

Shmooz'R – THE BEST ICE-BREAKER

■ Isn't the “Gift of Gab” A Little Overrated?

Maybe. A recent article in the Wall Street Journal discusses this very point.

“There is an art of elegantly starting, sustaining and ending a dialogue with strangers or friends. Experts call it conversational intelligence. Others call it the gift of gab. Hard as it may be for chatty people to believe, not everyone is born with it. For many, it takes study and practice. Some people dismiss small talk as mere chitchat, an unnecessary and annoying waste of time. Many men consider it a female thing. But experts say casual conversation is essential social grease—a ritual that helps us connect with friends, colleagues and people we’ve just met. ...It can lead to more-significant conversations that spark friendships and clinch deals.Unfortunately, we seem to be getting less good at it.”ⁱ

■ Ice Breaker Games Don't Work

We recognize how difficult it's always been to get people upon first meeting to interact quickly and in a meaningful way. Let's explain the ice-breaker phenomenon another way. At virtually all networking events, ice-breaker games and rituals are a semi-serious way of getting friends and strangers to mingle and make small talk more easily: they lubricate the social gears because in a peculiar sense they “force feed” friendliness and connecting with others.

But, regrettably, ice-breakers don't work at reunions. How can you go around the room and have everyone tell their favorite color and relate an interesting event that happened to them on their way to the reunion? Ice-breaker games just look silly, contrived and immature. Also, at reunions many people are already on a first name basis: they've met each other before... usually many years before. That's why reunion planners try to stack the “sociability” deck by plying attendees with exciting venues, good food and potent drinks. But, for the most part, these are one-off solutions.

Yes, Shmooz'Rs are definitely old-school, but old-school works better than any thing else in high-contact, high-anxiety social situations. Shmooz'Rs have been designed specifically for use at college reunions, a high-contact social situation. Why? Because a Shmooz'R imparts instantly-usable information, in a friendly, “let's establish a relationship” manner to everyone within eyeshot.

In everyday parlance with a bit of Madison Avenue thrown in for good measure, it's a live-event mingling tool designed to stimulate conversations containing the kind of emotional hooks that lead to lasting relationships. That's the essence of a perfect ice breaker.

■ Is There A Need For Better Reunion Name Tags?

Well, of course there is. That's essentially the reason why people attend reunions in the first place: To meet their friends and others who'll soon be their friends. First, let's understand one thing: name tags in general (at least in the past) are cosmetic, rather superfluous niceties that serve only one basic, no-nonsense necessity: identify someone. Yes, name tags are simply event amenities, a social formality that's intended to prevent the painful awkwardness (known to etiquette pros as the "approach set-up") that occurs when you go up to someone you don't know well with nothing intelligent or relevant to say.

But a Shmooz'R is a whole other animal because Shmooz'Rs establish the rules of the game: "Bro, here's how we get started talking!" So it's kind of like comparing apples to bicycles. Perhaps the question could have been better phrased as: "Do reunions need a better ice-breaker, and if so exactly what?"

■ The Remarkable "Conversational" Power of Images

The adage that a picture is worth a thousand words stresses the potency of images as powerful ice-breakers. We only have to look to the fact that all social media platforms are constructed around pictures and visual media to grasp that. They form the "content" of how people communicate with each other every bit as much as hard data. Just think how people use slogan-festooned baseball hats, mugs and T-shirts to scream what's important to them. To promote their pet ideas and causes.

Need further proof: It's axiomatic that on online dating sites, people who provide their photograph are 400% more likely to get a response from an admirer than someone who doesn't. Make no mistake about it: images make the sizzle that sells the message. Need more proof? Just think of your college's branding program and how pervasive and impacting it is. Without images and logos, it wouldn't be.

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