



Networking Workshop

The Art of Mingling to Build a Meaningful Network

Bren School Career Development Program
Fall 2026

*Scan to tell us
you're here!*





Our goal today:

Give you practical tips and mindsets
to make “the art of mingling” more
authentic, successful, and enjoyable.

Helpful Mindsets

Bren Mindsets

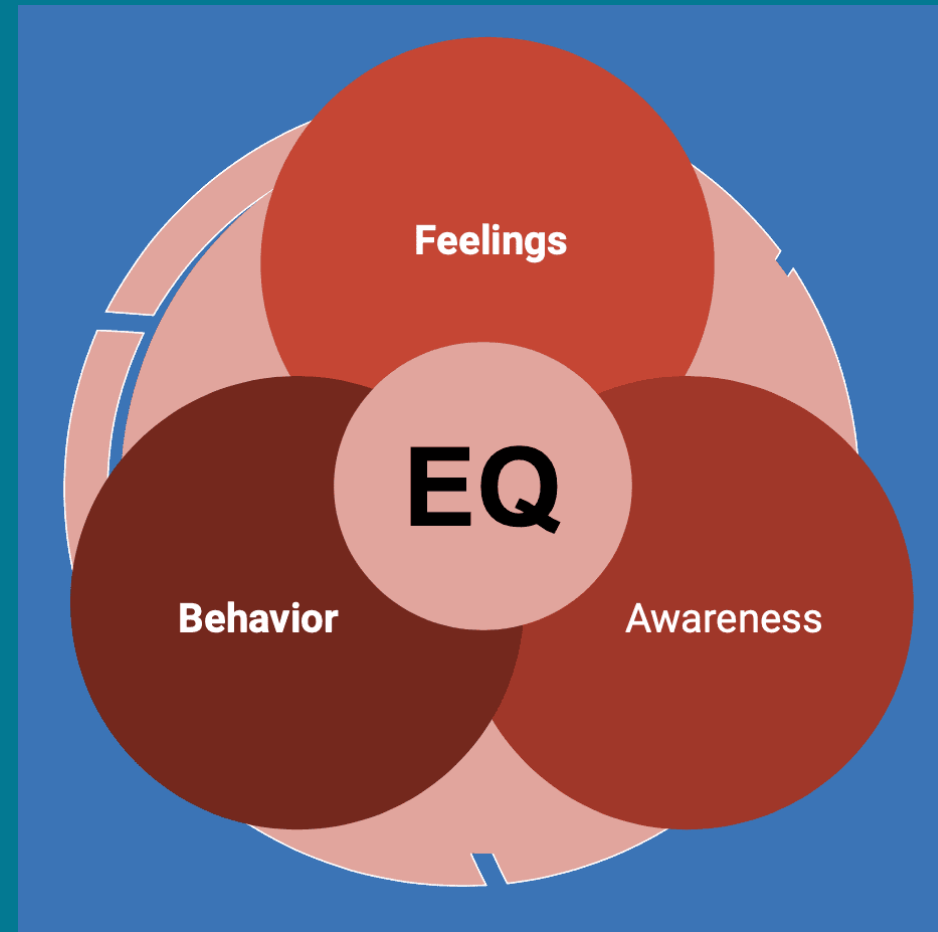
- **Remember, you are building a lifelong network.** Play the long-game. Relationships aren't microwaveable.
- **Not every interaction needs to have a career-related benefit.** A positive encounter with another person is enough.
- **Research people and try topic prep.** Qs you might want to ask, people who might be at the event, topics you could discuss.
- **Try these confidence builders:**
 - **Warm up the week prior.** Grocery store, bus line, coffee shop line, gym, FedEx, UPS store, etc
 - **Start easier/lower stakes → Harder/higher stakes.**
 - **Wear something that makes you feel good/confident.**



Emotional Intelligence

There are five key elements:

Self-awareness
Self-regulation
Motivation
Empathy
Social skills



It can be taught:

R - Recognize
U - Understand
L - Label
E - Express
R - Regulate

Tips for Extroverts or Other Mingling Fans

Play to your strengths:

- **Invite people into conversation**, especially those trying to get in, seeming left out, etc.
- **Make introductions.** Connect others when you can.
- **Ask other people questions** rather than just talking.

Possible Ways to Grow:

- **Challenge yourself to go deep, not just wide.** Set goals, such as having 1-2 deeper conversations.
- **Pay attention to non-verbal cues and adjust.** Eyes wandering, looking deep in thought, arms crossed, shifting uncomfortably, feet/body pointing away.
- **Avoid taking up too much conversational air time.** Remember that the conversation goes both ways.



