

## Small talk is HUGE! by Lillian D. Bjorseth

The content can be current chitchat; the role small talk plays, however, is far from minor. It's an enormously important conversation starter and often determines if you want to keep talking – hence the opportunity to build a relationship – or make a quick escape.

Because the content may seem unimportant (let's get right to the “what do you?” and “what can you do for me”), you may think it unnecessary to prepare ... and wing it. That works for the few people who can think succinctly on their feet and then articulate their thoughts fluently and effortlessly.

Gender differences in communication can also be small talk hazards. Men have three main topics in their small talk repertoire: sports, current events, business/jobs. Women have hundreds and since they disclose more about their personal lives they may run into a blank stare when they start with children and spouses.

Here are eight tips to help you use small talk to get big results.

1. **Fill your small talk arsenal.** Get up-to-date on current news through whatever vehicle you use and then form an opinion so you can discuss it. It's fine if you have a divergent opinion so long as you listen to others' and remain congenial.
2. **Prepare a few questions based on the time of the year.**
  - a. Unusual weather
  - b. College/pro basketball/football/baseball/hockey games and standings
  - c. Movies and TV shows/ Oscar or Emmy nominees
  - d. Questions/comments about the sponsoring organization
  - e. Activities at your kids' schools

It is generally advisable to steer clear of politics and religion.

3. **Practice by yourself.** Talk to yourself in the mirror and watch your expressions and gestures. Are they appropriate? Do they need honing? Don't imitate the politician who raised three fingers when he was discussing two items.
4. **Practice with others.** Try starting conversations with family, friends, clerks, neighbors, co-workers, wait staff, people in doctors' waiting rooms, etc. Mentally record if you get the conversation started and if it goes in the direction you want.
5. **Listen better.** Use your two ears and one mouth to your advantage. Remind yourself of the proportion as you glance in a mirror at an event ... in fact, every time you look in a mirror.
6. **Look confident.** You automatically appear to be more knowledgeable and someone others want to get to know.
  - a. Plant your feet.
  - b. Hold your head high.
  - c. Keep your shoulders back.
  - d. Put your chest out.



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- e. Hold your stomach in.
- f. Make direct eye contact.
- 7. **Women, pump up your interest in sports and current events.** Men, expand your base to include more general-interest topics.
- 8. **Observe and listen before joining a conversation in progress.** Prepare your remarks and wait for an opening.

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**Lillian Bjorseth helps you build a new kind of wealth – social capital – by improving your face-to-face and networking and communication skills. She’s an acclaimed speaker, trainer, coach and prolific author and certified DiSC trainer. She was named 2009 Outstanding Chicago Speaker and 2010 Member of the Year by the National Speakers Association-IL Chapter. Contact her at [lilianspeaks@duoforce.com](mailto:lilianspeaks@duoforce.com); [www.duoforce.com](http://www.duoforce.com), [www.lilliancommunicates.com](http://www.lilliancommunicates.com); [www.greaterchicagonetworking.com](http://www.greaterchicagonetworking.com)**



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