

Hello
my name is

HOW TO BUILD
BIG RELATIONSHIPS
WITH
SMALL GATHERINGS

THE
2-HOUR
COCKTAIL
PARTY

NICK GRAY

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THE 2-HOUR COCKTAIL PARTY

How to Build Big Relationships with Small Gatherings

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Introduction

Tyler Vawser moved to Little Rock, Arkansas so his wife could be closer to her family.

Tyler had no job and no connections when they got there. He didn't know a single person in town except for his wife's family. He felt alone and worried about his career. He didn't even have a friend he could text on a Friday night.

Today, Tyler's life is completely different. He hosts popular gatherings that have a long waiting list of interesting people. He's become a vice president in charge of hiring for a major education company. His life feels full, he makes more money, and he has new friends and colleagues that inspire him.

What changed? He started to host small parties. Tyler created new connections and built up his relationships using the instructions in this book. I'll finish his story in Chapter 5— it's a good one.

You'll meet other first-time hosts in special "Party People Profiles" throughout this book. Like Tyler, they all wanted something more in life—but they never considered hosting a party could make that happen.

Thanks to my unique cocktail party formula, which in turn helped them build new relationships, they dramatically enriched and transformed their lives. All from spending seven dollars on a pack of name tags and one hundred dollars on various drinks and snacks.

This book worked for them, and it will work for you.

Hi, My Name is Nick Gray

I've created a lot of fantastic, meaningful relationships in my life. I count business owners, engineers, teachers, artists, and many interesting people who are just fun to hang out with as my friends.

I get to spend quality time with many of them—usually every single week.



Those friends helped me turn my wacky weekend hobby, Museum Hack, into a full-fledged business that gives

“renegade tours” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I never thought this would happen, but that side hustle grew into a multimillion-dollar company.

Before I sold Museum Hack in 2019, we had fifty employees and were working in some of the biggest museums in the world, like the Art Institute of Chicago and the Getty Museum in Los Angeles. My company was included in the Inc. 5000 as one of the fastest growing privately held businesses in America. I gave a popular TEDx talk and was featured multiple times in the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and other major media outlets.¹

When I moved to New York City in 2007, I only knew a few people. I was a socially awkward twenty-something from a middle-class background trying to make it in the big city.

In social situations, I sometimes felt overwhelmed and intimidated. My heart would race, and I’d stutter or say something embarrassing. Entering a room full of strangers was scary. If I got invited to a party, I would hang by the bar and play with my phone. In my braver moments, I’d hover on the sidelines waiting for the perfect moment to join a conversation.

1 For links to these articles and to see my TEDx Talk, visit www.party.pro/mypress.

That moment never came. Instead, I'd find a reason to leave the party early and go home alone. I felt sad and low, like I'd wasted my time. I always took it personally. It frustrated me that a city of millions of people could make me feel so lonely.

You might be wondering how I went from there to where I am now: how did I go from sitting home alone on Friday nights to having a packed calendar and lots of meaningful relationships?

Well, as you'll see in this book, the solution was simple...

Don't Attend Bad Events— Host Great Parties Instead

Instead of going to random bars or meetups to try to create new connections, I decided to go a different route. Instead of going to other peoples' parties, I decided to bring the party to me.

What I discovered, through lots of trial and error, is that there's a specific way to structure parties to make them easy and successful—a "formula," if you will, that anyone can follow.

Over the last ten years, I've hosted hundreds of these small parties. Then I've spent the past few years writing this book and testing every single aspect of it with different people around the world.

What follows in these pages is my formula to “hack” your social life by learning how to throw parties. I’ll show you how to easily host fun events in your own home. You’ll become very good at hosting a gathering, just as I have helped tens of thousands of people to appreciate the art inside the Met.

Some people may think a party requires loud music, late nights, and tons of booze. But a party is simply where people get together and have a good time. There can be an explicit purpose such as playing board games, celebrating an event, or meeting new people. But the essence of a party is that you are there to enjoy yourself and to connect with others.

Combining partying and relationship-building may sound counterintuitive. But it works. I’ll show you how throwing small parties in a strategic way can be the easiest method to make new friends and even boost your career.

The Perfect Party Formula

In the following chapters, you’ll find everything you need to feel confident hosting your first party, including:

- **Guest invitations:** who to invite, how to invite them, and when to send the invitations to maximize RSVPs and minimize no-shows.

- **Scripts you can use:** my favorite and most effective email templates and event reminders to send after someone has RSVP'd. You'll learn how one of these messages makes people feel special, valued, and excited to attend—boosting your attendance rates above 80 percent.
- **Must-have supplies:** checklists with all you need to prepare for a seamless event.
- **Proven-to-work icebreakers:** the best conversation starters that I've found, why they work, and exactly how and when to use them.

