

Curiosity Is the Enemy of Conceit

I am a selfish person, but occasionally my selfishness helps to temper my conceit.

In a room full of strangers, my default mode is the curious interviewer. I ask people about themselves, about their plans, and about their experiences. If I have to talk about myself, I typically keep things short and understated so I can get back to asking questions of other people.

This curiosity is my way of being selfish. I'm selfishly driven to acquire more knowledge about the world and to expand my mind. I know it benefits me to learn more. But I'm not so sure how valuable it is for me to talk about myself.

What do I have to learn* by repeating the same biography – my job, my education, my location, my life status – that I already know?

Through the lens of curiosity, self-promotion and conceitedness become pretty boring alternatives to learning more and engaging with others. I'll spend those first few minutes of conversation asking the questions. If my life story comes up as something valuable, I should know how to use it. But if I hardly speak a word about myself at a networking event or other gathering, it's not such a great loss.

*I'm discounting here the value of clarifying your thoughts with talking about them, which I do not dispute. That much I enjoy!