



Socialising for Success



Clare walker

Be the
Life & Soul
of the
Party

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Introduction

Have you always wanted to be the life and soul of the party? Have you dreamt that the endless small talk could be transformed into a genuinely interesting event and that you could know, in your heart that it was you, at your very best that was holding everyone's attention, rather than the quality of the canapés? Better still, what would it be like if each party or event were an opportunity that led you one step further along the path that you really want to follow?

Or maybe you've always wondered how someone in your family or your workplace manages to know so many people or to get on in life so young, when you know far more than they do about your subject or have put in far more effort. Yet they are always talking, talking, talking, and succeeding. How do they do it?

You can learn to be the 'life and soul' of *any* party

The good news is, you can *learn* to be the 'life' and perhaps even more importantly, an important part of the 'soul' of every gathering from now on, if you choose to do so. It is a set of skills, a system, which is well within your grasp. Other people may, because of chance or circumstance, happen to use the right strategies naturally and, as a result, appear to be the life and soul of the party. The ideas in this book will enable you to approach all kinds of gatherings, from work events to weddings and dinners to dog-racing, with genuine confidence. What's more, as you have more fun at these events (and show it) so will the people around you. In turn, your enjoyment will create the

conditions in which interesting opportunities can be presented to you and so create an upward spiral of ease and success.

You could be forgiven for cynicism here. How can the toe-curling embarrassment of meeting strangers be something that inspires excitement rather than dread?

Some people enjoy social events

The important thing to remember is that every person is different. No two people in the world, even identical twins, share the same belief systems, the same 'map' of reality. As the saying goes, 'one man's meat is another man's poison'. Therefore, just because you currently hold a particular view of partying or going to a workplace 'do', Christmas with the in-laws or similar, this is not necessarily the same as someone else's. Some people out there actively enjoy socialising with a purpose and even relish it just as much as gatherings with their 'ordinary' friends, because of the unique opportunities it presents. I know this, because, I confess, I am one of them.

More importantly, I've 'bottled this skill' into a form that I've seen works for people, across the board. I'll be sharing the stories of many of these people as we go along but, first of all, for those of you who like this kind of thing, here's how it all got started.

For several years, I never even realised that socialising was a skill. I wandered around (quite often enjoying seminars and dinners much more than my actual job) and was blissfully unaware that my more technically competent colleagues would have given their eye teeth to know how to charm their way into the next opportunity. Little did I realise that I had unconsciously set in motion a snowball, where the effects of my technique gathered momentum at each successive event and often continued to be felt for weeks, months or even years, into the future.

Everyone can learn new skills

It was only later when studying a branch of psychology that I became aware that getting on with other people and being the life and soul of the party, when appropriate, was a skill in itself. However, because it is a skill, it can be broken down into its component parts and taught to anyone else who wishes to learn. Skills are simply a combination of particular habits of thought, action and attitude, which, if they are linked together in a particular sequence, produce a desired result. This book will teach you to build and implement just such a sequence in relation to being the life and soul of the party.

Believe it or not, you have been learning such sequences throughout your life. Even when you learnt to walk, you needed a strategy. First, you grasped the furniture and stood. This taught you to balance but, even more importantly, it gave you the *belief* that you could balance. In turn, this gave you the confidence to make one tottering step, shift your weight on to that foot and step forward with the other foot. In that instant, you acquired the strategy for walking. Such was your unstoppable confidence after this mighty achievement (and the probable praise from your proud family) that the odd stumble, or even series of stumbles, did not then prevent you from perfecting the technique.

The only trouble is, you probably don't even remember that learning a new skill can and should be that simple. Most probably, as you've got older, you've suffered setbacks in certain situations that have led to nagging doubts, re-runs of previous embarrassing events and other self-criticism, which build up over time into a wall, needlessly holding you back. Therefore, this book explains the process of socialising from a much earlier stage than you might imagine. It begins with your beliefs, so that your self-confidence will be built upon a firm foundation.

Be the Life & Soul of the Party will then take you step-by-step through a process that will make the whole business of mingling with others at parties and social events more attractive. Specifically, the skills you'll learn here are:

- How to build a set of attitudes that support you in having more fun;
- How to create a vision of yourself having fun that will immediately make you want to start putting it into practice;
- Communication tips that work every time;
- Everything you need to consider in order to forward plan your ultimate triumph;
- Techniques to help you breeze through an actual event;
- The follow-up strategies that can make the rest of your life more fun.