Plus, plenty more tips and tricks to make your parties stress-free. From picking the best day of the week to knowing what to say when someone arrives early—and how to nicely ask people to leave at the end.

I used to be terrible at throwing parties. Then I discovered these specific tactics to get better at it. They are—and I can't stress this enough—incredibly easy to implement yourself.

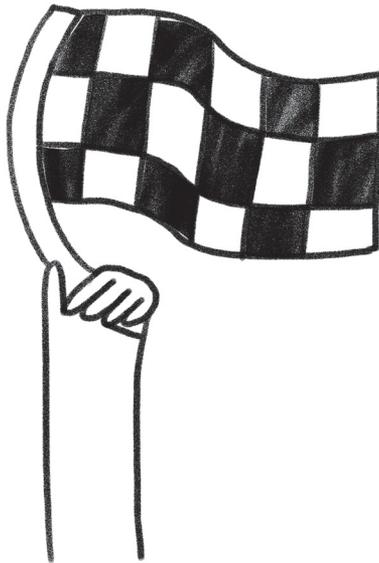
You Can Do This!

Hosting parties that build big relationships is a skill you can learn. Everything you will read in this book has been tested and proven to work.

And sure, you might make a few mistakes. I've had mishaps along the way—like getting caught mid-shower when my first guest arrived early or hosting a party where only two people showed up.

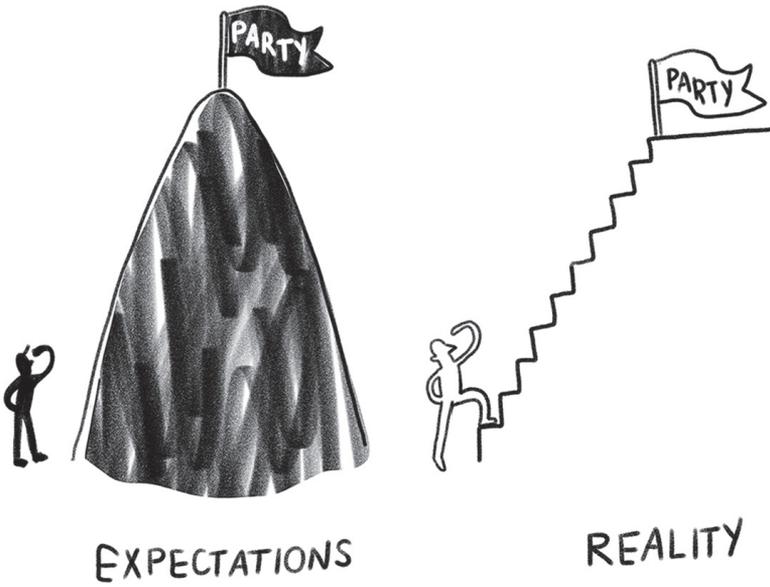
But I've written this book so you don't have to repeat my mistakes.

Now let's go!



PART 1

The Basics



Why Host a Party

A NOTE FOR ADVANCED READERS

If you're ready to host your first party right now and want to get started immediately, skip ahead to "The Challenge" at the end of this chapter. Or, if you're still not sure about this whole "cocktail party" thing, keep reading. You'll learn about what happens at my parties and a few not-so-obvious reasons to host something like this.

When was the last time you made a new friend?

Maybe you do the same things with the same people every weekend. What else are you going to do? Maybe you've accepted the mindset of *I'm getting older. That's just how it is.*

But another way to think is *I'm getting older. Now is the best time to make a few new meaningful relationships.*

It's never too late to make new friends. There are people out there just like you: awesome, smart, motivated people who are a little lonely after work. Or they're bored of their same routine. They want to meet new people too.

Making Friends as an Adult Is Hard

It's hard to meet new people. It's even harder to make new friends and build relationships.

Science backs this up. I read about a study that found most American adults haven't made a new friend in over five years.¹ Another study showed that nearly half of US adults report feeling lonely and left out. It has reached, they say, "epidemic levels."²

Perhaps you still keep in touch with friends now from various parts of your life, but you wish you had an easy way to see them more often. Maybe you want to connect with certain

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- 1 Zoya Gervis, "Why the Average American Hasn't Made a New Friend in 5 Years," *New York Post*, May 9, 2019, <https://nypost.com/2019/05/09/why-the-average-american-hasnt-made-a-new-friend-in-5-years> or www.party.pro/footnotes
 - 2 "Many Americans Are Lonely, and Gen Z Most of All, Study Finds," CBS News, May 3, 2018, <https://cbsnews.com/news/many-americans-are-lonely-and-gen-z-most-of-all-study-finds> or www.party.pro/footnotes

people in your career, but you don't want it to seem awkward. Or maybe you just want to make some new friends, like millions of others, and you want more out of life.