Tips for Introverts or the Less Mingling-Inclined

Play to your strengths:

- **Know that “success” might look different to you**, e.g., initiating 1 convo or having 2-3 deeper ones.
- **Lean into other ways of networking**, not just mingling.

Possible ways to grow:

- **Set manageable goals** like approaching 1 new person.
- **Commit to moving from passive → active** (at least a little).
- **Attend with an extrovert wing-person.**
- **Replace negative self-talk with positive.**

Have a plan afterward:

- **Reflect afterward.** What went well, what didn't, what you liked that others did/said that you want to emulate.
- **Plan to rest/recharge after the event.**



Getting into Conversations

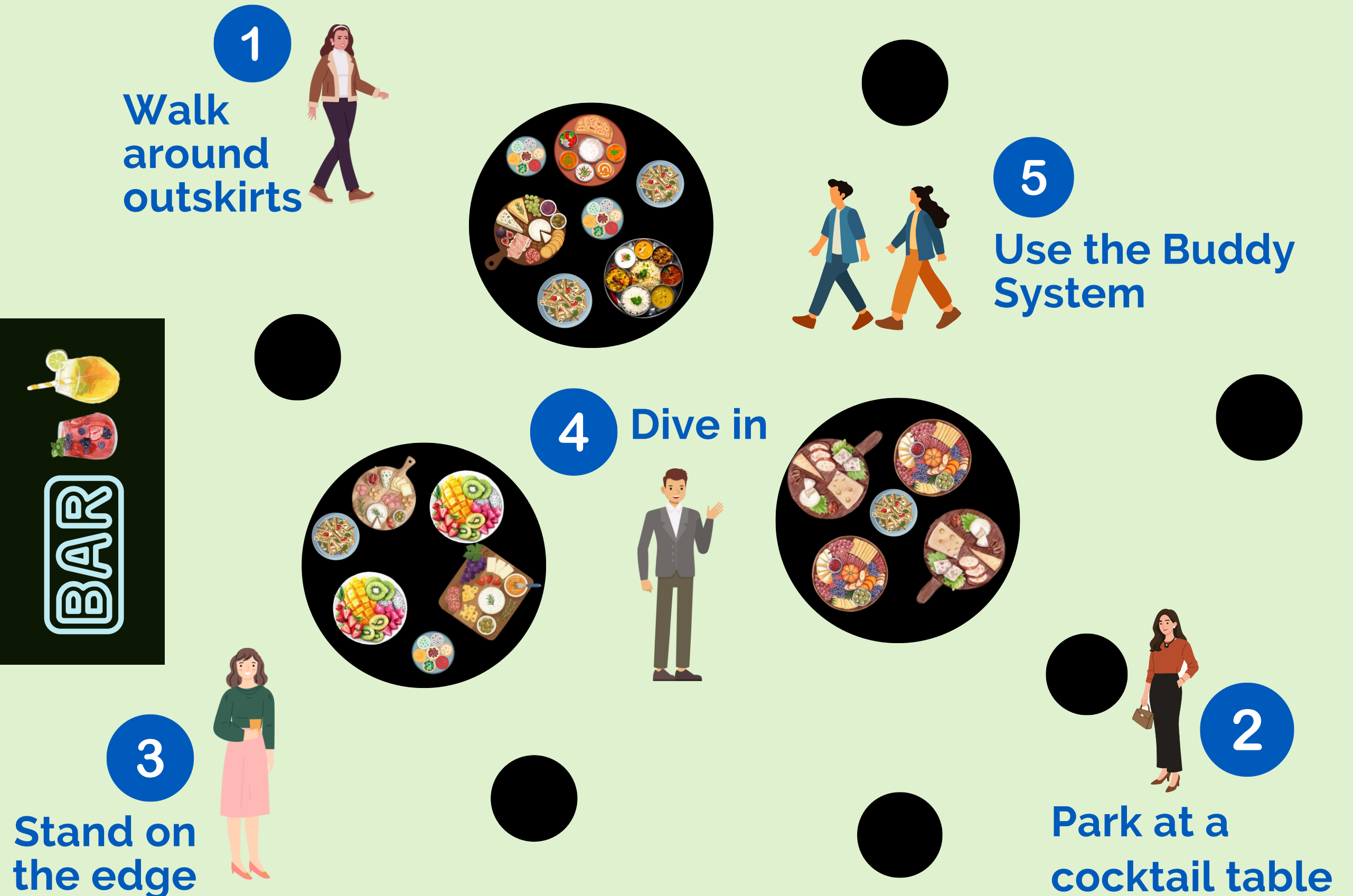
Who should you approach, and how?



