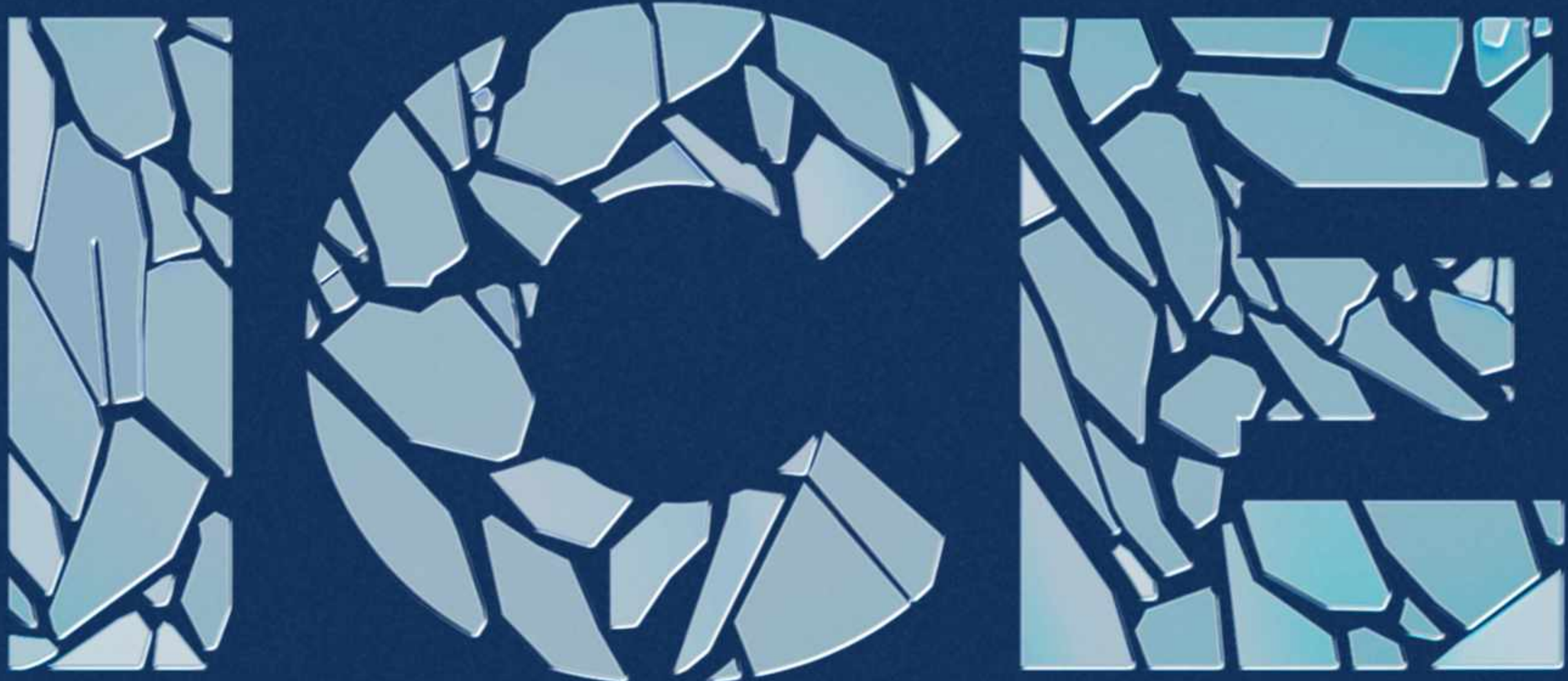


BREAK THE



Easy Networking For Entrepreneurs

An Entrepreneur's Guide to
Starting Conversations at Networking Events

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An Entrepreneur's Guide to Starting Conversations at Networking Events

Hey there, fellow entrepreneur!

If you're reading this, you're probably like me in more ways than one. You've attended countless networking events and conferences, exchanged numerous business cards, and had your fair share of conversations - some memorable, some... not so much. And if you're anything like me, here's the kicker - you don't actually enjoy networking all that much. Surprised? Let me explain.

