

Talking IRL:

Conversation Starters

for When You

HAVE

to Talk to Someone

UNIVERSE

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1.

AT A BIRTHDAY PARTY (SOMEONE ELSE'S OR YOURS)

The only thing worse than attending someone's birthday party, where you're expected to make small talk with the guest of honor and maybe a few other people, is attending your own birthday party, where you're expected to make small talk with everyone.

Talking IRL IDEAS

IF YOU'RE AT SOMEONE ELSE'S PARTY,
ASK ABOUT A PERSON'S RELATIONSHIP TO
THE GUEST OF HONOR:

- HOW DO YOU KNOW THE BIRTHDAY BOY/GIRL?
- > NOW TALK ABOUT **YOUR** RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PERSON, LIKE HOW LONG YOU'VE KNOWN THEM, AND/OR WHERE YOU MET.

A VERY IMPORTANT NOTE

If it involves the phrase "you had to be there," then do not explain private jokes you share with the Birthday Boy/Girl. The jokes won't be funny to other people because they had to be there.

MORE Talking IRL IDEAS

SOMEONE ELSE'S BIRTHDAY PARTY CUE #1: OH LOOK, THERE'S CAKE.

- WHAT KIND OF CAKE DO YOU LIKE? WHAT KIND OF CAKE DO YOU NOT LIKE?
- > NOW DESCRIBE **YOUR** FAVORITE AND MOST HATED DESSERTS, WHERE YOU GET THEM, AND IF THE PERSON HAS EVER TASTED IT/BEEN THERE.
- > **ENCOURAGE** PEOPLE TO TRY YOUR FAVORITE DESSERTS.

NOTE

Do not talk about your intestinal, gut, or colon-related reactions to eating too much cake, dairy, or desserts.

SOMEONE ELSE'S BIRTHDAY PARTY CUE #2: GIFTS!

- THE BIRTHDAY BOY/GIRL IS SO HARD TO BUY FOR. THEY SEEM TO HAVE EVERYTHING. WHAT DID YOU GET THEM?

TRY FOLLOWING UP WITH:

- > DESCRIBE **YOUR** GIFT, AND WHY YOU THOUGHT IT WAS APPROPRIATE.
- > TALK ABOUT THE TROUBLE/EASE YOU HAD IN WRAPPING IT.

NOTE

Do not talk about how you re-gifted your present because you didn't like it.



MORE Talking IRL IDEAS

SOMEONE ELSE'S BIRTHDAY PARTY CUE #3: GREAT, NOW THERE'S THE SINGING OF THE HAPPY BIRTHDAY SONG.

- I USUALLY MOUTH THE WORDS TO THIS SONG.
HOW ABOUT YOU?

NOTE

Do not talk about the issues regarding copyright and payment to the heirs of the people who wrote the song—nobody cares.

Do talk about when your family, friends, and wait staff embarrassed you by singing "Happy Birthday" to you in a restaurant.

IF YOU'RE THE BIRTHDAY BOY/GIRL, IT'S YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO GREET THE ATTENDEES.

- THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR COMING TO MY BIRTHDAY PARTY!

IF THE PERSON BROUGHT A GIFT:

- THANK YOU! I WILL UNWRAP IT LATER.
- > IF THE PERSON **INSISTS** YOU OPEN IT NOW, DO SO AND THANK THEM FOR THEIR GENEROSITY.

IF THE PERSON DID NOT BRING A GIFT, EXPLAIN THAT NO GIFTS WERE NECESSARY, EVEN IF YOU'RE DISAPPOINTED.

- > **POLITELY SAY** YOU SEE SOMEONE ELSE WHO JUST ARRIVED AND YOU NEED TO TALK TO HIM/HER, BUT YOU'LL BE RIGHT BACK.
- > **DO NOT GO RIGHT BACK** IF YOU DON'T WANT TO.



1.

