

April 2024

**CHUKUNI**  
Communities Development Corporation



Serving the Red Lake  
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Northwestern Ontario



## Small Business Newsletter

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## Master the Art of Small Talk at Networking Events

Networking events can be intimidating for many, especially if you are shy or lack confidence in social settings. However, mastering the art of small talk is an essential skill that can open doors to new opportunities, create meaningful connections, and generate sales. So, how can you become a little more comfortable in these situations?

### 1. Preparation is Key

Before attending a networking event, take some time to prepare. Research the event, its purpose, and who is likely to attend. A basic understanding of the industry, company, or individuals you encounter can provide a foundation for conversation. Perhaps you could prepare a few open-ended questions that can act as conversation starters and demonstrate your genuine interest in others (see next article for sample questions).

### 2. Set Realistic Goals

For those who struggle with shyness or lack confidence, set achievable goals for the event. Rather than aiming to connect with everyone, focus on making a few genuine connections. Quality over quantity is an often-overlooked asset in networking. We've all seen people with stacks of business cards handing them out to everyone. They are not going to make a single meaningful connection, and it's likely their cards will be junked before people get back to their cars.

### 3. Body Language Matters

Confidence often starts with body language. Maintain eye contact, stand tall, and offer a firm handshake when introducing yourself. A positive and open posture can make you appear more approachable and help build rapport with others.

### 4. Start with the Basics

Begin conversations with simple, non-intrusive topics. Commenting on the event, the venue, or shared

experiences can break the ice. Weather, travel, or recent industry news are safe bets for initiating small talk. As the conversation flows, gradually steer it towards more relevant and meaningful topics.

5. **Listen Actively**

Listening is a crucial component of successful small talk. Pay close attention to what others say, ask follow-up questions, and show genuine interest in their responses. This demonstrates your engagement and makes the conversation more enjoyable for both parties.

6. **Embrace the Awkward Moments**

Awkward moments are a natural part of social interactions. Instead of letting them deter you, embrace them with humor or a light-hearted comment. Acknowledging the awkwardness can help diffuse tension and make the conversation more relaxed.

7. **Find Common Ground**

Discovering shared interests or experiences can help establish a stronger connection. Finding common ground provides a foundation for a more meaningful conversation, whether it's a common industry background, a shared hobby, or a mutual acquaintance.

8. **Have a Few Go-To Topics**

Prepare a few go-to topics that you feel comfortable discussing. This could include recent movies, books, or industry trends. Having these conversation starters in your back pocket can be particularly helpful if you are at a loss for words—more on this in the following article.

9. **Practice Active Self-Compassion**

Feeling self-conscious or anxious in social situations is natural, especially if you are shy or lack confidence. Practice self-compassion —acknowledge your feelings without judging them. Remember that everyone at the networking event is there to meet new people, and many of them may not love networking.

10. **Follow-Up**

After making a connection, be sure to follow up. Send a personalized email expressing your pleasure in meeting everyone you met, especially those with whom you made a meaningful connection, and reiterating points of discussion from the event. This solidifies the connection and demonstrates your commitment to fostering a professional relationship.

Mastering small talk at networking events is a skill you can develop over time. If you are shy or uncertain, or even if you are not, it's crucial to approach them with preparation, realistic goals, and a positive mindset. By focusing on active listening, finding common ground, and practicing self-compassion, you can confidently navigate networking events and build valuable connections beyond the event itself.



## Open-Ended Questions: A Cheat Sheet

Try these conversation starters at your next networking event; you'll be a networking superstar in no time. These are especially useful if you find making small talk difficult, as the other person does most of the talking. Also, reports have shown that the person who talks the most in a conversation usually enjoys it more. This tactic works like a charm if you are trying to impress someone and hopefully get them interested in your product or service.

### About the Event

- “What brought you to this event today?”
- “How did you hear about this event, and what interested you in attending?”
- “Have you been to similar events before? Any favorites?”

### About the Industry or Company

- “What excites you most about [industry/company]?”
- “How do you see [industry/company] evolving in the next few years?”
- “What initially drew you to work in [industry/company]?”

### Personal Interests

- “Outside of work, what are your passions or hobbies?”
- “Do you have any favorite books, movies, or TV shows you’ve enjoyed recently?”
- “If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would it be and why?”

## **Professional Background**

- “Tell me more about your professional journey and how you got into [industry]?”
- “What aspects of your work do you find most fulfilling?”
- “What challenges have you encountered in your career, and how did you overcome them?”

## **Current Trends**

- “Are there any emerging trends in [industry] that interest you?”
- “How do you think recent developments in [industry] will impact our work?”
- “What are your thoughts on the latest [industry-related news]?”

## **Event or Venue Related**

- “What do you think of the venue? Have you been here before?”
- “Any interesting sessions or speakers you’re looking forward to at this event?”
- “What’s been the event’s highlight for you so far?”

Use this list of questions to inspire you to create your own list. Using the questions you have formulated will make you even more confident. And make some of them specific to the event you are attending.

Remember, the key is to ask questions that invite more than a simple “yes” or “no” response. The questions above encourage others to share more about themselves, fostering a more engaging and meaningful conversation.



## **Coach's Corner - Pause, Reflect and Connect with Yourself**

Mindfulness and meditation are practices that involve focusing one's attention on the present moment. Mindfulness is the act of being fully aware of one's thoughts, feelings, and surroundings without judgment. It involves paying attention to the present moment in a non-reactive way, which can help reduce stress and anxiety.