Over a decade of working events has taught me a thing or two about starting conversations, especially with people I seemingly have nothing in common with, or whose industry is a complete mystery to me. I've had amazing conversations that opened doors I didn't even know existed, and I've had interactions where I wished the ground would open up and swallow me.

Throughout these experiences, I've developed what I like consider my 'go-to method' for networking - a method born not out of a love for small talk and mingling, but out of necessity and the practicalities of being an entrepreneur. It's a method tailored for those of us who find networking less than natural, who'd rather be working on our next big project than making small talk.

In this book, "**Break The Ice,**" I'm going to share everything I've learned from my own experiences. You'll find real stories, practical tips, and strategies that have helped me navigate these waters. This isn't your typical networking guide. It's a collection of insights from someone who's been in the trenches, learned the hard way, and found a way to make it work despite not being a natural at networking.

So, whether you're attending your first networking event or your hundredth, whether you love these events or secretly dread them, this book is for you. I'm here to show you that it's possible to have meaningful, productive conversations even when you're out of your comfort zone.

Let's embark on this journey together.

Let's turn those awkward introductions into opportunities, one conversation at a time.



A Quick Note Before We Begin

As we dive into this book, you'll come across various examples and suggested phrases. It's important to remember that these are just guidelines. The specific words I use might not perfectly match your style of speaking, and that's okay. The key is to use language that feels natural to you.

Also, keep in mind that reading a conversation on a page can sometimes feel a bit awkward. But don't worry, this is normal. When you adapt these examples into your own words and speak in a way that's comfortable for you, the conversation will flow smoothly and feel more natural. So, take these examples as a starting point and make them your own.

Chapter 1:

The Art of Starting Conversations

Mastering the Three-Step Approach

Starting a conversation at a networking event doesn't have to be a daunting task. By following a simple three-step approach, you can start engaging and meaningful conversations with ease. Let's break down these steps: Location/Occasion/Situation, Career/Passion, and Past Positive Memories.

Step 1: Location/Occasion/Situation

Start your conversations in the present moment. This is about using your immediate surroundings, the event you're both attending, or the situation you find yourselves in. It's a shared experience, and that makes it a great conversation starter.

***Example:** At a startup launch event, you might say, "This launch has been quite the buzz in the tech community. What brings you here tonight?"*

Step 2: Career/Passion

Once you've broken the ice, it's time to get a little more personal. Shift the conversation to their professional life or personal interests. This step is crucial because it moves the conversation from general small talk to something more substantial and personal.

Example: "I heard you mention you're in digital marketing. What drew you to that line of work?"

Step 3: Past Positive Memories

People love to share stories and experiences, especially positive ones. Encourage your conversation partner to share past experiences related to their career or interests. This not only makes the conversation more engaging but also helps you understand them better.

Example: "You mentioned you've been in marketing for a decade. What's one of your favourite projects that you've worked on?"

Why This Approach Works

This three-step approach works because it naturally deepens the conversation. You start with neutral ground (location/situation), move to something more personal (career/passion), and then invite them to share more about themselves through their experiences and memories. It's a smooth, logical progression that feels natural and is easy to follow.

Now I've explained the 3 step process, let's unpack this a bit more.



Breaking the Ice: It's Not as Hard as It Seems

I know, I know, walking into a room full of strangers can feel like stepping onto a stage unprepared. But here's the thing - it doesn't have to be that way. Let's talk about breaking the ice, and trust me, it's not as daunting as it seems.

Why the First Words Matter

Remember, the first few words you say aren't just about starting a conversation; they're about setting the tone. You want to come across as approachable, interested, and genuine. That's the trifecta that can turn a simple hello into a meaningful connection.



The Opening Line

So, what's the secret sauce to a good opening line? It's simpler than you might think. Start with something relevant to the setting or event. It's a neutral ground that's comfortable for both parties.

