to keep in touch with English basically every single day of my life. And this is true in the last two and a half, let me think... from middle of the 2013... two and a half years.

And also... to conclude... I find this is linked to another motivation that arose in me (myself)... I got stuck in my Italian culture. A couple of years ago I perceived the need to enlarge my knowledge and to go deeper in English culture.

I perceived that "keystone"...this is [my] one of my favourite words The "keystone habit" would have been to go deep in the foreign culture, not only "language", but "culture"... what I'm referring is native habits and behaviours... And you know what? What happened next? I got hooked from it, like an addiction.

And finally, I wanna say something that right now is coming into my mind that is intuition... And my intuition said something to me. I felt this was like the right way. This was the right way. I consider intuition a very important thing.

One time I read a paper from... and I'm going to read this because this is really really interesting, I read a paper from *Sir Richard Branson*, well known all over the world, he said:

"I research new ideas very thoroughly, asking a lot of people about their experiences and their thoughts. But on many occasions I have followed my intuition; you can't make decisions based

on numbers and reports alone. It's important to have the courage to follow through on a project if you truly believe it's worth pursuing. We all have an intuitive sense of what's best – follow it! This approach has never let me down"

Also, I read something else from *Steve Jobs* that he wrote in a paper that I usually keep in touch. He wrote:

"...have the courage to follow your heart and intuition, everything else is secondary"

Now, I believed... I was opening my own new path! I'm so excited! And guess what? ... still I am! I am here! :)

Ivan: Thank you very much! So you mentioned your motivation and ideas. And how do you learn English, I mean, on a daily basis or what tools do you use? You mentioned one website, but maybe if you can tell us more about this website and also other websites and other sources you use.

Massimo: Yeah, yeah. This was a tough question that was coming up when I began my path, when I was in the beginning of the path... because I didn't want to repeat the same mistakes that I did in the past, when I became frustrated after so many years of wrong method. I knew that I needed something new.

Obviously I needed to change drastically the method. This was the first issue. And I laugh when I say this but I really believe that if you find the right technique, maybe [it] is 50% of your work, though!

First and foremost I follow as more as I can the *A.J. Hoge's rules* ([The 7 rules from Effortlessenglish.com](#)) and teachings from *Christin Dods* and *Joe Weiss*, from [LearnRealEnglish.com](#).

I can say this is the core fundamental material of my learning. Among those rules, like no grammar, never-ending listening... every single day, true and genuine English material as much as you can, ministories, one comes to my mind...and I'm gonna say that...but, I really would like to invite all friends, all over the world, that I really would like to keep in touch that are a learner like me to trust *A.J.* and the group from San Francisco because they are so amazing for me... they are so clever...

Anyway I was saying that one idea comes to my mind: "never, never learn single words". Single words don't [doesn't] work. I really think... it's a wasting of your time... you'll forget it, soon after you read or listen you'll forget... you'll forget it...

Sentences, the point is... sentences have a meaning, you'll remember the meaning and the phrase connected to the meaning and you...I mean... you'll remember the meaning and you'll remember the phrase, this is automatic...this is a spontaneous mechanism of the brain... simple! It's not simple...I'm joking of course... It's not easy also for me. :) First, for me.

Let's speak about meditation... it's a simple example to follow through what I said regarding so called "real material". I'm very keen on meditation. I scoured internet and found a bunch of sites that spread all over the world meditation material. I listen, learn and all of a sudden I realise that it's true...I follow something I really like and effortlessly, almost automatically I suck the language... This is my experience in meditation.

Eventually, what I found is that learning a second language trying to master it, is not only learning, but is living a fully awareness. I realise that the way to master a foreign language is to get straight inside the culture. Therefore I followed through with [TED talks](#) and many real English materials that we can find in internet... also for free.

What else? I like [WordReference](#), as a vocabulary, media online like BBC or CNN, not often but sometimes... by the way... podcasts. What I really prefer generally are things I can read while I can listen to it... very useful!

The rest... let me say this Ivan... because I think the rest is all about persistence and will power. That's it.