Well, heck yes. You can do all of those things. But it stinks that no one, and I mean *no one*, teaches adults how to make new friends in a straightforward, practical manner—until now.

Over the past few years, I've heard from tons of people who shared similar frustrations. That was the case for a woman who came to one of my parties and was so inspired that she now hosts her own. I wrote this book to give people like Lindsey (and you) a roadmap to create new connections.

Lindsey's Story: A Decision That Changed Her Life

Lindsey Martin is a shy thirty-one-year-old. Originally from Texas, she's now been living in New York City for ten years. Her life changed when she made the decision to host her first party.

Lindsey owns and runs a digital marketing company. Her job requires a lot of screen time, and she has little face time with her audience or customers. She found herself craving human connection and wanting to make new friends that would inspire her. She decided to throw a party where she could meet some of her readers and clients.

Lindsey started by hosting women's networking events. At the first one, she was nervous and felt like she had no idea what she was doing. But she followed the formula from an early draft of this book and did it anyway. Her first party was a success: more than fifteen guests came, and many of them met new friends, received job leads, or found a workout buddy. People kept telling her how fun her party was and asking when the next one would be.

Today Lindsey's events are so popular that she has to limit the number of attendees. Others think of her more often too. People invite her to birthday parties and gym workouts. Her social calendar is overflowing with opportunities that excite her and make her feel connected. She also developed true friendships. She even met one of her best friends at one of her parties, and together they started a business club that meets every month.

Lindsey finds value from hosting parties. She loves the feeling of helping people. She also developed new business relationships that have brought her cool projects, like a big book launch campaign for a fashion icon. All of this came from investing time in a single skill: hosting parties.

Lindsey's hosting experience is not without challenges. As an introvert, she doesn't feel natural commanding a room. But this self-awareness reminds her that it is hard for people to

meet others when they're shy. By stepping out of her comfort zone to host, she gives her guests a chance to meet new people while simultaneously boosting her own confidence.

Most Networking Events Are Terrible

I've been to lots of terrible networking events. I'm sure you know the kind...I'd walk into a packed bar and stand there feeling like an outsider. The music was so loud that conversation was impossible. There was no easy way to meet people because nobody was facilitating things or making introductions. I'd usually get a drink just to keep busy, then have forced "So what do you do?" conversations with a few random people.

I rarely made any exciting new connections at these kinds of events. Something about it was way too transactional and inauthentic. After an hour, I'd normally leave and swear off trying to "build my network" forever. These things were such a waste of time.

But it doesn't have to be that way!

What's Different about My Parties?

My party formula brings a totally different approach. It's definitely not a networking event, but compared to most casual

gatherings with friends and colleagues, there's a *lot* of structure. For example:

- Everyone wears a name tag so it's easy to meet (Chapter 5).
- You know who will be there beforehand (Chapter 9).
- The party feels friendly and warm when you arrive (Chapter 11).
- The host frequently facilitates introductions to help you start new conversations (Chapter 12).

While you might fear imposing a structure like this onto a small party, I found that structure makes things easier. It liberates your guests from uncertainty. It lets them get comfortable and encourages them to chat and meet new people.

But my party formula is not so structured that it feels like a formal business meeting. Far from it. Here's a typical party:

Everyone comes into a room where the energy is high. I'm standing by the door and greet guests with a huge smile. They each get a name tag, and another friend of mine shows them the makeshift bar area to fix a drink.

A few days earlier, I sent out a reminder message with short notes about many of the guests. That helps people recognize a few of the names on the tags to start conversations. There's a healthy air of curiosity among everyone to meet new people.

Soon I make a playful little noise to bring the room to attention. I ask everyone to circle up and then quickly lead a round of icebreakers to make newcomers feel included. These icebreakers happen fast. Everyone goes around the room and says their name, a little about what they do during the day, and something else interesting or fun about themselves. After the icebreaker, the room comes alive as new conversations form.

Guests pop around to meet a few different people. Thirty minutes later, I lead another iteration of icebreakers. New people have arrived, and the room is getting more crowded.

Two hours fly by. Now, new friends who didn't know anyone when they arrived have met several interesting people whom they genuinely look forward to following up with. I warmly usher people out and some are surprised to get home before 10:00 p.m.

Attendees to my party are inspired by the people they met. They've never been to a cocktail party like that before. It

reminds them that meeting new people feels great, and they look forward to the next one.

