Supplies Needed:

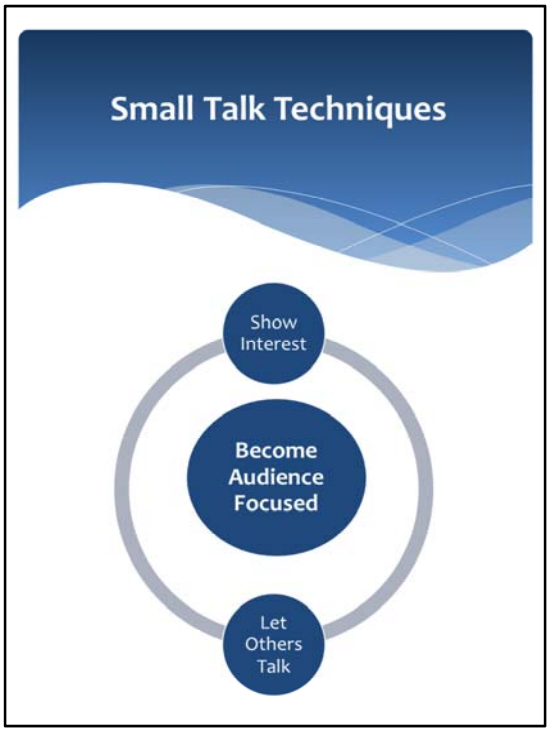
- 1 White poster board and sharpie
  - Divide one page into 2 columns:
    - **Safe** as heading for column 1
    - **Avoid** as heading for Column 2
- For all participants: pen and Small Talk Journal

Purpose: To enhance the communication skill of making small talk

Target Audience: Employees who assist customers via phone

Facilitator Note: (As participants enter room welcome them and provide training package: Pen and Small Talk Journal)

Facilitator Script: When you think of small talk and phone skills what comes to mind? (next slide)



Facilitator Script: The first technique to apply when making small talk with customers is to be **audience focused.** Let's define this by negation – give me an example of what being audience centered does not include: (wait for responses). Now provide some ways we can demonstrate being **audience focused** to our customers on the phone: (wait for responses). You want to make the person you are speaking with comfortable by demonstrating genuine interest in the other person by letting them talk and actively listening. If you are not familiar with a topic, be honest and ask them to teach you more about it. If you don't show genuine interest, the other person will know you are going through the motions and not trying to connect with them.

Help me by quickly teaming up with 3-4 people and decide who will be the group speaker. You only have to speak to your small group. The speaker will tell a story about themselves such as: what happened on the way to work, best day ever, most memorable accomplishment, why you liked a recent movie, etc. and provide vivid details. Your group members will Actively Listen and write down a few key words that interest them

about your story, something you want to learn more about or that caught your attention. You have 10 seconds to pair up in small groups and choose your speaker - Ready, Set, Go! (provide time for everyone to get in groups)

Now that you are in your groups I will give you 2 minutes to tell your story and your group will actively listen. I will tell you when time is up. Ready, Set, Go! (when participants look like they are close to finishing up, provide 15 -10 second warning, then say “Times Up” at end of timeframe.)

Speakers, what did the listeners do to make you feel like they were showing interest in your tale?

Listeners, share some key interest points about the stories you heard (in key words or phrases) – (note: to get a laughter response, randomly select members to read out their written notes and respond with “I would have loved to hear that story, sounds interesting. Or I’ll need to learn more about that during the break.)

Actively listening involves finding key aspects of what the speaker is trying to communicate. In a call situation, they may sound angry, and the only way to resolve the issue is to listen to their needs and answer the fear behind their words. Can someone give me an example of when you actively listened to a customer and how did you use what they said to engage in small talk? (Have example ready if no one shares)

Facilitator Script: If you don't show genuine interest, the other person will know you are going through the motions and not trying to connect with them.

