



Make contacts and develop business

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“HOW TO SKILFULLY CONVERSE WITH PEOPLE” SECRETS TO SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS AND CASUAL CONVERSATION — by Ron Gibson

In order to manage a career, grow a business or guide your personal or professional endeavours you have to communicate with people. It's not always easy, but you have to do it.

Often this communication amounts to basic conversation and it's been evident to me for a long time now that a great many young people don't know how to have one. In fact, a great many older people don't know how to have a conversation, either.

Conversation is one of the most decisive factors in our success in business and in life. It is also an art anyone can learn — and practice leads to mastery.

So if you're looking to fine-tune your conversation skills, see if any of the following resonates with you.

1. Know that the people you're talking to mostly want to talk about THEMSELVES. They want to talk about their world, their family, their lives, their business, their likes, their views, their interests. When you talk to them about themselves they will be deeply interested and utterly fascinated. They will think well of you for doing this. They will be enjoying having a conversation with you. This helps to establish the next guideline.
2. Use the words “you” and “your” much more often than you use the words “I”, “me”, “my” and “mine”. That's not to say that you should not use “I”, “me”, “my” and “mine” at all. In the give and take of conversation, you need to counter information offered by the other person with some information about yourself. If you are discussing a topic, tell how it relates to you or why you're interested in it. This adds depth to the conversation. But when “I”, “me”, “my” and “mine” outweighs “you” and “your”, you will notice a waning enthusiasm in the other person. Why, because your conversational focus is more on YOU rather than on THEM.

Most of us are not effective at finding common ground, “getting on” and having meaningful conversation because we keep thinking and talking about ourselves. The thing to remember is that it is not how you like what you say, it's how your listeners like what you say. So — when talking to others, talk about them and get them talking about themselves. This means using the words “you” and “your” not “I, me, my, mine.”

3. The goal of the first few minutes of any conversation with someone you just met is threefold: (I) to find out a few things about the other person, (II) to share a few things about yourself, (III) to find some common ground between you. Wherever you go in the world, if you talk with anyone for five minutes, you will usually find several items in common — perhaps a shared interest or experience or maybe a common acquaintance or goal. Common ground builds confidence and trust between parties. It's foundational to relationship building...and doing more good business.

Small Talk. Never underestimate the importance of small talk. Small conversations can often lead to BIG business. Small talk provides insight into a person's interests, values and needs. The more you know about a person, the stronger the connection. You must cultivate the rapport and likeability that's crucial to gain someone's business or referrals.

- 3.5 A few words about small talk. A lot of very bright people believe that they should only spend their time talking about serious matters. They think that talking about unimportant things are a "frill" to avoid and not waste their time on. What they may not realise is that small talk is something that two people use to find out what they have in common. Small talk helps to get the conversation flowing and eventually some of your small talk will lead to deeper conversations and relationships. You often have to spend time on small talk with others before they let you in to other aspects of what they are really interested in. If you can't use small talk effectively, you will have far fewer relationships and much less business coming in.

Common ground leads to rapport. No rapport. No business.

4. Follow the basic formula for good conversation. Think of conversation as a tennis game. Do your part to produce a good back-and-forth exchange by hitting the conversation ball back in the other person's court, usually with a question attached, so that they have to return it to you. This means your conversation consists partly of statements and comments, some of which reveal a little of you to the other person, and partly of questions, to get the other person to reveal a little of themselves. Nothing will be more helpful to you in becoming a great conversationalist than this metaphor of a tennis game. Keeping the ball in the air is an art, and the point of most conversations.
5. To "keep the ball in the air", vary your contributions to the conversation by alternating among (I) making statements/comments, (II) asking questions, (III) offering a piece of information about yourself, and (IV) asking something (not too personal) about the other person. Then start all over again. An agreeable balance among these four elements will produce the best kind of conversation.

"Conversation is like a ball that is tossed from person to person, with no one holding on to it for very long. If you feel that you have been talking for too long stop and ask a question of someone in the group. You will be tossing the conversation ball and giving that individual an opportunity to converse."

