



Making **Small Talk** Naturally

TAKING THE STRESS OUT OF SOCIAL SITUATIONS



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Getting Into Small Talk

Many books on skills development begin by listing all the benefits you'll gain by mastering that particular skill. I'll bet, however, that you already have a pretty good idea about how you'll benefit because that's what motivated you to get this guide in the first place. You've already identified the consequences of poor or under-developed conversational skills and you don't need page after page of explanations and commentary. What you want are solutions, ideas, tips - whatever you need to become a successful conversationalist.

Small Talk, Big Impact

Small talk is the verbal foot-in-the-door of conversation. There are various techniques for making small talk and conversation that you can use the next time you're in a situation where you don't know anyone or if you find yourself surrounded by acquaintances and you don't know what to say. These tips will help you approach others and begin a comfortable, relaxed and enjoyable conversation.

What Isn't Helpful

Let's start off by clearing the air about what won't help you make small talk.

There's a myth that what we need to make conversation is a general list of topics so all we have to do is take a look at the list and select a topic or two and the conversation takes care of itself.

Not so.

Think about it. Do you really need a list of standard, generic topics like:

- weather
- hobbies
- sports
- family/children
- pets
- work
- local news

Do you feel like starting a conversation with someone you don't know right now just by reading that list? I doubt it.

Sure, these are all topics that you can make conversation with, but they aren't natural icebreakers.

Of course, you can talk about the weather but who doesn't? It's a typical opener but it does very little to sustain a conversation. After covering off the forecast for the next five to seven days there's not a whole lot more to add and you're stuck in uncomfortable silence.

Hobbies, family, sports aren't necessarily natural openers in every professional or social setting. They can be so irrelevant to the immediate situation and environment that bringing up these unrelated topics seems odd.

Let's say, for example, that you're at a networking event. Are you really going to go up to someone you don't know, introduce yourself and ask about his hobbies? Of course not. That's just weird.

The other problem with referring to a list of topics is remembering what's on it.

Picture it. There you are getting off the elevator, heading into an event and thinking to yourself, "What's on the list again?"

It's unlikely that you're going to pull out an index card from your blazer pocket or purse to remind yourself of potential topics of conversation. And if you actually do this, you'll appear awkward, which doesn't do much for that crucial first impression.

So now that you don't have your list-crutch, what do you do? Avoid people by sticking yourself in the corner of the room clicking away on your hand-held device, pretending to be engrossed in the most important email of the week? Why bother wasting your time and money going out if that's all you're able to do because you don't know how to make conversation?

What you need are techniques, not topics, that empower you to make small talk and interesting conversation. This way, you can be in any situation, anywhere and at any time and be able to engage anyone in conversation.

Isn't that what you've been looking for?

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