



Unit: Speaking
Skill 18: Holding Individual and Small Group Conversations

Activity A: One-on-One

Activity Skills:

Group work, public speaking, creative thinking.

Leadership Skills:

Effective conversation, Professional etiquette techniques.

Suggested Level:

Beginning

Time:

15-30 minutes

Supplies needed:

- A pencil or pen to write.
- Copy of the handout “Etiquette for the professional conversation”.

Do Ahead:

- Make copies of worksheets

Source:

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BACKGROUND:

Conversation involves more than just what we say – body language, eye contact, and active listening are all essential elements of effective professional dialogue.

It is important to understand the basic rules of conduct for professional conversations. This activity explores some tips and techniques of engaging in a professional conversation that will help to keep the dialogue friendly and courteous.

WHAT TO DO:

Start out by introducing the activity and requesting a volunteer to help with a demonstration.

Step out of the room for a minute with your volunteer and explain to him/her that you are about to act out a professional conversation gone wrong. In this scenario, the two of you have just run into each other unexpectedly at a conference. Your volunteer will attempt to politely initiate a conversation with you, but you the facilitator will be very rude and unprofessional in response. Instruct your volunteer to try as hard as they can to remain courteous during the conversation while you repeatedly say and do rude things.

To demonstrate your rudeness and lack of professionalism...

- Find a slick way to avoid shaking the other person’s hand (for instance, by faking them out and slicking your hair back).
- Invade the other person’s personal space.
- Interrupt the other person frequently.
- Constantly finish their sentences.
- Bring up sensitive personal information (i.e. “so, I heard that old granny of yours finally croaked”).
- Gossip about a mutual acquaintance.
- Look disinterested.
- Answer a cell-phone call while the other person is talking.
- Avoid eye contact.
- Pay more attention to the things going on around you than to your colleague.

Reenter the room and explain to the group that you and your volunteer are about to act out a scenario in which two professional colleagues run into each other at a convention. Inform the group that it is their job to judge the conversation.

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Notes:

When you finish acting out the scenario, stop and debrief:

- How do you think the conversation went?
- Why did the conversation go the way it did?
- What rules of etiquette did I break?

Explain that the reason you did this role-play was to illustrate that there are rules and boundaries to every conversation, particularly in professional situations. However, not all rules are as obvious as in the example.

Divide participants into groups of 3-4 people, and ask them each to come up with a set of guidelines for holding a professional conversation. Explain that the things that should be avoided are called faux pas.

Once the participants have had an opportunity to talk things over, you may wish to distribute the reference, "Etiquette for the Professional Conversation," for your participants' future reference.

TALK IT OVER:

Reflect:

- What guidelines did your group come up with?
- What things should you avoid doing? What are some faux pas?
- Why is it important to behave appropriately in a professional situation?

Apply:

- Can you think of any situations in which you might be expected to use professional etiquette?
- Which of the guidelines from your discussion will you be most aware of in future professional situations?

BEYOND THE BOX:

Optional Homework:

Option 1: Think about a scene from a book, a television show or a movie in which a character broke some rule of professional etiquette. How did the social faux enrich the plot? Did it make the scene more interesting, more dramatic or more amusing?

Option 2: Think about a time when you were unsure of the proper rules of etiquette. What was the situation and how did you respond? What did you learn from the experience?

Option 3: Write a one act play about a situation in which professional etiquette is necessary. Create a character list, describe the scene and

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write a dialogue using the guidelines from discussion and the handout “Etiquette for the Professional Conversation.”

Resources and Web Links:

http://www.careercenter.sisu.edu/jobsearchtips/businessetiquette/social_conversational.html. This website provides career tips from San Jose State University.

http://www.westminster-mo.edu/wc_info/offices_and_services/career_services/etiquette_tips.pdf
This resource, sponsored by Westminster College’s Office of Career Services provides advice for making good first impressions, dining with style, and rules for basic professional social etiquette.

<http://www.southwestern.edu/careers/students/etiquette/etiquette.html>
This site hosted by Southwestern University’s Career Services covers everything from dinner etiquette and general social manners, to how to properly shake hands and how to offer an introduction.

<http://www.scu.edu/careercenter/resources/publications/professionalsocialetiquette.pdf>. More information on etiquette from Santa Clara University’s Career Center.