Practical Mechanics of Getting into Conversations

Grab food and/or a drink, and then:

- ✓ Head and eyes up
- ✓ More open than closed body language
- ✓ Eye contact
- ✓ SMILE! 😊
- ✓ Ditch your phone



Easier Ways to Start Conversation

Can be logistically or emotionally easier to approach:

People who
are alone

People on
the edges

People in
line

Someone
you already
know

Bren staff/
faculty

Fellow
student

Someone in
a less senior
role than
you

Someone
closer in
age to you

1-3 people
instead of a
large group



Things You Could Say

- **In Line:** "Wow, what a great turnout tonight. Have you been to this conference before? . . . I'm Valeria, by the way; what's your name?"
- **Bren Affiliate:** Excuse me, are you____? Nice to meet you! I read about your XYZ work in that article on the Bren website. I'd be so interested to know. . ."
- **People on Edges/Alone:** "Mind if I/we join you? I'm Martha. What's your connection to AEP?"



MORE Examples: See the reference section at the end.



Diving into the Crowd/Groups

Look for possible “opening points”
as you mingle:

“Changing
of the
guard”

Open body
language

People
having
interesting
convo

People who
smile at you

People
leaving the
bar

Those left out
of a group
(eyes, body
language)

When you
have an
authentic
response

When you
have a legit
question



Strategically Approaching Key People

People you know of
or want to talk to:

People who
gave a talk

Someone
who asked a
good
question

People who
emceed/
helped

People you
know of but
haven't met

People you
know you
want to
meet

Someone
well-known
in your field



Things You Could Say

Diving into Groups:

- “Excuse me, are you all talking about the XYZ session? I’m participating too!”

Strategic Approaches:

- “Excuse me, hi, I’m Kira. I thought your question about XYZ was so interesting. I’d love to hear more about your thoughts on X.”



MORE Examples

What about Handshakes?

- Firm, few shakes, eye contact
- Culturally common in US
- But post-pandemic changes:
 - Do what you are personally comfortable with.
 - Don't force a handshake.
 - Don't take rejection personally.

Alternatives:

- A wave of introduction
- "Oh, hi, nice to meet you; I'm a fist-bumper."
- Could keep hands full if prefer not to shake.
- Up the warmth in other ways → smile, tone of voice, eye contact, "it's nice to meet you!"
- "I'd shake your hand, but [my hands are full]. It's nice to meet you!"



**Receiving Others, Inviting
Them In, & More**

Be Open to People Joining You

Let people who are trying to get in, in!
(Within reason, but lean toward openness)

Eye contact

A smile

Widening
the circle

A greeting +
drawing
people in

An
introduction



Things You Could Say

To People Joining You

- "Hi, we were just talking about the XYZ session. What did you think of it?"
- "Hi, I'm Fermin . . . nice to meet you. This is Annie, and she was just telling us about . . ."



MORE Examples



Help Others Have a Good, Successful Time

Introduce other people/introduce yourself when you can:

- “Tomas, I don’t think you’ve met my friend/coworker, Omar.”
- “I didn’t get a chance to introduce myself; I’m Eva, by the way.”

Vocalize connections:

- “Edgar, this is Shelby. She just started a job at CEC where you interned last year.”

Get the conversation back on track when the group gets distracted:

- “Angie, you were saying. . .”

Privately follow up if the distraction is too far gone:

- “Xochitl, I know we got side-tracked, but I’d love to hear the rest of what you were saying!”



[MORE Examples](#)

Invite People into Conversation . . .

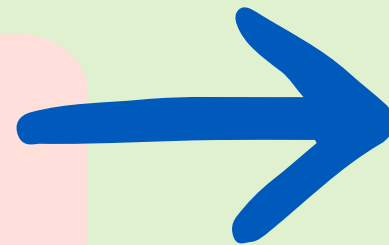
(Rather than calling them out, even with good intentions)



Instead of:

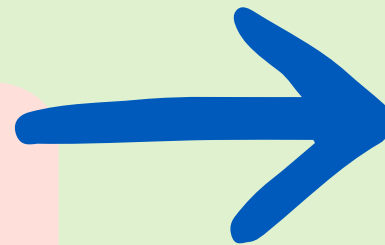
To people who haven't spoken:

- "You haven't said anything. I wonder what you think about this."
- "You're so quiet. What do you think?"



To people alone:

- "Why are you by yourself over here?"
- "You seem uncomfortable; is that why you're in the corner?"



Try this:

- "That's really interesting. What does everyone else think?"
- "Greg, you know a thing or two about aquaculture--are we missing anything?"

- "Mind if I join you? I'm Miguel. What's your name? It's nice to meet you. What brought you here today?"