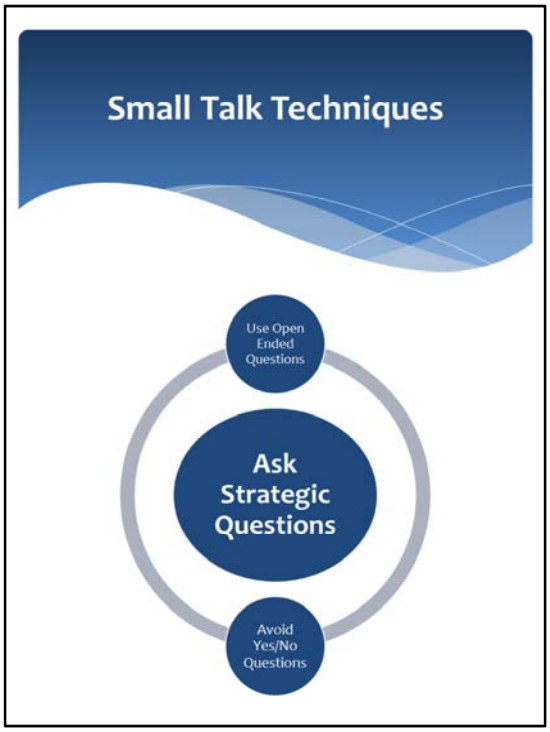
If you are not familiar with a topic, be honest and ask them to teach you more about it. This is another method for actively listening.

Have you ever encountered someone who was faking interest or have you done this yourself and gotten caught? How could this affect a call with a customer?

Facilitator Note: (Set up scenario and read question and allow participants to answer.)

Facilitator Script: Your customer begins explaining how they are training for a marathon and you respond with: (say impatiently) "That's nice…okay, so your customer account shows…" What does such a response communicate to the customer? Instead of ending this opportunity to connect, engage the customer's interest in marathons by taking a few moments and ask about the rigors of marathon training or what inspires him/her to run before getting down to business. Even 5-10 seconds devoted to making small talk on what interests the customer can build rapport…**but how long is 10 seconds**? (pause) Let's see. I need someone to be the Timekeeper for the next 10 seconds. (when you have secured a volunteer). Okay, official Time Keeper, ready, set, go…(stand motionless and stare at audience for the whole 10 seconds….the prolonged awkward silence/stillness should illicit laughter and you have made your point!) As we can see, 10 seconds may not sound like a long time, but in vivid reality it can be. 10 seconds of engaging in small talk

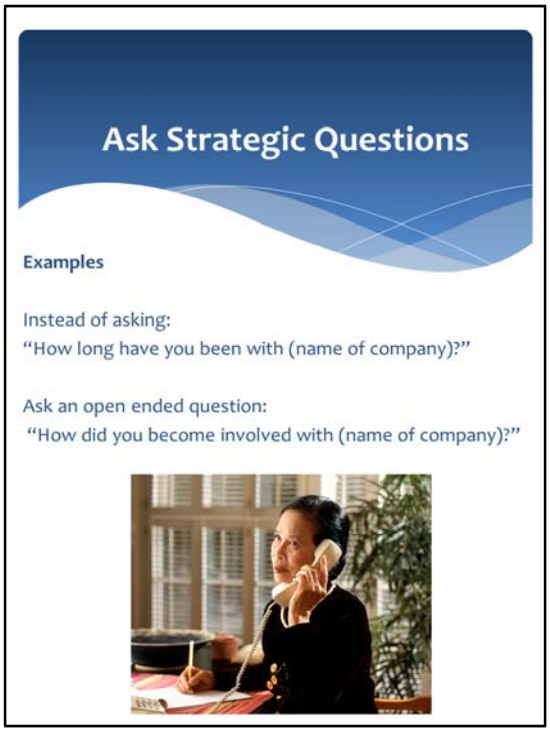
can make all the difference if you invest that time in being audience focused. Focusing on what is important to the customer and showing genuine interest can positively impact your ability to **connect with** rather than just **communicate at** your customer.



