

Top Leaders and Professionals Share Advance Praise for...

*The Power of
Meeting New People*

Debra Fine

“In our business, casual conversation is an essential leadership skill. Demonstrating conversational skills and techniques that build rapport and relationships in both social and business situations is a key to success.”

—**Vice President, People Development, AMERUS Group**

“All the information Debra Fine discusses can be used in personal life, as well as professional life.”

—**Texas Dental Association**

“I realize from your material that ‘casual conversation’ is a valid component of my job and of everyone’s life. Casual conversation is a pleasure if you make it one, and trivial only if you think connecting with other human beings is trivial.”

—**Dan Underwood, Vail
Ski Resort**

“Your message is sure to not only be reflected in improved customer service but also in people suddenly volunteering to go to the next corporate ‘mixer.’”

—**General Manager, Destination Services of Colorado, Inc.**

“I give my unqualified recommendation of this material to anyone in a group or practice seeking to gain useful and practical information in the art of communication.”

—**S. Kent Lawson, DDS, MS, Aurora Orthodontics**

The Power of Meeting New People

**Start Conversations, Keep Them Going,
Build Rapport, Develop
Friendships, and Expand Business**

Debra Fine

A Possibility Press Book

The Power of Meeting New People

Debra Fine

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Dedication

Dedicated with love to the
wind beneath my wings, my husband Steve,
and my two magnificent sources of
inspiration, Jared and Sarah.

“... The People You Meet.”

As I've been known to say, “You're the same today as you'll be in five years except for the books you read and the people you meet.” Now here's a tremendous book that teaches you how to rev up your ability to meet new people. It'll help you supercharge your business or career, and energize all areas of your life.

Debra Fine teaches us how to expand the number of people we meet so we can excel at whatever we are doing. Everyone I know who is extraordinarily successful has met lots of people. But it's not the people you know that counts. It's the people who know *you* and how you can help them with what you have to offer that determines your success.

The Power of Meeting New People is jam packed with must-read information and examples that can help you meet more people and have great fun doing it. Read this book and blow your people-meeting skills through the roof. You, too, will then be on your way to even more tremendous success.

Tremendously,

A bold, black, handwritten signature that reads "Charlie 'Tremendous' Jones". The signature is written in a cursive style with thick, dark strokes.

Charlie “Tremendous” Jones

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“Start thinking of strangers as future friends—not as people to be feared or avoided. After all, our friends and associates were once strangers. Meeting new people and becoming a good conversationalist will help you bring new people into your network of associates, friends, colleagues, clients, customers, and others.”

—Debra Fine

If I Can Do It, So Can You

“There is no doubt that meeting new people and enhancing your conversational skills will improve your life.”

—Debra Fine—

When I first got into the business of helping others meet new people and cultivate conversational skills, I ran into a lot of skepticism. Executives scoffed at the idea as a housewife’s trivial initiative to overcome boredom. Then I would get clandestine calls for assistance from folks with prestigious titles. They would construct elaborate covert operations to seek advice without admitting their true agendas. As it turned out, people were actually embarrassed about it, and I can appreciate that.

In my previous life as a nerdy engineer, I was burdened by poor social skills and embarrassed by my own conversational ineptitude. Before I gave myself a remedial education in the power of meeting new people, I had been a poor communicator and a timid person for as long as I can recall.

As a kid I was overweight and reticent—invisible in the back of the class, and often excluded because of my size. One of the most vivid memories of my childhood is that of a

birthday party for my third-grade classmate, Rita. All the girls in my class were invited except one other girl and me. I felt so hurt that I withdrew into a world of books. I had no idea how to make a friend or have a friend. Consequently, I never learned how to talk to my peers.

Little Chatting Was Required and No New Friends Were Necessary

Naturally, when I got older, I selected a career that didn't have a high demand for meeting new people. Engineering was the perfect choice for me since it tends to be highly technical and requires little chatting. I routinely made technical presentations or answered complex engineering questions without any trouble. All that was required was technical competence in my field. However, as my career progressed, I was sent to conferences and industry meetings where I was expected to mingle with colleagues, network, and meet clients. This struck fear into my heart.