Talking to More “Senior” People, Status Differences

Talking to More “Senior” People:

- Remember they are human
- Look for commonalities through normal conversation
- Don’t immediately jump to what you can get out of the conversation
- Practice by talking to alumni
- Research people ahead of time
- “Tell me about your research.”

TALK by Alison Wood Brooks:

- **Social “status”:** E.g., expertise, experience level, wealth, age, race, etc.
- **Think of times you were “lower” status—how did people draw you in, or how did you *wish* they drew you in?** → Build empathy through this thought exercise to help you draw people in at times you have higher status.
- **If you have higher status in a conversation, help include others:**
 - Equitable eye contact
 - “Pass the baton”
 - Acknowledge people when you’re building off of their ideas
 - Be the circle-backer

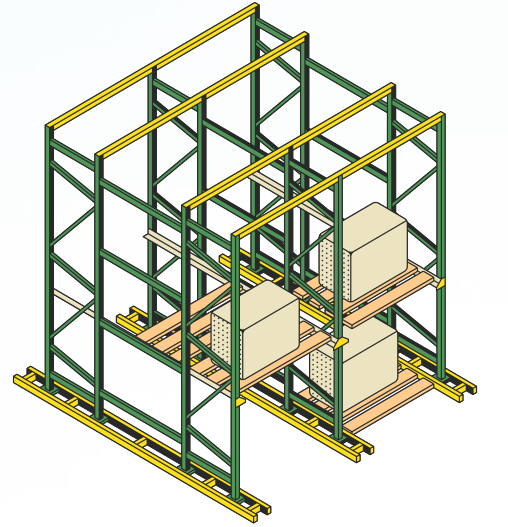
Carrying On Conversations

Reframe **small talk** as a vehicle that
gets you where you want to go



Talking about the food, venue, weather, etc.
can break the ice . . .

How do We Build the Conversation up to be More:



- Interesting
- Enriching
- Inspiring
- Deep
- Helpful
- Authentic
- Human
- Enjoyable?

Scaffolding Conversation: Building it Up to Go Deeper

1

Share “free information.”

- Share something extra to spark interest/conversation (in response to a question or on your own--sharing when not asked).
- Notice when people give you free info.

Free!

2

Increase chances of emotional resonance (shared understanding/relatable emotional response).

- Ask questions about motivation, perspective, challenge, surprise, etc.



3

Use “curiosity statements” for better elevator pitches.

- Focus more on connection and piquing interest than on selling.
- Give bite-size info, not your whole resume!
- Get people to want to know more.



4

Be a little vulnerable (appropriately) to create opportunity for relatability.

- Communicate it → First event, don't know anyone, trying to meet new people, arrived late → All could be opening lines.



→ See Next Slides for Examples

Scaffolding Conversation: Building it Up to Go Deeper

1

Free Info Example:

- **“What are you specializing in?”** → “Probably conservation planning. I did XYZ prior to Bren, and I was fascinated by XX but felt I needed the YY perspective to make a bigger impact on ZZ.”

Free!

2

Emotional Resonance Examples:

- **Motivation:** “Why is that important to you?” “What drew you to that?”
- **Challenge:** “What’s been most challenging” “Is there anything you miss about Y?”
- **Perspective:** “Would you change anything?”



[MORE Examples](#)

Scaffolding Conversation: Building it Up to Go Deeper

3

Curiosity Statement Examples:

- **“How are classes at Bren going?”** “They’re really interesting! I’ve been especially surprised to learn that_____.”
- **How’s your week been?** “Good, I’ve been preparing a pretty cool presentation on _____. I’ll be going to Sacramento to present at the XYZ conference next week.”



4

(Appropriate) Vulnerability Examples:

- **First Event/Don’t Know Anyone:** “This is actually my first AEP event; I must admit I don’t know anyone here!”
- **Trying to Meet New People:** “Excuse me, I’m trying to meet new people. I’m . What’s your name?”



[MORE Examples](#)

Let's practice!

3 rounds, 4 minutes each



Find a partner, introduce yourselves, and ask each other:

Round 1 (Warm-up, lighter topic): What's a book, podcast, or movie you recently enjoyed?

- **Go Deeper:** Why did you enjoy it? Why was it meaningful to you? What was a key takeaway?

Round 2 (Career-focused): What's an academic/professional goal you hope to achieve while at Bren or afterward?

- **Go Deeper:** How did that become important to you? What excites you about that? What would it mean to you to succeed in that?

Round 3 (Event-focused): What's a key takeaway from this workshop for you?

- **Go Deeper:** Why did it resonate or stand out for you? Did that inspire any goals for tomorrow's reception?