— Brian Tracy

6. You might find this simple formula for striking up a conversation helpful: Begin with a statement about the location or occasion, then ask an open question. Your statement might be linked to something you already have in common with the other person. For example, the meeting or function you're attending, the hotel you're staying at, the plane you're travelling on — even the weather will do at a pinch. You might call this a location/occasion statement. Examples include: Just after a seminar has concluded, "I thought she handled that last question from the audience very well." While helping yourself at a smorgasbord, "Look at the fantastic spread we've got here." At a business cocktail party, "There's a lot more people here tonight than I expected." A business networking event, "I was intrigued by your introduction. You said you specialise in ABC." That sort of thing.

Next comes the open question: "What's your take on her presentation?" "What looks good to you?" "How do you know our hosts?" "Would you tell me a little about what you do or what your company does?" Simple stuff, but that's all it takes to initiate a conversation. **Hint:** It is not so much the words you use but the "vibes" you give off — "FRIENDLY" is the way to go.

It's always a lot easier to introduce yourself to someone when you are one of the first there. You can say, "Hello, I'm.....It's nice to meet someone else who likes to arrive early." The conversation will flow from there.

- 6.5 A compliment, if genuine, can be a terrific way to start a conversation. "Hey, I like your (whatever)".
- 6.5A If you are at a networking event and you want to make contact with a particular person in the group you are participating in, wait for a time when the person is not speaking or listening intently. Then catch their eye and say, "Excuse me, I just wanted to introduce myself." or, "Excuse me, can I speak to you for a moment?"
- 6.5B When I take my seat on a plane, I always ask the person beside me, "Are you heading out or coming home?" Usually the conversation flows from there.

See my article entitled "**STARTING CONVERSATIONS WITH NEW CONTACTS**" for a whole host of opening lines, ice-breakers and pointers for initiating conversations with strangers wherever you go.

7. You can connect with just about everyone, if you make the effort. Dale Carnegie famously pointed out that you can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you. "To be interesting, be interested" Carnegie advised. Try to find some aspect of the other person's talk that genuinely interests you. As they mention a personal or business issue, grab it, run with it, expand on it. Ask follow up questions to invite the person to continue or elaborate.
8. Unless you're trapped by a motormouth — he or she who talks for the pleasure of their own voice — don't interrupt. Allow the other person to complete their points and count at least three seconds of silence before you respond. No interruptions allows you to show your interest in what the person is saying.

The potential for clinching the sale and winning new business increases exponentially when we demonstrate a personal interest in the other person i.e. the client or the prospective client.

- 8.5 Many executives/professionals think they are supposed to be a fountain of advice and business solutions. As experts, they often feel the need to come up with answers to everything on the spot. They often recognise the issue/concern being described to them and in their eagerness to please will interrupt the speaker (usually a prospective client or referral source) and start to provide the “answer”, hoping to impress by proving how knowledgeable they are. This, unfortunately, has the exact opposite effect almost always.

By interrupting and offering solutions when we hear a “hot button”, we prove two things: one, we’re not *really* listening, and two, that we’re too keen to “pigeon hole”, the issue or concern like a “generic” one, not as a special/unique one as the speaker may feel it is. The best business developers and salespeople hold themselves back from offering solutions and advice until after all the issues/concerns/needs/wants are on the table. If you start responding to concerns as you hear them, you will be doing far too much talking and interrupting the speaker confiding in you.

Ever have conversations like this?

Prospective Client: “We hired a consultant to design and install a communications network for our office and the guy didn’t meet the project timetable. Now my boss is complaining that the network isn’t doing the job we paid for it to do.”

You: “No problem! We get all of our work done on time and on budget. And all of our clients are happy with the work we do for them.”

Prospective Client: “That’s what the last guy said”.

Are you in the (bad) habit of interrupting when you should be listening? If so, you could be talking yourself out of a lot of good business. Think about it.

Hint: Suppress your enthusiasm and let people finish their words before you respond — you’ll have better conversations and win more business that way.

9. Great conversationalists show a genuine interest and curiosity in other people by weaving good, well-worded questions into the conversation. Questions allow you to find out about other people. Questions give people the opportunity to talk about the most interesting subject in the world to them — THEMSELVES. Questions save you from those awkward moments of silence when conversations stall. Your questions help you build rapport and develop other people’s trust in you.

The following list of questions will help you make more of your conversations open, honest and meaningful experiences — for you and the other person. It’s not about interrogation. You’re not going to fire all of these questions at someone in the one meeting. Indeed, just one or two engaging questions is often all it takes to jumpstart a deep and meaningful conversation. Try some of these...