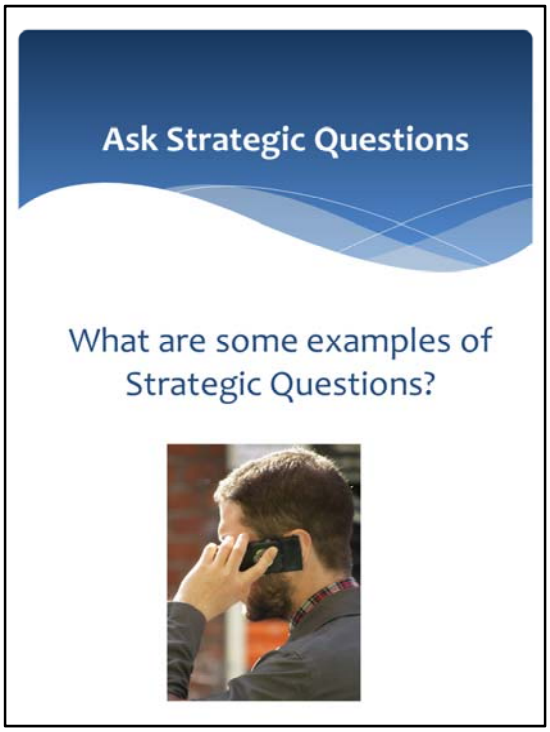
Facilitator Script: The second technique to apply when making small talk with customers is to ask strategic questions. Instead of asking closed questions with yes or no type answers, use questions that allow the customer to choose from a broad spectrum of answers. Give me some examples of yes/no questions (allow audience to provide answers).

Where do Yes/No questions lead you? Nowhere!

Where can open ended questions take you? Anywhere



Facilitator Script: Here is an example of yes/no question transitioned into a strategic open ended question (read slide).



Facilitator Script: Whenever the person you're talking to introduces any new information about themselves, their interests, their preferences... anything at all that you didn't know about them before, pounce on that. See that as a doorway to a new path of conversation, open it and see where it leads. People drop new information about themselves constantly in conversation... it's just a matter of developing an ear for it. Provide some examples of strategic Questions you have heard others ask or you may have used successfully. (have samples ready if no audience response)

Instead of asking, “What do you do?” instead say, “What's keeping you busy these days?” This allows your conversational partner to choose what he/she is interested in talking about such as work, family, or online gaming.

Facilitator Note: (need volunteer, call on someone who has been very interactive or ask for volunteer)

Facilitator Script: The third technique to apply when making small talk with customers is to build a topic list by exploring events, trends, and gathering other interesting topics to discuss with customers.

Turn to Page 3 in your **Small Talk Journal** and let's begin generating some ideas for a "Safe Topic List"

(Use white board for everyone to see with **Safe** and **Avoid** heading two separate columns)

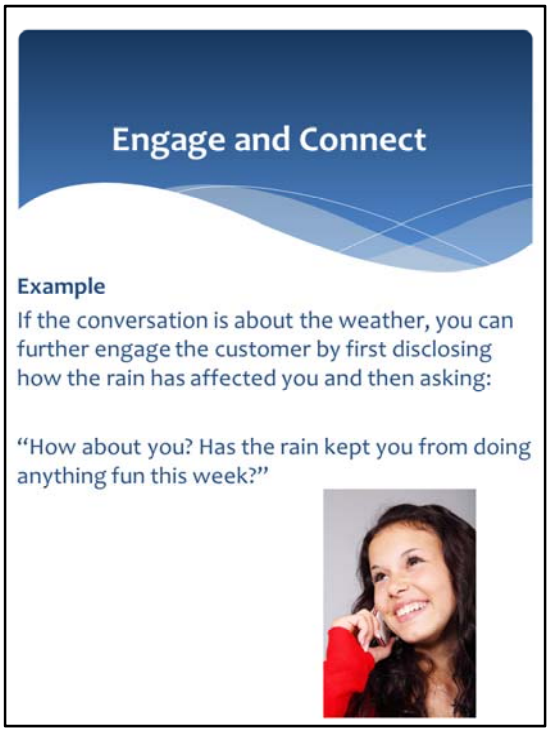
Call out some ideas for the safe or unsafe topics list and let's help "name of volunteer" categorize these properly. (As ideas for topics are proclaimed by participants ensure the volunteer is categorizing them in appropriate columns. Watch interactivity and when some participants seems tired of this activity ask for one more, then stop)

Facilitator Script: Be sure to stick with safe topics such as: weather, music, television and films, sports, pets, current events and trends. Avoid touching on topics that have opposing viewpoints such as religion or politics.

