

# How to schmooze when it's just not your thing



Even the most confident leaders may cringe when entering a crowded room of strangers. Schmoozing can cause otherwise commanding personalities to clam up and feel nervous.

Introverts face special challenges. They need to draw upon extra reserves of energy to mingle and engage in small talk.

For Elisabeth Hendrickson, founder of Quality Tree Software in Pleasanton, Calif., preparation pays off. Before she starts networking, she memorizes three questions that help her launch stimulating conversations:

- *What brings you here?*
- *How do you feel about being here?*
- *What do you hope to take away from being here?*

Using some variation of these questions helps her break the ice. She finds that others respond well and open up to her.

After you ask these questions, shift into listening mode. Let people speak freely without cutting them off. Don't interrupt to talk about yourself, and don't impose your opinions on the budding conversation.

Another tip is to take advantage of the waiting game. If you're in line with others—to register, to order a drink, etc.—capitalize on that time to initiate conversation with the person next to you.

Make a comment about a speaker you just heard. Ask others what they deem the highlight thus far of the conference. Review upcoming breakout sessions and compare notes on what looks like the best topic to attend.

Before introducing yourself, rehearse a few sentences that explain what you do. The ability to summarize your job in a way that stirs a lively exchange can help you bond with others.

Finally, regulate your body language. If you grimace and look uncomfortable, you'll drive away potential allies. It's better to loosen your facial muscles, smile and try to relax and enjoy the process.

—Adapted from "[Schmoozing 101: Tips for shy techies](#)," Mary Pratt, [www.computerworld.com](http://www.computerworld.com).