

Creating a Cordial Atmosphere

Some of us have an easier time with networking than others. For some, the thought of mixing with strangers is intimidating. Even those of us who find networking fun are uncomfortable at times. Anything we can do to give members confidence and to set the tone of the gathering is worth the effort. Your members will thank you!

- **Overcome the fear of meeting new people.** We all understand the enormous value and joy of getting to know others. That means making new acquaintances as well as getting to know old friends in new ways.
- **Make attendees feel welcome and set up support systems.** Ask leaders to serve as hosts and to watch for, and to introduce themselves to, anyone who looks a bit lost and could use a friend.
- **Build in sufficient time in the schedule to allow people to really talk to each other.** Take the time to find commonalities and mutual interests to develop a strong productive relationship. Skip small talk about the weather and spend a couple minutes more to ask about jobs, spouses, kids, lives, loves, etc. Many times, if you talk with someone long enough, you always find something in common.
- **Who doesn't love to eat?** Provide a variety of food options including vegetarian meals and welcome special meal requests whenever they are received. Restaurants are always willing to assist with special requests. Offering food and beverage provides a topic of conversation and automatically provides something for attendees to do. When someone has a role, an assignment, or something specific to do, they are less likely to feel intimidated.
- **Play lively background music** to lift the tempo of the interaction by energize attendees. It can help to ease the tension some might feel if a conversation exchange ends and "dead air space" follows.
- **Make your meetings fun.** It's a break from the day to day, an opportunity to learn new things and meet new people. If people are having fun it's much easier to talk to other people, to be drawn into conversations, to share your thoughts and ideas, to learn and remember. Having fun opens people up to new experiences and new people.

The opportunity for networking is a key reason why people attend local dental society meetings.