

5 ways to kick-start conversations

It's not just what you say, it's how you say it. The next time you find yourself at a group event like a conference, or face-to-face with a promising new contact, give one of these tactics a try.*

Approach	Instead of ...	How about ...
<p>1. The Interesting Intro. How you introduce yourself or respond to the question <i>What do you do?</i> can cause eyes to glaze over — or light up. Think beyond your title, company and industry, focusing instead on something likely to elicit a response.</p>	<p><i>"I'm Alex Villegas, a software engineer."</i></p>	<p><i>"I'm Alex Villegas. I'm trying to build a new gaming app that's as addictive as Angry Birds."</i></p>
<p>2. The Memorable Compliment. Have something nice to say? Say it (if you mean it), but challenge yourself to go beyond the typical fare. People will appreciate it — and remember you for it.</p>	<p><i>"Great presentation!"</i></p>	<p><i>"I thought your response to that question about trends in venture capitalism was really insightful. Could you explain that idea in a little more detail?"</i></p>
<p>3. The Small-Talk Topper. Get past pleasantries by asking questions that feed your curiosity and establish true rapport.</p>	<p><i>"How are you?"</i></p>	<p><i>"Tell me about the project you're most excited about right now."</i></p>
<p>4. The Name Save. It happens to everyone. You bump into someone you've met and can't recall his or her name. Don't let it ruin the encounter.</p>	<p><i>"I'm so sorry, but I can't recall your name. Let's see, it was ..."</i></p>	<p><i>"I remember you. I'm Alex." (As you say this, put out your hand; chances are, the other person will follow your lead and share his or her name, too.)</i></p>
<p>5. The History Lesson. Asking how people got where they are is a great way to learn more about them — and it's a subject most people enjoy.</p>	<p><i>"What do you do in marketing?"</i></p>	<p><i>"How did you get into marketing?"</i></p>

*Tactics based on tips in *Make Your Contacts Count* by Anne Baber and Lynne Waymon.