***Example:** You're at a tech conference. Instead of the usual "What do you do?", how about "Have you seen any cool tech today that caught your eye?" It's specific to the event and shows you're interested in their opinion.*

The Power of Observation

A little observation goes a long way. Notice something interesting about the person or the environment? Use it as a conversation starter. Maybe they're holding a book from your favourite author, or perhaps there's a unique piece of art or feature in the room.

***Example:** "I couldn't help but notice the book you're holding. 'The Lean Startup' transformed the way I approach my business. What's your take on it?"*

Listening is Key

Here's a tip that's often overlooked - listen more than you talk. Yes, the art of conversation is as much about listening as it is about speaking. Show genuine interest in what they're saying. It's not just polite; it's engaging.

From Small Talk to Real Talk

Alright, you've broken the ice. Now, how do you steer this ship from small talk to something more substantial? Ask open-ended questions related to your common ground – the event, the industry, their work. It invites them to share more, and before you know it, you're having a real conversation.

Example: "They mention they're in digital marketing. You could say, "Digital marketing changes so quickly. What's one trend you think is a game-changer?"

Remember, It's a Two-Way Street

Networking isn't just about what you can get out of a conversation. It's about mutual exchange and adding value. Share your insights, offer help if you can, and most importantly, be yourself. People can tell when you're genuine, and that's the key to any good relationship, business or personal.

Conclusion

So, there you have it. Starting a conversation isn't about having the perfect line; it's about being present, observant, and genuine. As entrepreneurs, we're constantly learning and adapting, and networking is no different. Keep these tips in mind, and you'll be starting meaningful conversations in no time. Let's turn these introductions into opportunities, one chat at a time.

PRO TIP

Harness the Power of First Impressions

Here's a little secret that I've learned over my years of attending networking events: When you meet someone new, they have no preconceived notions of who you are or how you normally act. This is your golden opportunity to set the tone for how you're perceived.

Enter every conversation with absolute confidence and positive energy. Why? Because the person you're talking to will assume this is just how you are. They'll think, "Wow, this person must be confident in all their conversations. They wouldn't be this self-assured if they hadn't been successful in countless other conversations."

It's a bit like a self-fulfilling prophecy. You act confident, they perceive you as confident, and this, in turn, fuels your confidence even more. Remember, confidence is contagious. When you bring good energy to a conversation, it sets a comfortable and engaging tone, making the other person more likely to respond positively.

So next time you're about to start a conversation, remind yourself: They don't know you. As far as they're concerned, you're a successful, confident entrepreneur who's been networking like a pro for years. This mindset can be a game-changer in how you approach and handle conversations at networking events.



Chapter 2:

Deepening the Dialogue

Beyond the Introduction: Engaging in Meaningful Conversations

So you've mastered the art of starting a conversation (or at least you have read how to master a conversation). But what comes next? How do you turn that initial exchange into something more meaningful and engaging? Let's look at deepening the dialogue.

The Art of Asking Good Questions

Good questions are the backbone of any engaging conversation. They show that you're not just interested in talking about yourself, but genuinely curious about the other person. The trick here is to ask open-ended questions – the kind that can't be answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no.'

***Example:** Instead of asking, "Do you like your job?", try "What do you enjoy most about your work?" It invites them to share more detailed insights and experiences.*

Active Listening: More Than Just Hearing

Active listening is where the magic happens. It's not just about hearing the words; it's about truly understanding and engaging with what the other person is saying. Nodding, maintaining eye contact, and responding with relevant comments or questions show that you're fully present in the conversation.

Sharing Your Stories

While it's essential to listen, sharing your own relevant experiences and stories is equally important. It makes the conversation a two-way street and helps establish a connection. Just remember to keep your stories concise and relevant to the topic at hand.

