

Shmoozing

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More than a few introverts struggle with the obligatory upcoming holiday shmoozing. It's called many names like networking, connecting, cocktailing or plain using social skills. Here is a formula that has helped a number of my clients and friends with this seasonal challenge:

Step One: Ritual.

The first time you meet someone say "Hi. How are you?" for a playful introduction. "Hello. How do you do you?" can be used for formal situations. It is always appropriate to add "I'm so glad to meet you?" Exchange names with "My name is Patricia and your name is?" Use that name two or three times to put it in your memory bank – at least for the duration of your initial conversation. Some people balk at the ritual "game." I hear people say "I don't like to be bothered with small talk." Yet ritualistic talk provides a safe space to check out mutual interest. Keep asking and answering questions as evenly as possible. If you receive brisk answers with little reciprocation of interest move on by saying, "It was great chatting with you. I'm going to meet some of our host's other interesting guests." Or "Excuse me. I see a friend I want to say 'hello'." At any time in the conversation if the sharing is not feeling balanced or connected politely move on.

Step Two: Geography

Places of residence, work, vacation and birth can be safely discussed as long as you the two of you like. It's a non-personal, low risk topic. I've talked geography for up to an hour when I needed to fill in time at a corporate event. "How did you meet our host?" can be included in this category. "What part of the city do you live?" "What do you like about your community?" "Where is your favourite holiday spot?" "Why?" By talking about geography we stay on safe topic while getting a better feel for the individual.

Step Three: Activities

If we decide that we are interested in spending future time with our companion we can introduce the area of interests and hobbies. Bouncing back and forth a conversation about favourite pastimes can be fun and lively. People's eyes often shine when they talk about their passions. "I love going to movies with great character development that provides a good laugh and cry. Beaches with Bette Midler is one of my oldie favourites." We share activity interests until we agree on one we both would like to do together. Now we have a happening that extends beyond this obligatory holiday event. It's our choice to develop the relationship or not.

Step Four: Feeling Risk Analysis

But before we set a time and place to share a mutual activity we will share a tender feeling to test the emotional safety of our future companion. "Sometimes at the movies if there is a scary part, and I mean just a little spooky, I feel so nervous I pull my sweater over my head." Now if our conversational partner says, "That's dumb," there's no way we are going to the movies with this dude. If the response is "I've thought of doing the same thing myself" we're ready to leave the dutiful party and head for the closest movie theatre.

Enjoy your seasonal shmoozing and remember it's OK to talk about next to nothing.
Most others are and now you can do it with grace and giggle.

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