

THE EXCHANGE

SMALL TALK, BIG RESULTS



Are you ready for the people rush?

Here comes Christmas, New Year's Eve, company parties, vacations, traveling, and more!

This time of year is a great excuse for parties. Chances are that you'll attend a social or an office party where you are thrown in with a bunch of strangers and you have to engage in "small talk." Aside from the rigors of the holiday rush, making small talk with a stranger can be pretty stressful.

To some, small talk is simple. For some people, it's too easy. They are seemingly always talking and hardly saying anything of value, hence "small" talk. It can be rewarding to occasionally engage in small talk or idle networking. However, if you are introverted, shy, or just not a great conversationalist, here are three easy tips you can instantly apply to relieve the stress of having to talk to new people:

- **Ask StartProbes:** These are questions beginning with "how" or "what" that start up a conversation. Because you are asking the questions, you can feel more relaxed being in control of the conversation. For example: "What do you do when you are not working?" or "That sounds interesting. What do you enjoy most about your job?" After asking a good StartProbe, you can enjoy the opportunity of being the listener while the other person does all the talking!
- **Use BridgeProbes:** This is a great, stress free, small talk tool. When someone has finished talking, take a word or phrase they said and use it to bridge to another question. For example they might say, "I enjoy my job because I get to travel." Your BridgeProbe could be "Oh, where are some of the places you have traveled?" They might say, "Last year I went to Japan." Then you say, "Oh, Japan! I have never been there. What's it like?" With this tool, you could eventually find out some pretty interesting things about a person who only moments ago was a total stranger (probably as nervous or stressed to talk as you were)!

What Our Clients Are Saying

"[Referring to **Talk Is NOT Cheap**] Most comprehensive, easy to read book with concrete examples I've ever read. I was very impressed."

Donna Suter, Chattanooga TN

"The Listening Test was very revealing. We not only learned that we need to improve our listening skills, but also how much of the real meaning of a conversation is conveyed through non-verbals."

George Flury, Atlanta GA

- **Use Neutral Comments:** This is another good way to come across as a good conversationalist without really talking. Forty-six percent of our society is made up of extroverts who like to talk. Keep them talking by slowly nodding your head and saying things like: "Uh huh, oh really, is that right, you don't say, hmmm." Remember to speak in a low tone that suggests, "Hey I'm interested in what you're saying." This will cause the speaker to talk longer and this allows you to just sit back and listen calmly! When engaged in small talk that remains small in interest and you want to escape, here are a few techniques for tactfully removing yourself from a conversation:

- **Summarize & Run:** When you want to close the conversation with someone, you can rephrase what they said using a word or phrase they mentioned. For example: they might say, "...and it was the best vacation we ever had!" Then you say, "So you went to France and Germany, had great food, and you hope to go back. Sounds like you had a quality trip. Thanks for sharing, Bob, and good luck on your next vacation." At this point, break eye contact and slowly walk away.
- **The Stop and Pop:** When you want to close the small talk, ask questions that limit the amount of information you get and then pop away. Ask StopProbes (questions that begin with verbs: did, are, have, can, will, etc). These words will usually limit how much a person will talk because they are forced to say either "yes" or "no." For example: "Did you enjoy that book?" "Are you attending the meeting?" "Have you finished your Christmas shopping?" Remain aware you could ask a great closed-ended question and they may still ramble. So be prepared for a few catch phrases to bring the small talk to a close.

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Every path has its puddle.
English proverb

LOOKING AHEAD:

- ◆ January's issue will focus on "Keeping Promises"
- ◆ New coaching and training opportunities unveiled



Quick Tips:

- Make your holiday to-do list in your professional calendar. That way you have everything in one place and it keeps you more balanced during this busy month.
- Get an early start next year. Turn a few shelves into a "gift closet" and when you find something Uncle Joe would love, buy it, tag it and place it in the gift closet.
- Stay focused on your business goals by writing them down and reading them each morning.



To learn more about it, [click here!](#)

Small Talk, Big Results, cont. from page 1

- **The Switch & Ditch:** This works well when you want to let people know you are listening and want to discreetly get away (this one may take some pre-planning or creativity). After they have finished talking, take something they said and use it in a statement as a reason to remove yourself. For example, they might say, "Our sales are up this quarter so we should have a good fiscal year." You can say, "Quarter? I am glad you mentioned that, I have to go and put more change in the meter." Or if parking was free, you could say, "Speaking of fiscal year, I need to find my friend and ask him how he did this year in...excuse me."

Often, small talk is stressful not because we dislike the person, but because we dislike the topic, or don't know what to say. Challenge yourself to engage and remain in small talk and use the advised techniques to steer the conversation to something more enjoyable. This, of course, takes practice. Your tone of voice, body language, timing, and other variables play key roles in doing this effectively.