Example: *"If they talk about a challenge they've faced in their business, you might share a similar obstacle you encountered and how you overcame it."*

Finding the Balance

The key to deepening the dialogue lies in finding the right balance between listening and sharing. You don't want to dominate the conversation, but you also don't want to be just a sounding board. Aim for a natural flow, where both parties are equally engaged.

Recognising and Adapting to Non-Verbal Cues

Pay attention to non-verbal cues. Are they leaning in, showing interest? Or are they looking around, signalling they might want to wrap up the conversation? Being sensitive to these cues can help you navigate the conversation effectively.

Conclusion

Deepening a conversation is a skill, and like any skill, you will get better with practice. The next time you find yourself in a networking event, use these ideas to transform simple introductions into engaging, meaningful dialogues. Remember, the goal is to build connections that are both professionally beneficial and personally rewarding.

PRO TIP

The Art of Using Softeners in Conversation

When diving into deeper topics or asking personal questions, it's important to keep the conversation feeling like a friendly chat, not an interrogation. That's where 'softeners' come into play. Softeners are phrases that you can use to gently lead into a question or topic, making it feel more like a natural part of the conversation rather than a sudden probing inquiry.

My go to softeners that I use day to day are:

- ✓ *"I'm curious, "*
- ✓ *"Let me ask you this, "*
- ✓ *"Just so I understand"*

Using softeners signals to the other person that my intention is to know more about them in a respectful and interested way.

Example: *Instead of bluntly asking, "Why did you choose your career?", try softening it with, "I'm curious, what inspired you to choose your career in...?" It feels less like an interrogation and more like genuine interest in their story.*

Or, when wanting to delve deeper into a topic they mentioned, you might say, "Just so I understand, could you tell me more about...?" It shows that you're actively listening and eager to understand their perspective.

Remember, the key here is to maintain a conversational tone. Networking isn't about grilling someone for information; it's about building a connection. By using softeners, you're more likely to encourage open, honest, and comfortable sharing.

Armed with this three-step approach and the knowledge of using softeners, you're now equipped to start conversations that are not only engaging but also comfortable and natural. Keep these tips in mind as you navigate your next networking event, and watch as conversations unfold more smoothly and connections form more easily. Happy networking!

Chapter 3:

Finding Common Ground

The Key to Memorable Conversations

Now that you understand starting conversations and using softeners, let's move on to one of the most crucial aspects of networking: finding common ground. This chapter is all about turning those initial exchanges into engaging, memorable conversations.

Why Common Ground Matters

Finding common ground is like discovering a secret passage in a conversation – it opens up a whole new level of connection. It's not just about making small talk; it's about finding a shared interest, experience, or viewpoint that can transform a polite chat into a meaningful interaction.

Listening for Clues

The first step in finding common ground is to listen – really listen – to what the other person is saying. Are they mentioning a hobby, a business challenge, or perhaps a recent vacation spot that you're familiar with? These are potential areas for deeper connection.

***Example:** If they mention enjoying hiking, and you're an avid hiker, that's an instant common interest you can explore further.*

Sharing Relatable Experiences

Once you've identified a potential common ground, share something related from your own life. This isn't about one-upping their story but about showing that you relate to their experience or interest.

***Example:** "You mentioned you enjoy hiking. I recently hiked the [Trail Name] it was amazing. Where is the best place you have hiked?"*

Asking Open-Ended Questions

Once you've found a common area of interest, use open-ended questions to delve deeper. This encourages a more meaningful dialogue and shows that you're genuinely interested in their perspective.

Example: *"You said you're passionate about renewable energy. What do you think is the most exciting development in that field right now?"*

Conclusion

Finding common ground is a skill that enhances the quality of your networking conversations. It's about finding small threads and building it into a rope between your world and theirs. With practice, you'll get better at identifying these opportunities for connection. Remember, the goal of networking is not just to meet people – it's to connect with them on a level that goes beyond the surface.

