研究者のための＋αシリーズ Vol.10
Socializing & Networking at Global Academic Events
―研究者のための国際社交術の心得―
（2021 年 11 月 12 日（金）16:00〜18:00 開催）

Thank you for many insightful questions. The speaker's responses to them are listed as follows. For further inquiries, please contact Mr. Ron Read via e-mail (read@athuman.com).

【Q1】**Normally I don't have a problem to initiate a conversation. However, I often don't know how to end a conversation smoothly, especially when I run out of topics. Could you please provide some tips on this?**

【A1】

> Usually, the reason for having trouble ending a conversation is not due to problems of finding topics but to the difficulty of smoothly bringing a discussion to a conclusion. Finding topics is relatively easy: listen for what the other person is truly interested in; read or listen to current news before the event (but avoid highly controversial topics); regarding the location of the event (e.g., Kyoto or San Francisco), if it is your hometown/home country, make a comment about the place, or if it is his/her hometown, ask a question about the place. As for steering the conversation to an end, make sure that the other person(s) says the final major point, with you just replying something like, "That's a good point" or "That's very interesting"; do not try to say a major point just before leaving that would naturally call for a detailed reply by the other person, since this has the effect of seeming like you're "cutting off" that person.

【Q2】**I have read that leaving parties unannounced is better, because it does not divert anyone's attention. What do you think?**

【A2】

> This makes me wonder where you read such a suggestion. Of course it depends on the particular type of social occasion. In no case do you need to yell, "I'M GOING! I'M GOING!" But if you pass people you've talked with or know, of course it's nice to at least nod and smile, or say, "Good to talk with you, good night" or "It was great seeing you again, take care of yourself" as you head to the exit. As I said in the seminar, if you're at a 'home party' you should ALWAYS thank the host/hostess when leaving. But please don't appear to be 'sneaking

out' with the aim of avoiding contact with other participants—this is simply cowardly.

【Q3】In the international conference when everyone is gathering, sometimes people have different accents depend on the countries they belong to.

【A3】

- Well, yes, this is a reality of dealing with people internationally: they often don't speak "BBC English" or "NHK Japanese." Personally, I have to drink two or three beers before I can understand my long-time friend from Newcastle, England. In such situations, about all you can do is listen very carefully and, at key points when you don't understand say something like, "Sorry, I didn't quite catch your meaning." But try to limit the number of times you do this. If you show the other person you really want to understand his/her ideas, most likely he/she will make an extra effort to be understandable. But sometimes this can be tricky.

【Q4】Are there any magic phrases to save yourself from awkward conversations?

【A4】

- It's rather difficult, and potentially unpleasant, to explicitly say something like, "I don't want to talk about that!" or "That's too personal, don't ask me." For example, my wife and I don't have kids, and once in a while someone will persistently ask me "Why not?" (very annoying!); in such cases, I just answer vaguely and then quickly change the subject: "Well, it just didn't happen. By the way, which of today's presentations interested you?" If someone then doesn't get my message, then they're obviously rather unsophisticated (or stupid) and I look for a quick escape.

【Q5】I often get bored from small talk.

【A5】

- Ah c'mon—really? Life's too short to get bored! Exercise your imagination muscles to find interesting topics, or think deeply about what the other person is trying to express to you (probably something more than "Do you like sushi?").

【Q6】It would be nice if I could know more tips to mingle well.

【A6】

- As I mentioned, you will get better at this mainly through experience rather than

"studying." It's like swimming. You can try websites such as this: https://personalimpact.ca/networking-etiquette-how-to-mingle-like-a-pro/ or this: https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/248847. But the main thing is to practice and develop your "mingle muscles" to feel at ease and unafraid of social risking.

【Q7】 I am pretty bad at remembering the name of the people. Is there any trick for that, especially when it is not a very small group (5 <)?

【A7】
➢ This can be tough, especially when intros are made at a fast pace. The old trick is to look at the person in the face and repeat his name: "Nice to meet you, Ms. Swenson." Sometimes I find a place to privately make notes on their business cards about appearances ("large man, short hair, big smile, and walks fast"). If you try and practice, you'll get better. Also, no one expects perfection.

【Q8】 Many Japanese people are afraid of silence, and they try to fill that silence with smiling. Which is better, smiling or just be silent?

【A8】
➢ Smiling for sure! Then smoothly add a comment about the last thing discussed or, if you feel it's appropriate, start a new topic that you think will generate further enjoyable conversation. Don't fear silence, it won't kill you. Of course there is "comfortable silence" and "awkward silence," as well as "in-between silence."

【Q9】 How do we jump into a party cluster?

【A9】
➢ Smoothly (See #6 above). This means listening to the ongoing conversation carefully before jumping in with your own ideas. And smile. You can listen to the conversation a bit from outside the cluster to tell whether it's a good cluster to join, but do this very briefly to avoid being seen as someone who "hovers" around groups.

