

Worksheets – Socialising (1): Breaking the ice**Quiz: Breaking the ice**

1. You decide to attend an international conference. You have never attended such an event before. What is your main reason for attending? Choose one option.
 - a. I'm going to attend lots of presentations so I can keep up-to-date with developments in my industry.
 - b. I'm hoping to meet lots of interesting people – maybe some of them will be useful for my future career.
 - c. I have a target of twenty people that I want to meet, so I can persuade them to buy our products.
2. On the first evening, you attend a 'welcome party'. You arrive in a large hall filled with about 500 people. They all seem to be talking to each other in groups. There's nobody that you recognise. What do you do?
 - a. Go up to one of the groups, introduce yourself and ask if you can join them.
 - b. Go up to one of the groups and listen to the conversation. Maybe you can join in later.
 - c. Find where the food is being served and try to start a conversation with someone in the queue.
 - d. Walk around the hall, pretending to be looking for someone. Avoid eye contact with other people.
 - e. Turn around and go home.
3. At the conference party, which of these problems would be worse for you?
 - a. No-one wants to talk to you.
 - b. A really boring person wants to talk to you ... and you can't escape from him/her.
4. Where is the best place to stand if you want people to talk to you?
 - a. In the middle of the hall.
 - b. By the wall.
 - c. Outside.
 - d. By the buffet / bar.
5. Which topics of conversation could you use to break the ice with someone?
 - a. How much you hate parties like this.
 - b. The conference.
 - c. Your work.
 - d. Sport.
 - e. The weather.
 - f. Politics.
 - g. How bad the food is.
 - h. Where you're from.

Reading: Breaking the ice (part 1)

Everyone knows that conferences are great for networking. Of course, you might also learn some new things at the presentations and workshops, but it's what happens during the coffee breaks and the evening events that make conferences such a good use of your time and money. Conferences are all about meeting people and, yes, making friends. Of course, some of those new contacts may become customers for your company too, but don't try to sell to them at the conference unless you really have to. Most of the people you meet won't want to buy from you – but they might be able to point you in the direction of some potential customers that they know. In other words, relax – don't try too hard. Just be yourself, and allow any business partnerships to appear naturally.

The most difficult part of networking is always breaking the ice: starting a conversation with a stranger and then keeping it going for those important first five minutes. It can be incredibly daunting to walk into a room full of people, all of whom seem to know each other and are involved in deep conversations. How on earth do you join in? Well, the most important thing to remember is that most of those people are in the same position as you. Half the people in the group conversations also don't know anybody and are nervously trying to get involved. The busy-looking people who are walking around the hall are probably just pretending to be busy so they don't have to admit that they're alone.

The best thing to do is to try to get involved in one of the conversations. It's polite to introduce yourself and ask if you can join the group, but there's nothing wrong with standing and listening for a few minutes first. Don't worry that the group are discussing top-secret business deals: they almost certainly aren't! And if they are, they should expect people to interrupt them from time to time – it's a networking event, after all.

The worst thing to do – apart from standing in the middle of the hall by yourself – is to walk around looking busy. This is like holding up a sign saying '*Please don't talk to me*'. If you really feel too embarrassed to talk to strangers, perhaps you should go home and try to network at the conference tomorrow, where it should be much easier. A much better solution, though, is to move slowly around the room, make eye contact with people, smile and say 'hello'. That way, even if you're too nervous to start a conversation, other people will understand that they can start a conversation with you.

Sometimes, we're our own worst enemies: we feel bad when no-one wants to talk to us, but then when someone tries to engage us in conversation, we can't wait to get away. If someone has made the effort to come up to you, they deserve at least five minutes of your time, no matter how boring that person seems. Even if you decide at the end of that time that the person is too boring to talk to, perhaps they can introduce you to someone else who you can talk to. And if you're lucky, perhaps more people will join your conversation group, and suddenly you'll find yourself in the middle of the action.