SEEKING AND FINDING COMMON GROUND

- What do you like to do when you are not working? What are your interests outside work? What do you like to do on vacation or on the weekends?
- Where did you grow up and go to school?
- What was it like growing up there? /going to school there?
- Where are you from? What's the accent all about? Where are you from?
- What do you enjoy reading when you have the time?
- Where do you like to eat out?
- How did you decide to come to (wherever it is he or she now lives)?
- What sports do you enjoy watching/participating in?
- Who is the most famous person you're ever met?
- What book has had the biggest impact on you?

- Who would you consider to be your hero?
- Do you have kids? Boys? Girls? How old?
- How do you know our hosts?
- What's your tie-in/connection with this group? How do you know our hosts?
- What's your interest in this topic/seminar/conference etc?
- What are your reasons for coming to this (whatever the event is)?

You make connections and build relationships on common ground. Common ground is something — anything — you have in common with the other person and, as the list below shows, covers a broad spectrum.

- Cars/Boats
- Clothes
- Friends/Business Associates
- Sports
- Hobbies
- Art
- Music
- Food/Restaurants
- Wine
- Dance
- School/University
- Memberships
- Home Town/State/Country
- Goals/Ambitions
- Mentors/Coaches
- Travel/Vacation
- Kid's School/Sports
- Studies/Courses
- Politics
- Religion
- The Environment
- Business.....You name it.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU...RAPPORT BUILDING IN A BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS ENCOUNTER

- What do you do for a living? What are you involved in?
- So, how are you finding things at the moment?
- What does your company do? Tell me a little about your firm.
- How long have you been at (whatever the name of the company he or she works with)?
- So, what do you like best about what you do? What's your favourite part of your job?
- Oh yeah. So what got you started in that direction? So what made you decide to go into your line of work? How did you get into this field? So what was it that attracted you to the law (or whatever)?
- What business or industry associations, if any, do you have time to be involved with?
- When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?
- Who has influenced you most professionally?...most personally? Who were the most significant influences in your professional life?

- What is your motto?...favourite book?...favourite destination?
- What do you like to eat and drink?
- How do you stay up to date with business trends and ideas?
- What's going on in your business these days?
- What types of individuals or companies do you typically work with?
- Why do people typically come to you? What problems do you solve?
- What sort of clients are you looking for and how can you help them?
- What do your clients accomplish by working with you that makes you different from your competitors?
- How do you go about finding new clients? How or where do you find most of your business?
- What's going well for you this year? What difference is that making?
- So, where do you think your industry is heading? What trends do you see shaping up? What are the emerging business trends in your market?
- Who are your major competitors? How are you different from them?
- Where did you get the idea for your business?
- What was the first job you had?
- How did you get your start in business/in banking/in the legal game (or whatever)?
- What's your company's greatest strength?
- How did you find out about this meeting?
- Walking out of a meeting, presentation etc, "What did you think of all that?"
- What other meetings or groups do you attend during the month?
- How long have you been a member of this organisation?
- How has this organisation been helpful to you in your business/career?
- What do you like most about this organisation?
- What other organisations have you found to be helpful to you?

Networking is not all about you; it's discovering what you can do for someone else. This means making an effort to understand your "contacts'" hopes and dreams, needs and wants, likes and dislikes, worries and concerns, issues and challenges, goals and priorities. In short, this means asking questions like the following ones....

