



REAL SOLUTIONS

# Conversations To Remember

Jeffrey Meshel, a master networker, has 5,000 people in his personal database. And it's growing by the day.

"You network well by putting yourself on someone's radar screen," said Meshel, author of *"One Phone Call Away."* "You have to make an imprint on others in a short amount of time."

To strike up fruitful conversations with VIPs, Meshel uses a two-step process. First, he will introduce himself and express sincere praise in the form of a firsthand observation. Example: "I've seen dramatic improvement in your company's customer service in the six months since you arrived."

Meshel follows his compliment by proposing an idea and requesting a meeting with the VIP to solicit his or her feedback. He may say, "I'm launching a customer service initiative, and I'd like to schedule a 10-minute meeting with you to ask your opinion before I implement it."

"If you're trying to impress someone, don't try to make an appointment to sell something," he said. "Instead, express admiration for them and then ask for a meeting to get their input. That will make them

Jeffrey Meshel



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feel special."

The best way to make yourself memorable is to drop intriguing bits of personal information into the conversation. If someone asks what you do for a living, never give a one-sentence response. Instead, Meshel suggests that you "create breadth and dimension" by citing two or three different aspects of yourself.

Rather than reply, "I sell insurance," you can say, "I specialize in disaster protection. Katrina was a huge challenge. I also just joined the board of a big nonprofit agency and I serve on the city council."

This way, you make it easier to draw people into the conversation. You give them several openings to ask questions or talk about them-

selves — perhaps by sharing their experience as a board member or their views about Hurricane Katrina's impact.

As people reveal facts about themselves, make every effort to retain what they say. Meshel will jot notes, often on the back of the speaker's business card.

"I'll say to the person, 'I hope you don't mind if I take notes. I want to remember what you tell me,'" he said. "That impresses people."

When he returns to the office, Meshel enters the information in his database. As a result, he stores biographical tidbits on many of his contacts. This provides useful data for future contacts.

Another way to enrich your conversations is to disagree diplomatically. Instead of saying, "You're wrong," use phrases such as, "That's interesting. But I have a different view" or "I hear you. I'd be curious what you think of my take on this."

If you can respect others' opinions while being provocative and stimulating, you can forge a connection by disagreeing with them. Just make sure you possess enough knowledge to support your position, Meshel says. **Morey Stettner**