I only knew one way to introduce myself and start a conversation. Without fail, I would ask every person I met, "What do you do?" After we exchanged career notes, the conversation invariably sputtered to an agonizing halt. I just didn't know how to keep it going. As a result, I skipped every social function I could. For the ones I couldn't avoid, I'd go late and leave early. In-between I'd pray that some other dear souls with better skills and a kind heart would rescue me by introducing themselves and initiating a conversation.

I struggled with the art of meeting new people and starting conversations throughout my tenure as an engineer. Then I took a break from my career to have my two children. During that interlude, I began feeling the need to have more friends so that I could expand my horizons. To do so, I knew that I had to improve my social and relationship-building skills. So, I began taking note of others who were successful at mingling

and cultivating friendships in crowds. I watched what they did and timidly began trying to imitate them.

Meeting New People Is Not Rocket Science

Here I was approaching 40, having been out of my field for several years, and needing to meet people to further my career once my children became old enough. It was a daunting prospect, to say the least. Nevertheless, I realized that acquiring people-meeting and conversational skills couldn't be anywhere near as complicated as rocket science. I easily convinced myself that it couldn't be that tough, because I had observed so many other people of various backgrounds doing it well. So I made it my goal to figure out how to start and keep a conversation going for longer than five minutes.

I soon discovered that a key element to meeting new people is *casual conversation*. I finally understood what a great tool it was for building rapport. I devoted myself to learning more about it, practicing it, and helping others become good at it. Ever since I started my speaking and consulting business, I have been devoted to helping others develop the power of meeting new people. I have met countless fascinating people, made many wonderful friends, and I now have a continuous stream of business referrals. My life is richly populated with diverse individuals who bring added meaning and depth to each day.

My goal in writing this book is to offer what I've learned so that you, too, can reap the tremendous rewards that come from meeting new people and having a repertoire of conversational skills. The tips and techniques in this book are for everyone—not just nerds!

The Conversationally Challenged Are Not Alone

I know salespeople who are wonderful at making formal presentations, but they enter networking events in a cold sweat. There are teachers who can chat with students and col-

leagues; but when they see parents at school functions, they don't have the slightest idea what to say. There are harried, yet happy, stay-at-home moms who are bundles of entertainment at playgroups, yet they walk away from community organization meetings or events at their places of worship feeling isolated and disconnected.

I know a fine physician who closed his practice and joined an HMO (Health Maintenance Organization) because, despite his expertise, he didn't have the conversational skills and confidence to garner new referrals. There are many business owners and other professionals whose success depends on their ability to network with others, yet they fail to grow their businesses or professions because they are afraid of meeting new people and starting conversations. I've found that there are an incredible number of perfectly competent people, from all walks of life, who need help in acquiring the ability and harnessing their power to meet new people and develop conversational skills. So if you are among them, you are certainly not alone!

Expand Your Horizons—*Meet Some New People*

This book will help you acquire the skills you need to meet new people and enhance your conversational abilities. As your skills grow, the quality of your life will improve. Becoming a good conversationalist has an amazing ripple effect. It will help you bring new people into your network of associates, friends, colleagues, clients, customers, and others. You will get joy out of events you used to dread, and you'll create pathways and channels for opportunities to meet more new people.

Now take a moment and invest some time considering the following statements. If you check yes to most of them, you are on the right track. If you find yourself responding no to more than a couple, it's time to get to work.

Developing the Power of Meeting New People

Check Yes or No to the following statements:

1. I have joined or participated in at least one club, group, or other activity in order to meet new people for business or personal reasons. Yes No
2. I'm conscious of taking turns sharing in conversations so I can get to know others and help them get to know me. Yes No
3. I have helped at least two people meet potential associates, customers, or clients in order to assist them in their networking skills. Yes No
4. I have attended at least two functions, events, or activities a month where I can meet people who are either decision makers or potential new friends. Yes No
5. If someone is friendly toward me it is easy to be friendly back. However, I don't wait to make sure someone is friendly before I am friendly toward him or her. I initiate the friendly gesture. Yes No
6. When someone asks me "What's new?" instead of saying "Not much," I talk about something exciting. Yes No
7. At meetings, parties, and virtually everywhere I go, I introduce myself to people I don't know and come away knowing the names and having the contact information of at least three people. Yes No

Well, how did you do? All right, that's enough casual conversation. Now let's get down to business!