DISCOVERING HOW YOU CAN HELP OTHERS ACHIEVE THEIR BUSINESS GOALS

- What prompted you to come here? Why is that important?
- Who makes an ideal client for you? Who is a good referral for you?
- How would I recognise a good business opportunity for you?
- What are some of the typical indicators that show there might be a need for your services/products/expertise?
- What are a few questions I could ask to confirm whether there is really a need, if I uncover one of these indicators?
- How can I know if someone I'm speaking to would be a good contact/client/prospect/referral source for you? Should I refer them to you?
- What do you want to achieve next? What do you still want to achieve that you haven't achieved?
- What are you committed to achieving in your business this year/over the next few years?
- What are your priorities?
- What do you find most challenging in your role? /about your line of work?
- What's the most difficult thing about your job?
- How or where do you find most of your business?
- What are your biggest challenges in your work?
- What are the day-to-day problems facing your business?
- What are the biggest challenges facing your firm?
- If there was anything you could change, what would it be? What difference would that make?
- If there was one thing you could get off your desk, what would that be?
- What are the business issues that keep you up at night?
- Where in your business would you like to see some real savings in costs made?
- Is there any specific improvement that you would like to see in your business?
- What challenges/issues in your work might I, or my company, be able to help you with?
- What's bothering you in your business these days?
- What's your biggest immediate need for your business?
- What's your most pressing and compelling needs in your business that you want to address? What difference would that make?
- If I could help you with that, would you be interested?
- Would you tell me what I can do to be of service to you in any way whatsoever?
- What is the best way to refer someone to you?
- Do you have a specific process?
- If there was one area/aspect of your business/company/department where you would like to see real improvement in, what or where would it be?
- What would make your job easier?
- What can I do to help you? Who can I introduce you to? Do you need anything in particular? Is there anything you need help with?

- Are you here for any particular reason? So, why are you here?
- What sort of people were you hoping to connect with today?
- How can I help you? Who would you like me to introduce you to?
- How will I know if someone I'm talking to will be a good introduction for you?

WHEN YOU'RE DONE WITH BUSINESS TALK OR IT'S JUST "SOCIAL" TIME

- What's your favourite childhood TV show?
- What's your favourite quotation?
- What's your favourite food to cook?
- What makes you laugh? Give us some insight into your sense of humour.
- What was the best prank you ever pulled off?
- What was the best prank someone pulled on you?
- What's the best book you've read about your field?
- If you could add a single option to your car, what would you add?
- Who would you most like to get stuck in a lift with?
- If you could only subscribe to one magazine for the rest of your life, which one would it be?
- If you could have dinner with any three people, whom would you choose?
- If you could hear anyone in history give a speech, whom would you hear?
- If you could possess any superpower, what would it be?
- If you could live in one city for the rest of your life, where would you live?

See my article entitled "**CLASSIC NETWORKING QUESTIONS**" for dozens more engaging questions you can weave into your business and non-business conversations to make them more successful...to show you care...to build a rapport...to find out how you can serve the other person first, rather than just prospect and sell...to open the door to new business for your company or firm.

These open-ended questions cover enough material to keep any conversation rolling along as well as providing gateways to new topics of discussion. They also demonstrate your openness and your interest in your conversational partner. Remember, it's not an interrogation. When misused or overused, questions are annoying. Asking too many questions makes other people feel positively hunted and is often the fall-back position of a poor conversationalist; questions are no substitute for thought, for self-revelation, for authentic exchanges.

Overall, in any conversation, balance questions and statements. All questions or all statements do not produce a good back-and-forth exchange.

"I happen to disagree with the theory that the art of conversation is merely the art of being a good listener. Such advice invites people to be cynical with one another and full of fake — when a conversation becomes a monologue, poked along with tiny cattle-prod questions; it isn't a conversation any more. It is a strained, manipulative game, tiring and perhaps even lonely."

— Barbara Walters

***Three questions in a row begins to look like,
sound like the Spanish Inquisition, so you need to have something
to say in addition to just asking questions.***

- 9.5 Knowing how to ask a good question is an invaluable skill. Good questions seek information honestly — the person doing the asking is genuinely interested and curious in hearing the other person's response. Good questions are your tools for creating open and authentic dialogue, building rapport and strengthening relationships.

Whether you're asking questions to get to know the person better or to find out about a prospective client's strategic objectives, business needs and personal aspirations, think about how you might preface them (your questions) with language that begs a response. People don't want to feel like they're being interrogated (and nor do you want them to grow bored or confused) by your questions.

A big part of asking questions that people feel good about answering, questions that promote a rich dialogue, is to lead into them with language that shows where you are coming from or demonstrates a rationale for asking your question/s. You don't want people wondering why you're asking what you're asking. And worse than that, you don't want to offend people or have them grow bored or confused by your seemingly inappropriate questions.

Here are some examples of prefacing a question, explaining "why" the question is being asked...

