



## ***The FINE art of Small Talk***

A great perk enjoyed in my business is meeting many talented speakers and trainers. Debra Fine, author of *The Fine Art of Small Talk* (Hyperion) and *The Fine Art of the Big Talk* (Hyperion), is such a person. Deb agreed to help our clients and colleagues with tips for creating 'fine' conversations during the holiday season. (For more tips, check out [www.DebraFine.com](http://www.DebraFine.com)) Here are some great ideas and suggestions from my interview with Debra.

***Colleen: Holiday social occasions include hosting open houses and attending office parties, however, it can also mean awkward moments, uncomfortable silences and eruptions of office and family feuds. Give us some tips for making the most of holiday social opportunities.***

Debra: Invest time in reviewing names of attendees you may know, along with spouse/partner names, if you have access. Also practice conversation starters such as: "Bring me up to date about your kids..." or "Tell me about your trip to Florida last year..." or "What books have you read that you recommend?" Asking about and remembering bits and pieces of people's lives make them feel special. Always be prepared with a few things to talk about for those awful moments when no one is talking! Simple open ended questions such as: "Tell me about your favorite holiday tradition..." or "What are your plans for the New Year?" can be written in your palm. (This is especially valuable for those miserable tables of eight when everyone is playing with their food!) Avoid making people uncomfortable by asking personal questions that you do not know the answer to: "Did your daughter finally get into Northwestern?" and "When are you two getting married?"

***Colleen: What are some top office party blunders to avoid?***

Debra: Well, let me give you my top five list.

- People Forget to Wear A Smile and Make a Positive Impression

This is the time to make those around you feel comfortable and enjoy getting to know you. Appear approachable in your body language with good posture (no slouching!), eye contact and a warm smile. Appear relaxed even if you have to fake it, as no one wants to spend time with someone ill-at-ease or nervous. This is the time to find out if your co-worker participates in activities, hobbies, sports or travel. You might even discover that you attended the same school as someone you work with. Anyone is delighted to learn that members of their team are actually multi-faceted human beings, not just a job title.



- We make Assumptions About Who We Are Talking To

Are you certain of this person's position or alliances within the company? Probably not, so skip the gossip and negative comments of any kind. Prepare by reviewing a company directory in order know people's names and be ready for introductions

- Get Drunk and Tell Your Boss How You REALLY Feel

Cocktails make for loose lips that sink ships! Watch your intake to insure your mind moves faster than your mouth. Abstinence for the office party is a wise and risk free plan. Anxiety is directly related to increased alcohol intake so if you must imbibe, just take a few sips, or water down your drink so it lasts a lot longer. As friendly as your boss is, the office party is not the time to ask for a raise, mention a friend who is looking for a job, or offer your opinion about the lousy coffee provided the break room.

- Limit Your Conversation to "Shop Talk"

You approach the Manager of XYZ department, introduce yourself and then, well, what do you say? Guess what? He or she is probably not hoping for an update on the project your team is in the thick of. If you like, you can keep the conversation work-related, just not specific to the current work you are doing: "Tell me about your career path in human resources..." or some favorites opening for these occasions: "What keeps you busy outside of work?" or "Tell me about your holiday plans..." People enjoy talking about themselves, especially when they perceive a genuine interest.

- Mingle Only With Your Best Office Cronies

It is tempting to remain in your comfort zone, talking with the people you meet regularly within your department or enjoy lunch with a couple times a week. Instead, your company party may be the only time you have all year for a face to face conversation with the CEO. The office party is an opportunity to get to know new people and enjoy the chance for others to get to know you. Invest the effort in making sure the people who should know that you are there...know that you are there. Circle the room and say hello to your boss, her husband and other decision makers and executives. Push yourself outside of your comfort zone and introduce yourself to people you don't know.

***Colleen: Debra, as always, you have been a delight to interview. Thank you for helping our clients and colleagues enjoy a more successful holiday conversation.***

Good Selling!

Colleen Stanley  
Chief Selling Officer