

Small talk is part of lots of work moments but can feel uncomfortable.

Reframing small talk as a chance to make a quick connection can be a useful starting point to make conversations easier.

## Coach yourself questions

How do I feel about small talk?



Which small talk conversation starter feels most natural for me?



## Ideas for action



### 1. Small talk starters

Getting started is often the hardest part. Try one of these approaches to ease into small talk:

#### Low-commitment questions

Simple questions help take the pressure off and keep the conversation informal and easy to answer. Try asking:

- 🗨️ "What have you been up to since I last saw you?"
- 🗨️ "Who are you looking forward to hearing from or seeing today?" (at events)
- 🗨️ "What's new since last week?" (ask your team)
- 🗨️ "How's your week going?"

#### Giving to get started

Share something about yourself to encourage others to do the same. e.g.

- 🗨️ "This week I've been..."
- 🗨️ "Yesterday I..."

### 2. Half versus whole listening

Small talk is easier when you focus on listening rather than thinking about what to say next.

Whole listening means being present, which makes it easier to spot subtle signals and quick connections. Try:

- 🗨️ After a quick connection, test your whole listening – can you remember 75% of what was said?
- 🗨️ Paraphrasing what you've heard during a quick connection to help the conversation flow naturally.

### 3. When to stop the small talk

Small talk is short – often just a few minutes. The key is to know when and how to move on.

There are two ways you could do this:

- 🗨️ **Segway to the main conversation:** signal the shift by saying: "What's the most useful thing for us to talk about first?" or "Let's get started"
- 🗨️ **Stop and conclude positively:** end the chat in a way that feels authentic to you. For example: "It's been lovely talking, I'm going to go meet a colleague"

## Recommended resources



**10 ways to have a better conversation.**  
Insightful Ted Talk by Celeste Headlee.



**How to get better at small talk and even enjoy it.** Ten minute video by Harvard Business Review.



Helen talks to journalist and author Kate Murphy on how you can upgrade your listening skills in episode **#319** of Squiggly Careers.