The Benefits of Being the Host

At this point, you're probably thinking: *Hosting something like that sounds great, but it also sounds like a lot of work. Is it actually worth it?* I'm biased, but the short answer is *yes!* Here are three big ways that hosting cocktail parties will change your life:

1. Meet Awesome People

We know that approaching new people to develop a personal or business relationship can be intimidating. Even terrifying. I've avoided asking someone out for a friendly coffee or a drink because I was afraid of being rejected. I thought, *What if they say no?*

Then I found a solution: invite them to my party. Compared to a dinner or a coffee meeting, a cocktail party is a fun way to get to know somebody. It is a small commitment and an easy invitation to say yes to.

After asking hundreds of people, I've consistently received a positive response to the question "Can I invite you to my next cocktail party?" Everyone appreciates being invited to a party.

2. Boost Your Reputation

I don't know how to say this without it sounding like a power grab, so I'll just say it: hosting parties makes you more popular. For me, cocktail parties have led to business opportunities (like new clients), introductions (like amazing friends), and invitations (like fun events).

The same thing will happen to you. Here's how it works: You'll get introduced to friends of friends as someone who hosts a great party. Everyone wants to know someone like this. Because you're the one who has the courage to bring people together, you'll start to build your reputation as a natural connector. You'll get introduced to interesting people—sometimes when you least expect it. It's one of the most surprising follow-on benefits new hosts tell me about.



3. Strengthen Relationships

Have you ever wondered what your old friends are doing? Or how about your acquaintances or colleagues at work to whom you say, “We should hang out!” but then never actually do? Hosting a party makes it easy to hang out with people like this.

Compare the numbers: Coffee meetings are one-on-one and take about an hour. Dinner parties often have four to eight guests and can last an entire evening. But a 2-hour cocktail party lets you connect with fifteen people all at once. In the time it takes to watch a movie, you can improve your relationships with a room full of people. It is the most efficient and effective way I've found to strengthen many different connections.

THE STRENGTH OF WEAK TIES

You'll be exposed to new opportunities—ones you maybe can't even imagine—when you host parties. Research shows that most people find out about new jobs and opportunities through “weak ties”; the people we see occasionally, perhaps only once or twice a year.

Sociologist Mark Granovetter coined the term in his 1973 paper, “The Strength of Weak Ties.” According to *Wired*, Granovetter noted that “people were nearly three times as likely to have found their job through a ‘personal contact’ than through an advertisement, headhunter, or other ‘formal means.’”¹

Referencing the same study, *Business Insider* reported that “acquaintances are more likely to know something

1 Jonah Lehrer, “Weak Ties, Twitter and Revolution,” *Wired*, September 29, 2010, www.wired.com/2010/09/weak-ties-twitter-and-revolutions or www.party.pro/footnotes

you don't. They represent social power—and the more acquaintances you have, the more powerful you are.”¹

Your Guests Will Benefit Too

This party formula works because it benefits everyone who attends. You'll give real value to the friends, acquaintances, and colleagues you invite when you help them meet new people. Creating new connections is one of the most impactful and generous things you can do for another person.

A few guests from one of my parties later shared the direct ways they benefitted by attending:

- Amy Ling Lin, owner of several nail salons, met a consultant who she then hired to help grow her sales.
- Ben Fisher, a product designer and Shopify consultant, was invited to an immersive classical music concert after he met the organizer. He called it the highlight of his year.

1 Aimee Groth, “Gladwell on Why We’re Connected to More Powerful People than We Think,” *Business Insider*, July 14, 2011, www.businessinsider.com/malcolm-gladwell-tipping-point-connectors-2011-7 or www.party.pro/footnotes

Pick a Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday night. Set the date and put it in your calendar. You'll learn why these days work best in Chapter 2. For now, simply make the commitment and let your party-hosting adventure officially begin.

A Message for Skeptics

Perhaps you're still a bit skeptical. Some people wonder what will happen if nobody shows up, especially on a Tuesday night. They worry that their party will be boring, people will leave early, and then their friends will think less of them. (*This will not happen. I promise.*)

Some feel too introverted to face such a daunting task. They think that hosting a party takes too much work, it is too much stress, or they're too busy to do it during the week. They worry it will be expensive and cost hundreds of dollars. (*It won't.*)

Just thinking about this challenge and who you should invite might make you feel vulnerable.

Look, I've felt all of those things, and I understand where you're coming from. I also know that there comes a time to say "screw it" and just do it.

It's OK to be nervous about throwing a party. Use this book as an excuse to host your first one, then blame me if it goes poorly. Really. Say this when you invite people later: "I'm

reading a book about how to host a happy hour. I've never done one before, and now I want to try it out." Or say, "This guy Nick that I saw on the internet always posts about these 2-hour cocktail parties." This gives you some space to practice and an easy punching bag (me) if anything is a little awkward.

For now, just commit to hosting a small cocktail party for a few of your friends. Focus only on this first party using the examples in this book.

Parties aren't hard to throw. If you want to become a better host, you can. I felt like a total amateur at the start, and so did everyone else I've helped. I've got your back now.

