

## O's Five-Point Plan to ...

# SOCIAL CONFIDENCE

You're not alone in shying away from centre stage, but prepping for a party and taking a few social risks could have you relishing the spotlight. By **MARIE ROCHER**

### 1 Love Being You

There are genetic and environmental reasons why some people feel more comfortable in social settings than others, says Durban psychologist Sherona Rawat. "A socially confident person feels calm around other people, because they know themselves well and have found self-acceptance. Shy people, on the other hand, are their own harshest critic." She adds that people are anxious in public when they feel that they are in danger of being embarrassed. "Try cutting yourself some slack," suggests Rawat, "and aim to feel comfortable in your own skin. Once you feel good about your abilities, you'll be able to focus on socialising."

### 2 Dress for Success

According to Cape Town personal image consultant Megan Smith, appearance reflects inner confidence. "The key is not to expect perfection, but to highlight your personal style and create a positive impression." Smith points to Donna Karan's advice: accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative. While not everyone is supermodel material, says Smith, we can all follow basic ground rules: Show off a great pedicure in a pair of sexy sandals; dress for shape, not size; and invest in classic party pieces, rather than faddish fashions.

### 3 Own the Room

Learn to make a bold entrance, says Johannesburg-based Yolanda Burgell, of the Social Skills Academy of South Africa. "Never enter a room apologetically, looking down at the floor. Before you walk into the party, put a big smile on your face and pretend that the place belongs to you and that all the people there are already your friends. Carry yourself like royalty, and pause while you look for a group where the conversation isn't too intense. Walk over regally, make friendly eye contact and ask them if you may join them."

### 4 Embrace Small Talk

Parties are all about mingling. The art of idle chitchat is not nearly as difficult as we might imagine. "Don't be afraid to introduce yourself to others. Extend your hand and let them know your name, and give a short explanation of your connection to the function. Should you need to introduce others, mention something about them to their new acquaintances so that the group has some information with which to continue the conversation. Make positive observations about the venue, food or music and invite the others to give their opinions. Keep the conversation light, the questions open-ended and avoid sticky topics, like politics or religion," says Burgell.

### 5 Show Respect

"We aren't remembered for what we do," says Burgell, "but for how we make others feel, so always be positive and you will be welcomed wherever you go." Showing respect and admiration for others, being a friendly and warm source of joy will get you invitations elsewhere. Finally, don't forget to say your goodbyes before you leave, and to thank your host graciously for their hospitality. **Q**

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