What's more, the crucial follow-up phase that will ensure that your efforts (if you can really call something that's this much fun an effort) pave the way for future, as well as present, successes.

You already have the tools you need

Whether you are aware of it at the moment or not, you already possess all the skills you need to be the life and soul of the party. All you need to do is link together the resources and abilities you already have, in the right order and in the context of parties and social events. If you need further evidence, think for a moment about your everyday life. Unless you have lived permanently on a desert island, it is likely that at some point, you have already used some of the skills that will enable you to get on with others easily. If you have ever told a bedtime story

Chapter Four

How to Talk About Anything

So far, much of what we've covered may seem relatively passive. Anyone who started this book may be needing action by now. They may be able to turn up to an event and listen until the cows come home but still need practise in actually saying something. Now it is time for action.

Of course, your confidence in your ability to talk to anyone will have been building up inside you since the beginning of this book, whether you are aware of this or not. These new beliefs and attitudes have been beavering away behind the scenes for a while now, just waiting for this moment.

Conversational tags

The first stage of talking about anything takes us right back to listening. This time, as well as concentrating fully on the meaning of full sentences, you'll also be paying greater attention to individual words, or 'tags'. There are two reasons why this is a crucial part of your toolkit. First, they show where the other person's interests may lie and second, they give you the opportunity to steer the conversation in a direction in which you feel comfortable. Examples of various tags and conversational directions to which they might lead, are illustrated below.

Ending the sentence on a question

Listen for key questions at the end of a comment, such as ‘isn’t it?’, ‘can’t it?’ or ‘won’t it?’. These are your cues to pick up the conversation by agreeing with the speaker or offering a different point of view.

Emphasis on particular words

Consider the difference between someone saying ‘Fred hated that’ (which implies that others may not have done, so opening up an avenue for you to explore) and ‘Fred hated *that*’, which gives you the opportunity to ask either, why Fred hated that particular thing or, which things it was that Fred preferred.

Of course, if the stressed word is a topic you know something about, it also gives you the opportunity to lead the conversation off again, if you wish. So, if your specialist subject is the nineteenth century and someone says, ‘I really enjoyed history ... especially learning about the *nineteenth century*,’ then this is an opportunity for you to talk about that period of history as well.

In addition, stress on particular words can often indicate enthusiasm, which will enable you to find the speaker more and more interesting. *What interests each person most?* Have you ever had an experience where a conversation is jogging along quite happily on the lines of, say, house repairs? There you are, debating the merits of plumbers and the other person pipes up with, ‘Oh, yes, the guy who came to me had terrible marital troubles.’

Now, although this may seem to you to be a bizarre hijacking of the subject, it is in fact a mine of information. This person is clearly telling you that their focus of interest (either in this conversation, or in life in general) is firmly on the people involved in any incident. Different interests might include:

- **Time** ‘Yes, my plumber is always fifteen minutes late ... it was the same last Tuesday.’
- **Place** ‘Did you get someone in from that local firm? I used to have someone who only lived at the end of the road.’
- **Cost** ‘Does he charge much?’

A few words of warning may be useful here. First, this list of interests, like the conversational tags given above, is not exhaustive.

Second, if a person mentions, for the sake of argument, cost, just once, this may very well be their focus of interest only in this context. Maybe they want to re-do their bathroom and have limited funds. Look for a pattern of interest over the course of a conversation.

Third, even if you think you’ve detected a pattern, be careful to steer clear of pigeonholing people. Although they often are happiest asking or answering questions on home ground, they may yet want to focus on something completely different.

Have fun with this but take care

Getting in synch with people in this subtle way is exceptionally powerful. So that’s fantastic if you genuinely want to have a great time and help others to do so as well. I know of at least one person who got so genuinely interested in other people’s points of view by using this technique that they found a new job, a new hobby and a new relationship as a result. All this within a few weeks of one another, after several years of feeling that they ‘just rubbed people up the wrong way’.

But focusing on other people’s interests can also be a trap: even if the person from the purchasing department is exceptionally attractive, it just might not be you to talk about the cost

Filling your diary

So, now that you've cleared the way, you're ready to fill your diary but only so much as to still give it the very best of your energy. How do you do that? As always, of course, there are no set rules. You will probably find it helpful to start small and work upwards. This will allow you to pace yourself so that you adapt easily and naturally to a social life that is tailored to your own definition of success.