The more you expand your comfort zone for small talk, the easier it will become. Many of our careers and life ambitions are dependent on the support and advice of other people. Look at it this way, your favorite co-worker, your most enjoyable neighbor, or your best friend were all strangers at some point. Expanding your comfort zone can alleviate the stress of small talk and help you find some of your best friends! Small talk can lead to Big results!



A BLUE CHRISTMAS

By Ben Cairns, M.A.

My friend who is a surgeon in the emergency room once told me that the holiday season is the busiest in the emergency trauma unit because it's the time of year that families get together, get stressed, get in fights, and hurt themselves and/or each other. As sad as it may seem, people often have emotional difficulties during the holidays. Here are some tips regarding depression, and what you can do if you or someone you know is depressed.

If **You** are Depressed:

- Acknowledge it. The holiday blues are common. You haven't done anything wrong, and you're not unusual or bad! Over half of the population will suffer significant depression at some point in their lives.

- Let your closest relatives and friends know that you are having a tough time and ask them to support you. At the very least, let them know that they don't have to do anything except be there for you. Make sure that you are in regular touch with your support network.
- Recognize that anger and irritation often appear along with depression. The tendency for you to snap at others or get upset for small reasons is increased. Your ability to think clearly is diminished. You might want to give yourself some space to cool down a little. Apologize and, if it is safe, let them know what is going on with you. Then do your best to deal with what needs to be done without overreacting.
- If you have thoughts of suicide or violence, seek professional help immediately. You can call your primary care physician's office or the local help line.

If **Someone You Know** is Depressed:

- Recognize it. Denial is a common component of depression, so labeling it out loud for the other person may actually push them away from you. Instead, be a soothing resource for them. Talk to them and let them know that they are important to you. If you want to acknowledge their feelings, reflect the emotions that you observe or that they communicate. You might say something like this: "Having to buy presents for a lot of people when you're on a tight budget can be tough! I can tell you are feeling blue this week."
- Isolation, both psychological and physical, can make depression worse. Make sure to include the person in activities. For people who insist on staying away from others, just a telephone call or note can be a lifesaver.
- Depressed people often lash out as an expression of their frustration and heavy emotions. They may feel trapped and angry at others. Realize that if you get defensive it will just make things worse. Listen carefully to the other person and acknowledge their feelings. Don't argue the point.
- Slowed-down movements and duller emotions can signal a deepening depression. Oversleep is common (for example, 3 or more extra hours per night). If you notice or hear any comments or hints of possible suicide or violence, take it very seriously.

Be understanding during the holidays. While people are pulling together, and the music and decorations are the most cheerful of the year, many people are emotionally heading in the other direction. Instead of singing "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas" they're having a blue Christmas. Be aware of your own emotions and those of the people around you. Include others in your communication and activities, and spread the holiday cheer!



PEOPLE YOU LOVE, BUT DON'T NECESSARILY LIKE



It is traditional for most people to spend time with their extended families during the holidays. This array of people who have a direct link by either blood or marriage is like a miniature universe... most of the people you enjoy, some you tolerate, and at least one you dread seeing. While we are able to pick our friends, our families are chosen for us. There is no need to feel defenseless because we can choose how we react to those dear souls that we may love but not necessarily like.

Here are some practical things to remember that will keep the Grinch out of your Christmas:

- Even though you don't feel like it, go to the gatherings where this person will be in attendance. Otherwise, you'll have to make up excuses that are as transparent as Saran Wrap. Besides, once you start creating information (like "Suzie has a play that night."), you have to remember your "reason" and life is complicated enough around the holidays.
- Focus on what you'd like to have happen with this person. Whatever you focus on is exactly what you will find.
- Remember your sense of humor. You'll need every ounce of it!
- Don't stuff your feelings only to dump on another family member that you do like.
- Avoid getting plastered - it's a lousy excuse to relieve you from being accountable for your actions.
- Ask yourself, "What are good traits about this person?" Your brain is wired to answer your questions, so the key is to ask positive questions internally about this person.
- Engage at least one other person into conversations that you have with this individual. This allows you to ask someone a question and while they are answering you can get control of your emotions.
- Imagine what it is like to walk around in their skin.
- Keep your voice low in volume, rate, and pitch. In other words, keep calm.
- Demonstrate a relaxed body posture. It will actually send secure messages to your brain and lets the others in the room feel more comfortable.
- Toss the question back to the person if they throw you a lose-lose question. (If they ask you why you haven't had a promotion in 2 years, respond with, "What makes you ask that?") You may continue to control the conversation with questions that begin with "what" or "how" until you get a question you want to answer.

- Be comfortable with yourself and not with their expectations of whom you should be.

Biological families are a lot like work families – a mixture of all kinds of people who are brought together. Success with one family will breed success in the other. Remember, although you can't pick who will be in your family, you can pick how you will be when you're with them. If you pick right, you'll end up giving yourself the best gift possible: self-respect.

TO GO BERSERK

By Vincent Ivan Phipps, B.S.