Anyway, when you follow carefully [A.J.'s principles and rules](#), it's just a matter of choice. A matter of choice! The fact is... we usually live in a kind of model, a reality that we built up until we are young and also I think we can say that we are indoctrinated by society we live in.

And it's so difficult to overcome our culture, in order to learn a different culture... because it's a matter of culture and resistance to change ourselves... This is the toughest thing, how to figure out the way of living of native, what they take for granted, (and) their habits. When you get this, you are in the right way to master the language.

Afterwards I'll talk more about if you want Ivan... about my "Skype community". There's also [Speaky](#) for chatting all around the world. Youtube is another incredible sources... well known sources of material, I like [Dear Abby Letters](#), I laugh so many time... [Dear Abby Letters](#) in US very funny stories from people, usual normal people, very funny and powerful.

Also I recommend [Deep English](#) as well, cool site.

Finally... many of them give the chance to speak with someone. Somewhere you have to pay, but very very often materials are for free, really!

I also follow through very often in [LearnRealEnglish.com](#) and [EffortlessEnglish.com](#). That's it. I don't wanna be boring.

I just want to end up my list, telling that I left... I left myself completely hooked from English, also... this is funny but this is really, really useful: reading English version of the manual, the manual of your clock, household electrical appliances, assembling manual of furniture, television, your device in your house and so on!

Friends, there are so many sources in internet. Searching will bring you up to success!!! Yes!!! :)

Ivan: Thank you Massimo! :) Thank you very much for all this resources.

And several weeks ago we had an interesting conversation on Skype and you mentioned an idea of how our identity can affect our English learning process. Could you please tell us something more about this?

Massimo: Yeah, yeah, I remember when I said this... a friend of mine told me something about his learning pathway in French speaking. He comes from US and... I remember that he learned a lot with this system. The question is: what is the most difficult thing to do when you learn a new language? One would say... memorising.... this is natural, I have to learn the words that I need to

communicate... and the more I remember the more I have words to speak to keep in touch with someone... wrong! This is wrong, this is not true! Also this is what I was thinking until 2 years ago. Well, I'm gonna explain the... I don't want to explain the system but basically I think this...

The beauty of the world is the "differences". OK? Very luckily, we have not the same culture in the globe. Our language is the direct expression of what we believe and think, namely our culture [our culture]. Therefore, if I want to learn deeply, I'm saying deeply, this or that language, I have to be aware of behaviour and mindset of people who represent that culture. Technically speaking, it's nonsense not to use real English material.

One of the main rules is to follow original, true stuff, between real native or, why not, between really clever and "well culturalized" not native speaker... there are a lot of them all over the world. Ideally, in order to get deeper in the new language and get sucked into it for the rest of your life, we have to "transform" ourselves.

At that time, when we speak new language, actually we are not ourselves anymore!!! At that time we are into someone else... right? There are teachers that invite to change also the name. For instance, I wouldn't be "Massimo" but "Max"... Riccardo would change into "Richard"... and pay attention, we are English, not Italian in that situation. We have to change our brain sets.

Expressions, idioms, sayings come from a way of thinking, a mindset, not the one that you built while you were growing up but something different someone different!

There are some French teaching systems that invite to shift in that way as I said before. This kind of thinking brings to establish a radical learning rout.

What is the point? A radical learning rout. I mean you prepare an open free pathway in your brain, right, a new clean way. You have a brand new space... a new clean way where new culture in your brain... new culture foreign information will be write. It's a very powerful method. A brand new sheet to draw upon... you can draw in a white sheet, right? It's a new one, it's not the older one... I believe that English is. English is not Italian or your language translated.

In fact I really believe that the main or at least one of the main ways to strongly head to a deep knowledge of a second language like English in this case for me is learning the culture. What I mean is the "common sense".

I have a video from YouTube, if you want I will send you the link, we could put in the interview, as you want Ivan. And this is a really interesting one. He describes this in a very interesting way:

<https://youtu.be/h0DhMjnzupl>

To conclude up to the beginning, to close the circle, the more challenging thing to do in learning of a new language, in my opinion, is what native speakers take for granted - their tastes, their opinions, way of thinking, habits and also what they have in their mind, in their brain, their beliefs I mean.

