



WHY IT MATTERS

“Every big romance or major business deal started with a tiny conversation,” says psychologist Bernardo J. Carducci, Ph.D., of Indiana University Southeast.

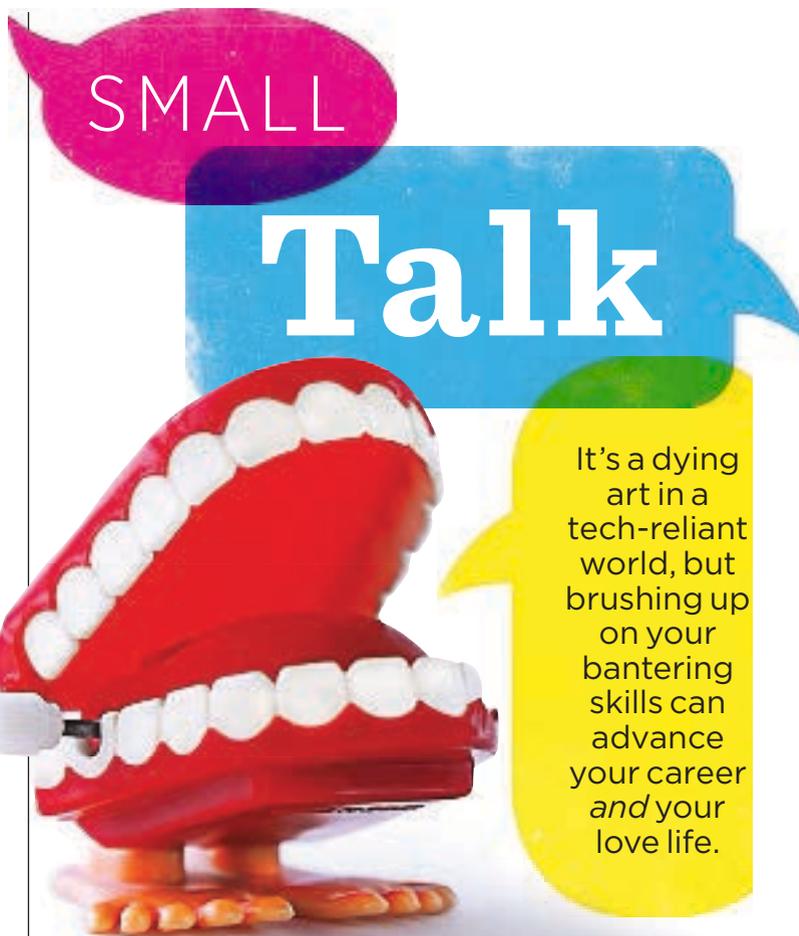
“These seemingly simple exchanges are not really ‘small’ at all!”



DO THIS FIRST

Stop scrolling through your Instagram, look up, and smile. “Nobody will approach you if your face is down and you look uninviting,” says Debra Fine, author of *The Fine Art of Small Talk*. “Eye contact is critical because it can help foster a connection and trust.”

Translation: Your friendly gaze will make it easy for even a stranger to say hi.



BODY LANGUAGE

What to do with restless limbs while you chat it up

STRIKE THIS POSE

Keep your arms free and by your sides (so you can “talk” with your hands, if needed) or, if you feel fidgety, tuck one hand into a pants pocket.

DON'T STRIKE THAT POSE

“When people feel awkward, they often stand with their hands clasped in front of their privates,” says Patricia Rossi, author of *Everything Etiquette*. She calls it the “fig leaf”—and it can look ridiculous. Another no-no: crossing your arms, which screams “not interested.”

FOLLOW UP

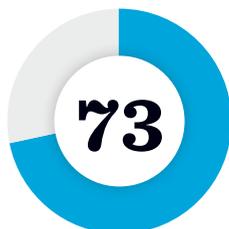
If a mini chat leaves you wanting more, extend a verbal invite for coffee or lunch before leaving—instead of pouncing on your new friend’s FB page. That way, she chooses how to be contacted.



Prepare for an encounter with your boss at the proverbial watercooler. It can be smart, not creepy, to have googled her to discern her interests. If she likes art, for example, ask her if she’s seen that new exhibit you read about.

SAY WHAT?

“Your opening line doesn’t need to be genius,” says Carducci. “It only has to be simple and nice.” Comment on something you’re both experiencing: a bus stop, a long coffee line, or, yes, even the weather. Then ask for what Fine calls “free info”: If you’re at a party, inquire how he or she knows the host—or try, “Hi, I just wanted to meet you.”



Percentage of fliers who say they actually don't mind a little airplane small talk
Source: TripAdvisor survey

CRISIS AVERTED

Chitchat angst? No problem.

IF NAMES ELUDE YOU

Echo the name as soon as you hear it, says Rossi (“Amy, it’s great to meet you!”)—and repeat often (“Amy, I can’t believe how cold it is in here”). It will help your recall—and endear you to her (or him).

AVOIDANCE TACTICS

To dodge squirm-worthy Q’s (like “Why aren’t you married?”), Fine suggests a laugh and “That’s a river I’m not going down today.” Cue subject change!

THE EXIT STRATEGY

Give a warning, but ask for a bit more info: “I’m gonna have to run in a sec, but first, I want to hear about your cruise.” Or excuse yourself to use the ladies’ room—as long as you actually go!