

Small Talk: 3 Tips to Great Conversations at Business Events

By Lynda Goldman

Does the idea of making small talk with strangers at a business event fill you with dread? It isn't easy making small talk with strangers. If you've ever ended up with a frozen smile on your face while you frantically search for a topic to discuss, here are some tips to make it easier.

1. Prepare conversation topics. Chances are, before heading out to a business or social event, you think about what you will wear, how you will get to the event, and even where you will park. How often do you plan what you will say once you get there?

Before the event, plan three or four conversation topics. Plan at least one topic from your industry, and one general interest topic that you can discuss.

At a business event, know what's happening in your industry. Read professional journals and newsletters in your field to keep up to date.

Be up on current events. Read the local and national newspapers. Skim the headlines and top stories for topics of interest. Watch the local and national news so you won't be in the dark about recent developments.

2. Opening lines. Plan what you will say first. Don't worry, you don't need a brilliant opener. In fact, it can stop the conversation because when you say something weird or unexpected, people may be momentarily taken aback if they aren't sure how to respond.

Stick to simple topics like the weather or why you are at the event. That's why we talk about the weather – it's something everyone can talk about.

A compliment is always a great opener. Comment on the person's unusual tie or necklace, or on the wonderful hors d'oeuvres. Just make sure your compliment is sincere, and not too personal.

3. Keep the connection: Begin with your shared experience, such as the event you are attending. Ask about the person's relationship to the event or group. Ask their opinion on the speaker, or how they know the host. Or talk about the venue or city you are visiting. Any of these questions give you an instant connection because you've had the same experience.

Remember that at business events, people want to meet new people. Be friendly, use your opening line, and talk about the event. You're sure to get the conversation moving forward.

You are invited to use these tips at your next business networking event.

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