In the next chapter, we'll dig into the details.

A NOTE ABOUT THE PHRASE "COCKTAIL PARTY"

The phrase "cocktail party" is the best that I've found to quickly describe the atmosphere that these events are meant to create. Cocktail parties have always been small events for people to get together and socialize in a fun way. The cocktails and snacks are only there to set the scene. It's never been about the drinks—it's always been about the people.

In the first few years of hosting my gatherings, I didn't drink alcohol. I hosted cocktail parties but didn't actually know how to make a cocktail. And you know what? It didn't matter. People weren't coming to my events for fancy drinks. They still don't.

Throughout this book, I'll use terms like cocktail party and event and gathering interchangeably. You could also call it a mixer, a get-together, a happy hour, or whatever term feels natural and appropriate to you. They all convey the same idea with the same purpose and results.

CHAPTER CHECKLIST

- Accept my challenge and plan to host your first party three weeks from now.
- If you want an accountability partner, email the date you picked for your first party to nick@party.pro. I'll try to check in with you along the way.

CHAPTER 2

When to Host Your Party

There is a good reason why you should select a date three weeks away for your first party: it will give time to build your guest list.

The Party Runway

Think of a runway at an airport. It exists to give the plane time to build up speed and take off. In the context of hosting a party, the runway gives you plenty of time to invite people. Plus, advance notice makes it more likely that your guests will have an open schedule and be able to attend.



A three-week runway allows you to do most of the work in advance to guarantee great attendance.

The runway also gives you time to buy a few necessary supplies like basic drinks and some snacks. But don't panic about preparation yet. We're just making a runway right now, not a whole airport.

Three weeks is the sweet spot. It provides you with plenty of time to build a solid list of RSVPs. You'll message a few close connections, create a simple online event page, lock in those first RSVPs, and then send invites to other prospective guests. Upcoming chapters will cover each of these steps in detail. For now, just know that a long party runway will increase your party's attendance and decrease your stress.

How Not to Plan a Party

As I mentioned, I haven't always been a natural host. Years ago, on my journey to becoming a party professional, I was attending a mindfulness class in New York City. It was there that I met Olivia, a friend of a friend who was successful in the fashion industry. I loved her style and was incredibly curious about her world and network. After chatting for a few minutes, I knew that I wanted to see her again.

What better way to get to know her than by inviting her to a cocktail party I was thinking of organizing?

She was excited. We added each other on social media, and I said I'd add her to the Facebook event I had already made for the party. To my delight, she said she couldn't wait to come. Unfortunately, I screwed up.

Yes, I was *thinking* about organizing a party, but I hadn't done any of the groundwork. I stood there outside the class with calming Zen music playing in the background, and as I added her to the Facebook event on my phone, I realized what was about to happen. I felt a sudden flush of embarrassment.

I hadn't yet reached out to my core group of trusted friends and colleagues (you'll learn more about what this is and why

it is important soon). The event I was inviting her to showed only one other confirmed attendee: me.

From her perspective, it must have looked as though I was pulling a sleazy trick to get her to come to my apartment.

When I got home, I knew I needed to put together a party with less than a week's notice. I invited as many friends as I could, and I begged them to attend. I rushed out and bought supplies.

It was a scramble, but I did it. Olivia attended and had a great time and we ended up becoming friends. Thankfully I didn't look like too much of a weirdo. I was lucky that time. But the whole experience was way more stressful than it needed to be.



Do: decrease the party stress by planning ahead.



Do: invite interesting new people you meet.



Don't: invite them before you've prepared the party runway.

The Best Day Criteria

Host your first party on a non-busy weeknight. Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday nights work best for me. Choose a

day when most people you plan to invite are probably available. This makes it easier for them to say yes to your invitation.

I always avoid Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights because I don't want to risk schedule conflicts for my guests. Sunday tends to be a family or rest day, so I skip that day too. And steer clear of long weekends and holidays. All of these are what I call "heavyweight" days.



Do: Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday night.



Don't: Thursday, Friday, Saturday, or Sunday night.



Don't: long weekends or holidays.

Heavyweight Days: Why They're Your Enemy

My friend Steve decided to host his first party on one of the most heavyweight days of the year: New Year's Eve. New Year's Eve is like the World Championship of Parties. It's not the night to throw a party unless you *really* know what you're doing and plan well in advance.

To make matters worse, Steve sent out his invitations by mass email using an online service. I found mine in my spam folder in late December. He didn't even text me—one of his best friends—to invite me individually or remind me to RSVP.

When I called him, it was clear he was stressed. He'd invested a lot of time and money into his planning and was worried about whether people were going to show up. His hosting confidence was shaken before the event even happened.

