

Lesson 7: Networking and small talk

Group size: any, also one-to-one
Level: pre-intermediate upwards
Lesson focus: introductions and small talk
Language focus: questions to initiate small talk; language to introduce a third person into a conversation
Materials: a set of Business Top Trumps cards; a copy of the worksheet for each student

1 Introductions

Kick off with an open discussion about what information is usually given in the students' countries when people introduce themselves in a formal business situation. Do they, for example, talk about their rank in the company, their age or their salary?

Choose one of the following three meeting scenarios:

1. Production – Michael, Murat, Yuri, Nicole, Jason, Lee, Bernard, Su Lin (further possibilities: Ralf, Dina, Vince, Andi, Albert)
2. Managerial – Robert, Jolene, Frank, Michael, Dave, Ralf (further possibilities: Valerie, Reg, Jasmine, Vince)
3. Cross-company – any cards but possibly remove any outsourced cards (such as Joy, Jonathan, Albert)

If possible, have the students sit around a table as though they were in a meeting. Hand out the worksheet and have students read task 1. Then, deal out to the students the relevant cards for the meeting you have chosen. Ask them to choose one of the cards they have been dealt and use that as their 'role card'. Allow them a bit of time to think about what they will say.

You, as the teacher, play the role of Robert, the MD. Welcome them to the meeting and introduce yourself as Robert (or Bob). Be aware that the students are likely to copy the way you introduce yourself, so try to provide a good model. Say that, before you get down to business, you'd like to open the meeting by having everyone introduce themselves and say something about their role in the company. Students then take it in turns to introduce themselves as the person on their chosen card.

2 Small-talk topics

Students should write the topics into the circles and add more ideas of their own. Topics that they think

can be both good and bad, depending on the context or the way they're approached, can be written into the overlapping part of the diagram.

Where they place the topics will depend on many factors, including their age and the culture they live in. If they (and you) do not agree on the answers, be open to discussion.

If they cannot think of any extra topics, offer some suggestions such as:

books, weather, sports, top news stories, work projects, colleagues, smoking, alcohol, forthcoming festivals, health, technical devices, pets, holidays

Key (suggested answers): good – children, houses, travel, films; bad – politics, money, religion

3 Small talk – opening and follow-up questions

Read the situation on the worksheet and decide together which of the events the students are going to meet at.

a. Circulate just the 12 cards named on the worksheet. Students read the texts and complete the worksheet with topics from task 2 they could discuss with each of these 12 people. They can add any further topics they come up with while reading.

b. Having decided on the topics that they could discuss with each of the 12 employees, the students should think about ways to initiate small talk with them and then fill in the worksheet. They should think not only about the first question but also a follow-up one. An example is given on the worksheet. Ask students to share their ideas and write the best ones on the board.

c. Students will now take part in a role-play small-talk activity. Hand one of the 12 cards to each student. They should mingle and make small talk with each

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other. The questions on the board, as well as on their worksheets, will help them to start and continue conversations. Ask the students to stay in their roles and to use the information they have on their cards, but allow them to elaborate on it if they feel it will help with the small talk. The language in the box will help them introduce a third person into their conversations.

Extension / Advanced version

This extension task looks at how to cope in a situation when you need to make small talk with people who are, for one reason or another, not so easy to approach (they may be your boss, for example) or not so easy to hold a conversation with (perhaps they are shy). Students talk about why these people may be more difficult to talk to. They then decide what topics they could comfortably talk about and which topics it would not be wise to broach. They should complete the table using their ideas. They must then come up with tactics to engage these people in small talk.

4 Small-talk partners

The students read the texts on the remaining cards and, using the clues in the texts, decide what topics each person would probably be happy to talk about in a small-talk situation. Students then discuss the questions, deciding who they can emphasize with and why.

5 Discussion

This last task opens up the discussion. It allows students to talk about their experiences and give each other advice on how to cope successfully in potentially tricky small-talk situations.

