

“Small talk isn’t just about being gregarious or entertaining, it is a gesture of respect.”

Brett Nelson, “Forbes”

There is nothing small about small talk. Small talk is an important people skill. It’s an important executive skill. It’s the first step in connecting with others and forging lasting and meaningful relationships in business. It is an easy way to get to know someone, create a positive first impression, and gain self-confidence.

Executives cite making small talk with clients as one of their least favourite duties. And yet, getting a job, working with clients, and entertaining existing ones all require small talk. “In trying to generate business, the deal pitch is obviously critical. What is not so obvious is that simple, seemingly innocuous conversation with potential clients can be just as important. Companies want to hire people who can think on their feet,” says Scott Hoover, Associate Professor of Finance at Washington & Lee University.

Small Talk:

- Breaks the ice and puts others at ease.
- Establishes a connection or defines a common denominator between two persons.
- Doesn’t require original or profound conversation.
- It’s what persons say to each other to be polite.

The following ten tips will help you master the art of small talk:

1. **Have approachable body language:** open stance, eye contact, and smile. Casual eye contact and a warm friendly smile demonstrate your interest and desire to communicate.
2. **Take the initiative and be the first to say hello.** Be the first to introduce yourself and ask an open-ended question. This not only demonstrates confidence and shows interest in the other person, but it gives you an opportunity to guide the conversation.
3. **Begin with statements or questions** about the immediate environment, situation, weather, how the person arrived at your location, et cetera. A compliment is also a great way to start a conversation.
4. **Be well-informed and prepared.** Read newspapers and news magazines to be knowledgeable about what is going on in the world. Go prepared with topics or experiences to discuss that you think will be of interest to the persons you will be meeting.
5. **Focus on the other person and less on yourself.** This will help you feel less self-conscious, and make the other person feel important.
6. **Do listen.** Control internal and external distractions. Be present; watch the tendency to daydream. Truly listening to another person is the highest compliment you can pay them.
7. **Keep the tone light and positive until you find a topic in which you are both interested.**
8. **Discuss general-interest subjects** such as movies, theater, sports, books, movies, food, travel and hobbies. It demonstrates to others that you are approachable and friendly.
9. **Think before you speak.** It makes you appear thoughtful; and it may help you avoid a faux pas, or saying something that is better left unsaid.
10. **Always close a conversation before walking away from the other person** by using a graceful exit line; don't simply melt from conversations. "It's been great talking with you. I really enjoyed hearing about..."

Avoid these subjects with others you don't know very well:

- Your health or diet habits.
- The cost of things.
- Personal questions.
- Mean gossip.
- Off-color jokes.
- Controversial issues, such as politics or religion, when you don't know the others in the group.

By: Patricia Napier-Fitzpatrick

<https://etiquette-ny.com/10-tips-to-master-the-art-of-small-talk-in-business/>