“**B**ecoming a good conversationalist has an amazing ripple effect. You will get joy out of events you used to dread, and you’ll create pathways and channels for opportunities to meet more new people.”

—Debra Fine

“The great news about the skills needed to meet and engage in conversations with new people is that anyone can learn them. While some people have more of a tendency to be effective meeters and greeters, most have had to work at it.”

—Debra Fine

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So What's the Big Deal About Meeting New People?

"People who excel at meeting new people are actually experts at making others feel included, valued, and comfortable."

—Debra Fine—

Jack pulls into the parking lot, turns off the engine, and sits for a minute, dreading the next two hours. An important client has invited him to an open house in celebration of opening a new downtown office.

Jack hates these things—he never knows what to say, won't know anyone except the client, and will feel nervous while trying not to look lost. So he always eats more than he knows is good for him, just to keep occupied.

Jack needs to attend—that's a given—but he sinks deeper into the front seat and agonizes over how long he'll have to stay. Is dropping by for 30 minutes enough, or will he insult one of his best clients if he doesn't stay for the whole event? He searches for excuses to get himself out of there early. He could have someone page him at a specified time and use that as an excuse for a quick exit...perhaps one of the kids has a big game...or maybe he just allows his anxiety to carry him right into an illness. Does any of this sound familiar?

Gear Up for More Enjoyable Daily Interactions

Typically, casual conversations can occur at least a dozen times a day—on the way into work, picking up your child from an after-school activity, riding the elevator with a colleague, fielding a phone call from your mother-in-law, attending an industry meeting, taking a client or associate to lunch, going to a job interview, sharing an opportunity, product, or service with a prospect—the list is endless!

But for many of us, the demands for meeting new people don't ever make it any easier. If anything, such encounters may increase anxiety and cause some people to fear or even avoid going to social events or business lunches, and risking chance encounters with neighbors or others.

Do your conversations evaporate almost as soon as they've begun? Are you a reluctant participant at social or business get-togethers? If so, this book will help you attain the conversational skills you need to feel confident and poised in *any* situation. When you practice the simple techniques and approaches shown, you will put your meeting-new-people demons behind you. You will learn how to:

- Engage anyone in a meaningful dialogue.
- Rejuvenate a dying conversation.
- Transition into new topics.
- Feel more at ease at networking events, parties, and receptions.
- Develop business friendships.
- Step out of a conversation with grace.

Getting to the BIG Stuff

Casual conversation is often thought of as the lowly stepchild of real conversation, yet it serves an extremely important function. Without it, you can rarely get to the real conversation. Casual conversation is the icebreaker—your

first comment or question upon meeting a new person—that clears the way for more in-depth conversations and stronger relationships. People who excel at casual conversation are actually experts at making others feel included, valued, and comfortable. And that goes a long way toward furthering business relationships, closing deals, and making new friends and associations.

The great news about the skills needed to meet and engage in conversations with new people is that anyone can learn them. Don't be fooled into thinking that all those other people you see who are smiling and happily mingling came by it naturally. While some have more of a tendency to be effective meeters and greeters, most have had to work at it. They've practiced, attended seminars, received guidance from coaches or other leaders, listened to tapes, and read books. Don't think so? Trust me, I know. I used to be a geeky, introverted engineer—no one has worse skills than I once did. But I became a pro by learning the skills and then practicing them. It was that simple.

The first step in obtaining success is letting go of the idea that we all are somehow supposed to know how to meet and converse with people we don't know or hardly know. It's simply not true. We are rarely taught how to do it, nor is there some biological mechanism that instinctively takes over when we find ourselves with a conversational opportunity.

Mark McCormack, an attorney from Cleveland who founded one of the first sports management firms in the United States said, "All things being equal, people will buy from a friend. All things being not quite so equal, people will still buy from a friend." The bottom line is that it's to your benefit to cultivate friendships, not just collect business cards.

In his book *Megatrends*, John Naisbitt discussed our need for high-touch in our high-tech world: "The more technology

around us, the more need for human touch.” People are compensating for living in a high-tech world of computers, e-mail, and being alone in work settings by reaching out to other people. Witness the fact that shopping malls are some of the most frequented places in the world! People need to gather—to connect and have caring relationships. When you make the extra effort to meet new people, you are extending the hand of friendship that is usually warmly received.