Reading: Breaking the ice (part 2)

I don't smoke, and I don't intend to start, but I've noticed that smokers seem to have a natural advantage at networking events: they hang around outside, where it's quieter, there are fewer people and it's easier to talk, and they have an easy way to start a conversation (*Do you have a light? It's cold out here, isn't it?*). Of course, you don't have to smoke to get these advantages: you could simply step outside for some fresh air and try to strike up a conversation with someone who is standing alone out there. You may find that half of the 'smokers' aren't actually smoking, just taking advantage of the natural opportunity to start conversations.

Another natural place for starting conversations is the buffet or bar, even if the conversations are very superficial: *Do you know where I can find the spoons? Could you pass me the milk?* Of course, you need to be ready to follow up these ice-breakers with something much more engaging.

So what can you talk about? The obvious thing to mention is the party itself – but whatever you do, don't start moaning about how much you hate parties. Nobody likes listening to moaners. Why not ask if the other person knows a lot of people at the party, or if they are enjoying the party. Another great topic is the conference: did you attend any good presentations today? Are you giving a presentation yourself? Have you travelled a long way to get here? Topics like sport and the weather are fine for keeping a conversation going, but might not be suitable as an opening discussion. The same goes for work: by all means find out what the other person does for a living, but perhaps try a little small talk about the party, the conference or the food first.

Finally, you may think that socialising in a foreign language would be harder than in your first language. In fact, in many ways it's easier. You've got a great topic of conversation which other people will always find interesting: where you're from. Many people will also treat you with more patience when they know you are a foreigner, and you are having problems with the language.

Of course, you can't just walk up to someone and say "*Hi, I'm from Brazil*". It's always better to start with a question about the other person, rather than a statement about yourself. But by choosing the topic, you're making it much easier for the other person to follow up with a question about you: "*And what about you?*"

So don't hide, don't walk around looking busy, and don't try to escape from the first boring person who tries to talk to you. If you make an effort, you'll find the experience a lot more enjoyable – and successful for your professional career.

Useful language: Ice-breakers

1. Excuse me. Do you ...	a. ... a long way to get here?
2. Hello. My name's XXX. Is it ...	b. ... for a living?
3. Are you here alone ...	c. ... good presentations today?
4. And what about you? ...	d. ... have a light?
5. It's cold out ...	e. ... have you tried it?
6. I just came out for some fresh air – ...	f. ... here, isn't it?
7. Sorry, do you ...	g. ... I can find the spoons?
8. Are you giving a ...	h. ... me the milk?
9. This salad's delicious – ...	i. ... mind if I join you?
10. Do you know many ...	j. ... morning's lecture?
11. Are you enjoying ...	k. ... OK if I join your group?
12. It's a great ...	l. ... or with a group?
13. Is this your first ...	m. ... party, isn't it?
14. Did you attend any ...	n. ... people here tonight?
15. Do you know where ...	o. ... presentation at the conference?
16. Did you enjoy this ...	p. ... round here?
17. Have you travelled ...	q. ... the party?
18. What do you do ...	r. ... there are too many people in there.
19. Are you from ...	s. ... time at the conference?
20. Could you pass ...	t. ... Where are you from?

Leaving a conversation

1. Well, I've just _____ someone that I need to speak to _____. It was very _____ meeting you. Let me give you my _____. I'll _____ you when I get back home, so we can stay in _____. Maybe we can have a _____ talk later in the conference. See you _____.

2. I'm really _____, but I've just had an _____ SMS from my husband, so I need to go _____ and call him. _____ we'll have a _____ to talk later.

3. Right, so if you'll _____ me, I _____ to go and talk to a _____ of other people. Do you _____ a business card _____ you? ... Great, thanks. And here's _____. Feel _____ to email me. Well, it was a _____ meeting you. Enjoy the _____ of the conference.

card
chance
couple
email
excuse
free
have
hopefully
later
mine
need
nice
on
outside
pleasure
proper
rest
sorry
spotted
touch
urgent
urgently

Ice-breaking role-play

Name:

Job title:

Company:

Name:

Job title:

Company:

Name:

Job title:

Company:

Name:

Job title:

Company:

Name:

Job title:

Company:

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Job title:

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