【Q10】 Is it rude/awkward to exchange social media with people you meet at conferences or any social circumstances?

【A10】

> Not at all, as long as you're not too "pushy" about it. It's generally better to exchange info for professional-oriented SNSs like LinkedIn rather than the personal Facebook or controversial Twitter types. But if they bring it up and you feel a 'connection' with the person, go for it!

【Q11】 Because of COVID-19, we have less opportunities to meet other researchers. Do most of them use social media? If so, what kinds of media do you recommend?

【A11】

> Actually, I'm not much of an SNS user. I use Facebook to keep up with family members and old friends (NEVER politics) and LinkedIn for professional contacts. I suggest searching for specialized SNSs in your field.

【Q12】 Basically I prefer to put "Professor," "Dr.," "Mr.," "Ms." to call a person's name; is that out-of-date style?

【A12】

> It's politics and still normal to use such 'honorifics' before a person's name, but if they say something like "Please, call me Dave," then take this seriously and do it. Also, if others with similar 'rank' and familiarity to yours use first names, then following this is fine. Keep your ears and social wits alert so that you're not overly formal and appear 'stuffy.'

【Q13】 How should we deal with a person who is a trouble-maker, like the person who makes me stressful and asks sophisticated questions?

【A13】

> I guess you mean a questioner in the audience who, for some reason, is personally attacking you. I'd suggest giving the best short answer you can, end with something like "... and that's how I see it. I should really move on to another question." If you have a skillful session chair, he/she should help you with this.

【Q14】 How do you avoid being too personally connected when you want to keep things professional?

【A14】

> Hmm... I suppose if someone is very annoying about making unwanted personal invitations, you just need to persistently refuse offers. But don't make the

mistake of giving overly detailed, apologetic reasons for refusal—keep it simple and vague. If the other person persists, you can say something like, "I make it a point to never mix my personal and work like" in a cold voice.

【Q15】 What method would you recommend to approach well-known people? I think they might be bored of hearing about how famous they are.

【A15】

➢ I suppose you're right. I suggest approaching such celebrities with a definite comment like "Excuse me, Mr. Musk. I just wanted to tell you how much I admire your efforts to expand EV charging stations" rather than something only about the meeting like "Oh Mr. Musk, I've always wanted to meet you!"

【Q16】 If someone talks about some technical contents that you don't care, how do you manage your conversation?

【A16】

➢ If they just mention it lightly, just bear it and try to 'steer' the conversation into a more general topic. If they continue being too technical for too long, you can try to change their discussion with something like "Well, I really don't know about that at all, could you explain your work in more general terms?"

【Q17】 Sometimes my opponent giving a long detailed speech which I can't really focus on. Should I change a subject or just keep listening. Is it rude to suddenly change it?

【A17】

➢ A sudden, unexpected change in topic is usually considered rude, but this does not mean you have to smile and listen to an unclear or disorganized speech for many minutes. Find a bit of a pause in his/her speech and give back a summary like "Excuse me, but are you saying …?" After this, the other person should, if even slightly sophisticated, adjust to your level of understanding and desire for a more general explanation.

【Q18】 Now academic conferences are all online, do you think non-face-to-face methods are not conducive to communication?

【A18】

➢ It's more challenging, from both communication and technical aspects, to hold deep discussions online. But it is possible when participants make an effort.

Generally, you have to be more careful about turn-taking and more tolerant of unintended but rougher interruptions. Without the benefits of using body language and physical presence, more attention needs to be paid to expressing your ideas fully in what you say and perhaps the supportive documents you use.

【Q19】 I tend to ramble on when I get nervous while talking to someone for the first time. Is there any way to calm the nerves?

【A19】

➢ Well, maybe take a tall pre-mingle drink. But if that's not practical for you, at least find some time before the event to quietly sit, breathe deeply, and tell yourself that you're going to enjoy the event and feel confident. When you're with a person or persons, try asking a question that will require them to give a relatively long answer; then listen well and really think about what they're saying. Plan your own input in short, specific points that can be elaborated upon, if you feel there's time/interest, or that can stand alone as ideas.

【Q20】 Is it rude to use a hand-writing name card when I run out of business cards?

【A20】

➢ Basically, over-estimate the number of cards you'll need before an event. If you do run out, then you could write your name and email address on a small piece of paper torn from an unneeded document or even napkin (clean!). If this isn't practical in the situation, take the other person's card, explain you don't have any more cards, and tell the person you will email him/her soon—then do it!

【Q21】 As a non-native English speaker, there may be errors in their English grammar expression. Does the other party pay attention to English grammatical errors?

【A21】

➢ In your documents, take great care to ensure a high level of English. In socializing, use the best expressions you can, briefly correct yourself for large errors that affect meaning, and forget about small errors that don't make any difference in meaning; don't think too much about producing grammatical perfection. Don't correct others' grammatical errors in social discussions, just enjoy the conversation.