

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



514 Reluctant Networkers Can be Great Conversationalists

Do you have trouble making good conversation at those networking meetings and other gatherings? I'm Jerry Roberts and today, easy-peasy ways to transform the way you talk to folks, and to be seen as a great conversationalist. That's next on The Extra Point.

You may know my story... I was a timid networker, never feeling I was good enough to be in a room full of business owners, company managers, bigtime salespeople — people who had achieved a lot.

I was 19 and most people in the room were in their 30s and 40s, and the difference between us was the ability to carry on a conversation. They were talking about things like real estate deals and expansions, which I knew nothing about.

They sounded smooth and always had the right words to say. I struggled with that and it led to a massive lack of confidence. All I knew about was sports and if the conversation drifted away from the Dodgers, Lakers or Rams, I was in trouble.

If you find yourself a bit conversationally challenged in gatherings where you're among people you're not familiar with, I've got some ideas that can help.

You only need two skills: the ability to listen carefully and the ability to ask good questions. Let's start with listening. Cut out distractions and focus on what the other person is saying as if they are the most important person in your life. At that very moment, they are. Make them the star, let them talk. Don't get caught up in worrying about what your response will be. Just listen.

When it's your turn to talk ask an open-ended question that forces a detailed answer. Let's see how this works. You're at a hotel event and get introduced to someone who just put together a deal to buy ABC, a large company.

They start giving some information and when they stop you say, "Wow, ABC is one of my favorite stores, I'm glad you've got it."

While that's polite it's not likely to extend the conversation. Instead, you might hear, "Well thanks, it was great to meet you" and they move on to someone else. What if you had asked a question like, "Can you tell me how a deal like that gets put together?" They give you some details and then you say, "This is fascinating, what else can you tell me?"

Focused questions make it easier for the other person to answer. If you met up with Ray and asked, "Can you tell me about talk radio", it would be tougher to answer than if you asked, "When you've have the governor in your studio, what's going through your head on what you want to get from the interview?"

When you ask your child, "So how was school today," what do you hear? Maybe, "fine." What if you asked, "I'm curious, what's the best thing about your health class?" One lacks focus and the other has focus.

You can extend conversations with responses like, "How so?" "Then what happened?" "This is great, please go on." "How did that make you feel?" The possibilities are endless.

Do you want to be seen as a confident, intelligent conversationalist? Listen carefully and ask the kind of questions that encourage people to tell you more.

That's The Extra Point. Get out there and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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