

How to Break the Ice

Lindsay: Okay. Hello. Good evening.

Keriann: Hi.

Francis: Hi there.

Lindsay: So tonight we're talking about how you would approach someone at a party to begin small talk, someone you've never met before and what you would talk about. So let's start with body language. When you approach someone in the US, (like) what is a common, (sort of), standing distance?

Francis: So you shouldn't stand too close to the person because they might get scared or afraid or think you're weird. So (um), maybe **at arm's length** is a good thing.

Keriann: That's what I was going to say, about an arm's length because people in the United States have their personal space and their bubble and you should not break into their bubble

Lindsay: Yeah that's a common thing, the **personal bubble**, so watch out for that. I remember feeling uncomfortable when I was teaching English in New York, (um), a few years back. I had a student from Spain who would come up and would stand *really* close to me and I would back up gradually until I was against the board.

Keriann: That's funny.

Key Vocabulary Words

1. At arm's length

2. Personal bubble

3. Acquaintance

4. So-and-so

5. Common ground

Lindsay: So what about smiling. (I mean), do you think Americans tend to smile a lot when they first meet someone?

Keriann: You could smile if you're nervous, but you could also smile if, if it's reciprocated and the other person's smiling back at you, then maybe that's a sign that you're allowed to go talk to that person.

Francis: Yeah, (I mean), if you see someone and you smile, more likely they're going to smile back to you, unless there's something wrong, but...

Keriann: It's better to smile than to frown at someone I guess.

Lindsay: Have you seen any differences in terms of (like) eye contact, the directness of eye contact in US culture compared with Japan, for example?

Francis: Yes, most definitely. So in Japan, you shouldn't look straight in someone's eye, but here in (the) US, if I meet you for the first time, (like) "Oh, hi. How (are) you doing?" and I look at you, look in your eye.

Lindsay: Yeah, I think eye contact is a really good sign here in the US for sure. What about – do you shake hands with someone when you first meet them at a party? Is that typical for you?

Francis: I, I don't know (if) a party is a good situation for shaking hands. Of course if you're doing an interview or some business transaction, I would shake a hand.

Keriann: I, yeah, I'm not sure about at a party because it's usually through a mutual friend, so it's (kind of) just saying, "Oh, nice to meet you."

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Whaddya (what do you) do? Where are you from?" That kind of thing, small talk. But I'm thinking, (um), I buy some things on Craigslist once in a while and when I meet up with the person, I'll shake their hand.

Lindsay: Yeah, that's a great example. That – (kind of like) an **acquaintance**.

Keriann: Yeah.

Lindsay: So what are some greetings that you would use typically in a party when you go up to someone? What would you say?

Keriann: I might just say "Hey. How do you know **so-and-so** (whatever person)?" Maybe if we have a mutual friend at the party or (um) ask them, like I just said, "Whaddya (what do you) do? How's it going? Where are you from?" Maybe -- yeah, I would ask "Where you're from?" because I like to talk about that 'cause (because) I think a lot of people in Boston aren't from Boston. So we like to talk about that kind of thing and "Oh, my aunt lives in Florida," or something like that.

Lindsay: Yeah, there are a lot of transplants in Boston, right. That's what we say?

Keriann: Yeah.

Francis: Yeah, definitely.

Lindsay: What are some other topics or phrases that you might use to say "Hello"?

Francis: Just, you can just introduce yourself (like) "Hi. My name is Francis," or "Hi. How (are) you doing tonight?" or things like that.

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Lindsay: Yeah.

Keriann: “What’s up?”

Lindsay: Yeah, “What’s up?” is a good one. And Keriann, you mentioned in terms of topics to cover, (um) asking a person how they know the host.

Keriann: Yeah, that’s, that’s definitely an easy thing. I was thinking back, I just went to, well not just -- in December, a Christmas party, housewarming party. So (you know) people bring their friends from college or their friends from work and you can just talk about that until something else, (you know), you have more **common ground** to talk about that maybe will pop up after a little bit.

Francis: Yeah, I think some great small talk topics are the weather, and sports, and anything that’s happening (um) in the area at the time. (You know) this is March, so there’s a lot of basketball going on. So things like that. (You know) St. Patty’s (St. Patrick’s) Day is coming up, so just different topics like that.

Keriann: I received a piece of advice once from someone that told me, “If you don’t know what to talk about, ask them about themselves. People love talking about themselves.”

Francis: That’s so true.

Lindsay: Yeah, that’s great. I think we’ll end with that one. That’s the best comment. I like that. (You know), always be interested in other people and they’ll see you as being interesting, right?

Keriann: Exactly.

Francis: Exactly.

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