



Tell me more: Talking points for productive conversation

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Chit-chat, table talk, cocktail chatter or small talk; regardless of how cute it sounds, making conversation at a networking event instills fear in even the bravest adults. Your networking success depends upon your ability to create meaningful connections. Try our talking points for productive conversation and never get tongue-tied again.

1. Deliver personality instead of a pitch. The goal of networking conversation is to connect with another person, not to close a sale. Make it an opportunity to learn, share, establish chemistry, and find common ground. Reveal something significant or unusual about yourself. "I competed in my first underwater welding competition last week, and it was thrilling. I'd like to invite you to join me at the next event," is engaging and memorable. Reciting the list of your corporate services is not.

2. Update your pick-up lines. Take those old groaners and turn them into useful questions. Instead of closed-ended questions that produce only one-word answers, use open-ended queries that encourage ongoing conversation. "Come here often?" becomes "What is your experience with this organization?" "What's your sign?" becomes "What is your area of expertise?" and "Who's your daddy?" becomes a reason to go talk to someone else.

3. It's not what you say; It's how you say it. Most of us won't remember every sentence, or even the main topics, of most cocktail conversations. What we do remember, however, is the overall impression someone left on us. Complain and criticize, and you'll end up at the bar alone. Be confident, positive, approachable and professional - and everyone will want to see you, and speak to you, again.

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