Facilitator Script: Use active listening to determine new and safe paths to take the conversation. Continue to add ideas to your topic list in your Small Talk Journal to build your repertoire.

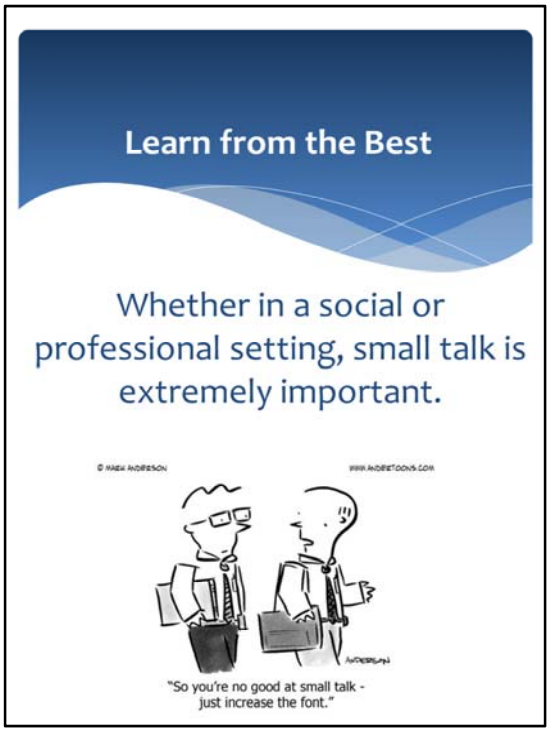
Facilitator Script: The fourth technique to apply when making small talk with customers is to engage and connect with them. If your conversation partner starts a topic you do not know much about, then be honest and use this time to ask follow-up questions. You can use small talk to make the other person feel good about themselves or even draw attention to the awkwardness of a long silence.

Facilitator Script: Everyone has something to talk about, but some people feel intimidated because they think the things they're interested in is boring to others. **The truth is that interested people are interesting.**



Facilitator Script: Try to find common ground to build a conversation starting point which can help relax the customer and enhance their experience with you. Giving sincere compliments that are not too personal is also good way to build rapport. The purpose of small talk is to have a sincere desire to know someone else better, understand them, and connect with them.

Facilitator Script: The fifth technique to observe when making small talk with customers is to learn from those who do it best. Make an effort to observe conversational champions such as talk show hosts, colleagues, or comedians. Consider what they say and how they say it. The best lesson is a good example.

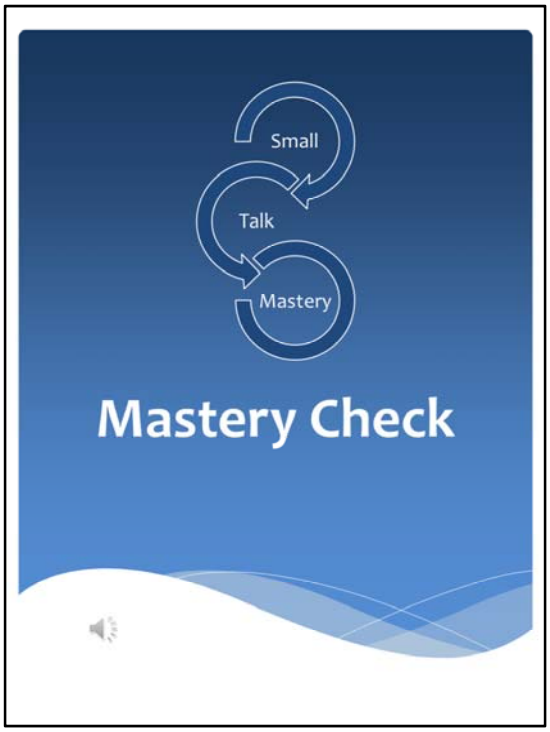


Facilitator Script: Your small talk skills can impress co-workers or bosses, or make you the life of the party. Improving your small talk skills by practicing what you've learned everyday can make all the difference. Let's explore some resources to learn more about this topic.