Exiting Conversations & Staying in Touch

Staying in Touch

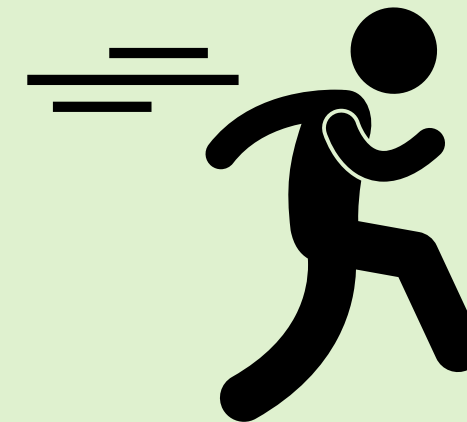
Sample Language:

- "It's been great talking to you. Here's my card; I'd love to stay in touch."
- "It was great meeting with you. Can we exchange contact info? I'd love to stay in touch."
- "It was great talking to you. Do you mind if I add you on LinkedIn? I'd love to stay connected."

➔ Resources:

- Business cards
- LinkedIn QR codes
- How to keep the relationship going
- Email templates for following up with people





Exiting Conversations Tactfully

Honest Escape:

- "It's been nice talking to you. I need to make sure I connect with _____ before the event ends."
- "It was great meeting you; I'm going to _____."

The Food Excuse:

- "I think I'm going to go get a few more of those dumplings before they're gone."

The Heads-Up:

- "Wow, this has been so interesting. I need to go look for my friend soon, but I have one more question first . . ."

The Buddy Escape:

- Use a buddy to come pull you away when you give a "save me" sign.
- Your friend might say, "Hi, I wanted to talk to you . . ."

The Fade-Out & Changing of the Guard (Groups):

- When someone new comes to the group, you move out (fade out).
- Might say thank you and move away.
- Say something if you've developed a stronger relationship with members in the group.



MORE Examples

Food & Drink

Food & Drink: Etiquette and Practical Tips

From Aleah Van Woert (Bren Sr. Events Manager)



Purpose of a reception. . .

Surprise

It's not about the food!

Instead of this...



Do this . . .



Action Plan for Tomorrow

Your Plan for Tomorrow's Reception

Try out Today's Tips!

- Get a plate and wine glass—try to hold them at the same time!
- Practice adding different types of food to a small plate.
- Try at least 1 new conversation/mingling strategy.

Brainstorm 3 Things You Can Share

- Examples:
 - Local trail
 - Surf spot
 - Recipe
 - Podcast/book rec
 - Campus resource you've learned about

Brainstorm 3 Things You Can Learn

- Examples:
 - Bike route to school
 - Hobby or sports group
 - Restaurant
 - Internship opportunities
 - Go-to study spot
 - Course recommendations

Final Pep Talk: Taking Action

→ **Commit to action. Move from passive → active**

- Behavioral activation → improved feelings!

→ **Act with “3 seconds of courage.”**

- Usually gets less awkward/scary after that.

→ **Think/act like a host (or volunteer).**

- Help others and reduce your stress.
- **Volunteering:** Built-in conversation/ownership.

→ **Decide to “extend yourself to others.”**

- Sharing yourself with others is a gift to them!

→ **Get curious to reduce fear.**

- “What inspired you to come today?”
- “What takeaways did you have from the talk?”
- “I was struck by XYZ. What did you think?”





Reference Section

More Examples & Resources

👉 Review on your own before the reception!

