



## **When Can We Go Home?**

As this is the Christmas edition, I thought it may be relevant to focus on communication in a social context.....

A brief survey of friends and family has thrown up the following common concerns that people have about mixing with other members of the human race, irrespective of whether it be a work, business, social or extended family gathering:

**1. Who will be there? Who will I know?**

Mixing with a large number of new faces can be uncomfortable for many people. If this is a problem for you then, congratulations, you are normal! One mindset to adopt is that there are likely to be other people feeling just like you at the gathering. Smile when you are introduced (or introduce yourself) to other people – they say it's the cheapest marketing tool you have. Say your name clearly and repeat the other person's name as it might just help it stick in your memory bank. Remember to introduce other people who may also be nervously looking to join a group. Making them feel welcome will put them at ease and the effect is likely to be contagious. Find some common ground. If you have been invited to the same gathering there can't be any more than two degrees of separation between you.

**2. Will they be interested in me? Will they like me?**

Now this is a trick question! The efforts we put into impressing others may turn out to be counter-productive. People would generally rather charm than be charmed. So start by giving them a turn at impressing you. Be interested in them rather than worry about being interesting. Ask open questions to open up the conversation. For example, if the person you are speaking to is new to your company you could ask: "Do you like it here?" A better question might be: "What do you like about working here?"

**3. What if we have nothing in common? What will I talk about?**

We all have had poor experiences being caught in conversation listening to someone else elaborate on a pastime that we have no interest in. eg Alan from Accounts describing his fishing trips. One tactic is to lift the conversation above the detail. Rather than discussing the relative merits of different hooks and different bait, ask Alan what it is about fishing that he enjoys. It may be a more rewarding conversation if it turns out that you share the joy of fresh air and tranquillity (even if you hate fishing).

**4. What if I embarrass myself?**

It may be trite to suggest that most embarrassing moments stem from people trying too hard. Remaining natural and remembering to be you is probably the best defence. (As well as staying away from the home-made fruit punch.)

I hope that your communication in the Christmas season is successful for you!