PRO TIP

Building Common Ground Through Your Responses

A vital aspect of networking conversations is not just in how you respond to others, but also in how you frame your own stories and answers. Remember, effective networking is a two-way street. When you share your experiences or answer questions, think of it as laying out a series of stepping stones for your conversation partner. You're giving them opportunities to connect their own experiences and thoughts with yours, keeping the conversation flowing naturally.



When you respond or tell a story, try to include elements that the other person can relate to or pick up on to start a new thread of conversation. This approach makes it easier for them to engage and contribute, creating a more creative and flowing conversation.

***Example:** "If you're asked about your hobbies, instead of just saying, "I enjoy reading," elaborate a bit more. You might say, "I enjoy reading, particularly historical fiction and biographies. I find it fascinating to dive into different eras and life stories. How about you? Do you enjoy reading or any other hobbies?" This not only shares something about you but also opens the door for them to connect on their interests.*

This strategy is particularly helpful in situations where you might not have obvious common ground. By providing diverse hooks in your conversation, you're essentially casting a wider net, increasing the chances of finding a shared interest or experience.

Chapter 4:

Navigating Conversational Challenges

Turning Challenges into Opportunities

Let's face it – not every interaction goes as smoothly as we'd like. In this chapter, we'll explore how to navigate through some common conversational challenges and turn them into opportunities.



Dealing with Difficult Conversations

Sometimes, you might find yourself in a conversation that feels like it's going off the rails. Maybe the topic is contentious, or perhaps the other person's views are drastically different from yours. In such cases, the key is to maintain a respectful and open-minded stance. A great line that you want to keep in the back of your mind here is "That's an interesting perspective/take/view".

Example: *If the conversation veers into a controversial area, you might say, "That's an interesting perspective. I hadn't considered that. My experience has been a bit different, though."*

(I will then try and move the conversation in a different direction, normally based on another thread I have picked up on)

Handling One Word Answers

You ask a question, and all you get is a one-word answer.

It happens and it can feel REALLY derailing. The trick here is not to take it personally and instead, try a different approach or topic.

***Example:** "If your attempt to discuss their work doesn't elicit much response, switch gears. "Outside of work, what do you enjoy doing in your free time?"*

Exiting Conversations Gracefully

Not every conversation is meant to turn into a meaningful connection, and that's okay, to be honest, some conversations will bomb even if you have the best conversational skills in the world. If you feel the conversation has reached its natural conclusion or isn't mutually beneficial, it's important to exit gracefully.

This is the exact line I will normally use:

Example: *"[Name] it was great chatting with you, I'm going to go and meet a couple of other new faces, but let's connect on LinkedIn!"*

An Extra Note On Exiting A Conversation

Body language plays a crucial role in communication, especially in signalling your intentions non-verbally. When you're ready to exit a conversation, start using body language that gently indicates you're preparing to leave the interaction.

Conclusion

Conversational challenges are part and parcel of networking. The key is to navigate these situations with grace, adaptability, and a touch of humour. Remember, each interaction is a learning opportunity. With practice, you'll become more adept at turning these challenges into opportunities for growth and connection.

PRO TIP

Embracing Awkwardness with a Personal Story

Here's a little secret: everyone finds networking awkward at times – even the most charismatic communicators. Sometimes, the best way to handle these moments is simply to acknowledge them.

Example: If you both stumble over your words or experience a moment of silence, a light-hearted comment like, "And there is the awkward silence that I was dreading" can ease the tension - this needs to be delivered with a smile and friendly nature.



Personal Story

I like to go with the flow when I am presenting on stage and be in the moment with the audience. I remember once telling a joke that I thought worked well given the situation, in my head it was comedy gold. But as I delivered the punchline, there was complete silence. No laughter, no response, just a sea of blank faces staring back at me. In that moment of awkward silence, I paused, looked at the audience, and said, "That was so much funnier in my head." To my relief, this instantly broke the ice. The audience burst into laughter, and the tension dissolved... This line is a go to line that I now use whenever I tell an unfunny joke on stage (*which is quite often*).

