

The Gift of Gab

The art of the schmooze, small talk, gift of gab, these are all descriptions given to a special talent some people have. It's the ability to make conversation with a chunk of tanzanite if one had to. I'm not talking about loud mouths, conversation hogs, salespeople and the like. Folks with the gift of gab are people who engage others to talk, not themselves. At parties, they seek out the meek, timid, and shy to test their skills. They can find something in nothing. Every gathering needs them. I'm allegedly such a person. Allegedly! Here is an example of the art form. It occurred at a party at a neighbor's home not long ago. It was a surprise birthday party for someone I did not know. Not surprisingly, I did not know anyone else at the party either, other than the host and two or three stragglers. It was a challenge. People with the gift like challenges. The trick is always the same, talk about something innocuous until you hear a trigger word that can segue into a nightlong conversation. This particular time, I moved into action almost immediately. My target was the wife (assuming) of some hoopin' and hollerin' guy. They are easy targets because they are just dying for someone to listen to them. As usual, she was left to fend for herself, sitting alone near a cheese platter. She seemed a bit self-conscious of being alone too. Perfect. It was going to be like taking candy from a child. It was time for me to do my thing. I sauntered over to the platter and studied the assortment of cheeses. "Anything you recommend?" I asked calmly, as I picked up a piece of provolone by the toothpick. "Um, I'm not really a cheese person. I'm lactose intolerant." "Okay, there's a piece of information but I don't know much about the subject." "What is lactose exactly? Is it that mold part? Can you scrape it off?" Ah, the art of disarming stupidity. It's the finely honed tool of a conversational craftsman. She smiled. "No, it's in the cheese itself." "What does it do if you eat it? Turn you into a Democrat?" Now this is what I call a conversation revealer. It's geared deliberately to expose potential topics. I win either way. If she is a Democrat, she'll ask me if I'm a Republican in which case I'll tell her no way. Then I'm off to the races in a hundred directions of my choosing. If she is a Republican, she'll chuckle and I will have learned what to stay away from. She struck me as a Republican. "Oh God not that!" She laughed. I was right. I am too tricky for my shirt. I also learned that she could be a little engaging and forthright, again, as I had figured. She was probably all bottled up by that no-goodnik she married. Good to confirm because I can take some chances now. "Are you?" She asks. "I'm not real political. Gotta lot of opinions but I try to stay away from the party stuff." I needed to dump this path lickety split. Politics, unless shared, is risky at best. I got back to the cheese thing right away. "So seriously, what is lactose intolerance?" I really was smooth. "It's like an allergy to lactose, a byproduct of dairy products." "Do you swell up like a blimp? Like if I go in the other room and look in here later and you look like a Macy's Parade balloon, I should call 911?" She laughed. "It's more like a digestion thing." "A digestion thing?" This was another gimmick. I repeated the sentence, as if in thought. Instead it was intended to buy some time while I ran a few potential lines through my head. I wondered if I should use a projectile vomiting line. I decided against it— too much, too soon. I didn't have enough confidence to be sure it would work. So I slowed it down some more. "Hum, digestive thing." I played my last stall card. I decided to move on. "Oh well, I won't eat cheese in front of you, okay?" "Don't be silly. It's all right." She seemed very agreeable. Okay, let's see, Republican, not that shy, laughs, lactose intolerant, agreeable. Hmm, I know. "Is it something that is passed from generation to generation?" "Actually, I have one daughter who is fine and a son who has the problem." "By the way, my name is Bob and yours?" Bingo! Match over! I must be in the front row! Kids are one of the gifts in the gift of gab. They can take a conversation a million ways. I nodded my head in smiling approval for hours as she talked about kid issues, interrupted by me only to inject some humor to redirect the subject. It was fun. I look at the whole ordeal like a slot machine. I drop about ten lines in and if nothing comes up, I take my questions to the next person. Usually, I can find something. I just need to find the slightest little opening and I can bring out the stars. Having said all that, there is one conversation killer I have yet to figure out. It stops me dead in my tracks. It goes something like this (maybe it's happened to you). Let's use the same scenario. I saunter over to the cheese platter. "Anything you recommend?" I ask calmly as I pick up a piece of provolone by the toothpick. "Um, I'm not really a cheese person. I'm lactose intolerant." "What is lactose exactly? Is it that mold part? Can you scrape it off?" She smiles. "No, it's in the cheese itself." "What does it do to you? Does it turn you into a Democrat if you eat it?" "Not if my savior Jesus Christ has anything to do with it!" she laughs. "Praise the Lord." "Alrighty then. Do you know where the bathroom is. Had a little too much beer." "I'm not good with Jesus Christ types, not that there is anything wrong with that. I just don't know how to listen. Well, it's more than "how to". I can't. My mind swirls when I hear verse numbers and stuff. Look, I want to make this clear. It's not their fault. It's my problem, pure and simple. I think it exposes me for the fraud I really am. I can't claim to have the gift of gab if I can't engage a Bible quoter. I think what really makes me less than an honorable human being is that I've been known to dump a bore or two by playing the Jesus Christ card myself. On one occasion, I managed to engage one rather self-important, recent, first-time mom. I just got done listening to her one hour story about delivering her baby in a vat of salt water from Atlantic Ocean. She cruised through the first twenty days and seemed hell bent on dragging me through the next sixty. I had to do something. My head could not nod encouragingly anymore. "So let's see, I told you about how my daughter was already walking by the age of three weeks. We decided to enroll her in "foreign language first" school for exceptional one month olds. The idea is to expose infants to a foreign language before they learn English. Edwin and I think it is the right thing to do. She was number one in her—" "Jesus Christ is Lord!" I clasped my hands. "Do you know where the bathroom is? I've had a little too much Perrier with lemon." She left abruptly. I'm going directly to hell and I'm not collecting two hundred dollars on the way. Am I?

About the Author

Since satiety during fat intake is induced by fat in the intestine we investigated the efficiency of a lipid compound that retards fat digestion.