Paragon Acquisitions' valuable guide to mastering the Art of Small Talk

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In order to help new entrepreneurs gain confidence in networking, Paragon Acquisitions has offered their advice on mastering the art of small talk in seven easy steps.

About Paragon Acquisitions: http://www.paragonacquisitions.co.uk/about/

Paragon Acquisitions believes that much emphasis is placed on the importance of addressing certain points when networking and forging new relationships. However, it is in fact mastering the art of small talk that needs to be addressed. Being able to talk about small everyday things is how the tone is set, and allows natural relaxed conversation to take place. Paragon Acquisitions believes this is the best way for entrepreneurs to start building a successful network, which can be truly based on personal opinion whilst offering themselves with a great first impression when forging new relationships.

Paragon Acquisitions offer their tips on how to get started when mastering small talk:

1. Be proactive. Don't wait as approaching people first creates an aura of confidence and will put the other person at ease. Many people are naturally introverts and struggle to make conversation. Don't miss out on opportunities from casual conversation, as you never know where a conversation may lead.

2. Smile and make eye contact. Smiling relaxes the other person and sets the tone as relaxed and friendly. Making eye contact displays interest and engagement in the conversation.

3. Practice makes perfect. Talk to everyone; from the people on the train to the store staff. It's likely you won't see these people again and it will relax the conversation allowing you to practice.

4. Learn some opening lines. Try starting with a statement as opposed to a question. It's less formal, less intrusive and will relax the conversation and the other person. A few examples of how to do this include:

"I wanted to introduce myself and say thanks because I always enjoy what you blog about. Where do you get all your ideas?"

"You always look so put together. I know you're a busy mum. What's your secret?"

"Sam told me that you visited Japan last month. What was that like?"

5. Ask open ended questions. A great way to get a conversation flowing is to ask open ended questions that require a detailed response and will get the other person to engage. Knowing the difference between open and closed questions is important. So instead of: "How long have you lived here?" Ask "What made you decide to move here and how do you like it?" This is a great opener as people like to talk about themselves, and this is a relaxed topic.

6. Be a good listener. Display that you're listening by offering good responses. It will create an instant connection. Try paraphrasing the conversation to display listening and ensuring that clear understanding has been established as it offers the speaker a chance to correct if misunderstood.

For example:

New acquaintance: I wish we'd get a change in the weather.

You: Sounds like you're not a fan of snow.

The result: remaining neutral in the conversation, but offering a reflective response.

7. Keep it upbeat. Remain positive, no one likes to spend time with a nit-picker. Choose about non-controversial topics to avoid any first impression blunders. Hot button topics are the usual suspects: politics, the economy, religion, race and ethnicity and the environment. When people raise these topics, form a stock reply such as, "Well, that's a matter for another discussion." If that doesn't work, just gracefully let the person give their opinions.

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