Small Talk Assignment

NOTE: This assignment requires you to attend a business or a social event and write about a small talk experience. It is unreasonable to expect that you can do this assignment the night before. You may have to search for an appropriate event.

Purpose:

Depending upon who you are, this assignment may challenge you to venture beyond your comfort zone. You will need to speak with people you haven’t met before. If you are very outgoing individuals, this will not be a unique experience. For most of us, however, it may be nerve-wracking.

This assignment is associated with the following Student Learning Outcomes:

- identify and apply a variety of theories relevant to interpersonal communication.
  - contrast interpersonal communication with other forms of communication (e.g., intrapersonal communication, impersonal communication, public communication).
  - demonstrate understanding and application of fundamental theories (e.g., models, theories) of relational dynamics.
- analyze the role of the individual as both a sender and receiver in the communication process.
  - analyze the impact of perception in effective interpersonal communication.
  - assess the impact of intercultural communication and adapt communication appropriately in interpersonal communication.
  - demonstrate and evaluate the use and effect of verbal and nonverbal symbols in interpersonal communication.
- differentiate the various factors involved in communication that enhance or restrict communication effectiveness in relational systems.
  - apply appropriate listening styles and assess the importance of effective listening in producing satisfying interpersonal relationships.
  - diagnose self-disclosure approaches and their impact in interpersonal relationships.
  - evaluate the role of ethical standards on interpersonal communication and the impact of various relational challenges

Procedure:

1. Choose an event where you would be required to make small talk with one or more people you do not know for at least 5-7 minutes. This could be a business luncheon, a party where you don’t know anyone, standing in a long line, a wedding reception, etc.

   This would not be a party where you know everyone (or almost everyone), a short line, etc.

   The purpose is to initiate and carry on a conversation with people you don’t know, not people you do know. Ideally, I’d like you to step outside of your comfort zone. If you are comfortable talking to customers, then it shouldn’t be someplace where you talk to customers.

2. Prepare yourself for this event. Take business cards if it is a business event. Think of what you can say about the occasion as you open up a small talk conversation.

   Prepare yourself mentally as well. Give yourself a goal (i.e. I’m going to speak to two new people by the end of this event).

   You may want to review your notes on small talk in terms of who to approach, how to initiate a small talk conversation, how to keep the ball rolling, how to conclude, etc.
3. Go to the event (in good spirits), smile, and participate in small talk.

   You must initiate, maintain, and conclude at least two (2) small talk conversations lasting between 5-7 minutes each.

   If you have a bad experience with your first attempt, make sure you gracefully extricate yourself from that conversation and initiate another conversation with another (hopefully nicer) person.

4. After the event, pat yourself on the back for a job well done.

**Processing/Discussion Questions**

Then review your experience and the content/techniques discussed in the textbook and lecture, and answer the following questions (typed and well-thought out, please):

Please keep in mind that this is a graded assignment. Make sure it is obvious that you were here for the discussion of small talk and small talk techniques. Use some of the concepts/terms we discussed in class.

*(Please remember to put the Name of the Assignment at the top of your paper, as well as your name and the class meeting days/time in the upper right corner of your paper.)*

1. What was the background of the event you attended? When was it (give the date, please)? Where did you go? What was the occasion or purpose? What was the setting? How many people were there? etc.

2. How did you feel before you went to this event (in particular, the requirement to engage in small talk)? Why?
   How did you feel about your small talk experience after you went to this event? Why?
   Was there a difference between the two feelings (before & after event)?

3. Give some brief detail on two (2) small talk conversations. (Who was involved, what was the context, how long did it last, etc.) I'm not looking for a detailed discussion (that will happen in the next question), but I want to get the “lay of the land.”

4. Give a detailed example of one of the small talk conversations you had at this event.
   Who did you talk to? How was it initiated? What did you talk about? What techniques did you use that we've talked about in class? How long did you talk? How was it concluded? What made it work or not work? (The most points are allocated to this portion of the paper.)
   Please relate this to the lecture content; as I read this, I want to know that you have analyzed the small talk conversation in the context of the lecture and discussion we've had in class.

5. Was your small talk experience better than you expected? Worse? Why? Would you do it again? Why or why not? What did you learn from this experience?