



# Conversation Keys



**Key 1: Be relaxed and friendly.** Americans are often very casual, friendly, and expect more positive feedback than many other cultures. How does your culture compare?

*Tip: When giving an opinion about something, especially another person's work, try to say some positive things as well as suggesting ideas to improve.*

**Key 2: Learn to talk about your weekend.** Americans have different expectations for small talk, such as the weather, their weekends, and sharing opinions (critiques) of just about everything! How does your culture compare?

*Tip: Watch what other colleagues do and how they do it.*

*Try these topics: the weather, food, weekend plans or past activities, sports, entertainment, hobbies, pets, travel, or clothes.*

*Avoid these topics: religion, politics, dating/love life, finances, age, weight, and family.*

*Ask for or share an opinion about these things: food, music, movies, noncontroversial news, and the weather.*

**Key 3: "Talk yourself up."** Americans usually "talk themselves up," which means we make ourselves sound as good as possible in the workplace. In some cultures, it's polite to be self-deprecating. In America, you're expected to sell yourself if you want to succeed. How does your culture compare?

*Tip: Don't be dishonest, but present yourself in the best possible way.*

**Key 4: Take a chance.** Most Americans like risk-takers. Often it's better to try to participate and risk making a mistake than to be silent and wait until you feel 100% ready. Your colleagues may think you're not interested or have nothing to say, or that you're anti-social. How does your culture compare?

*Tip: Start with something that is popular or current and that you know something about or already have an opinion about.*

**Key 5: Have a plan in case something goes wrong.** If you try to start some small talk and it doesn't work, don't worry. Just try to move forward, and remember this popular American saying. "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again."

*Tip: Choose someone friendly to begin with. Don't choose someone who isn't friendly, is too busy, or doesn't like to talk.*

*Tip: If you try to ask a question or make a comment and it seems like the other person doesn't understand you, try reframing. You can also say "Let me try again," or "Let me try it another way."*



*Tip: Be honest. If something goes really wrong and the other person is still confused, just smile and say "Don't worry about it. I'm just working on my small talk."*