Talk Is Cheap—*But It Can Be Quite Valuable*

Casual conversation is essential in creating and enhancing business relationships. Always begin and end a business talk with casual conversation. For example, people choose financial planners as much for their ability to help them *feel* secure and comfortable personally as they do for their financial savvy. How important is your physician’s “bedside manner” to you? Hair stylists are often consummate conversationalists. They understand that few people will spend the better part of an hour or more, sitting in a chair at the mercy of someone with a sharp instrument, unless he or she feels comfortable with that person!

In an indirect but very important way, casual conversation is related to how businesses and individuals spend or invest time and money:

- **To get their problems solved or their wants or needs met.** Think about it—you may dash into a fast food restaurant for lunch to avoid packing leftovers. You might hire a babysitter to have an evening out. You may pay someone to cut your grass so that you can have more time to invest meeting potential prospects or more free time.
- **To gain good, positive feelings.** My neighbor Susan continues banking with the same institution she has for years—even though another bank offered a better free-

checking deal—because she likes the people. My friend Vince moved to the opposite side of town and still drives back to the old neighborhood to take his dog to the vet. Although he and the vet do not socialize together, he can't imagine going anywhere else. He likes that particular vet. (Hopefully his dog does too!)

A good conversationalist frequently gives the positive attention necessary to stimulate the good feelings people long to have. The reality is that people's choices about those with whom they choose to associate and where to spend their money are influenced by the presence or absence of rapport—a harmonious, empathetic connection. Casual conversation is a big deal because it is integral to establishing this precious rapport. Parents and teachers visit before conferences to create bonds. Mortgage brokers chat with people at referral sources, like title and real estate companies, to strengthen their relationships which will lead to more business.

It's a challenging and fast-paced world, and the news media provides more bad news than good. People appreciate conversations in which they feel acknowledged, heard, and significant. While it's understood that people seek these benefits in conversations with friends, it's also true that people choose to associate in business with and buy goods and services from individuals who are warm, friendly, and caring. From the senior executives of a large corporation seeking a supplier, to a parent picking up a few groceries, to the account executive in need of a courier—buying decisions are all influenced by the rapport, or lack of it, established with the other party.

Garner BIG Gains—*With a Little Talking*

Effective managers and other leaders use casual conversation at the front end of meetings to set the mood for discussion

and create a bridge to more meaningful, and perhaps difficult, dialogue. Casual conversations and formal icebreakers offer opportunities to build rapport, increase success, and create cohesive teams.

By developing more casual conversational skills, you can even improve communication with your children. You'll recognize the most repeated question in parenting—"How was school?"—as a conversation killer. You can avoid the usual one-word response—"Fine"—and create a meaningful dialogue. Imagine being able to gain valuable insights about what they're learning and who their friends are!

Casual conversation is no small thing. It's a precious personal and professional tool you can use to connect with other people. Appreciating the power of casual conversation is the first step. By recognizing its value, you'll be more inclined to put forth the effort necessary to acquire the skills. If you thought casual conversation was all about becoming a smooth-talker to take advantage of people, you were misinformed. It's more like that first domino; it causes a positive chain reaction with all kinds of implications for more success in all areas of your life.

This book is filled with tips and techniques to help you develop the skills you need to meet new people and enjoy the perks of quality conversations. You may even decide that you love attending networking events, parties, and meeting people everywhere you go because you will have the skills to be more successful with them.

Like me, you may still prefer to stay at home with a good book rather than attend an event at which you don't know anyone—*but you'll go anyway*. There's no denying that it takes effort to mingle when a room is full of people you don't know. However, there's also no denying that there are plenty of times all of us need to attend such events as a part of our jobs, businesses, or personal lives. So it just makes sense to

maximize those opportunities. Improved people-meeting and casual conversational skills offer you the tools to do just that.

By the time you've finished this book you'll have the information and resources you need to be a successful conversationalist anywhere you see people. Upgrading your casual conversational skills can enhance your leadership abilities, reduce your anxiety in social situations, boost your confidence, lead to new friendships and business relationships, and more. Before you know it, you will actually look forward to and enjoy meeting and talking to people you don't know.