

Small Talk

There is nothing small about small talk. Not only is it an important people skill, but it's also a crucial executive skill. Making conversation is the first step in connecting with others and forging lasting and meaningful relationships in business. It is an easy way to get to know someone, create a positive first impression, and gain self-confidence. Executives cite making small talk with clients as one of the most daunting tasks. And yet, getting a job, working with clients, and entertaining existing ones all require small talk. Sometimes simple, seemingly innocuous conversation with potential clients make a world of difference. There are some undeniable benefits of just making conversation. It breaks the ice and puts others at ease, which may prove invaluable before an important meeting or negotiation. Moreover, it establishes a connection or defines a common denominator between two persons, so that they are more comfortable with one another. Finally, small talk doesn't require original or profound conversation, it's just what people say to each other to be polite. Here are some tips to make you the master of small talk:

1. Have approachable body language: open stance, eye contact, and smile. Casual eye contact and a warm friendly smile communicate your interest.
2. Take the initiative and be the first to say hello. Be the first to introduce yourself and ask an open-ended question. Not only does it demonstrate confidence and shows interest in the other person, but it also gives you an opportunity to guide the conversation.
3. Begin with statements or questions about the immediate environment, situation, weather, how the person arrived at your location, et cetera. A compliment is also a great way to start a conversation.
4. Be well-informed and prepared. Read newspapers and news magazines to be knowledgeable about what is going on in the world. Go prepared with topics or experiences to discuss that you think will be of interest to the persons you will be meeting.
5. Focus on the other person and less on yourself. This will help you feel less self-conscious, and make the other person feel important.
6. Do listen. Control internal and external distractions. Be present; watch the tendency to daydream. Truly listening to another person is the highest compliment you can pay them.
7. Keep the tone light and positive until you find a topic in which you are both interested.
8. Discuss general-interest subjects such as movies, theatre, sports, books, food, travel and hobbies. It demonstrates to others that you are approachable and friendly.
9. Think before you speak. It makes your comments appear thoughtful; and it may help you avoid a faux pas, or saying something that is better left unsaid.
10. Always close a conversation before walking away from the other person by using a graceful exit line; don't simply melt from conversations. A simple: *it's been great talking with you* or *I really enjoyed hearing about it* is more than enough. Avoid subjects like, for instance, your health or diet habits, the cost of things, personal questions, mean gossip, off-colour jokes, and controversial issues, such as politics or religion, when you don't know the others in the group.

Ex. 1 Find the words or expressions in the text which mean the following:

- 1) very important: _____
- 2) being sure of your competences and skills: _____
- 3) to need sth: _____
- 4) not harmful or offensive: _____
- 5) the good sides of sth: _____
- 6) extremely useful: _____
- 7) to start sth: _____
- 8) very deep: _____
- 9) easy-going, friendly: _____
- 10) to tell what your name is: _____
- 11) a chance to do sth: _____
- 12) a kind remark about sb: _____

Ex. 2 Match the expressions from the two columns into logical collocations:

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 1) making | clients |
| 2) to forge | the ice |
| 3) to get | a world of difference |
| 4) a daunting | stance |
| 5) existing | denominator |
| 6) to make | task |
| 7) to break | question |
| 8) a common | a relationship |
| 9) open | conversation |
| 10) an open-ended | to know sb |

Ex. 3 Provide English equivalents of these expressions:

1) obeznany	7) unikać czegoś
2) skrępowany	8) nieuprzejmy
3) coś, co odwraca uwagę	9) pikantny żart
4) przemyślany	10) kontrowersyjna kwestia
5) zgrabny (np. zwrot)	11) tematy ogólne
6) wycofać się z rozmowy	12) mowa ciała

Grammar corner...

Not only is it an important people skill, but it's also a crucial executive skill. In this sentence from the reading the author wanted to emphasize (or stress, make sth sound more important or be more noticeable) the importance of small talk. *Not only, no sooner, or other phrases with not* can be used for this purpose. If you use *not only*, you should remember about the QUESTION sentence order right after *not only*, e.g. *not only IS SHE a great manager, but she also has great people skills.* If you cover *not only* what you have left is actually a question (Is she a good manager?). For sentences with *no sooner*, you must remember about two simple rules: PAST PERFECT right afterwards and THAN in the second half of the sentence, e.g. *No sooner HAD WE MERGED with them, THAN the lay-offs began.* What it means is that right after the merger they started firing people.

Ex. 4 Choose the right option.

- 1) Not only *she is / is she* a great boss, but she's also a very nice person.
- 2) No sooner *we started issuing / had we started issuing* shares, then their prices went through the roof.
- 3) Everyone, I have to say that not only *it was / was it* the best year for our company so far, but we are also proud to announce that we were just awarded a huge government contract.
- 4) No sooner had we finally become profitable *when / than* the tax authority knocked on our door to collect more taxes.
- 5) *He is / is he* not only a talented speaker, but also an amateur comedian.

GLOSSARY	
crucial	istotny, ważny
self confidence	pewność siebie
to require sth	wymagać czegoś
innocuous	niewinny, nieszkodliwy
invaluable	nieoceniony
to establish sth	ustanowić coś, stworzyć coś
profound	głęboki
approachable	przyjazny
to make conversation	podtrzymywać rozmowę
to forge a relationship	nawiązać relacje
a daunting task	przytłaczające zadanie
to make a world of difference	robić wielką różnicę
to break the ice	przełamać lody
a common denominator	wspólny mianownik
open stance	otwarta postawa
an open-ended question	pytanie otwarte
knowledgeable	obeznany
self-conscious	skrępowany
a distraction	coś, co odwraca uwagę
graceful	zgrabny
to melt from a conversation	wycofać się z rozmowy
mean	nieuprzejmy
an off-colour joke	pikantny żart
a general-interest subject	temat ogólny
body language	mowa ciała
to gain sth	zyskać coś
internal / external	wewnętrzny / zewnętrzny
a remark	uwaga

ANSWER KEY:

Ex. 1

- 1) crucial
- 2) self confidence
- 3) to require sth
- 4) innocuous
- 5) benefits of sth
- 6) invaluable
- 7) to establish sth
- 8) profound
- 9) approachable
- 10) to introduce yourself
- 11) an opportunity to do sth
- 12) a compliment

Ex. 2

- 1) making conversation
- 2) to forge a relationship
- 3) to get to know sb
- 4) a daunting task
- 5) existing clients
- 6) to make a world of difference
- 7) to break the ice
- 8) a common denominator
- 9) open stance
- 10) an open-ended question

Ex. 3

- 1) knowledgeable
- 2) self-conscious
- 3) a distraction
- 4) thoughtful
- 5) graceful
- 6) to melt from a conversation
- 7) to avoid sth
- 8) mean
- 9) an off-colour joke
- 10) a controversial issue
- 11) general-interest subjects
- 12) body language

Ex. 4

- 1) is she
- 2) had we started issuing
- 3) was it
- 4) than
- 5) He is