IN A MEETING WITH CLIENTS OR OTHER NON-COLLEAGUES

Your colleagues are caught in traffic or waiting in line for their Frappuccinos, and you find yourself in a conference room or on a conference call making small talk with a business partner. You're the face of your company (or at least the voice), so your job is to set a positive, productive, and enthusiastic tone for the meeting.

Stick to topics that feel neither too personal nor have the potential to veer into negativity or complaints. Steer the conversation to either work-related topics or those tangentially related to work.

Talking IRL IDEAS

TRY BREAKING AN AWKWARD SILENCE WITH:

- HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN WITH YOUR COMPANY?
- > NOW DESCRIBE HOW LONG YOU'VE BEEN AT YOUR COMPANY.
- WHERE IS YOUR COMPANY LOCATED?

TRY FOLLOWING UP WITH:

- DO YOU LIKE THE AREA?
- HOW LONG IS YOUR COMMUTE?
- DO YOU DRIVE OR TAKE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION?
- > NOW DESCRIBE YOUR COMMUTE.

3. IN THE RESTROOM

Let's start with the most awkward place for small talk: The restroom.

Unless you find yourself in the restroom with your supervisor who insists on discussing business, restrooms are not places for substantive professional conversations. Work issues are unwelcome anywhere within eye or earshot of a toilet, and should be kept to workstations or common areas. Similarly, though restrooms offer the illusion of privacy, they are not necessarily conducive for office gossip as someone you don't see or hear may be listening.

Excepting situations in which you find yourself in need of some sort of assistance, it's best to keep bathroom small talk to a minimum. Nobody wants to chat while doing their business, especially with someone standing or sitting right next to them (whether separated by a partition or not). Keep your small talk to the times before and after the main purpose of your trip, such as when you're entering, washing your hands, or exiting.

Talking IRL IDEAS

ANY TIME OF DAY :

- I DO/DON'T LIKE THE KIND OF SOAP THEY HAVE IN THE DISPENSER.
- THIS WATER IS ALWAYS TOO HOT/COLD.

IF IN THE MORNING:

- GOOD MORNING. READY FOR THE DAY?

IF IN THE AFTERNOON:

- HI. HOW WAS LUNCH?

IF AT THE END OF THE DAY:

- WHAT A DAY, HUH? HAVE A GOOD NIGHT.

ENCOUNTERING THE SAME PEOPLE IN THE RESTROOM

In one of the universe's more cruel twists, you will inevitably find yourself encountering the same one or two people every time you have to use the facilities.

Make no mistake: it's a weird thing to experience, especially at first. The easiest and most obvious thing to do is acknowledge the ridiculousness of a shared timetable and say something along the lines of, "I guess we're on the same schedule!" or "I see you received the same eVite/XX."

You'll both (all) politely laugh at the absurdity of life and then retreat to your own stalls, trying to relieve yourself while you try to reconcile yourselves to the fact that your biological imperatives are somehow cosmically synchronized with someone who shares your email server and and 401K provider.

Sorry, but this is your life now.

But, after a few weeks or months, you'll both get used to it and probably forgo any small talk by simply nodding at one another before going about your business.

TWO VERY IMPORTANT NOTES

> HANDWASHING <

You must wash your hands before leaving the office restroom, even if you don't feel it's necessary (it is) and if you don't do so in the privacy of your own home (you should).

Because if another person in the restroom sees you not washing your hands, your not washing your hands will undoubtedly become the topic of small talk between that person and your other coworkers and you'll be known as the "person who doesn't wash their hands after using the restroom."

> ENCOUNTERING SUPERIORS <

If you find yourself in the restroom with your superior, say hello or otherwise greet him or her, but do not try to engage your superior in conversation, as anything more substantive might go in an even more awkward direction: a discussion about business matters. Which would make your superior feel even more awkward, which will be remembered when he or she conducts your annual review.

If you find yourself on the same schedule with your superior you need to immediately change your schedule.