This experience taught me a valuable lesson: embracing awkwardness can be a powerful tool. It makes you more relatable and human. When people see that you can laugh at yourself, it makes you more likeable and approachable. This approach works wonders in networking situations as well. If a joke falls flat or if you find yourself in an awkward pause, a self-deprecating remark or a light-hearted acknowledgment of the situation can turn it around and even endear you to others.

Embracing awkwardness, especially in networking scenarios, can turn potentially uncomfortable moments into opportunities for connection. By sharing your own experiences of handling awkward situations with humour and grace, you give others permission to do the same. This not only eases the tension but also enhances your likability and approachability.

Chapter 5:

Beyond the Conversation

Cultivating Lasting Connections

Welcome to Chapter 5! You've learned how to start conversations, navigate challenges, and find common ground. But what happens after the networking event is over? How do you turn those initial conversations into lasting connections? I want to wrap up this short book with a few tips around what to do after you have nailed the conversation.



The Art of the Follow-Up

Following up is perhaps the most crucial step in networking that's often overlooked. A timely, thoughtful follow-up can turn a brief interaction into a lasting professional relationship.

Send a Personalised Message: Within a day or two after meeting someone, send them a personalised email or LinkedIn message. Mention something specific from your conversation to show that you were genuinely engaged.

***Example:** "Hi [Name], it was great to meet you at [Event]. I really enjoyed our conversation about [Topic]. I'd love to keep in touch and see if there are ways we can collaborate in the future."*

Connect on Social Media: LinkedIn is a great platform for professional connections. A connection request accompanied by a short, personalised note can solidify your new relationship.

Scheduling Follow-Up Meetings

If you think there's potential for a business relationship, don't hesitate to suggest a follow-up meeting. This could be a coffee catch-up, a formal meeting, or even a virtual chat.

Example: *"I feel there's a lot we can learn from each other. Would you be open to meeting for coffee next week to continue our conversation?"*

Adding Value to Your Connections

Always look for ways to add value to your connections.

Share resources, introduce them to someone in your network, or offer your expertise. This approach builds trust and shows that you're interested in a mutually beneficial relationship.

Conclusion

The conversations you have at networking events are just the beginning. By following up effectively and looking for ways to add value to your new connections, you can build a robust network that supports your entrepreneurial journey. Remember, networking is about building relationships, not just collecting contacts. With the tips in this book, you have all you need to master the art of networking.



PRO TIP

Stay Organised

Networking involves meeting a lot of people, and it can be easy to lose track. Keep a record of who you meet, key details from your conversations, and follow-up actions. This organisation will make your follow-up efforts more effective and personal.



My Closing Words

A Heartfelt Thank You

First off, thank you for downloading and reading this little book I've put out into the world. My hope is that it helps make your entrepreneurial journey, and maybe even the world, a little better.



Beyond the Search for More Tips

I often see people, after reaching this point, scouring the internet for more videos on 'How to be more charismatic' or 'How to start a conversation.' They're looking for more tips and tricks, thinking they need to be fully armed before they can dive into the world of networking. But let me tell you straight – I'm calling BULL@#*T! And yes, I'm using strong language here, but it's essential to drive home this point. It's just an excuse to avoid the discomfort of initiating a conversation, and your brain might try to find any reason to dispute this.

I say this with confidence because that was me. And honestly, I still catch myself doing it when learning something new. It's human nature to avoid discomfort, but as entrepreneurs, we thrive on facing challenges head-on. That's our superpower.

The Formula for Success

You don't need an endless list of tips or tricks to start a conversation. In this book, I've given you a clear, simple formula for conversational success. Trust it. Anything more, and you risk overcomplicating things. Just get out there and say that first 'Hi'.

That's how it all begins.

Appreciation and Invitation to Continue the Journey

If you're still here with me, I sincerely appreciate you lending me your time and the voice you've chosen to give me in your head. My goal was to guide you on starting conversations, and I hope I've exceeded your expectations, offering you immense value for your time.

