

Take the work out of networking



FOR MOST OF US, making small talk at business and social events is about as pleasant as a paper cut. But these encounters don't have to be so dreaded, advises Debra Fine, a professional speaker and business trainer.

Instead, small talk is a chance to make a good first impression, which can lead to deeper, more productive relationships, says Fine, a Costco member based in Denver.

"Acquiring this skill will help you develop rapport

with people and leave a positive impression that lasts longer than an exchange of business cards," she says.

Fine, who wrote a book on the matter, *The Fine Art of Small Talk* (Hyperion, 2005), offers these tips for improving small-talk skills.

- Be the first to say hello and introduce yourself. Act as if you're the host and introduce new arrivals to your conversational partner or partners.

- Smile first and always shake hands when you meet anyone.

- Get somebody to talk about why they're attending the event and you are on your way to engaging them in conversation.

- Listen carefully for information that can keep the conversation going.

- When asked, "How's business?" or "What's going on?" answer with more than "Pretty good" or "Not much." Tell more about yourself so that others can learn more about you.

- Be prepared. Spend a few minutes before an anticipated event preparing to talk easily about three topics.

- Have exit lines. You need to move around and meet others.

- Make a positive impression by shaking hands and saying goodbye as you leave. [H]

For more from Fine, or to order the book, visit her Web site at www.DebraFine.com.