

Commentary

Good Social Skills are Not Optional

Socializing successfully isn't an option; it's an important business skill. It's an opportunity to meet people and have people get to know you outside the traditional office setting. And that's important because people do business with others they know, like, and respect.



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According to Barbara Pachter, "Social skills can be mastered by anyone - even the very shy - if the person is willing to learn and practice the essential strategies." Pachter is author of "When the Little Things Count...And They Always Count."

She offers these strategies to become a more confident business socializer:

Prepare

1. *COMMIT TO THE PROCESS.* It is important that you put yourself in positions where you have to socialize. Like most business skills, socializing requires practice. The more you practice, the better you will get. This means you have to attend events on a regular basis.

2. *BE POSITIVE.* If you go into a social situation or networking event thinking you will have a horrible time, you will have a horrible time. If you go thinking, "I can have an interesting, good time," you are much more likely to have a positive experience.
3. *CARRY YOUR BUSINESS CARDS WITH YOU AT ALL TIMES.* You don't have to give them out, nor should you plan on emptying half a box per event, but if you need to give someone your card you'll be prepared.

Meet and Greet

1. *ENTER THE ROOM LIKE YOU BELONG THERE.* Use good posture, keep your head up, smile, and have a deliberate stride. After you enter, stop for a moment and get an overview of the room so you know where everything and everyone is located. Greet the hosts if there are any.
2. *FOLLOW THE 10-5 RULE.* If you make eye contact with someone within 10 feet of you, you should acknowledge that person with a nod or a smile. At 5 feet you should offer a verbal greeting, such as "Hello" or "Good morning." These guidelines apply both to people you know and to those you don't know. It drives people crazy when others pretend they don't see them!

Mingle with Meaning

1. *JOIN GROUPS OF THREE OR MORE.* As you move out of your safety zone, challenge yourself to approach larger groups of people-you'll interact with more people and you won't have as much of a burden to make conversation. Simply approach the group, listen to the conversation for a while, and when appropriate, add your comments.
2. *NEVER SIT WITH OTHERS WITHOUT INTRODUCING YOURSELF.* If you're seated at a table, introduce yourself to everyone at the table, if that's possible. Make a special effort to turn to the people on either side of you, say hello, and introduce yourself.

Get the Conversation Going

1. *HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY.* You will feel much more able to approach others when you have something to say. Read newspapers or newsmagazines so you'll know what's going on in the world. Read your professional journals and newsletters so you'll know what's going on in your field. Be aware of any special events happening in your city.
2. *ASK QUESTIONS.* To encourage another person to talk, ask open-ended questions that require more than a yes or no or simple answer. For example, instead of asking, "How long have you been with your company?" or "Are you a member of the organization?" ask, "You seem so knowledgeable; what's your background?" Or "How did you get involved with the group?"
3. *LISTEN.* Be genuinely interested in others. When in a discussion with someone, give that person your undivided attention. Don't interrupt. Maintain eye contact. It's offensive to be talking with someone but looking everywhere except at him or her.

Comments or Questions?



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