



**Tether Free
Vision**

Helping foreign-born professionals succeed in U.S. companies

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Small Talk for Foreign-Born Professionals 25 Topics for Sparking Conversation and Building Relationships

While it may not be true in many cultures, it's very common to strike up a conversation with complete strangers in the US. With colleagues and clients in the corporate world, that small talk is the spark that ignites good working relationships and connections that help individuals to grow and thrive in their careers, and teams to collaborate like well-oiled machines. For a Foreign-Born Professional unaccustomed to having those types of conversations, it may not be as easy as the term "small talk" sounds.

As a Coach working with hundreds of individuals from other countries and cultures over the years, I've given this "homework" more times than I can count... to develop a list of 25 small talk topics, and practice using them daily, at work, at the grocery store, with a neighbor, or whenever you're with someone you don't have an established, easy relationship with. Then I have them review the list before a meeting, let's say, and choose a couple questions they might like to explore with. The practice is simple, and the results are powerful. This basic tool helps to ease the initial awkwardness and frustration that comes with not knowing what to say while you're standing in the coffee line with your boss in the morning, or waiting for a meeting to start as folks are gathering.

What's even better is... once you've cracked that initial conversation or two with someone... if you're paying attention, you've begun to add to the list just by listening to their responses. Before you know it, you'll be able to easily build on each conversation as you learn more and more about them, developing that relationship foundation.

Remember, being well versed at small talk is a conversational dance. It's not a one-way interview. So, as you read through this list, think about some of the answers you might give if you were to be asked. If some of the topics don't apply to you, just make up your own. For the conversation to flow well, it's important to be able to share a bit of your own story, a bit of who you are, and what you like to do as well. You'll notice almost all the questions are open-ended, which means they can't be answered with a simple yes or no. The ones that can, are followed up with an open-ended one. When you phrase your questions this way, it opens up the conversation and allows it to expand into more, instead of letting it dead-end with an uncomfortable "no".

Give yourself time, practice and patience. Soon, you won't need the list at all! And just think... others might be feeling as awkward as you are... so lean into your curiosity and connect!

1. What did you do that was fun or interesting this past weekend?
2. What plans do you have for this coming weekend? I heard the weather is supposed to be [warm, cold, rainy, snowy...], what would you suggest?
3. What vacation plans do you have this year?

4. I saw a movie last night and noticed _____, which reminded me of what we used to do where I'm from. (Tell them a bit about it, then ask about their experience)
5. I'm planning a vacation soon and I'm looking for some ideas. Where would you suggest?
6. Did you see the [Football, Baseball, Basketball, Golf, Soccer, Olympics...] game last night? What did you think? (If you don't know how the sport is played, ask a question about the rules)
7. Are you going to watch the [Football, Baseball, Basketball, Golf, Soccer, Olympics...] game this weekend? Do you usually watch with a group of people?
8. What's your favorite sport? (If you don't know how the sport is played, ask a question about it)
9. I've been trying to learn about [Football, Baseball, Basketball, Golf...], mind if I ask you a couple questions about it?
10. My daughter/son is starting school this morning, and I'm [a little nervous, very excited...]. Do you have any kids? What's fun to do with them in the area?
11. Do you have a dog? Do you know of any good dog parks around? Can you recommend a good veterinarian?
12. Where's a great place to order [Chinese, Indian, Mexican, Italian, Vegetarian...] food?
13. What's your favorite local restaurant? What makes it your favorite?
14. What's types of museums are there around here? What would you recommend?
15. Where's a good place to get [a beer, a burger, seafood, falafel, pizza...] around here? Want to join me for lunch or after work?
16. What movies have you seen? I tend to like [drama, comedy, suspense, documentaries...] What would you recommend?
17. I'm new to the area, what are a few fun things to do around the city/state for a [single person, family, couple, bunch of visitors...]?
18. How did you get into the work/role you're in? I'm interested in moving towards that position, what would you suggest?
19. How long have you been living in the area? What's your favorite part about living here?
20. Did you grow up around here? Where are you originally from?
21. What projects are you working on now? How are they going? Do you like the team you're working with?
22. How much snow did you get from the storm? I got X inches and it took me X hours to dig out!
23. I'm interested in learning more about _____. Might you be able to help me out a bit?
24. I'm looking for some ideas for a [Christmas, birthday, anniversary...] gift for my [wife, husband, girl/boyfriend...]? What do you think?
25. I [read this book, saw this show, heard on the radio...] about _____, and I [learned, found it interesting, was surprised...] _____. What have you heard about that?

Please be in touch... I would love to know how I can support you in your efforts!

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A business coach with more than three decades of experience in technology and leadership training, Tether Free Vision Founder, Marie Bankuti, specializes in helping foreign-born professionals "fit in" so that they can thrive in U.S. companies. For additional resources, please visit www.TetherFreeVision.com.

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