Facilitator Script: To learn more about ways to engage in successful small talk, do some research. Here are two examples articles I quickly found by searching for “Small Talk in the Work Setting” (Click on the linked pic resources to learn more about how to enhance your small talk skills.)

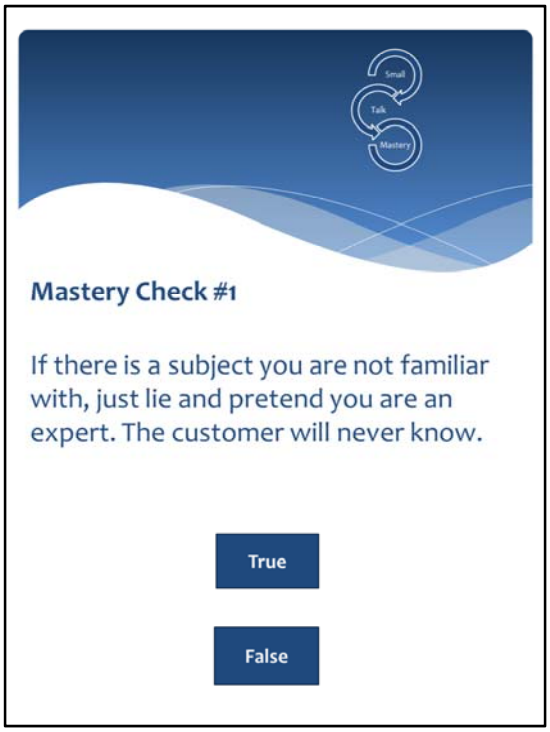
Facilitator Script: Here is a video from Business Insider about making small talk. Though it focuses on general situations in business, we can apply the same concepts to connecting with our customers. Let's watch. (click on 2 min video and watch)

(after video) What are some techniques you learned from this video? (if none answer cover the ARE technique)



Facilitator Script: Now let's see what you've learned today with the Lightening Round! Turn to your Small Talk Journal starting on page 4 and answer the following questions. You will have 87 seconds to complete. Ready Set Go. (click on music icon and play until participants are finished).

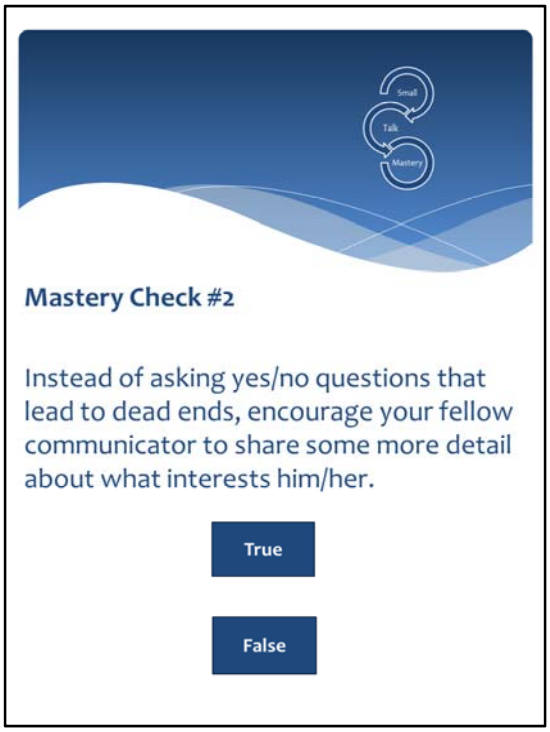
Let's check the answers together.



Facilitator Note: (Ask the question and wait for audience to respond with True or False)

Facilitator Script: If there is a subject you are not familiar with, just lie and pretend you are an expert. The customer will never know. The answer is False.

