

CHAPTER 1: SMALL TALK—NOT DEEP, BUT IMPORTANT

Listening (5 min.), Part I, page 6:

How to Be a Good Conversationalist

Have you ever wished you were better at making conversation? A great conversationalist is someone who connects with people and makes them feel important. When they talk to you, they make you feel like you're the only person in the room.

Becoming a good conversationalist requires knowing three things: first, how to start a conversation; second, how to keep it going; and third, how to end it.

Starting a conversation usually means coming up with an opening line or ice breaker. The best kind of ice breaker is one that's positive. The last thing people want to hear from a stranger is how noisy the party is, how awful the food is, or how ugly the people are dressed.

A compliment is always a good ice breaker and will usually be appreciated. Any news event is a good ice breaker. I encourage all of my clients to read the newspaper because it's so important to know what's going on in the world. The fact is, any opening line will do, as long as it's not negative, and as long as it's not a line. The best way to entice a person to have a conversation with you is by being sincere and respectful, and letting them know that you are interested in talking to them.

Part II, page 6:

Once you've got a conversation going, the best way to keep it going is by asking the other person questions that don't require just a *yes* or no answer or questions which show genuine interest on your part. For example, if someone says, "I'm from Miami," you may respond with, "Oh, I've been to Miami!" and continue with, "How long have you lived there?" Then, "I was born there, and I've lived there all my life." You might say, "I've never met anyone who is a Florida native. Is your family from Miami as well?"

You keep asking questions based on the last thing a person says. This is called the "elaboration

technique." Choose questions that will get the other person to elaborate on what they're saying. Ask questions similar to those a reporter might ask to draw a person out: who, what, when, where, and why questions.

Once you hit on something you find interesting, keep asking questions in order to get the person to elaborate about the topic as much as possible. A good conversationalist elaborates on the experiences they've had. Instead of saying the party was fun, tell why it was fun. Describe why you had a good time—who was there, what happened, where it was, and how people arranged the party. Go into detail. Description is the best form of communication because it keeps people's interest up and stimulates them. Use words to create images and paint pictures so that the other person can get a visual as well as an auditory image of what you're describing to them. If you use the description effectively, you can make the person feel as though they were actually there.

In order to keep a conversation going, there are seven tips that can help you be an excellent communicator:

1. Be aware of your own body and facial language. Make good facial contact when you speak, and be physically expressive without being excessive.
2. Don't gossip. You run the risk of offending the person you're talking to. It also makes you look small.
3. Cultivate a wide range of topics.
4. Have a sense of humor. Everyone enjoys a humorous story or joke. Sexual and ethnic humor, however, are not worth the effects that the jokes may have on your total image. People may be offended, which may in turn reflect poor judgment on your part and may encourage them to think less of you.
5. Don't interrupt. People hate being interrupted. Fight the impulse to interrupt and give the person you're talking to the time they need to complete what they're saying to you.
6. Be enthusiastic and upbeat. Don't be afraid to show enthusiasm. It allows the other person to feel that you're interested in what they're saying to you.

7. Be flexible in your point of view. Try to be as open as possible, and try to see things from the other person's point of view.

Another way to signal is to use transition words like *well*, or *at any rate*. You may want to recap all that was said. Whatever you do, don't lie to the other person. If you're not interested in talking to them again, don't mention the possibility of a future meeting just to be polite. That's hypocritical. Instead, you may want to say, "Nice meeting you." And then, leave.

Part III, page 6:

If you started a conversation with another person, and you're having difficulty ending it, there are several signals you can send to the other person that will bring the conversation to its close without hurting anyone's feelings. Breaking eye contact is a discreet signal that the conversation is about to end.

Finally, be sure to give the other person a good, firm handshake. The final impression you make can be just as important as the initial one you made.