Conversations Tips Adapted from Lisa B. Marshall

Tip #1: Break the Ice

Smile, be open, and ask a question to break the ice. "What country did you get for your project?" as an icebreaker or, "Is this your first time having Miss \_\_\_\_\_\_ as a teacher?" Before joining a group, I save a set of icebreaker questions on my iPhone (I have a list for personal and a list for school).  I review the list before I go in to school so that they're fresh in my mind before I meet anyone.

When you are the one initiating the conversation, it makes it easier for the other person to respond.  Notice something new and ask question about it. If the class discussed a topic, ask a question about it to the group later.

Tip #2: Share Your Values and Beliefs Though Stories

Share something about yourself, without sounding like a sales pitch.  Although asking a question or even a few questions is a good way to start the conversation, you need to also share information about yourself to make this into a dialogue. By sharing stories about yourself, you are revealing your personal values and beliefs and this helps your conversation partner to feel more connected to you.  Conversations are about questions and stories—aim for a 50/50 mix.

Tip #3: Be Interested in Your Conversation Partner

Show a genuine interest in the other person and what they do.  Even if you have no real interest in their activity, use the conversation as an opportunity to learn and expand yourself.  My father was a master at this skill.  He could talk to anyone about anything. He'd often ask probing questions, exploring deeper and deeper, drawing out the person's enthusiasm for the topic even more.  People loved my Dad for the genuine interest he showed in others.

Tip #4: Find Commonalities

The secret to moving from making conversation to building a relationship is to find commonalities, similarities, and positive traits between yourself and the other party, and then express them.  That is, find a way to genuinely like your conversation partner—even if you find it tough to like that person.  I'm not suggesting you fake it or make stuff up.  But by being sincerely interested in another person's words, they will in turn reciprocate that respect and interest in you.

Tip #5: Some Conversations Will Be Awkward

Conversation-making can at times be awkward, but you can't let that discourage you. I once walked up to someone and tried to introduce myself.  I tripped over my words and sounded like an idiot!

The point is, even when you know how to make a great conversation, sometimes it just doesn't come out the way you planned!  And that's Ok!

Bonus Tip: Be Yourself

Don't be afraid to be yourself.  Some people will like you, others may not.  But I've found that being comfortable in your skin is a quality that others admire and are attracted to.  So in every conversation, allow your personality show through.  Let others in on who you are and what makes you tick.