When making small talk, be genuine. If you don't know, use the opportunity to ask them to teach you more about the topic. Ask questions and use active listening to build rapport.

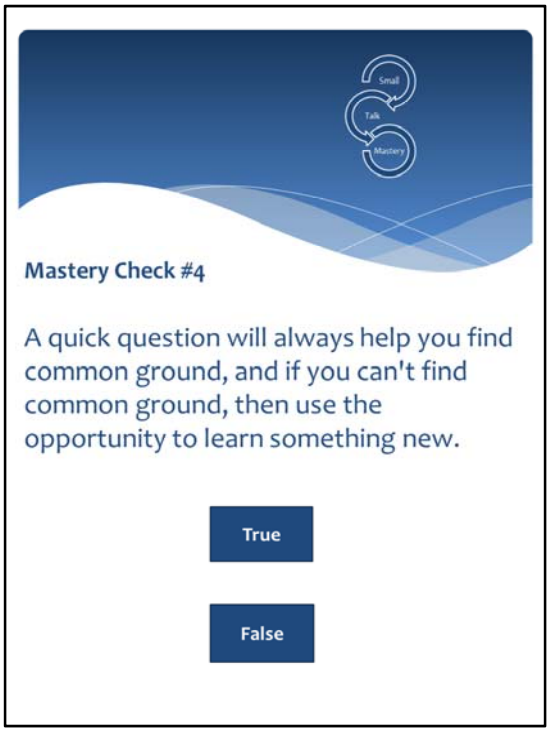


Facilitator Note: (Read quiz and answers and let audience choose answer)

Facilitator Script: (Read question) the answer is True. Open ended questions can inspire further topics to discuss.

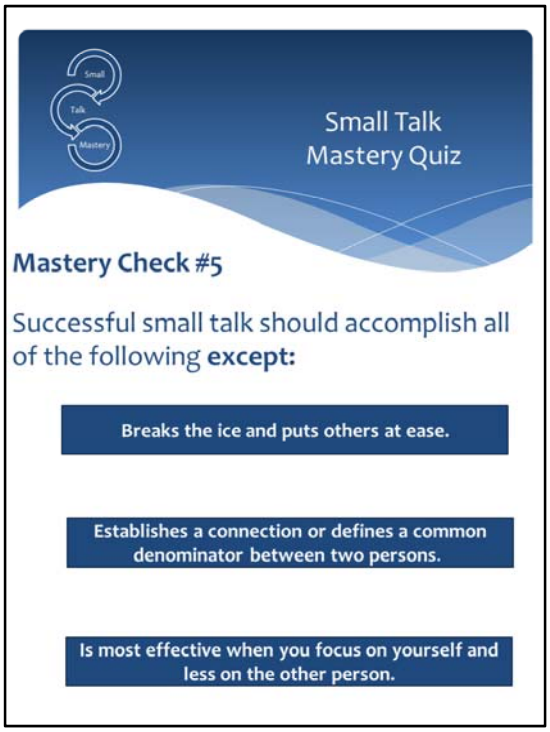
Facilitator Note: (Read quiz and answers and let audience choose answer)

Facilitator Script: (Read Question) The correct answer is Discussing the Weather in their Region



Facilitator Note: (Read quiz and answers and let audience choose answer)

Facilitator Script: (read question) The answer is false. It may be challenging to find common groups, and if you can't find common ground, then don't worry: you are now learning something new, which is equally as cool



Facilitator Note: (Read quiz and answers and let audience choose answer)

Facilitator Script: The last answer is correct, small talk should be focused on your conversation partner, not yourself.

Small talk is used to break the ice between people and form connections. Some people seem to be naturals at jumping in and making great conversation. Alas, be encouraged, if you are not one of these with the "gift of gab" do know that it is a skill that can be learned, practiced, and mastered.

Facilitator Script: Thank you for chatting with me today about Small Talk. In the next session we will learn about vocal queues to help you engage in high level interpersonal communication techniques not only on the phone but in person-to-person communication situations. (ensure music plays on slide as participants leave)

End Session