# Sharpen Our Skills

## Treat the Event Like a Party
### S.O.S. Class 20
### June, 2018

Don't talk shop.

Isn't that what we've always heard about conversation at a social event? You're at a party with friends. It's rude to talk about work. After all, this is a social gathering, not a networking event.

While I agree (mostly) with the rule of not talking shop, I think splitting events into either social or networking is what they call a false dichotomy. The underlying flawed assumption is that there is really any difference between the two. Think about that. They are both gatherings of people, usually involving food and convivial conversation for the purposes of establishing new relationships or strengthening existing ones.

Oh, and people who refuse to follow good social behavior can ruin either one.

To get the most from a networking event, pretend that it's a social event instead (which it is). With that in mind, there are definitely some behaviors to avoid regardless of whether you are at a birthday party or a Chamber of Commerce lunch.

1. **Don't talk shop.** It's not necessarily rude, but it *is* usually boring. Face it, you probably don't want to hear about someone elses work for more than about twenty seconds either. Unless they are actively asking you to tell them more about the wonderful world of widget selling, keep the description of your line of work to a minimum. Let *them* decide if they really want to know more.

2. **Don't sell.** Most people wouldn't even consider doing this at a child's birthday party. The same rules apply at any networking event. No one, I repeat, *no one* goes to a social gathering hoping that someone will try to sell something to them. If you try to do this, you deserve to be forcibly ejected by security. Of course, if after you spend ten seconds telling them what you do, they say they are interested, the right thing to do is ask for a follow-up meeting where you can give them your undivided attention.

3. **Don't hand out your business card.** I want you to imagine someone walking around to all the tables at a wedding and leaving their business card at every place setting. What would you think? What kind of results would they get? The only person who likes this kind of behavior is the card-passer's printer. The only time you should be handing out your card is when the other person asks for it.

4. **Don't monopolize the conversation.** In fact, since your goal is to get to know other people (or get to know them better) they had better be talking at least half of the time. It's hard to find out information about another person (or if you even like them enough to continue the conversation) if you are talking the entire time. Most people do this either because they are full of themselves and couldn't think of a better topic (not you) or they are nervous and are speaking to fill the void. To avoid this behavior be prepared with questions you can ask the other person. How long have they been selling widgets? What are their plans for the upcoming season? What do they like to do when they aren't selling widgets?

5. **Don't hijack a conversation.** If you saw a friend at a party chatting with an attractive member of the opposite sex, you'd probably be doing your friendship a disservice if you tried to force yourself in between them. The same holds at a networking event. I don't care how much you want to meet that president of XYZ Company. Forcing yourself into the conversation and attempting to turn it your way only underlines a lack of respect for those around you. Assuming their body language isn't radiating the "private conversation" vibe, you can approach and politely ask to join them, but you should always be respectful of the connection that is already in place. Oh, and the "Don't sell" rule goes double here.

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Networking events are social occasions. Social gatherings are networking opportunities. If you want to know how to act at one, choose behaviors that would be acceptable at both. In either case, you'll make more friends, have more fun, and be more successful in the long run.

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