

The Art of Schmoozing

By
Joan C. Curtis, EdD

In today's work environment **schmoozing** has become an art. Whether you are building a new business or winning the attention of new clients, to be successful, you must learn how to communicate in a way that builds rapport. Ask your most successful salesmen if people buy from strangers. They'll tell you that **people buy from people they know and trust**. They don't have to know you very long, but they must feel they can trust you enough to buy your product or your service.

According to Susan Roane, in "How to Work the Room," the word schmoozing comes from a Yiddish word that means to make prolonged, friendly conversation. It does not mean trying to sell your product. It does not mean hard sell. In building relationships, you take that first step toward trust. You take that first step toward developing referral partners or clients. The schmooze isn't sleazy. It's a comfortable, sensitive interaction.

So, how do you Schmooze comfortably:

- **Break the ice.** Introduce yourself in a way that is light. Don't take yourself too seriously. Don't try and sell yourself or your product in the first five seconds. Be open and honest about who you are and what connects you to the organization or event. Give the person you're meeting something which will engage them.
- **Listen.** Pay attention to what the other person says. How do they introduce themselves? How are they connected to this event? Ask open, non-threatening questions. Use humor when you can.
- Look for a **connection** between you and the person. Do you like the same sports? Do you live in the same town? Do you both like to travel? What similar books or movies have you seen?
- Talk about up-to-date current events that are non-political. **Try and find common ground** through pop culture or things that are happening in the world or relevant to your community. Steer away from controversial subjects even those that are only controversial within that company or environment.
- Don't always be the one to "tell" the story. Instead, be the one to **encourage the other person to tell his or her story** and listen attentively. It's always more fun to be the one telling the story. Laugh even if you've heard the joke before.
- **Watched practiced schmoozers.** Pay attention to what works for you. What kinds of things engage you with someone else? Who are the people you're drawn to and what do they do? How do they connect with you and with others?

Schmoozing is a practiced art. The more you do it, the more comfortable you will become. When you start out, do not expect to win friends each time. There will be some people with whom you won't connect. That's fine. Move on. There is always someone else, standing alone, just waiting for your gracious handshake and hello.

Read more about Dr. Joan at www.totalcommunicationscoach.com