There are many times during your career where you will have short periods of time to make conversation with other professionals either during a professional conference, lunch with new co-workers or while waiting for a job interview to begin. This type of conversation is often known as “small talk” and it is important to plan ahead, practice and be ready for these conversations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appropriate Topics</th>
<th>Topics to Avoid</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Career, education</td>
<td>• Money</td>
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<td>• Travel</td>
<td>• Politics</td>
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<td>• Sports</td>
<td>• Religion</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Books, movies, music</td>
<td>• Negative events</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Current events (News, Olympics, Oscars, Superbowl)</td>
<td>(divorce, war, conflicts etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Hobbies</td>
<td>• Personal problems</td>
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<td>• Food, restaurants</td>
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**Sample Questions to Ask**

Where do you work?
Tell me about what you do at (company name)?
What do you enjoy most about your job?
What did you study in college?
What are your future career goals?
I am really interested in your field. What advice do you have for someone like me trying to enter the field?
What do you do for fun in your free time? (Be interested and ask follow up questions!)
Did you watch (the Superbowl, the Olympics, etc.)
Are you from the Twin Cities originally?
You mentioned you like to read in your free time. Have you read anything particularly interesting lately?
Have you attended this conference before?

**Small talk conversation outline for a networking event**

1. Ask if you can sit down or join the person/group.
2. Introduce yourself, ask their name(s). Shake hands if able.
3. Ask a question to get the conversation started.
4. Listen intently to the answer.
5. Ask a follow up question based on something they said.
6. Listen intently to the answer.
7. Consider sharing something about you that relates to the conversation or that you have in common.
Example conversation at a professional conference.

Job Seeker=J, Professional=P

J: Is anyone sitting here?
P: No, go right ahead.
J: Thank you. Hi there, my name is Mai. (offers to shake hands)
P: Hi Mai, my name is Nathan.
J: It’s nice to meet you. Where do you work, Nathan? (Tip: use their name right away so you remember!)
P: I work at Cargill.
J: What do you do there?
P: My job has a lot of variety I…(will explain job). What do you do, Mai?
J: Actually, I am a student at the University of Minnesota studying Applied Economics. After I graduate, I hope to get a full-time marketing position in the Twin Cities using the skills from my degree which is why I thought this conference would be useful. Right now I a looking for a marketing internship so that I can use my skills outside of the classroom.
P: That is great! I went to the University of Minnesota as well.
J: Do you have any advice or suggestions for a student like me looking to get into the field?
P: Yes, absolutely. I would recommend (inserts advice).
J: Thanks for those ideas, I appreciate that. Would you ever be willing to do an informational interview with me in your office so that I could learn more about your job and see your work environment?
P: I’d be happy to. Here is my card. Feel free to call me or email me at any time.
J: Thank you, I appreciate that. I will probably reach out to you in a few weeks once summer break is here and my final exams are done.

So, Nathan, what do you do for fun when you are not working at Cargill?
P: I travel a lot and I run marathons. And you?
J: I also really enjoy traveling. Last year I… (talks about a place they traveled and what they liked about it.). What places have you traveled to in the past?
P: (Explains favorite travel destinations.)
J: That sounds really fun. It was really nice to meet you, I think I am going to grab some more water before the session begins. Thanks for your willingness to chat more in the future. I will be in touch in a few weeks!

Additional Tips

- Talking to new people will always feel a little scary and difficult. Practice and it will get easier!
- Avoid questions where the answer will be yes or no. Instead ask “open ended” questions (questions beginning with "how" or "what") that will result in a longer response.
- Ask follow up questions on what people share to keep the conversation going and to show you were listening.
- Even if people don’t ask you a question, look for opportunities to share information about yourself too.