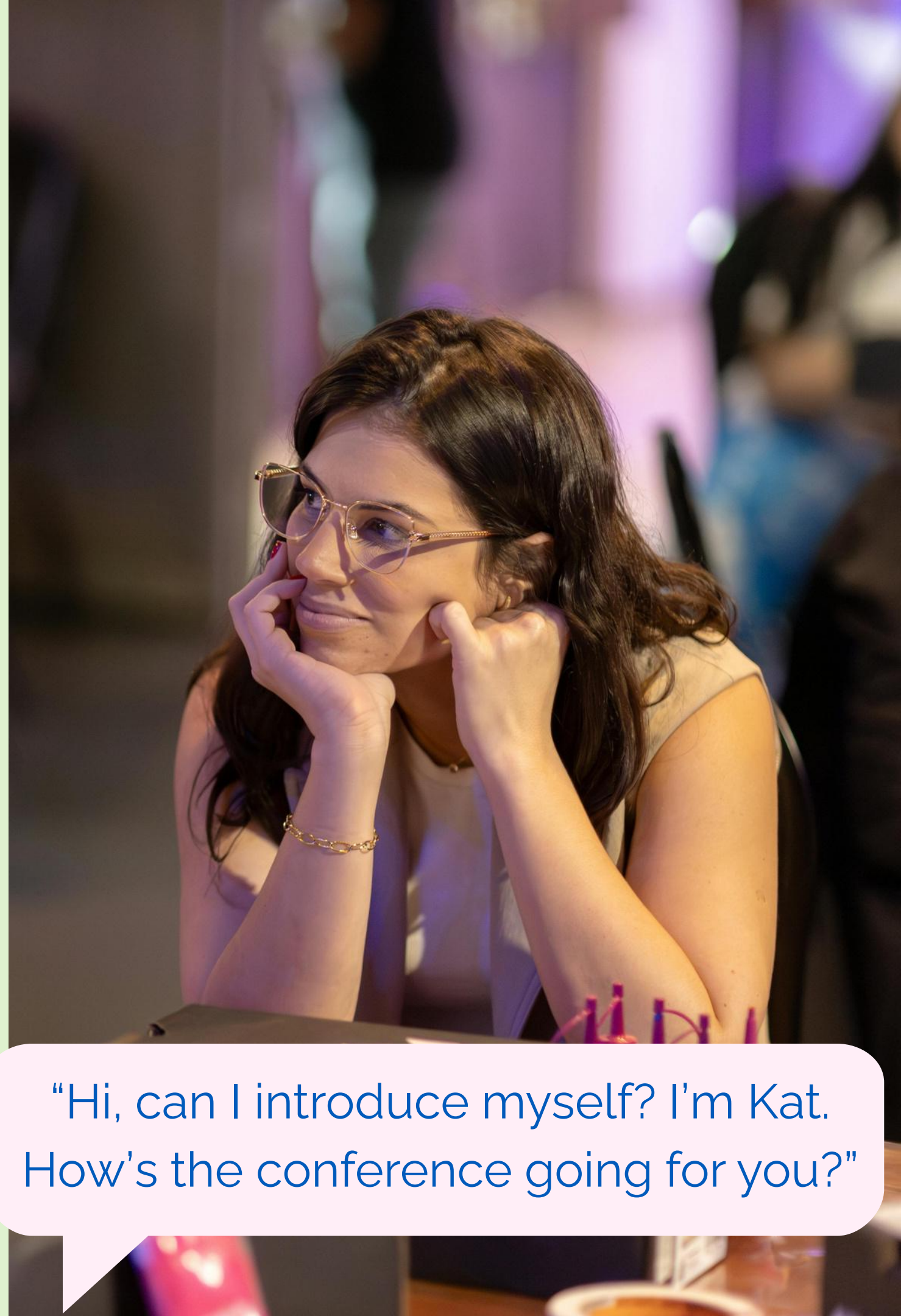
Things You Could Say: In Line

- “The food looks so good. I can’t wait. I’m Robert; what’s your name? . . . nice to meet you. What brought you here today?”
- “Wow, what a great turnout tonight. Have you been to this conference before? . . . I’m Valeria, by the way; what’s your name?”
- “Excuse me, is this the sign-in line? Great, thanks. I’m Anook, by the way. What brought you to this?”
- “Is this the coffee line? Perfect, I need some energy. What did you think of that last talk?”



Things You Could Say: To those on Edges/Alone

- "Mind if I/we join you? I'm Martha. What's your connection to AEP?"
- "Hi, I don't think we've met; I'm Joaquin. Have you been to one of these events before?"
- "Mind if I join you for a bit? I need a little break . . . I'm Kendall, by the way. How've you been enjoying the conference/event so far?"
- "Excuse me, is there a free spot there?"
- "Excuse me, I thought I'd introduce myself. I'm Adrian. . . have you been to this event before?"
- "Do you mind if I join you here, where it's a bit quieter? . . . thanks! How's the event going for you?"



"Hi, can I introduce myself? I'm Kat. How's the conference going for you?"

Things You Could Say: People You Know

- Hi, how are you? What have you thought of the presentations so far?
- Good to see you! How's the evening going for you so far? . . . Have you met anyone interesting?
- How are you? . . . Is there anyone here you think I should meet?

Things You Could Say: Bren People

- Excuse me, are you ____? Nice to meet you! I read about your XYZ work in that article on the Bren website. I'd be so interested to know_____.
- Hi, how are you? . . . I know you mentioned XYZ would be here. Would you be able to introduce me?



Things You Could Say: Diving Into Groups/ Crowds

- "I'm trying to meet new people; mind if I join you?"
- "Hi, I don't think I've met you all; I'm Priya . . . What brought you to the event tonight?"
- "I heard you mention Italy and had to come over; I was just there this summer! . . ."
- "Excuse me, I thought I'd introduce myself. I'm trying to meet new people. I'm Anabelle . . ."
- "Excuse me, are you all talking about the XYZ session? I'm participating too!"



