



[Home](#)

[From the Editor](#)

[Surviving the season](#)

[Feature-Fannie Flagg](#)

[Holiday magic the artful way](#)

[Dazzling ways to play dress up](#)

[Making magic and miracles](#)

[Out & About](#)

[SB Consignment Company](#)

[Bag the perfect tree](#)

[Holiday Help for Caregivers](#)

[The Girlfriend's Gift Guide](#)

[Events Calendar](#)

[Gifts for guys](#)

[Contributors](#)

[Advertisers](#)

Out & About: Quaking in Your Slingbacks

By Lisa Braithwaite

Holiday parties are supposed to be fun. We get to dress up in our fancy duds and sparkly jewelry, indulge in fine wines and hors d'oeuvres, and meet fascinating new people. Oh yeah, that thing about meeting new people -- it's not so much fun as it is intimidating and anxiety-inducing.

Many of us dread attending parties, especially those where we don't know anyone, such as the holiday party hosted by your partner's company. During the holidays, this dread is intensified by the increasing stress of responsibilities like travel, gift shopping and year-end work matters. We may find it difficult to embrace the festive spirit when a workplace party is a requirement of the season.

Still, whether you work for the company hosting the party or you are a guest of an employee, it is absolutely possible to manage your anxiety, let go of your fear, and genuinely enjoy yourself.

Here's how.

How to be a good host to your guest

If you bring a guest to the party, whether it's your spouse or a casual date, it is your responsibility to make sure he has a good time. Make sure your guest has a drink and food. Don't leave him sitting alone while you chat with your coworkers. Make an effort to bring up non-work topics of conversation. And always introduce your guest to the people you know.

Share a little about the person you are introducing, so your partner can put faces with names: "Amy, this is Mark from HR. He's the one who always e-mails me those hilarious videos I've told you about." This creates instant familiarity and helps your guest feel more at ease with people you've mentioned before.

But what happens if you've forgotten someone's name? That's no excuse. Here are two ways to handle it gracefully. First, you can be honest with the coworker. Tell him that his name has slipped your mind. We're all human and we all forget things; he'll understand. It's even better if you say it with some self-deprecating humor: "I'm sorry -- I'm blanking on your name right now. My old age seems to be catching up with me; I can't remember anything lately."

Remember, you don't have to be confident to appear confident.

If the honest approach makes you uncomfortable, try introducing your partner first; your coworker will likely introduce himself. You say, "Have you met my boyfriend, Henry?" Your coworker responds by extending his hand and saying, "Hi, I'm Jason." Smooth!

How to be a good guest

You may be attending the party alone and know only the people in your department, or you may be the guest of an employee and not know anyone at all. Either way, before the end of the evening, you might make a new friend or business contact. Just follow these tips. Ask the person you know to introduce you to people at the party. Let your date know before you arrive that you would appreciate some introductions. Your date may assume you already know people, or just forget to introduce you.

The quickest way to get over party stage fright is to be the first one to say hello. Put out your hand and say, "Hi, I'm Jennifer, John's wife." Once the ice is broken, that feeling of standing there awkwardly while people chatter around you will fade away.

Remember, you don't have to **be** confident to **appear** confident. Put on a smile and give a firm handshake. The more you practice presenting yourself as confident and assertive, the more you will start to feel confident and assertive.

When the person you're meeting tells you his name, really listen. Don't be planning the next thing you're going to say. Repeat his name back to him. This will improve your chances of remembering his name the next time you see him.

When you sit down for dinner, you will eventually have to talk to someone besides your date. An effective way to connect with your neighbor is to ask questions. People love talking about themselves, and you might find you have things in common. Just be careful not to interrogate your neighbor or monopolize the conversation.

One open-ended question can keep a discussion going for quite a while, especially if you look for cues to lead you to the next question. Open-ended questions are ones that don't lead to a yes or no answer. If she mentions something about children, you can say: "Tell me about your kids." If she mentions something about work, you can ask: "How long have you worked here?"

Be prepared to explain your own profession concisely and clearly, as you likely will be asked. Bring business cards;

someone you meet at the party may turn out to be a future ally. And, no matter what, do not make fun of or share secrets about your partner as a way of bonding with his coworkers.

How to mingle your way through the dreaded holiday party

Chit-chat crib notes

Plan ahead for some safe, easy topics of conversation.

The party: "The desserts look amazing . . . what are you going to have?"

Local events: "I have a ton of holiday shopping still to do -- any good craft fairs in town?"

Travel: "What travel plans do you have for the holidays?"

Background: "How long have you lived in Santa Barbara? What brought you here?"

Hobbies: "John tells me that you collect Monty Python memorabilia; how did you get started?"

Tips for both host and guest

Greet and thank your party host when you arrive. This is a perfect time to practice introductions.

Smile; be friendly; make eye contact; shake hands.

Don't use the occasion to gripe to coworkers about your company. It may come back to you -- with consequences.

Drink lightly or not at all. Alcohol is frequently used as a social lubricant to relieve stress and make social interaction more comfortable . However, alcohol can quickly shift from social lubricant to an excuse to act inappropriately.

Finally, take a deep breath and relax. Be yourself and show an interest in other people, and you might find yourself making merry at a holiday party this season.

All Content ©Copyright 2006

Santa Barbara News-Press / Ampersand Publishing, LLC unless otherwise specified.