Meditation is a technique that involves training the mind to achieve a state of relaxation and awareness. It often involves sitting quietly and focusing on the breath, a mantra, or a specific object. Meditation has been shown to have numerous benefits, including reducing symptoms of depression, improving concentration, and promoting emotional well-being.

Although both mindfulness and meditation have roots in ancient Eastern practices, they have gained popularity in Western cultures in recent years. Many people incorporate mindfulness and meditation into their daily routines to improve their mental health and overall well-being.

In today's fast-paced and hectic world, these practices offer a way to pause, reflect, and connect with yourself. By practicing mindfulness and meditation, you can cultivate a sense of inner peace, clarity, and resilience in the face of life's challenges.

Mindfulness and meditation are powerful tools that can help you manage stress, improve your focus, and enhance your overall quality of life. Incorporating these practices into daily life can lead to a greater sense of calm and balance, allowing you to navigate life with greater ease and awareness.

There are many books, apps and websites that offer guidance in both of these areas. Consider the transformative possibilities: what might your life look like with the embrace of mindfulness and meditation as integral parts of your daily routine?

Paul Abra  
Motivated Coaching

# Navigate Common Networking Hurdles Easily

## 1 Introversion

Thrive as an introvert! Prepare questions in advance, seek smaller groups, and remember, quality over quantity.

## 2 Fear of Rejection

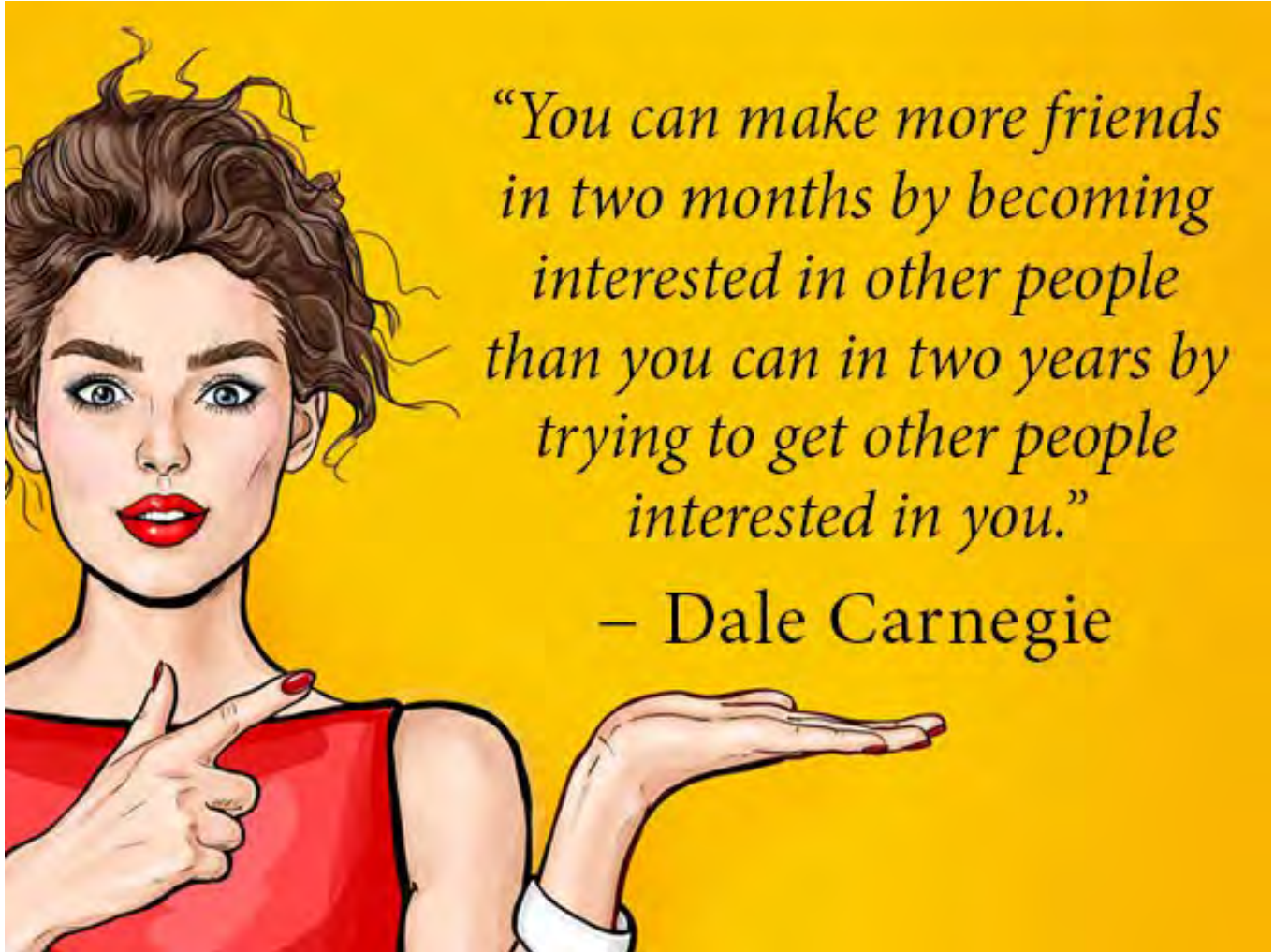
Don't fear 'no.' See rejection as a learning opportunity and keep a positive mindset to build resilience.

## 3 Lack of Confidence

Boost your confidence by researching the event, practicing your pitch, and engaging in positive self-talk.

## 4 Follow-Up Struggles

Keep the connection alive! Send a thank-you note within 24 hours and plan follow-ups to stay in touch.



*“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.”*

– Dale Carnegie



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