

THE CENTER FOR SPEECH EXCELLENCE

Social Speaking Anxiety

When faced with having to make conversation during a social event these tips will help reduce anxiety.

Prepare for the event by imagining who may be there and what you know about them that they may be proud of. Have they just gotten a promotion? Have they just bought a new house? Has their child just gotten an award? Have they announced that they are expecting a new baby? Remember that others may be feeling uncomfortable too and would welcome a smile and a friendly comment. Imagine your self smiling at someone and introducing yourself. “Hi, I’m Pam Bashor. It is nice to meet you.” They will respond by telling you their name. Make a positive comment about the event, ie. “Isn’t the food wonderful?” or “How do you know the host?”

To continue the conversation, use FORM. This is an acronym that will help you remember good conversation starters. If you ask people about these topics, you will generally be successful at learning something about them and having a pleasant conversation.

- F: family. Ask about children, parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles.
- O: occupation. Ask about the person’s occupation. What do they like about it? How did they get into their work?
- R: recreation. What does the person do for recreation? This may lead into discussions about travel.
- M: mission. What is the person’s mission in life? What is his/her passion? This may lead into discussions about politics or religion. These are emotionally charged topics so be careful. Remember that you are trying to get to know a person not trying to debate them.

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When you are finished with a conversation and want to move on, you might say “it has been nice talking with you, I am going to refresh my drink” or “I am going to get something more to eat”, or “I see someone that I want to speak with over there.”

If someone is standing close by and not talking to anyone else, introduce yourself and your conversation partner and bring them into a three-way discussion. Try not to turn your back on someone. When you leave, you are leaving two people who may then carry on their own conversation.

Always complement the host and thank them for inviting you even if the host is a company representative rather than a private individual.

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