- (a) Let's say you're meeting with a prospective client and you're seeking information to see if your business offering fits the prospect's needs. Preface your question with an item of information that shows you know something of the company and industry: "It's my understanding that.....So, I'd like to ask.....?" or, "Frequently, my clients have difficulty with..... Is this something that you would like to see your company improve/increase/decrease?" or, "When I speak to other key players in your industry they tell me..... How are you finding.....?" or, "I was reading in your annual report that you are looking to..... Can you tell me your thinking in wanting to.....?" or, "We often do X and Y as a way to..... Is that the kind of thing you were thinking about?"
- (b) Let's say you're at a business networking event talking to a new acquaintance. Someone you haven't met before. "I don't get along to these kind of meetings nearly enough. They really are an important way to keep up with what's going on in this industry and there's always people who can help your business. What about you Steve? What value do you get from coming along to these meetings?" or, "I've enjoyed a long and valuable friendship with (host's name). We've been doing business together since..... What's your connection with (host's name)?" or "Mary, I meet a lot of good people in my business, some of whom might benefit from meeting you. How would I know if someone I met would be a good client for you?" or, "It sure sounds like you are seeking to build your business with the same type of clients I like to work with. Why don't we get together sometime and explore how we might create a marketing alliance between our firms?"

By positioning your questions with a lead-in, you can make most people want to answer the question most of the time...and you can make tough business development questions prospect and client friendly. So, when you're asking questions think how you might preface them to promote a deeper, meaningful dialogue — one that will distinguish you from everyone else, especially your competitors!

- (c) If your's is a sales/business development role asking a question that creates meaningful dialogue in terms of the product or service you provide can (and often does) lead to new business for you and your company. The kind of questions I'm talking about here is one that engages the other person in a way that they will want to engage back with you. For example in your business it can be, "When you think about (insert your product/service here) what one word comes to mind?" Do you have four or five "engagement" questions that get people wanting to talk to you about your business?
10. Listen to people skilfully. The more listening you do, the smarter you will become, the better you will be liked, and the better conversationalist you will be.

A good listener always winds up far ahead of a good talker in the affections of people. This is because a good listener always allows people to hear their favourite speakers, THEMSELVES.

Here are a few rules which make a skilful listener.....

- Focus on the other person, not allowing yourself to be distracted by what's going on around you or by your own thoughts and concerns. (The major reason why most people are poor listeners is because they are busy preparing a reply while the other person is speaking. In fact, they are not even listening closely to what the other person is saying.

They are just waiting for the opportunity to jump in and take over the conversation). Look at the person who is talking, leaning slightly forward, nodding occasionally and saying "uh-huh" (or similar) at intervals.
- Never think you can "speak and peek" during a conversation. Don't scam the room, acknowledge people as they walk by, or check your watch. These gestures show that you are not really interested in the conversation and they are extremely obvious, no matter how short their duration.
- Occasionally break eye contact so that the other person doesn't feel as though they're under a microscope.
- Ask questions that show you're following the other person's train of thought. For example, "So, I take it that you mean.....?" "If I understand you correctly, what you are saying is.....?"
- Subtly mirror the other person: smile, frown, nod and laugh when they do.
- Stick to the speaker's subject and don't interrupt. Don't change subjects on a person until he/she is finished no matter how anxious you are to get started on a new one.

- Listen as though there were nothing else in the world more fascinating to you than what the other person is saying. The very best listeners seem to have developed the knack of making the person who is speaking feel as if he or she were the only person in the world. Good conversationalists can even do this in the middle of a crowded room.
- Pause before replying. A short pause of 3 to 5 seconds, is a very classy thing to do in a conversation. When you pause, you accomplish three goals simultaneously. (I) You avoid running the risk of interrupting if the other person is just catching his or her breath before continuing. (II) You show the other person that you are giving careful consideration to his or her words by not jumping in with your own comments at the earliest opportunity. (III) You will actually hear the other person better. By pausing, you mark yourself as a great conversationalist.
- When you're not absolutely clear on what the other person is saying or trying to say ask, "(say person's name), what do you mean, exactly?" This powerful question shows your interest in (and helps you understand with greater clarity) what the other person is saying. You can then follow up with other (open-ended) questions and keep the conversation rolling along.

The reason why listening is such a powerful tool in developing your conversation skills is because listening builds trust. The more you listen to another person, the more he or she trusts you and believes in you...and is open to hearing about your business offerings.

“Seek to understand before you seek to be understood”, advises Steven Covey author of Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. So — if you want to be listened to, you need to put in time listening.