When was the last time too much stress caused you or someone you know to "go berserk?"

This idiom dates back to when Viking warriors would attack with great ferocity and little or no regard for their personal safety. The reason they attacked with such belligerent insanity was that before going into battle, they intentionally feasted on hallucinogenic mushrooms. The mushrooms released endorphins in their bodies giving them a feeling of invincibility.

Vikings consumed so many mushrooms that it is reported that while most warriors usually battled wearing metal chest and head protection, these Vikings would attack wearing only a bearskin wrap. In Old Norse (language of the Vikings), bearskin was pronounced "berserkr" or "bear – sark."

When people saw the "Berserkers" coming, they would frantically stress out and warn the others the enemy was approaching wearing only bear skins. That meant that those Vikings were probably high on mushrooms and would attack with great force without feeling much pain. It became common when seeing these warriors to say, "We are going beserk!" This meant everyone was to prepare to engage in painstaking battle.

This caused most to worry and be quite stressed. Of course, this would cause even the bravest Viking to "go berserk!"



Remember to:

- Show appreciation by factually giving compliments
- Use BridgeProbes during those holiday parties



Laughing is the sensation of feeling good all over and showing it principally in one spot.

Josh Billings

Be strong!

**It matters not how deep
entrenched the wrong
How hard the battle goes,
the day how long
Faint not -- fight on!
Tomorrow comes the song.**
Maltbie D. Babcock



Eat, drink, and be merry,
for tomorrow ye diet.

Lewis C. Henry

You can make more
friends in two months by
becoming interested in
other people than you
can in two years by
trying to get people
interested in you.

Dale Carnegie

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PUTTING "NO-NO-NO" IN THE "HO-HO-HO"!

By Beverly Inman-Ebel, CEO



I love Christmas. Christmas for me is a time to demonstrate love to my family and friends. I love decorating the house, writing original Christmas stories for our annual Story Telling Party, finding perfect presents that show thought and creativity, dressing up in holiday garb, singing my favorite carols, spending time with people who mean the world to me, and thanking my Father for his precious gift.

What I don't love is trying to do all of these wonderful things while I still run a business, go to the grocery, do laundry, help with homework, and all the other normal activities that life requires. Everywhere I go I am reminded that no matter how much I do, it is never enough. Advertisers make me want to purchase presents that I cannot afford. Standing in the check-out lane I see magazines of crafts and recipes that I will never attempt. What has happened to the fantasy Christmas that has time for sleigh rides and chats by the warm fire?

I've decided this year to make priorities and to quit chastising myself for not being perfect. For me, this means I'll be saying, "no, no, no" to some of the opportunities that do not make the top of my list.

- No, I will not make homemade delicacies for my Christmas parties.
- No, I will not keep buying presents because I continue to find another, "Oh, he'd love that!"
- No, I will not decorate every nook and cranny on every floor in my home.
- No, I will not eat every dessert put in front of me and then feel sick and guilty.
- No, I will not get stressed out at my kids because they've messed up a room before company comes over.

Setting these boundaries will bring me joy. Starting November 27th, I'm going to answer my phone, "**Ho-ho-ho!** This is Beverly" as a reminder of my conviction. I'm going to make time to enjoy my **home**, **honor** my loved ones, and **hold** peace in my heart. I encourage you to lighten your heart and live your dreams.

TLC establishes long-term relationships with our clients. If we have helped you or if you believe our approach to change would work for someone you know, please communicate with us by email [tlc@talklisten.com] or phone [1-888-232-2873]. We work with individuals and groups on the following subject areas: attitude, listening, body language, voice, leadership, compliments and corrections, behavioral style, teamwork, effective meetings, public speaking, accent reduction and much more!

ASK THE EXPERTS



Dear TLC,

I dread office after-hours events. Some people in my department can't hold their liquor and they make me uncomfortable. Not A T-Totaler

Dear Not,

Many people feel out of place at office parties, especially if spouses attend. Part of that is caused because we tend to have one behavioral style at work and some variations on that style in our free time. Since they aren't sure how to act, some people choose to drink, thinking it will make it easier for them. Get to the party on time and interact with as many people as you can. If it gets to be too much for you, you can excuse yourself with a smile and leave. As long as you don't judge others, they most likely will not judge or label you.

FEATURED SERVICE

This is a great time of year for a day or partial day of team building. If you have a holiday get-together planned with your team, call TLC and have us plan the fun that bonds your team like Super Glue! Remember, we're the experts when it comes to people!!

THE PERFECT GIFT IS FREE!!

Stumped about what to get someone on your list? How about a gift that costs you little or no money, doesn't have to be wrapped, and is guaranteed to fit? Give the gift of listening. Be creative. State it on a beautiful card, a piece of paper, or whisper it in their ears. Perhaps give it in the form of "I.O.U. one hour of listening" for your loved one to cash in when it is needed most. There are some side effects: this gift most likely will be returned and it can become habit forming.

