

Learn to be assertive and outgoing

By NANCY MAZZARA

As the holiday season approaches, there are many occasions to celebrate with old friends. There's also the chance to meet new people and share common interests.

For some, meeting new people may present a challenge; for some, it may be just plain fun. Others may feel they lack the confidence to walk up to someone they don't know and strike up a conversation.

There are two main points to remember when introducing yourself to a stranger, according to Dr. Fountain, an instructor at Dale Carnegie Courses in Southfield. First, remind yourself that the other person is probably feeling the same as you are; and second, try to turn the attention away from yourself and focus on their interests or activities.

"That way, you won't worry so much about yourself and the other person will be more open," Fountain explained.

Many people have potential for starting conversations, but are soft-spoken or don't want to use their ability. This may be due to any of several types of fear, according to Fountain.

They may be afraid of not knowing what to say or of saying the wrong thing. They may worry about being rejected, such as when a woman turns down a man's request for a date. They may also avoid mingling with other party-goers for fear of ignoring the person with whom they came to the event.

"IT'S EASIER to make friends by being a friend, rather than by trying to force the other person to like you, such as when someone comes up to you and starts telling you all about his big house and his yacht and his sports car," Fountain said.

A simple introduction often helps break the ice. After that, try to find a common interest or opinion between yourself and the other person.

"You need the confidence to go up to someone and you need to know what to say," Fountain pointed out. "Like with everything else, repetition makes you better at it. After the first time it gets easier, and the more you do it, the more confidence you can build up."

Sylvia Pink, PhD, a psychologist at Oakland University's Continuum Center, agrees.

"When meeting people for the first time, the main problem is usually a lack of communication skills," she said. "Many people don't know how to start a conversation or how to convey interest in someone else."

"If you have the time you can enroll in assertiveness training classes," she suggested. "Rehearsing with your friends is also helpful. Practice starting conversations and an appearing interested in what the other person is telling you."

People who are wallflowers don't feel they have any personal value, Dr. Pink said.

"YOU HAVE to have a sense of self-worth, which isn't an overnight process. It's difficult to build up self-confidence when it takes such a long time," she noted.

Three points in the art of conversation were reiterated by Sarah Uile, a counselor in assertiveness training at the OU Continuum Center. She suggested to try to volunteer more information than others may ask for, saying it is a good way of building an interesting conversation.

"Don't just answer in monosyllables, amplify your answers," she said.

She also agreed with Fountain that two important things to remember at a party are that you're not the only one who may be shy, and talking about the other person's interests.

"To be confident with new people you have to believe in what you're doing," said state sen. Donald Bishop (R) of Avon Township.

"You have to be a good listener and pick up on points of interest. People are interested in what they know about so you should talk about that and also about what you yourself are knowledgeable about."

"I try to talk more about the other person than about myself," said Pamela Carie, a frequent party-goer. "I mention what they're wearing or doing, or sometimes I just go up to them and ask them, 'Do you know what I did today?' and then tell them an amusing incident."

MS. CARIE, a former Oakland Uni-

versity student, lets the situation command what she talks about at a party. Sometimes she just sits back and observes.

"If I'm alone at a party, sometimes I play bartender or bring drinks to the people there. If it's an occasion where there's singing I try to get people to sing along."

"Sometimes I just walk up to someone I want to meet and offer them a bite of food," she laughed. "It may seem forward but it's a good way to meet someone."

People often take such gatherings too seriously, believes Meadowbrook Woman's Club member Nancy Strong.

"It's not life or death, you're just here to enjoy yourself," she said. "Don't take yourself or anyone else too seriously and allow the other guests the same privileges of not taking the occasion too seriously and enjoying themselves."

The Oakland Township woman is more confident about herself when she thinks she gives an attractive

appearance.

"I always feel better about myself when I'm well turned out and my hair looks nice."

Janet Varner, owner of Janet Varner's, Inc. on Main Street in Rochester, gave some tips for women on how to look festive while not spending a fortune.

"There are many glittery accessories this year, such as textured shoes, evening hats, beads, trinstone jewelry, and small bags, that are inexpensive. They dress up the clothes you already have," she pointed out.

"YOU CAN cut off an old evening skirt to mid calf length and use these accessories to change the outfit to the new high-chic sophisticated look of this year."

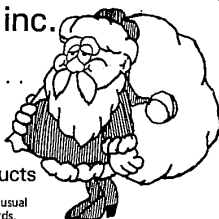
For men, Jere Hodges of Hiller's Mens Store on Rochester Road in Avon Township, suggested two alternatives.

Now that you have all the above hints on how to make your holidays sparkle, take a look in the mirror and get going. Practice makes perfect.

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