

10 Tips for Networking: How to Improve Your Conversations

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I have learned and practiced many human relations approaches to professional selling, effective speaking, and leading and managing people. They all added value to me and they increase my abilities to network, improve my communication and conversation skills. Many come from my Dale Carnegie Training and PepsiCo training, but I also have adopted some practical and useful approaches and techniques for creating the right conversation in any situation.

In her book, [The Fine Art of Small Talk](#), Debra Fine tells us to be mindful of 10

important things. I have followed her list below, examined her tips and have offered my perspective.

1. **Prepare in advance.** My view: Formulate icebreakers and understand the context and situation. I have learned in my career that preparation builds confidence, and you will increase yours. Preparing prior will make you stronger and you will understand your audience better.
2. **Be friendly, and use a welcoming tone.** My view: It is critical to remember that there are three parts to any message: content, tone (feeling), and relation. There are three types of communication: verbal, non-verbal, and para verbal. So being mindful of your messages, tone, how you might tend to communicate, then being mindful to be friendly and set the right tone, is the bridge that can lead to interesting dialogue and communication. In doing so, you will be able to start and sustain a conversation and gain positive momentum.
3. **Introduce yourself first, and greet by name.** My view: In my Dale Carnegie training, I learned that a person's name is the sweetest and most important sound in any language (Carnegie, 1981)
4. **Ask open-ended questions, and establish the conversation.** My view: These are simply the who, what, where, how, and why questions and can help advance a conversation in a group. Understanding the context and situation and finding common ground by asking open-ended questions is critical for success. Do it naturally, and be authentic and genuine.
5. **To keep conversations going, remember the acronym FORM.** My view: F represents family and friends; O represents occupation, R represents recreations and hobbies, and M represents miscellaneous items that come up. FORM is a great acronym and framework to remember. When you are in a group, you can use this framework in a natural, ethical, and genuine way. In my career, and in my Dale Carnegie training, I was always mindful to become genuinely interested in other people, talk about their interests, be a good listener, and encourage them to talk about themselves. FORM gives you the framework to do that.
6. **Be natural, and pay attention to your surroundings and clues to keep the conversation going.** My view: Stay engaged and be aware of the dynamics. Being ethical, genuine, and authentic is a key to success.
7. **Caution! There are certain topics you should avoid.** My view: Don't bring up gossip, controversial issues, or personal misfortunes. In most cases, doing so will leave your partner with a negative impression. For many, gossip in these areas it is a turn-off. Make a good first impression as it will last a long time and as you model consistency people will see it and you'll build more

trust this way. Also, if you are talking to a casual acquaintance, try to avoid asking questions related to his or her job or family members because things may have changed in their lives since you last spoke. Allow them to bring this up, not you.

8. **Pay careful to body language.** My View: Listen carefully and naturally. Make sure your conversation feels listened too. Being self-aware, socially aware, managing ourselves and our relationships, and applying our EQ (emotional intelligence) is key to success.
9. **Actively listen.** My view: Send positive verbal cues to a speaker to show you are listening. Listen attentively. People listen at 4 levels: they ignore, they pretend to listen, they listen selectively, or they listen attentively. It is so important to understand our non-verbal and verbal communication and how we respond.
10. **Know when to exit a conversation gracefully.** My view: If you apply form in a new group and the conversation has reached a lull for some reason know when to exit. Again, just knowing the situation, and paying attention to verbal and non-verbal communication will tell you this. Just pay attention and read the dynamics (process and characteristics). Work to make the best impressions possible.

These 10 principles have helped fine-tune my abilities, and they can add value to you, too. They can help you succeed further in conversations in any setting and are easy to apply. Remember, first impressions last long and bad first impressions last longer, so try to make your first one a good one every time.

References:

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