

POWER TOOLS FOR POWER QUESTIONS

How Do You Break the Ice?

If you're at a meeting with ten other people, and you don't know one or two of them, it's pretty easy to go up and introduce yourself. You'll also have a natural subject—the topic of your meeting—to talk about.

But switch to a different scene: You're at a conference with 500 people, all clustered in small groups and talking. Or, you've just walked into a party, and there are dozens of people milling around with drinks in their hands. How do you strike up a conversation? And how do you start connecting with other people once you've introduced yourself?

For most of us, these are awkward moments. But they don't have to be.

Walk up to someone who is alone, or to a small group of people who are talking among themselves. Look the person in the eye, extend your hand, and confidently introduce yourself. "Hi, I'm Andrew Sobel" or, "Let me introduce myself, I'm Andrew Sobel." That gets you started. It pushes you over the hump.

Then, *ask questions!* People love to talk about themselves. There are dozens of questions you can ask to further break the ice. These are "startup" questions. For example:

Startup questions:

- What's your connection with this event?
- Where have you come in from?
- Where are you based?
- So, what's your connection with the host?

...and so on. In addition you'll have the chance to ask follow up questions once you see what their answers are.

Next, you can ask questions to start getting to know the other person, but without probing too deeply:

Get-to-know-you questions:

- Where do you live?
- Where did you grow up?
- How did you get involved with this (group, cause, association, etc.)?
- What are your plans for the holidays? (for the summer?)

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Finally, if you're seeing someone for the second or third time—or if you can the chance to spend an hour or two with them—you can start asking depth questions. For example:

Depth questions:

- Can you say more about that?
- What do you like most about your work? Least?
- What is a typical day like for you?
- So you've been doing this for many years...If you could go back in time, what advice would you give your younger self, with the benefit of hindsight?
- What's it been like for you since your children left home and went to college?
- If you hadn't gone into (business, law, banking, carpentry...) what else do you think you might have done?
- How did you get your start?

...and so on