**PARTY PRO TIP**

Don't try to compete with busy social calendars. Host your party when people are less likely to have plans.

Steve managed to pull it off, but the party didn't live up to its potential. There were fewer guests than he'd hoped for, and he'd spent too much time and money renting a space and getting decorations. You don't want this to happen to you, so don't pick a heavyweight day for your first party.



Avoid schedule conflicts for your guests. Host your party on a less-busy day.

ASK THE PARTY PROFESSIONAL

Q: Should parties always take place on weekdays and at night?

A: I've found these days and times are easier to organize for a two-hour event. People's schedules tend to be more flexible during the week and after work. But these recommendations aren't set in stone. What worked in my research in a big city may not work for you. Those with kids or who live in smaller towns might prefer to gather on weekends. Plan an event you feel comfortable hosting, and be thoughtful if departing from my formula—especially for your first few parties.

Drinks Only—No Dinner Parties

Do not position this as a dinner party. Dinner parties are too hard for new hosts to manage. They take a lot of work. You must finely curate the guest list, order lots of supplies, cook the food, lead the entire conversation, and entertain longer.



PARTY PRO TIP

Serve drinks and snacks only. Make your first party a success by keeping it simple.

ASK THE PARTY PROFESSIONAL

Q: Can I use the formula in this book for a party I've already scheduled next week? Like a sports event, birthday party, or work function?

A: I don't recommend it, and here's why: your guests didn't sign up for a structured cocktail party. They RSVP'd to watch football or whatever you invited them to do. If you greet them with nachos and name tags, they're going to be confused and might not be willing participants. The best way to learn this formula is by planning a party specifically for the purpose of practicing what's in the book.

But if you're reading this to help you upgrade a party only a few days away, you can still do several key things to make your gathering better. Jump ahead to Chapter 5 to see the magic of name tags, then skip to Chapter 9 to learn about best practices for your reminder messages. I've posted more thoughts about how to improve an upcoming party at www.party.pro/tips.

I hosted dozens of dinner parties in my quest to find the perfect formula to build relationships. But I stopped doing them when I realized that cocktail parties are so much easier to master. Cocktail parties will give you the same or even better relationship-building results than dinner parties because you

can do them more often and you can invite more people. The impact is the same and the conversations are often livelier. Keep it simple and don't do dinner.

What Time Works Best?

Start at 7:00 p.m. and end at 9:00 p.m.

An event that starts at 7:00 p.m. gives people time to finish their workday and come straight to your party or eat dinner before arriving. They also go home early, so you can do it on a weekday without feeling guilty.

While 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. works best for me, I know a few hosts who throw parties from 8:00 to 10:00 or even 6:30 to 8:30. After your first party, you can experiment to find the time block that works best for you and your community.

If you want to have a bit of fun with the start and end time, you can pick a random minute around 7:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. Sol Orwell, the co-founder of the scientific research database Examine.com, started hosting parties because he wanted to commiserate with his fellow entrepreneurs in Toronto. He always uses quirky start and end times like 6:57 p.m. to 9:02 p.m. It sets his parties apart from boring networking events, and I have a hunch the novelty might encourage people to show up on time.

Party People in Action: Nagina Sethi Abdulla

Founder of MasalaBody.com in Jersey City, New Jersey

Nick: Why did you decide to start hosting parties?

Nagina: I wanted to feel like my town was “home” and that my kids and I could enjoy our time and have a community to learn from and spend time with. I moved here when they were in preschool. With my work and entrepreneurship-focused lifestyle, I had not made time to meet new people and make friends.

Nick: What have you gained by hosting parties?

Nagina: I created so many new connections. When I go out in town—to the store, a restaurant, or a school event—it’s much more common that I see someone I know. I also gained confidence that I’m adding value to my community.

Nick: What’s the biggest challenge or fear you’ve faced hosting parties?

Nagina: Before my first party, I had a real fear about putting myself out there and hosting. There was so much possible rejection if people didn’t come. What surprised me was that when I invited people personally like this book teaches, they got really excited to come. Even if they were busy or said no, they appreciated my invitation.

Provide Clear Start and Finish Times

Two hours is the perfect length of time for a cocktail party. It's long enough for people to meet and talk, yet short enough to prevent the party from fizzling out. Keep your party concise in order to:

- Encourage guests to show up on time and not be fashionably late.
- Make your parties easier to say yes to, especially on a weekday.
- Reduce your stress by setting expectations for when guests should leave.

The clear ending time tells guests that your party isn't an opportunity for a blowout or a crazy long night. Everyone needs to get up for work, family, or school the next day.