Things You Could Say: Strategic Approaches

- "Excuse me, I loved your talk on XX. I'm Mark, by the way. What inspired your passion for YY?"
- "Hi, thanks for your help putting this event on; it's great. How did you get involved with AEP?"
- "Excuse me, we haven't met, but I heard you speak at XYZ [earlier session, another event] and found it so interesting. I'm Binh . . . you mentioned upcoming research on XX; I'd love to hear more about that."
- "Excuse me, hi, I'm Kira. I thought your question about XYZ was so interesting. It sounds like you're in the XYZ space; I'd love to hear more about your experience."
- "Excuse me, are you XYZ? I saw the article on your work in [XYZ publication] and was fascinated . . ."



Things You Could Say: Venue/Event/Food

- "Attendance looks higher than last year. How long have you been attending these events?"
- "What is your connection to . . . ?"
- "What is your role in all of this?"
- "I can't stop eating these [insert appetizer]. Have you tried them yet?"
- "What a beautiful venue. Have you been here before?"



Help Others Have a Good, Successful Time

Introduce other people/introduce yourself when you can:

- “Tomas, I don’t think you’ve met my friend/coworker, Omar.”
- “I didn’t get a chance to introduce myself; I’m Eva, by the way.”
- “Hi, I don’t think we’ve met. I’m Arlo.”



Vocalize connections:

- “Edgar, this is Shelby. She just started a job at CEC where you interned last year.”
- “You’re working on sustainable apparel? We were just talking about Kiran’s research on that this summer!”
- “Krishna, this is Ben--I think he’d be interested in the XYZ work you’re doing.”

Get the conversation back on track when the group gets distracted:

- “Angie, you were saying. . .”
- “Craig, we got distracted. I want to hear the rest of your story.”

Privately follow up if the distraction is too far gone:

- “Xochitl, I know we got side-tracked, but I’d love to hear the rest of what you were saying!”



MORE Examples

More Examples - “Free Information”

You could share:

- More of the why
- Something you're excited about
- What's been surprising or interesting
- **Helpful Phrases:**
 - “What I've discovered is . . .”
 - “Actually, a little-known fact about that is . . .”
 - “Most people don't know this, but . . .”
 - “I think the most difficult part will be . . .”
 - “What I miss most is . . .”
 - “So I saw something interesting today . . .”

Can also be used to change the subject a bit, e.g., Question = “What do you do?”

→ “My day job iz XYZ, but I'm really excited about a side project I'm creating on ABC.”

Example: “How are you?”

→ “I'm doing well; I just got out of an interesting meeting on XYZ.”

More Examples - Emotional Resonance

Questions about Motivation/Desires/Goals”

- What brought you here today? → Or, what inspired you to come to this event today?
- Why is that important to you?
- How did that become important to you? (Is there a story behind how you got interested in that/how that became important to you?)
- What excites you about that?
- What drew you to that? What sparked your interest in that?
- What do you hope to achieve?
- What gives you the most hope right now in your work?
- What keeps you motivated to X?

Questions about Satisfaction/Reward/Enjoyment/Meaning:

- What's been most meaningful [about that, in your career]?
- What do you enjoy most about your work? (What's most rewarding about that?)
- What's the most meaningful part of your job?

Questions about Success/Optimism:

- What's your biggest success story?
- What makes you most optimistic [about that, about X work, etc.]?

... Continued

Questions about Surprise/Change:

- What's been most surprising (or unexpected) about that?
- Has (or how has) X changed your perspective? (or changed your perspective on Y?)

Questions about Perspective/Longing:

- Is there anything you miss about Y?
- Looking back, would you change anything about your career path, your approach to your research/the problem, etc.]?
- Would you do anything differently in the future (on a similar project, etc.)?
- Would you say it has been more X or Y? (e.g., challenging or rewarding, expected or surprising, hopeful or discouraging?)

Questions about Challenge/Difficulty:

- Has it been challenging?
- What's been most challenging?
- What's been your go-to method for handling the setbacks/challenges?

Open-Ended Invite to Share More (showing you're interested):

- What was that like for you? (What was that experience like for you? How is that for you? How has that been for you?)
- Tell me more. (Wow, that's amazing. Tell me more)
- I have so many questions. Could you expand on that?