This is just the start. I've equipped you with a powerful tool that, if used courageously, will open countless doors in your entrepreneurial journey.

If you're not already following me on social media, let's connect there. I share a lot of valuable content for free. And if you're ready to dive deeper, consider checking out my online course or email me about my monthly coaching program.

Until we speak again,

Anthony

P.S. I know you might still be looking for that extra push, so I'll leave you with a few conversation examples. Just a bit more fuel for your newfound conversational skills.



BONUS

Conversation Examples

These scenarios will help you visualise how the techniques from earlier chapters can be applied in different networking situations.

Scenario 1: Meeting Someone at a Conference

Context: You're at a tech conference, and you see someone standing alone, looking at the event schedule.

You: "Hi, I'm [Your Name]. There's so much to choose from in this schedule. Any sessions catching your eye?"

Them: "Hi, I'm [Their Name]. Yeah, I'm particularly interested in the keynote on artificial intelligence. How about you?"

You: "Definitely excited about that one too. I'm curious, what's your interest in AI? Are you working in that field?"

This conversation starter is based on the Location/Occasion/Situation approach, making it relevant and easy for the other person to engage.

Scenario 2: Connecting Over Shared Interests

Context: During a networking break, you overhear someone mentioning they enjoy mountain biking, which is a hobby of yours too.

You: "I couldn't help but overhear you're into mountain biking. I love it too! Do you have any favourite trails around here?"

Them: "Absolutely! I usually ride at [Trail Name]. It's challenging but really beautiful. How about you?"

You: "I've been there a few times myself! The views are incredible. Have you tried [Another Trail Name]?"

Here, you're using the shared interest (mountain biking) to establish common ground and deepen the conversation.

Scenario 3: Shifting from Professional to Personal Topics

Context: You're chatting with someone at a local business mixer, and the conversation has been mostly about work.

You: "It's been great hearing about your work. Outside of the office, what do you enjoy doing for fun?"

Them: "I've recently gotten into photography. It's a nice change of pace from my daily routine."

You: "That's awesome! Photography is really creative. What kind of subjects or scenes do you like to capture?"

This example shows how to smoothly transition from professional topics to personal interests, adding depth to the conversation.

Scenario 4: Starting a Conversation with Someone You Don't Know at a Workshop

Context: At a small business workshop, you notice someone who seems interested but hesitant to engage with others.

You: "Hi, I'm [Your Name]. This is my first workshop on digital marketing. How about you? Have you attended one of these before?"

Them: "Hello, I'm [Their Name]. Yes, it's my first time too. I'm hoping to learn some new strategies for my business."

You: "That's great to hear. I'm curious, what kind of business are you in? Maybe there are some strategies we could brainstorm together."

This approach uses the Location/Occasion/Situation to initiate a conversation and quickly moves to exploring mutual professional interests.

Scenario 5: Reconnecting with an Acquaintance at a Networking Event

Context: You're at a networking event and spot someone you've met before but don't know well.

You: "Hi [Their Name], great to see you again! Last time we met, you mentioned you were working on a new project. How's that going?"

Them: "Hi [Your Name], yes, it's going well, thanks! We're about to launch in a few weeks. It's been quite a journey."

You: "That sounds exciting! Launching a project is always thrilling. What was one of the key challenges you faced, and how did you overcome it?"

By recalling a previous conversation, you show that you value and remember your interactions, which can help deepen the connection.

Scenario 6: Encountering a Shy Participant at a Networking Event

Context: You notice someone standing alone, looking a bit shy, at a networking event.

You: "Hi, I'm [Your Name]. I always find these networking events a bit overwhelming. How are you finding it so far?"

Them: "Hi, I'm [Their Name]. Yeah, it's a bit daunting for me too. This is my first time at such an event."

You: "I totally get that. When I attended my first networking event, I felt the same. Is there anything particular you're looking to get out of this evening?"

Starting with a personal reflection and empathy, you create a comfortable space for someone who might be feeling shy or overwhelmed.