Also, as the saying goes, 'From little acorns, mighty oak trees grow,' so be aware of every opportunity to interact with others, whether on the phone, saying hello in passing, or even by e-mail. Once you have done this consistently for a few weeks and incorporated the other tips mentioned earlier, people will begin to take it as read that you are a sociable person who would be an asset at any gathering. When they reach this conclusion, the invitations will roll in.

Ideas for getting invites

If your diary's looking more empty than you'd like, here are the top ways to fill it with activities you'll actually enjoy.

1. Ask for an invite.

This may sound obvious, but often if you hear something mentioned by someone and you say, 'Oh, I'd love to come,' they will invite you.

But what if they're only doing it out of politeness? Isn't it rude? Well, not necessarily. There are dozens of reasons why someone might have wanted to invite you. From the point of view of a person inviting you, they may, for all you know, have a worry that not enough people will come, and be delighted that you've asked to

come along. They may have wanted to ask you all along, but have feared rejection, or felt that they don't know you well enough. They may just not have known that you were interested in coming along.

Certainly, if confidence has been an issue for you, and you're serious about being more forthcoming, you might like to experiment with this. After turning up to a couple of things at which you feared you might not be welcome, and having a good time, your confidence will grow.

As we're in the business of bringing out your 'life and soul' here, though, an extra point that ensures you'll always be welcome, and invited back, is to express the reason for your interest and the contribution you could make. Enthusiasm is much more important than expertise, 'Oooh, I love walking ... I didn't know you ran a rambling club' was enough to get someone I know a permanent invitation recently.

2. Get on lists.

Yes, marketing lists can be really annoying when they only result in shiny paper on the doormat. But they're also a great source of invitations, sometimes to fairly classy free events that the sponsors put on to advertise themselves. They're all places to meet people, and maybe even people who share your interests, if the marketing departments or people running clubs and organisations have done their job well.

Even if you choose to join more local groups, like clubs advertising in a library, local paper or regional Internet site, this method works. I know one person who went from having a blank diary apart from work, to being busy every weekend for three months, just by doing this.

3. Throw a party or event yourself.

This idea works because of the reliable way in which people tend to give back that which they receive. And no, before you ask, it doesn't matter how long it is since you've been in touch with the

people you invite, as invitations have this magical ability to re-forged connections, and to help you make new ones with all the extra people that your contacts are likely to want to bring along.

What sort of ‘soul’ is going to this party, anyway?

So, now that we have ensured that there will be a social occasion for which to prepare, where do you begin? A good starting point is to decide which environments, events and parties actually help you feel most comfortable in your own skin. Everybody has a different social character. Just as one person likes curry and the other prefers fish and chips, so one person’s idea of heaven is a night down at the pub, while his neighbour prefers a black-tie dinner or clubbing. There are no right and wrong answers. There are only different preferences and each one of them will make you feel naturally comfortable in one environment and less so in another.

The trick is to know both your own preferences and the nature of the event you’re thinking of attending in detail. Then you can see how closely the two match at any given time. So you need to be able to work out how to make choices that leave you feeling comfortable and good about yourself.

So, how do you achieve this feat? The next activity will guide you through every step of the process.

Your party preferences

1. Do this part of the activity very quickly. For each item in the left-hand column, write an example of it that appeals to you most in the central column. It doesn’t matter whether or not the item is remotely linked to parties, events or socialising: it may well not be.

"A straightforward, no-fuss guide offering simple, candid advice. It's liberating to know that each and every one of us has the potential to be the life and soul of a party!"

Nicky Hambleton-Jones,
Presenter of 10 Years Younger on Channel 4, and Director of Tramp2Vamp!

Have you always wanted to be
'the life and soul of the party',

to feel great as you chat with others, be accepted by anyone
and entertain an audience as you tell stories?

Well now you can. This book reveals the real,
and surprisingly simple, secrets to gaining lasting
self-confidence and self-belief, including:

- step-by-step strategies that allow you to use the techniques of great communicators
- tips that work in all kinds of social situations, from casual parties to business events and beyond, and
- the best ways to let the 'real you' shine through.

You'll never be lost for words, a great story or a fantastic question again. These ideas are easy to implement and will last you a lifetime.

Clare Walker is a personal development specialist and NLP Master Practitioner. She originally trained as a barrister, but has been helping individuals and organisations to communicate better and understand their real purpose since 1998. Her hallmark is to give you all the information you need, yet in a way that's as much fun as possible.



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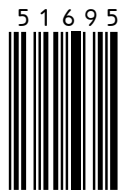
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