



Make contacts and develop business

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STARTING CONVERSATIONS WITH NEW CONTACTS

Knowing how to engage strangers in good conversation is a key networking skill to develop. Here's some tools and techniques you can use to become more adept at meeting and interacting with people at networking events.

- Successfully engaging people in conversation starts in the first second – that instant when you establish eye contact. Before you say a word, before you break your silence, give people your sincere smile. What will happen? 9 out of 10 people will return your smile. This sets the atmosphere, the stage for a warm and friendly encounter.

Tip: **First** catch the other person's eye. **Then** hit 'em with your smile. Always in that order. If people catch you smiling at them, they could wonder what you're up to.

- Now for an opener. **"Hi."** (or its close cousins, **"Hello"**, **"G'day"** and **"How you doin'?"**) **said with enthusiasm** is generally the way to go.

After you have successfully executed this slick come-on, and assuming the other party responds more or less in kind, extend your hand and say **"I'm** (say your name)"

If you want to be a bit more animated, try these for openers.....

"Hello. I don't think we've met before. I'm (say your name.)"

"Hi. I've seen you at these meetings before and I've been meaning to introduce myself. I'm (say your name.)"

"G'day. You've got a friendly face. I'm (say your name.)"

"Hello. We haven't been introduced. I'm (say your name.)"

"Hello. You look like someone I should know. I'm (say your name.)"

"G'day. This is my first meeting I'm (say your name.)"

"Hi. You've got the longest legs I've ever seen I'm (say your name.)"

Risky – but could pay off in spades.

So far, so good, but what do you say next? Read on.....

- Your major goal in the beginning is just to show interest or involve the other party, so the best way to do that is usually by asking a question. Of course, you could also voice an opinion (**"I think this is a great location for a cocktail party"**) or state a fact (**"There's a lot of people here tonight."**) but you're not inviting the person to speak – and if they don't, the conversation ball is still in your court.

Continued.....

Ask a question to get the other person talking about him or herself. This gives you a chance to find common ground and “connect” with the person which in turn increases your chance to develop a business relationship. You have plenty of leeway in your questions, but avoid being too trite. (***“Hot enough for you?”***), personal (***“Don’t you ever smile?”***) or negative (***“What do you think tastes worse: these Norwegian meatballs or this wine we’re drinking?”***)

Initially, people are most comfortable talking about the circumstances that brought them together or the reality they are sharing with one another. Here then are some sure-fire questions you can ask to get people talking at a networking event.

“How do you know the host/guest of honour/birthday boy/my wife?”

“What’s your interest in being here tonight?” “What brings you to this meeting?”

“I haven’t been here before. How do things work?”

“What’s your involvement with this group?”

“What do you think of the speaker’s comments on (whatever)?”

“What do you make of the conference so far?”

“How are you enjoying the party?”

“Where did you come from to be here tonight?”

“Are you a member of this organization?”

“Are you here for any particular reason?”

“How often do you attend these meetings?”

“Have you heard the speaker before?” “What’s he/she like?”

“That’s an interesting lapel pin. What organization does it represent?”

“I like yourwhere did you get it?”

“That’s a beautiful necklace you’re wearing. I bet there’s a story behind it?”
(This also works with anything else he/she is wearing.)

“What’s that perfume you’re wearing? It’s very pleasing.”

- When you ask questions, listen to the answers. They are stepping-stones to more questions which are essential to getting people to talk about themselves and, in the process, convincing themselves that you’re a terrific person. As soon as he/she mentions a business or personal issue grab it and run with it. Ask a follow-up question to invite the person to elaborate or continue. For example. ***“Will you give me an example?” “Why/How is that important to you?” “Please tell me more. I’m interested.” “Can you explain that to me?” “How do you feel about that?” “You really think so. Go on.” “What did you do when that happened?”***

Tip: It helps to call a person by name and match their delivery, style, voice, emotion and body language as you talk.

- With the “ice” broken and having exchanged some pleasantries, find out what the person does for a living. **This is a key networking question.** Fail to ask it and you miss the opportunity to gain vital information. Depending on what the person does for a living or what company they represent; their products/services and their clients/suppliers could represent beneficial value to you and others in your network.

“**So** (say the person’s name) **what do you do for a living?**” Or, looking at his/her name tag, “**Tell me about** (say the name of their company).”

Not only is question key, so is your reaction to the answer. Regardless of his or her line of work, nod approvingly and say something that suggests you are mightily impressed. Then ask some follow-up questions like the following.

“What’s your field of expertise?”

“What sparked your interest in law/accounting/public relations (or whatever)?”

“How did you develop the idea for your business?”

“Going back, what would you say really launched your business?”

“What did you have to do to enter your field?”

“What new projects have you been working on lately?”

Tip: Successful networking is about sincerity. If you don’t care about the answer, don’t ask the question.

“So you’ve been in business for 20 years. What’s your secret to success?”

“Have you always been in that profession/industry?”

“What distinguishes your company from your competitors?”

“What’s the most significant change you’ve seen take place in your profession/industry in recent years?”

“What do you see as the coming trends in the widget business/your industry?”

“What do you enjoy most about your work?”

“What’s your philosophy/opinion on (whatever)?”

“How do you feel about (whatever)?”

“What’s been your proudest moment/greatest success in business?”

Effective networking skills do **not** come naturally, but they’re easily learned. To find out about my networking and working the room courses, call me, Ron Gibson, on **0413 420 538** or visit my website at www.gonetworking.com.au