

## How to Skillfully Break the Ice with Anyone – Even if you Have No Social Skills

I know, I know – you've been waiting long and patiently for this chapter. I assure you that I'm going to cover your most absolute burning question right off the bat.

That is, *why is glacial ice so blue?!?!*



*Look at this giant slag of super blue glacial ice! Isn't it crazy?!*

It turns out, glacial ice isn't made from the same stuff as snow cones, Slurpees, or even cotton candy (I know, it's a shock!). No, it's actually blue because the ice absorbs red wavelength light waves and reflects blue wavelength light. Unfortunately, there's no sugar or food coloring involved, even though that would arguably be a much better idea...

Now, this fact might seem random, but when you're nervous about meeting people, you need to get good at breaking the ice. So, what better way to start off this chapter than with a random icebreaker literally about ice?

Alright, I get it. Let's move on to how to actually break the ice with people, at meetups and conferences, in a real way, not with some cheesy, awkward icebreaker like I just did.

### **First, you have to start small and make promises to yourself**

For everyone, walking into a room filled with random unknown people can suck. Even if you know you're likely to have a good time, it can still cause you emotional havoc. You walk into a room, feel like you have a giant spotlight on you, start breathing shallowly, and pull out your phone, pretending to do something important just so you don't feel awkward.

It's literally impossible to pump yourself up and say, "Okay, I'm going to go network!" and suddenly become a badass. So, you can't start there. Instead, a great way to approach new, unknown, and frightening situations is by starting small with small promises.

The specifics of how this will work will vary from person to person, but it's all about what causes you the most fear. Let's assume that you're willing to go to a meetup (online, in-person, or a conference) and walk into the room. But once you're there, it's really scary to start a conversation with someone new and the thought of that makes you literally sweat.

In that case, to practice facing this scary task from a place of comfort, you may promise yourself that you'll walk into the meetup, and you'll join a pre-existing conversation and ask one specific question to someone in that conversation. That's still likely a bit scary, but not as scary as walking up to someone and just saying hi.

Once you've gotten comfortable with that scenario, you can move closer and closer to "talk to a random person I haven't met and say hi."

This is a great way to break anxiety in general. I did this the first time I approached a free weight gym that intimidated me. My first promise was that I would walk into the room, and I could walk out immediately. My second promise was that I needed to walk to the back of the room before I could leave. Third was that I needed to walk in the room, pick up any dumbbell, and do a curl before I could walk out. Eventually, I pushed myself to feel fully comfortable in the gym with full workouts.

### **But once you're in the meetup and find a person you could talk to, what do you actually say?**

The last thing we want to do is walk up to someone and stutter, stammer, go mentally blank, or blurt out something that makes us sound foolish, like a jerk, or aloof.

So, instead, we can do one of our favorite things: play a game. Specifically, a game where the emphasis is on the other person.

Here's how it works: When you arrive at an event or a meetup, take your time. Pick out one person in the room who has a trait that seems genuinely interesting to you. Often, this is a visual characteristic, such as someone's shoes, hair, shirt, or something else (it doesn't have to be limited to this).

Once you've identified the person and the thing that interests you, start the conversation with a compliment and a question. For example, if you see someone with pink shoelaces in their sneakers and find it quirky, you can approach them and say, "I just wanted to say that I think your pink shoelaces are amazing. What made you choose to lace your shoes with pink?"

With that, you've begun the game.

Your goal from here on out is to learn as much interesting information as possible about this person by continually asking them small questions about themselves.

For example, if the person replies with something you might be afraid of: "Thanks! I mean...I just like pink, I guess?"

You can respond with another compliment and a question: "Oh cool. Have you always liked pink? Are there any other cool pink things you like?"

You may receive a quizzical look at some point, which is okay. Most people are not used to others being genuinely curious about them and asking questions, but after a question or two, they will relax and engage with you. I've only had one or two people ask me, "Why are you so curious about this?" My response is, "I genuinely find this interesting and enjoy getting to know about you. Speaking of which..." and then I follow up with another question.

This game is won by thoroughly creating a picture of the person through curiosity and listening. Eventually, the other person will try to turn the tables and ask you a question. To keep the game going, find a way to ask them another question, which is a high-skill move that earns you triple bonus points. Introverts are often skilled at this game and attain high scores because they are typically good listeners.

The game is lost once you start talking about yourself. You can end the game without a loss if you run out of things to say and follow up with, "It was nice meeting/chatting with you. I have to grab a drink/go to the restroom/etc." and then leave.

### **Is it really as simple as asking questions? Why does this work, and has it failed?**

Yes, it is as simple as observing and asking questions. Once I learned I could do this, I have been doing it at every meetup I attend, both in-person and online. If a person's camera online has interesting items in the background, it provides easy material to comment on.

What you're doing is taking a moment to genuinely show interest and curiosity in someone else. You are not searching the room for the weirdest thing to compliment without intention. Instead, you're looking for something that resonates with you, and that could wind up really connecting you with the person you end up talking to.

This works, I believe, because people really like to be heard and valued. In fact, I've used this approach even with the most introverted individuals, those who claim to dislike talking about themselves. I once had a man tell me his entire career and life story over a two-hour period. Better yet, I was genuinely fascinated by his stories and wanted to know more. Every time I've seen him since, he greets me with a hug and treats me like an old friend. All of this just because I took the time to show that I value him by listening to him share.

### **"But Adam I don't get it. I have literally ZERO social skills. I can't do this. I can't grow into this. I'm panicked – help me! I feel like I HAVE to do this and I don't want to!"**

First, take the pressure off. Building relationships with people isn't something that happens overnight, and neither is the comfort and safety involved with doing so.

If it's scary to walk into a meetup room, make a promise to yourself, such as "I will walk into the meetup, but I'm allowed to walk back out immediately if I feel like it."

Comfort with networking is built over time and in baby steps. Identify what causes panic and work back to an activity that causes mild (but bearable) discomfort. Just keep taking small steps from there.

What I think you'll find is that 'networking' becomes a lot easier when the pressure is off of you to do anything but walk into the room and be genuinely curious about other people. No need for sales pitches or complicated strategies, just be yourself and show genuine interest in what you're passionate about. You'll end your time much less exhausted than usual and surprised it could be so easy for you eventually, I promise.

**Okay so, how do I talk to people again?**

1. Start small and make small promises to yourself
2. Find something you're genuinely interested in about another person and ask them a question about it
3. Play the game – see how much you can learn about this person by continuing to volley questions at them to keep up the conversation

**Look, I know I started off the chapter with a cheesy horrible pun about ice in relation to icebreakers...**

But you don't have to be like me. In fact, when you're just starting to get comfortable building relationships with strangers, it's better if you don't try to be someone you're not.

Be yourself - find the things that interest you and embrace your curiosity. You've got this!

**Before you move onto the next chapter...**

Identify that first small step to you – is going to a meetup scary? What about talking to someone? Find that first promise you can make yourself, and commit to keeping it.