- 10.5 In sales and business development, when we really listen to the client or prospect articulate interests, wishes, concerns and other thoughts, we are putting them in debt to us. They then have a feeling that they “owe” us something in return and consequently, are more willing to listen to what we have to say since we have payed them the courtesy of listening to them. That’s “reciprocity” for you.
11. When opportunity knocks, open the door. If you share commonalities, especially in target markets, ask the person, “Would you be interested in getting together for lunch sometime? I’d enjoy the opportunity to learn more about you and your business. My clients see me as a resource and, at some point, you might be able to solve problems faced by some of them.”.....

If (in conversation) you identify an opportunity to do some business with the person you have just met you could say, “Can I call you next week to discuss the problem you have with.....Now isn’t the time or place, but maybe your problem is a simple issue which I can give you some help on.” If you have made the right impression, the answer will be “yes”.

“You mentioned earlier that your company is going through exponential growth. I’ve done a great deal of work with firms like yours. I have a couple of ideas that might help you with some of the challenges you are facing. Would you like to meet up for lunch/coffee sometime? I’d be happy to share my ideas with you”

“Would you like to have a business conversation sometime?”

“May I have your business card?” (After you have found a good reason to follow up later with the person).

When you ask for someone’s card, you can add, “Would it be okay if I called you to set up a meeting?”

“Can I call you to see if there might be a fit with your needs and our service offerings?” “I promise not to give you a hard sell” (optional).....

“If I could help you with that, would you be interested?”

“Who else do you know that I should be talking to?”

“Why don’t we sit down and talk sometime?”

“Let’s talk over lunch sometime and see what transpires.”

“Let’s find another time to continue this conversation. How about I call you tomorrow morning to tee up a meeting?”

“Can we get together to discuss this further?”

“I would like to talk with you further about my services, may I give you a call?”

After you’ve had a pleasant exchange with a new acquaintance, you might say, “I’ve enjoyed meeting you. Why don’t we keep in touch?” Then exchange cards, and the next day send a note/email to your new contact.

“Can I call you next week to see if there is a connection between your needs and what we have to offer?” “Let’s keep in touch/I’d like to keep in touch — you never know we might be able to help each other down the track.”

“Let’s schedule a follow-up meeting and continue this conversation. What do you say?”

“Let’s have coffee sometime and see what further connections there might be between us.”

“John, I might be able to help you with that problem. Do you want to sit down and talk sometime? Maybe we should sit down and talk sometime.”

I'd like to try to learn if there's a fit between what you're trying to do with your business and what we have to offer. Can I call you sometime and set up a meeting to chat?".....

"I can help you with that problem/issue/challenge. Would you like me to call you during business hours?".....

"Why don't we continue this conversation over coffee or a bit to eat sometime?"

If your conversational partner is interested in having a follow-up conversation with you, ask for his/her card and arrange to be in touch. "When is a good time for me to call and set up a meeting with you?"

"May I contact you Tuesday or Wednesday next week to find out more about your business and tell you a little about mine?"

"Let's get together sometime and explore how we can help each other find more business. It sounds like we work with the same types of companies."

"I've enjoyed meeting you. I think we might be able to help each other develop some business. May I call you tomorrow to talk some more?"

"May I send you a complimentary copy of my on-line newsletter?" (If they freely give you their business card).

12. Exiting conversations can be tricky if you're not sure how to go about it. Here's what works for me...If I'm a participant in a group, I simply scale back my active involvement and when there's a lull in the conversation I'll say something like "Please/will you excuse me" — "It's been good talking with you" or "I hope you enjoy the rest of the evening/conference (or whatever)". Then I leave. It's just that simple.

If you're engaged in a one-on-one conversation you need to wait for a lull in the conversation, at which time reach out your hand, shake hands and say, "You must want to meet others. I hope we'll have the opportunity to talk again." Then take your leave. Or, begin with a comment of thanks to indicate that you're moving on: "Thank you for taking the time to talk with me. I'm going to mingle a bit. Will you excuse me?" Don't be concerned if the other person will feel rejected. Just assume everyone will be fine and move on when you are ready. If you are at a business networking function, you could conclude a conversation with: "Why don't we see if there are others in the room that we should meet?" or "Why don't we go and talk to some other people here?" or "Let's go meet some other people?" or "I'd like you to meet.....Let's go say hello."

...And if both of you have a sense of humour, you might even say something like this: "I would love to stay here and chew the fat with you but, unfortunately, I've got more important people to talk to." I usually leave them laughing with this one.

