

Establish Rapport

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I am by nature an introvert and I don't mix easily during business networking events. Engaging with business prospects whom I don't know is not in my comfort zone. There are times I don't know what to say. However, I found an easy way around this problem—asking questions.

For example, during a business mixer most people have a name tag with their business on it. This opens an opportunity to ask more about the business as well as their role. These questions frequently open the door to ask about hobbies, where they live in town and other areas of interest.

By engaging an individual using questions, I don't need to think about what to say next or how to act. I merely keep asking questions and show an interest in the person I meet. Usually, the individual reciprocates with questions for me. While I answer them, my main goal is to encourage the person to talk about the most important person in their life, generally themselves. I don't say this as a judgment of a person's self-centeredness. I merely accept the reality that most individuals enjoy talking about themselves and items that interest them. During business gatherings their business situation is clearly a great opener and provides many follow-up question opportunities.

After I've engaged an individual, I have a personal tendency to want to talk too much sharing and even proposing business suggestions. After all, I am a consultant. However, I must remind myself that I am not their consultant until I've been asked. Until then, I'm merely pontificating.

Develop the habit of asking questions and you'll find you will break the ice consistently with those around you. James, the brother of our Lord wrote, "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger" (James 1:19, ESV) Ask questions and be very quick to listen but slow to speak. It is a stronger bridge to a new client or buyer.