

Worksheets - Socialising (5): From contact to partner**Reading: Turning new contacts into partners**

We meet dozens or even hundreds of people at conferences, and often find it difficult to remember faces to go with all the business cards we receive. For this reason, we need to do something different, to stand out from the crowd, to give the other person a better chance of remembering who we are and, hopefully, doing some business with us in the future.

The simplest approach is to follow up your meeting with an email or connect with them on a social networking site. This is much better than nothing, but it takes a long time to build a good working relationship with someone through typed messages. A much better approach is to try to build a relationship face-to-face. This may involve inviting the other person for a meal, offering them a lift (or even sharing a walk back to the hotel), or helping them in some way (e.g. buying them a coffee).

Easy, right? Well, actually, no. Inviting a person for dinner can be one of the most difficult things we have to do. For one thing, it may feel uncomfortably like flirting: showing that you are romantically attracted to someone. And even if you are not flirting, the other person may think you are. Or you may simply think that they think that you're flirting ... and it all gets very complicated.

More generally, by inviting the other person the chance to spend more time with you, it can be unpleasant for you if they turn down your invitation. They may even accept your invitation in order not to hurt your feelings, even if they don't want to spend time with you. This fear of rejection, or worrying about forcing the other person to do something they don't want to do, can make it very difficult to make the invitation in the first place.

So what can you do about these problems? One good way to show that you are not flirting is to invite several people at the same time, or at least to make it clear that the person you are inviting may bring a friend. There's an added bonus in this approach: the conversation will flow more freely if there are three or four of you, rather than just "dinner for two".

One way of dealing with the fear of rejection is to phrase your invitation in such a way that you can pretend later (even if only to yourself) that it wasn't really an invitation. For example, if you ask "What are you doing after this evening's meeting?", the other person could respond "Nothing, really. I was thinking of going to a restaurant. What about you?". Note the use of past tense ("I was thinking") – that's a signal that they're open to ideas, and you should continue with a more specific invitation. If they answer with some concrete plans (e.g. "I'm meeting up with some friends for a drink"), you can pretend all along that you were really just making small talk, and you could turn the conversation round to something else ("Oh, so you have friends here in the city?"). It's also important to signal that the other person can say no without being embarrassed. Something like "it's up to you" or "no pressure" is good for this.

Whatever you do, make sure you try at least. You'll find it gets much easier with practice, and you'll end up with some great new business partners – and maybe some good friends too.

Conversation 1

a		B: You know what, I think I will. There's no point in both of us eating alone.
b		B: Great. And here's mine.
c		A: Well, I was thinking of checking out one of the restaurants. I don't suppose you'd like to join me for dinner?
d		A: Great. Do you like Italian food? There's supposed to be a really nice Italian restaurant near the old castle.
e	1	A: So, do you have any plans for this evening?
f		A: OK, well, it's up to you. If you do decide to join me, you'll be very welcome.
g		A: Perfect. OK, so here's my business card – you can call me if you can't find it.
h		B: Well, I don't know. Possibly ...
i		B: Sounds great. Shall we say seven o'clock?
j		B: Not really. I thought I might have a walk around the old town later. What about you?

Conversation 2

k		B: By the way, please allow me to pay for tonight's meal. I can put it on my company's invoice.
l		A: Well, er, OK, then that's very kind of you. Thank-you. In that case, you must allow me to at least buy you a drink. What can I get you?
m		B: No – I got here about five minutes early, but I've been admiring the view of the castle. It's spectacular, isn't it.
n		B: Please, I insist. You were kind enough to invite me, so it's the least I can do.
o		B: Just an orange juice for me, please. Thank-you. Now, you must tell me more about this project you mentioned earlier.
p		A: It is indeed.
q	11	A: Ah, you're here already. Have you been waiting long?
r		A: No, no, I wouldn't dream of it. I invited you.

Conversation 3

s		B: No, I'm fine, thanks. I think I'll walk – I need some exercise after all that food.
t		A: OK, fair enough. What are you doing tomorrow evening?
u		B: No, no. It's not a problem.
v		A: It's really my pleasure. And are you sure I can't pay for anything?
w		B: I'm flying back tomorrow afternoon, I'm afraid. Why do you ask?
x		A: Oh, nothing. I was just going to suggest meeting up with some of my colleagues. But it doesn't matter. I'm going to order a taxi back now. Can I offer you a lift anywhere?
y	19	B: That was a lovely meal. Thank-you again for inviting me.

Functions and phrases

Look at these examples of phrases for a range of social functions. The gapped phrases all came from the dialogue. Without looking back at the dialogue, write one word in each space. Then check by reading the dialogue again.

Asking about plans	Talking about your tentative plans
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you doing anything after the conference? • So, _____ for this evening? • What _____? • What _____ tomorrow evening? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm not really sure. Perhaps I'll have an early night. • Well, _____ checking out one of the restaurants. • I _____ have a walk around the old town later.
Inviting	Testing whether an offer is serious
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you feel like going to a restaurant tonight? • I _____ you'd like to join me for dinner? • If you do decide to join me, you'll _____. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well, that's very kind of you, but wouldn't you prefer to be with just your friends? • Well, I _____. Possibly ... • And _____ I can't pay for anything?
Suggesting	Allowing the other person to say 'no'
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perhaps we could split the bill 50/50. • There's _____ a really nice Italian restaurant near the old castle. • _____ seven o'clock? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel free to say no if you've got other plans. • No pressure at all. • OK, well, it's _____.
Politely refusing	Accepting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'd love to, but I don't think it'll be possible. • No, no, I wouldn't _____. • No, I'm _____. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That will be very nice. Thank-you. • You _____, I think I will. • OK, _____.

Offering help / kindness	Explaining why your kindness is 'no 'big deal'
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let me help you with your coat. • I'm just going to the café. Can I get you anything to drink? • You _____ if you can't find it. • Please _____ pay for tonight's meal. • Can I _____ anywhere? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can _____ company's invoice. • You were _____ invite me, so it's the _____. • No, no. It's not _____. • It's really _____.
Insisting	Thanking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You _____ at least buy you a drink. • Please, _____. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OK, then that's _____. • Thank-you. • That was a lovely meal. Thank-you _____ me.
Making an excuse	Dealing with a refusal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's been a really long day and I've got an early start tomorrow. • I've already arranged something with some friends from work. • I think I'll walk – _____ exercise after all that food. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OK, that's fine. Perhaps another time. • Oh, nothing. I _____ meeting up with some of my colleagues. But it doesn't matter.

Role-play map

Start in one of the squares with a star (★). Use the phrases from this lesson to role-play the conversations. The arrows (←, ↑, → and ↓) tell you which square to move to. There are usually several choices. When you get to the end of a conversation (•), swap roles and start again.