You might worry about what to do at the end. If your guests want to hang out and continue socializing after your party is over, congratulations! That means you've done a great job creating connections. But that chatter and reluctance to leave doesn't mean you need to continue hosting. Recommend a nearby bar or restaurant that guests can go to, then finish the party at the time you stated in the invitation. You're free to

join them at the next venue or tidy up your space and rest. You'll learn more about how to end your party gracefully and on a high note in Chapter 14.

CHAPTER CHECKLIST

- Confirm your date. Ideally a Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday evening three weeks out.
- Set your two-hour time block. I suggest 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
- Don't invite anyone just yet. You'll learn who to invite and exactly how to invite them in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 3

Where to Host Your Party

Have you ever been to a “barty”? You probably have, even if you’re not familiar with the word.

A barty is a birthday party or other special event held at a bar.

Whenever I get invited to a barty, a little piece of me dies inside. I feel like the good luck leprechaun of party hosting has just lost his pot of gold.

A Barty is the Enemy

Here are some of the reasons why a barty is a major missed opportunity:

- They're noisy, so it's hard to talk.
- You can't control the aesthetics of the space or who is allowed in.
- Ordering drinks is transactional, the opposite of welcoming.

Barties usually lack clear structure and rules. Crowded bars can inhibit connecting. We miss out on making new friends and strengthening relationships with the people we know.

Many people are tempted to throw parties at a bar because it seems so easy. Resist this temptation. Host your first party at a venue where you feel confident and can control as many variables as possible.

Why You Should Host at Home

The best place to host your party is at your home. Your house or apartment is instantly personal. It's a chance to break out of your work and online identity.

When you invite people into your home, you offer them the chance to visit your personal space. You reveal more about who you are, especially in a world where digital interaction dominates. A lot of people appreciate this vulnerability. You feel more

relatable to them. It will help your guests see you in a positive light, and they will forgive any aspects of your home that aren't "perfect." They won't care if your house is small, plain, or a little messy. They're coming to your party to enjoy themselves and to meet new people, not to pass judgment on your dust bunnies.

Host your party in your own house or apartment because:

- You'll have more confidence in your own space.
- You can control variables like noise levels and costs.
- Your guests will appreciate you more because of how intimate and generous it feels.



Host your party at home for these reasons. The crown is optional.

Common Objections to Hosting at Home

When I suggest hosting a cocktail party at home, many people resist the idea. Some live far away from friends and worry that no one will make the effort to come to their event. Others worry their kids' playroom is messy, their guest bedroom isn't finished, they don't have the right furniture in the dining room, or their apartment is too small.

If you feel this way, your concerns are normal. But the location, size, and state of your home aren't as big of a deal as you think. People aren't going to judge you harshly if your home is a little cluttered or you don't have a huge, fancy apartment. Guests are more likely to appreciate your authenticity. You'll have more confidence too, being in your own space. You'll build relationships better and faster, and you'll set yourself apart when you host at home.

Small Is OK

New York City has many tiny living spaces. My friend Phillip has hosted twenty people in his two-hundred-square-foot apartment. I've seen his photos of a group of people crammed into a kitchen the size of a yoga mat. They were all smiling.

A small space makes an event feel intimate and special. I hosted at least ninety parties in my New York City studio apartment. It consisted of one main room with a built-in

kitchen the size of the galley you'd find on a small boat. It's tiny but functional.

If Phillip and I can host parties in a small space, so can you.

Party People in Action: Danielle Schulz

*Ballet Dancer at The Metropolitan Opera
in Brooklyn, New York*

Nick: Why did you decide to start hosting parties?

Danielle: I wanted to blend my artistic group of friends with my husband's MBA circle.

Nick: What's the biggest challenge or fear you've faced hosting parties?

Danielle: I thought that a modestly sized one-bedroom apartment in Brooklyn would deter people from attending, but that hasn't been the case. I find last-minute cancellations and no-shows frustrating, even disheartening. But it's bound to happen, and I remind myself not to take it personally.

Nick: What have you gained by hosting parties?

Danielle: Hosting these parties is all about connecting and nurturing relationships for me. One of the best compliments I received after a party was, "For two





whole hours I didn't see a single person break out their phone. Everyone was enthralled in conversation and truly connected with one another." I've also used these parties to practice and increase my confidence in facilitating group interaction and making more corporate connections for my business.

Nick: Do you have any advice to new hosts?

Danielle: I was nervous about the name tags. To help ease the awkwardness, I had guests write their favorite food underneath their name. This created a built-in icebreaker and made it feel more fun. People love talking about food.

When Hosting at Home Isn't Possible

For 95 percent of the people I've advised, hosting at home is a realistic option despite their initial objections. For the other 5 percent, it simply isn't. Here's why:

- A family member requires care at home, which makes it complicated to invite a lot of people over.
- They do not have an elevator, and they want their parties to be wheelchair accessible.

