

# 7 conversation starters for your next event

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



I have the hardest job in the world when it comes to networking. I'm an etiquette expert. When people learn what I do, they are either intrigued, and ask me all kinds of etiquette questions, or they avoid me like the plague because they think I'm going to criticize them.

But, regardless of my profession, my most important job is putting people at ease. I try to do that by asking the right questions and making people feel validated and important. Because who doesn't want to feel validated and important?

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Let's face it. It can be downright scary, walking into a room full of strangers, never mind going up to someone you don't know and starting a conversation. Perhaps the fear of rejection is holding you back.

Yet, as any business owner knows, networking is crucial to marketing your business. You just have to know how to get the ball rolling so a friendship can ensue. So how do you get the conversation going?

The answer: Fill your arsenal with a number of conversation starters. With these seven starters, you'll acquire the art of small talk, feel more comfortable and be able to chat up the room in no time.

## **1. Open with the topic of food.**

It may sound silly, but food is the one thing we all have in common. We all have to eat. Talk about the food on the buffet table or one of your favorite restaurants in town. Once you get the conversation started, move on to

other easy topics, including the room decorations, the entertainment or how you both know the hosts of the party.

## **2. Ask good questions, then listen.**

Ask open-ended questions, starting with “ Tell me about...” or “ What do you enjoy most about...” to get the other person talking, then actively listen to his or her answer. Talk about something everyone enjoys. For example, you may want to talk about traveling: “ I’m planning my next vacation and thinking about going to the beach. Do you have any locations you can recommend?” Nearly everyone has a favorite travel destination.

## **3. Offer a sincere compliment.**

According to real estate mogul Barbara Corcoran, most people enjoy compliments because they don’t hear enough of them.

Find something you can compliment listeners on, like their eyes or hairstyle or their tie or jewelry. You don’t know enough about them yet to comment on their achievements unless you’ve read about them in the news, so it’s safe to offer a sincere compliment on a physical attribute.

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## **4. Know a little about a lot.**

The best conversationalists are storytellers who can speak on a variety of subjects; however, you don’t need to know in-depth knowledge to share an interesting tidbit. To acquire a well-rounded repertoire of conversational topics, read books, magazines and professional trade journals; listen to talk

radio; attend classes; go to sporting events; and watch a variety of movies. Just don't be boring.

### **5. Ask for information.**

Everyone likes to be helpful, so if you're looking for a service provider, such as a dentist, doctor, mechanic or electrician, ask someone for a referral. It creates a commonality of a shared experience and distracts you from the awkwardness of having to think of something to say.

### **6. Don't exclude others in the group.**

When you approach a group, be sure to introduce topics that will interest everyone. If the event is social and partners are invited, keep business topics to a minimum. Bring up topics that everyone might have an interest in. Don't focus on just one person in the group. Hold that interaction for when you two can be alone together.

### **7. Introduce yourself.**

If you find it difficult to come up with an interesting conversation starter with someone, simply offer your hand and introduce yourself. Ask the person's name and an open-ended question that relates to the reason you're together, such as how he or she knows the host or hostess or enjoys most about the job.

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You don't have to be an etiquette expert to be a good conversationalist. It just takes a little practice. Don't be so hard on yourself, and don't let your fears keep you isolated. If you can be brave enough to initiate the

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conversation, and make others feel important in the process, you'll open doors to opportunities.