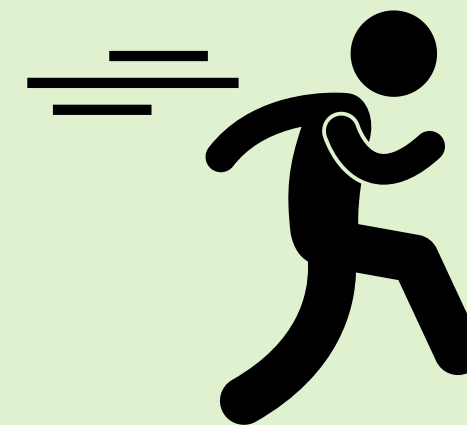
More Examples - (Appropriate) Vulnerability

- **First Event/Don't Know Anyone:** "This is actually my first AEP event; I must admit I don't know anyone here!"
- **Introverted/Hard Time Meeting People:** "How's the conference been for you?" → "Well, I'm introverted, so it's been a little harder to put myself out there to meet people, but I'm really enjoying some of the talks."
- **Over-Stimulated/Overwhelmed/Introverted:** "Do you mind if I join you here, where it's a little quieter? It's a little over-stimulating in that main room." (or "there's a lot going on over there" or "I need a little breather.")
- **Trying to Meet New People:** "Excuse me, I'm trying to meet new people. I'm_____. What's your name?"
- **Arrived Late:** "Excuse me, I just got here. Do you know what everyone is doing right now?"

Helpful Phrases:

- "I must admit . . ."
- "Do you mind . . ."
- "I'm afraid I don't know . . ."
- "Excuse me . . ."
- "Do you know . . ."
- "I'm not quite sure . . ."
- "I'm feeling a little . . ."

- **Lost:** "Hi, I'm a little lost. Do you know where . . ."
- **Confused:** "Excuse me, I'm not quite sure what's happening. Do you know what we're supposed to be doing right now?"



Exiting Conversations Tactfully

Honest Escape:

- "I've enjoyed talking to you, but I need to make sure I connect with _____ before the end of the event."
- "It's been great speaking with you. I think I'm going to call it a night."
- "It was great meeting you; I'm going to _____."
- "I wish I could keep talking, but I should probably _____."

The Food Excuse:

- "I think I'm going to go get a few more of those dumplings before they're gone."
- "I want to try a glass of that Pinot they just opened."
- "It was great meeting you; I'm going to go get some water."

The Heads-Up:

- "Wow, this has been so interesting. I need to go look for my friend soon, but I have one more question first . . ."

The Buddy Escape:

- Use a buddy to come pull you away when you give a "save me" sign.
- Your friend might say, "Hi, I wanted to talk to you . . ."

The Fade-Out & Changing of the Guard (Groups):

- When someone new comes to the group, you move out (fade out).
- Might say thank you and move away.
- Say something if you've developed a stronger relationship with members in the group.

Self-Talk Exercise

→ Replace negative self-talk with positive.

- I'll just be a burden to other people → Sharing myself with others is a gift to them.
- I never meet people at these events. → I'm practicing new skills, and that takes time. I'll introduce myself to at least 1 new person.
- I hate feeling so awkward at these things. → My discomfort is totally valid and I'm also proud of pushing myself to grow. I can do hard things.

→ Journal your own rewrites before the event:

- Negative Belief:_____.
- Positive Reframe:_____.

BELIEVE IN
MYSELF



Learning from Others

➔ Recall a positive interaction or conversation you've had with another person:

- **Describe it:** Who initiated it? What made it positive? How did you feel?
- **Apply it:** What can you emulate from that interaction in your own mingling interactions?



References

Here is a list of sources used; for space reasons, in lieu of in-text citations, the topics pulled into this workshop from each source below are listed in parentheses.

- ["Building Emotional Intelligence Isn't As Hard As You Think," Psychology Today article by David B. Feldman:](#) Emotional intelligence
- ["How to network - no matter your personality type," CFA Institute article:](#) Tips for introverts and extraverts
- [*Science of People* website & videos, founded by Vanessa van Edwards:](#) Standing a few feet from a bar, warmth, and more strategies.
- [*How to Start a Conversation and Make Friends*, book by Don Gabor:](#) Free information, moving from passive → active.
- [*How to Work a Room*, book by Susan RoAne:](#) Extending self to others, acting like a host
- [*TALK*, book by Alison Wood Brooks \(Harvard Business Professor\):](#) Topic prep, status differences, conversational strategies for when conversation gets off track
- [*Slam Dunk Job Search*, book by Dave Parker \(Bren Career Development founder and retired Exec Director\):](#) Curiosity statements
- ["How to End Networking Conversations Like a Pro," article by Andy Molinsky:](#) Giving a heads-up/preview that you're leaving the conversation
- ["Master the Art of Conversation \(Using Psychology\)," video by Dr. Thomas Smithyman](#)
- ["Networking Tips if You Hate Networking," conference presentation by Matt Ingold \(2026\):](#) More emotional resonance-building questions, getting curious to reduce fear
- ["5 Tips for Networking with Senior Executives," article by Sarah Downs](#)