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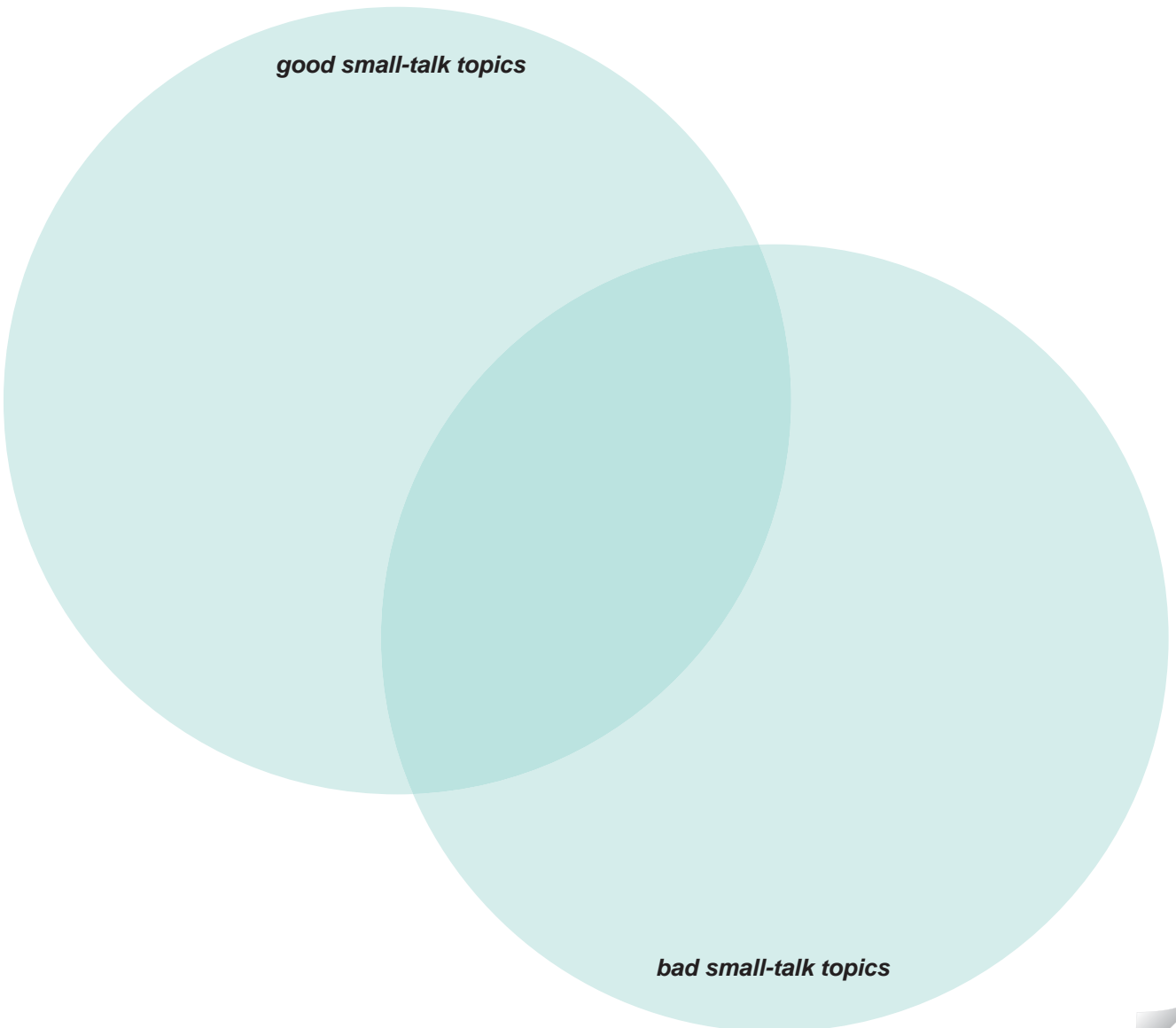
1 Introductions

Each of you has one Top Trumps card. You are at a kick-off meeting. Although you work for the same company, you do not really know each other. The Chair wants to start the meeting by asking all the participants to say a few words about themselves. Using the information on your Top Trumps card, introduce yourself to the group.

2 Small-talk topics

Decide which of these subjects make good or bad small-talk topics and write them into the relevant part of the diagram. Write topics into the overlapping part of the diagram if you think they can be both good and bad. Add any other topics you can think of.

- politics
- money
- children
- houses
- travel
- religion
- films



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3 Small talk – opening and follow-up questions

Situation: There is a social event at the company. Decide what it is: a summer party, a work outing, the grand opening of a new building or something else. At the event, you will have to make small talk with other employees who you do not know very well.

a. Read the texts on the following 12 cards and decide which topics you could easily talk about with each of these 12 people.

E.g. Ivy – food and health

b. Choose a topic and write an opening question and a follow-up question that you could use to start and continue a small-talk conversation with each of the 12 people.

e.g. Bernard

Opening question – When did you start working here?

Follow-up question – Has the company changed much in that time?

Ivy _____
Opening question _____ ?
Follow-up question _____ ?

Vince _____
Opening question _____ ?
Follow-up question _____ ?

Frank _____
Opening question _____ ?
Follow-up question _____ ?

Andi _____
Opening question _____ ?
Follow-up question _____ ?

Lee _____
Opening question _____ ?
Follow-up question _____ ?

Albert _____
Opening question _____ ?
Follow-up question _____ ?

Yuri _____
Opening question _____ ?
Follow-up question _____ ?

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Jason _____
 Opening question _____ ?
 Follow-up question _____ ?

Doris _____
 Opening question _____ ?
 Follow-up question _____ ?

Jasmine _____
 Opening question _____ ?
 Follow-up question _____ ?

Bernard _____
 Opening question _____ ?
 Follow-up question _____ ?

Valerie _____
 Opening question _____ ?
 Follow-up question _____ ?

c. Take on the role of the person on your card. Using the questions you previously wrote down and discussed, as well as whatever else follows on naturally, make small talk with at least three people. If possible, introduce a third person into your conversation. The language in the box below will help you do this smoothly.

Language box: Introducing a third person into a conversation

Have you met _____ ?

Do you two know each other?

This is _____. He / She works in ...

This is _____. He / She was just saying that ...

Here's _____. Let's ask what he / she thinks about this.

Look, _____ is on his / her own. Let's ask him / her to join us.

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Extension / Advanced version

At any event, there will always be someone who it is not so easy to make small talk with. Read the texts on the following six cards. Say why you think it may not be so easy to approach these people and make small talk with them. Then, decide what topics would be safe and appropriate (or dangerous and inappropriate) to talk about with each of the six people.

employee	good small-talk topics	bad small-talk topics
Holly		
Jonathan		
Jolene		
Michael		
Robert		
Danielle		

Come up with tactics for engaging these people in small talk.

4 Small-talk partners

Go through the rest of the cards. Discuss the following questions and give reasons for your answers.

- Who would you prefer to sit next to at a business lunch?
- Who would you *not* like to do group work with in a training session?
- Who would you like to be able to have a chat with and possibly get to know better?
- Which three people would you least like to be stuck in a lift with?
- Who would you like / not like to sit next to on a coach on a work outing?

5 Discussion

Talk about any business-related small-talk situations you have been in. How was the experience? What went well? What could have gone better?

Are you a person who finds it easy to make small talk? If so, what advice would you give to those who find it difficult? If not, think of ways you could make small talk easier for yourself.