Ivan: It's like living in another language, being in that language you're learning, yeah?

Massimo: Yes, yes, it's not learning but it's living. English is just the tool to feel like them, to hear, to speak, to think like them, this is the only way to master a new language.

I really had so... many progresses in just 1 year that I've never had in the whole life.

Ivan: That's really interesting approach. Yeah, I can completely relate, it was similar to me. I spent so many years trying to speak English and I couldn't and then after several months I started to speak because I changed methods, you know. I can completely relate to what you are saying.

Masimo: Yeah, yeah.

Ivan: And what would be the number one tip you would give to English learners around the world? You know, to our listeners.

Massimo: Yeah, yeah. Based on my own personal experience. I would say, choose real, original material and be persistent with that.

Doing that, many valuable attributes of your learning process will grow up spontaneously and automatically. Moreover you will be hooked by... like me... by your progresses along with your discoveries.

But, Ivan, if I could say a brief list, if you allow me to, let's say... mark down a few tips... I would say:

First, real talks first off. I put in the list in the first place. Real material first off as I already said. And afterwards:

Scour the internet in order to find your personal sources of learning. That means "prioritising" and "customization". You have to customize your pathway.

Again. Another issue is listening, over and over again.

Then; follow and follow through the [7 rules by A.J. Hoge](#)... I think they're so important.

And another element is persistency. That means every single day, at least [almost] ten, five minutes just to keep you ears trained to the English sound.

You know - don't lose the pace, the friendship with the language.

I realised that, if you're not native, like me and you don't keep alive English, you will lose it fast, really really fast!

I would like to say another two points I was thinking about.

The first is - find your community, and stay there, be faithful to them, don't... [Never]... don't be shy. Smile with them. Also be grateful with them for what they share and what they are. They are your friends and they share your pathway, this is so important.

Finally, quite important as well, do not care about mistakes!

I'm gonna get crazy thinking about so many people in my life, they highlighted my mistakes and they brought me to a terrible level of English... Right. Do not care about mistakes friends... Ivan... and get rid of emotional negative state of mind. This is the first thing that I picked up from my experience. Get rid of emotional, you know... negative state of mind that comes from them. Because mistakes are something... it's really negative. Mistakes... wow I had a mistakes... wow I

had two, three, four, five mistakes... I'm terrible... I wouldn't be able, I'll never get the learning, I wouldn't be able to learn English. This is not true!

That's it. What else? I don't think there something else...

I just wanted to end up (my) presentation, my talk, saying something about the mood because we think that learning is a matter of growing and the more we learn the more we grow and the more we grow the more we learn and the more we learn the more we make the other people learn.

I really want to wish to everyone a happy and amazing life. To all the community. Thank you very much!

Ivan: Thank you very much Massimo for these nice words and thank you very much for this conversation and I'm really happy that you are with us here today and I believe that listeners will benefit from your tips and your shared experience.

Massimo: Thank you very much, I have to thank you Ivan... my compliments for your site, your blog, keep doing, keep working. I really like you and your work and I assure you that I [swore that, sorry] swear that I really will continue to follow you in internet.

Ivan: Thank you very much Massimo! :)

Massimo: Thank you Ivan!

Outro

Ivan: Alright, I hope you enjoyed the interview with Massimo. And as you could hear he is a great English speaker.

Massimo, I know you listen to this episode, so thank you so much for your time, and also the knowledge and the wisdom and all the inspiration as well.

And for all of you, thank you so much for listening and I love that you are here and listening to this episode. And I look forward to serving you in the next one.

So have a great week, enjoy your life and enjoy English!

Bye-bye! :)

Links and Resources Mentioned in This Episode:

- [LearnRealEnglish.com](https://www.learnrealenglish.com)
- [7 Rules for Excellent English Speaking](#)
- [TED.com](https://www.ted.com)
- [Speaky](#)
- [Deep English](#)
- [Dear Abby letters](#)