Another way to exit is to offer to introduce your conversational partner to others. An introduction spoken with respect, interest and energy is infectious. Helping others increase their contact base is kind, smart and memorable. It's a way to build your business, your reputation and your bottom line.

Most conversations find their graceful, convenient, and natural end when those involved realise it's time to move on. However, if a conversation is not going well, excuse yourself. A couple of exit lines might be: "I ought to say hello to some other people. Will you excuse me?" "Well I suppose we should circulate. I hope you enjoy the evening." "I'm sorry but I must get going." For more guidelines, phrases and some dos and don'ts for ending conversations, see my articles entitled, "**CONCLUDING A CONVERSATION**" and "**84 WAYS TO WRAP IT UP**".

13. Here's a truism for people in sales and business development: All things being equal, people want to do business with their friends. A critical key to becoming a great conversationalist (and a truly successful sales person or business developer) is your friendliness. Your friendliness (and your ability to make friends) is based on the three Cs of caring, courtesy and consideration.

You've heard it many times: "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care". **Caring** is the catalyst in all good relationships. The people you like the best and who like you the best are the ones with whom you have the most caring relationships. Whenever you show another person that you genuinely care about him or her, you come across better as a conversationalist and as a friend.

The second C in the friendly factor is **courtesy**. It is the magic quality of politeness that causes people to want to be around you. All good conversationalists make other people feel calm and comfortable in their presence. They never do or say anything that could hurt or offend the other person in any way. They are continually diplomatic. They don't put down other people and their ideas. They leave their complaints and condemnations at home and the office. They always remain warm and friendly on the outside.

The third C in the friendly stakes is **consideration**. One of the major sources of "feeling good about ourselves" is the feeling that we are respected and considered highly by other people. Whenever you treat another person as an important and worthwhile human being, you trigger this consideration factor. You show that you not only value the conversation, but you value the speaker as well. **HINT:** Applaud and compliment people when they deserve it. Look for somebody and something to praise and then do it. Your praise must be sincere or don't give it — and the trick is to praise the act, not the person...pinpoint the act. Try it!

14. Some final thoughts for you...
- (I) As a basic tenet, you cannot sell when you're trying to meet people. If you've ever been trapped at a function next to someone who is trying to sell you something — his products, her reputation — you know how the smarminess kills off your interest.
 - (II) Don't ever feel that someone will not want to meet and talk with you, no matter what level of success they have achieved. In the end people are all the same. The trick is to have something that is interesting enough or important enough to gain that person's attention.

- (III) When sharing information about your business (or anything else) share just the basics. Save the long story for people you never want to meet again. It works!
- (IV) It's better to have two or three quality conversations at a business gathering than to superficially "work the room".
- (V) Remember to use people's names. "Please remind me. Will you tell me your name again?" You can say this only once.
- (VI) In a group, stimulate conversation as much as you can. "Did you see the article in this morning's paper about...?" "Has anyone seen (say the name of new movie)?" Bring in the quiet ones. "Mary. What's your opinion about all this?" Pass the baton to someone who hasn't spoken. "Brian why don't you tell everyone about your recent trip to China?"
- (VII) Make people feel important — recognise and acknowledge someone's expertise and capabilities, compliment them when they deserve it, pay attention to everybody in a group, call people by their names, pause before you answer them, ask them to tell you more or ask them how they feel about this or that.

Remember, the purpose of conversation is not to dominate, control or be right. The purpose of conversation is to enjoy yourself and to make sure others enjoy themselves when they are with you.

Knowing how to skilfully converse with people is a proficiency that will serve you well in all areas of your professional and personal life. Do practice your conversation skills — this will lead to more friends, more success, more happiness.

Nothing — absolutely nothing — builds relationships better than regular meaningful conversations.

Ron Gibson runs training programmes, provides one-on-one mentoring and conducts public and corporate seminars on building business through networking, referrals and word of mouth. Get Ron to speak to your people about how to bring in more business, more consistently and more often. Call Ron on 0413 420 538 or email gonetworking@iinet.net.au.

"Your network training has been enthusiastically received by our people. Your promise was to deliver the "how to" of networking. You did that. Thank you."

**— DEREK YOUNG
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
IPAC FINANCIAL PLANNING
HONG KONG**