

What Goes Around Comes Around

Introduction

In business, we find ourselves in a variety of social gatherings with those we know very well, those we know somewhat, and those we are meeting for the first time. Those at the event vary in their comfort level interacting with others. Some love to take center stage and entertain others with their escapades. Others enjoy working the room, easily conversing on a wide range of topics. Some like to visit with a few others and get to know them better. Then there are those who find the whole event a tortuous ordeal. (Johnny Carson, I've recently learned, had great difficulty in social settings.)

We know that fear of public speaking is among the most prevalent of human fears. So, too, is social anxiety. The woman who won't leave the side of her spouse may fear that others will think her stupid because she has not read the latest book. The man standing alone at the bar may fear that others will consider him lazy because he doesn't work a traditional job. The young adult living with her parents may fear being considered a failure. Many fears lie at the heart of shyness and other social anxieties.

So, what can we do when confronted with social anxiety—both our own and that of others—during business gatherings?

We can use the very talents we already possess to expand our own and others' comfort in social settings. Here are some tips.

1. When talking about your work, share your dreams

For writers like me, that might mean discussing your search for an agent or publisher, your interest in collaborating with an illustrator, your hope to create a Web site to promote your work. Set aside your reluctance to talk about yourself by sharing your aspirations. Ask for what you need. Can the person with whom you are talking help you personally or refer you to someone who can?

2. Set the spotlight on others and let them talk

Really listen to what they have to say. Find their passion. Hold off being judgmental and critical. When you reflect on what others say, acknowledge their thoughts and feelings whether you agree with them or not. After all, others have a right to be the persons they are. Who knows? When you listen carefully, you may just hear a story that offers a possible solution to the problem you're experiencing, that fuels your imagination for a new product you can offer, or that opens a door to a new market.

3. Offer your services

The full composite of your capabilities, aptitudes, skills, interests, and contacts makes you unique. True, others may be able to do what you do, but no one is just like you. So, find opportunities to provide help. Offer your services. Introduce individuals who can benefit from meeting, review a proposal, attend a friend's seminar, give financial support, or write a testimonial. By supporting others, you expand your network of well-wishers. True to the saying, *What goes around comes around*, good will may come your way from unexpected people and places. (*Synchronicity, serendipity*)

4. Remove the interference that gets in the way of communication

During a lunch meeting, this may be as easy as moving the centerpiece that keeps you from seeing others at the table. If the conversations buzzing around you make it difficult to hear, move your conversation to a quieter area. If you find that just when you are getting to a critical point in a conversation, someone cuts in, thereby interfering with the conversation, find a way to continue at a more opportune time and place.

5. Pay attention to feedback

Others may like what you say or they may not. They may be supportive or they may not. They may laugh, they may criticize, they may poke fun. Yet, their reaction should not make or break you. After all, disliking your work, your project, your idea is different from disliking you. And if it appears that someone just finds you ridiculous, you can survive with your confidence and self-worth in tact.

Conclusion

Though the writing, accounting, financial planning, and other work we do may be solitary activities done in the confines of our office, we are often in social gatherings. In preparation, remember the five tips.

As we practice our social skills, our anxieties will lessen, and our social graces will increase. I don't know about you, but I can't wait to get to that next gathering and practice, practice, practice.