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## 12 Tips for Making Small Talk

A study at the Stanford University School of Business tracked a group of MBAs 10 years after they graduated. The result? Grade point averages had no bearing on their success -- but their ability to converse with others did.

Being able to connect with others through small talk can lead to big things, according to Debra Fine, author of 'The Fine Art of Small Talk.' A former engineer, Fine recalls being so uncomfortable at networking events that she would hide in the restroom. Now a professional speaker, Fine says the ability to connect with people through small talk is an acquired skill.

Fine and her fellow authorities on schmoozing offer the following tips for starting -- and ending - - conversations:

1. As you prepare for a function, come up with three things to talk about as well as four generic questions that will get others talking. If you've met the host before, try to remember things about her, such as her passion for a sport or a charity you're both involved in.
2. Be the first to say "hello." If you're not sure the other person will remember you, offer your name to ease the pressure. For example, "Charles Bartlett? Lynn Schmidt... good to see you again." Smile first and always shake hands when you meet someone.
3. Take your time during introductions. Make an extra effort to remember names and use them frequently.
4. Get the other person talking by leading with a common ground statement regarding the event or location and then asking a related open-ended question. For example, "Attendance looks higher than last year, how long have you been coming to these conventions?" You can also ask them about their trip in or how they know the host.
5. Stay focused on your conversational partner by actively listening and giving feedback. Maintain eye contact. Never glance around the room while they are talking to you.
6. Listen more than you talk.

7. Have something interesting to contribute. Keeping abreast of current events and culture will provide you with great conversation builders, leading with "What do you think of...?" "Have you heard...?" "What is your take on...?" Stay away from negative or controversial topics, and refrain from long-winded stories or giving a lot of detail in casual conversation.
8. If there are people you especially want to meet, one of the best ways to approach them is to be introduced by someone they respect. Ask a mutual friend to do the honors.
9. If someone hands you a business card, accept it as a gift. Hold it in both hands and take a moment to read what is written on it. When you're done, put it away in a shirt pocket, purse or wallet to show it is valued.
10. Watch your body language. People who look ill at ease make others uncomfortable. Act confident and comfortable, even when you're not.
11. Before entering into a conversation that's already in progress, observe and listen. You don't want to squash the dynamics with an unsuited or ill-timed remark.
12. Have a few exit lines ready, so that you can both gracefully move on. For example, "I need to check in with a client over there," "I skipped lunch today, so I need to visit the buffet," or you can offer to refresh their drink.

When should you exit a conversation? According to Susan RoAne, author and speaker known as the "Mingling Maven," your objective in all encounters should be to make a good impression and leave people wanting more. To do that, she advises: "Be bright. Be brief. Be gone."

Source:

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