- They live with unfriendly roommates or in a multifamily situation. It makes it hard to know when the house will be free.

You can still throw parties even if hosting at home is not a possibility. The easiest and most common solution is to find a friend or colleague who will let you use their home for your party. Other options include:

- A park.
- A library or community center.
- Your apartment or neighborhood common space or game room.
- Your office.

**PARTY PRO TIP**

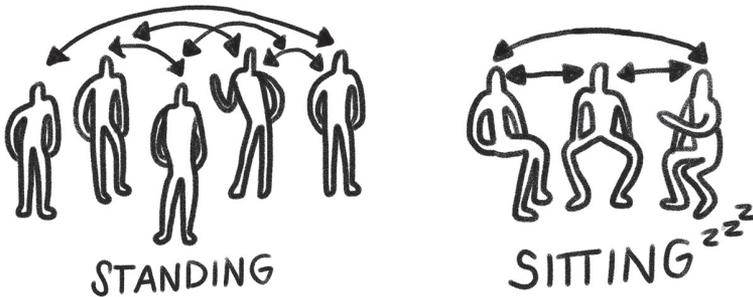
Name tags are especially important when you're hosting an event outside your home. In a shared space, name tags become a visual unifier for your group. They'll make it easier to identify your guests.

See more tips and tricks for hosting outside your home, including additional venue ideas, at www.party.pro/venues.

Nia's Story: Bloody Marys and Brunch

Nia, a fitness instructor in Texas, chose to host her first event at a local restaurant. She was worried that her house was too small. She felt her home wasn't located in a prestigious or trendy neighborhood and didn't have the layout to successfully host a group, which she thought should be a large dining table that could seat twelve or more people.

I told Nia these things didn't matter as much as she thought. I tried to tell her that **sitting down** is kryptonite to a successful event and that it would cause her icebreakers to drone on forever and kill the energy level.



Standing allows for more dynamic interactions. Sitting keeps people trapped in conversation.

Nia continued with her plan and hosted her first event at the local restaurant. She called the party “Bloody Marys and Brunch.” The brunch went relatively well. But doing it at

the restaurant saddled her with logistical hurdles outside her control:

- Splitting checks between twelve different people was a major distraction. It prevented the event from ending on a high note.
- The room was noisy. It was hard to hear people at normal conversation levels. Talking to people more than one or two chairs away was impossible.
- When Nia started her first round of icebreakers, her guests were already seated. There wasn't an easy space in the restaurant to have everyone stand up and gather. This made it hard for Nia to keep the icebreakers short. They ended up taking almost forty minutes to complete.

When Nia later took the leap and hosted an event in her home, she quickly realized how much better it was. Nobody cared about the size of her house. None of her guests snuck into her guest bedroom to check whether it was clean. They were simply happy to be there. People could move around. Conversations flowed more freely. Everyone had a great time, including Nia. She emailed me later:

“The party I hosted at my home was so much better. My home does not reflect where I'm at in my career. But I

put that fear away, and now I have new best friends and several new acquaintances. Also, no one cares! There are so many people with bigger and better decorated homes who don't have the confidence to host. People look up to those who host."

CHAPTER CHECKLIST

- Write down all of your concerns about hosting at home. Address each one. Know that you're making the right decision to host at home.
- Believe in your decision, recommit to your party date, and have confidence that you're doing the smart thing by hosting at home.
- If you're unable to host at home, try partnering with a friend who will let you use their space. Or host your party at a park, library, community center, or office. See www.party.pro/venues for more resources.

CHAPTER 4

Who to Invite

Your first party should feel easy to host. Start by inviting close friends, colleagues, and neighbors.

My First Party

I moved to New York City just shy of my twenty-sixth birthday. That became my excuse to muster up the courage and host my first-ever New York City party.

I didn't drink alcohol at the time, so I knew I didn't want to celebrate my birthday at a bar. I wanted to do something different. After checking with my roommates, I threw my birthday party at our shared apartment in Brooklyn, reserving the kitchen area as a party space.

I started by inviting my friends from college because I assumed they'd come. I messaged a few of them first to check their availability for the proposed date and time of my party. Once I had confirmations from five of them, I had a lot more confidence. I knew that at least those five people would be there.

Next, I began inviting more people, including neighbors and friends of friends. I followed the blog of a woman named Mallory Blair and thought she was a great writer. We'd traded messages for a while online. Since I knew my core group of college friends were already coming to the party, I could confidently say, "My friends and I are getting together on December 8 for my birthday. Do you want to come?"

Mallory was happy to receive an invitation and came to the party. She had a lot of fun and connected well with my friends. But since we were only passing acquaintances, I would never have had the confidence to ask Mallory to hang out one-on-one.

Today Mallory is a highly successful business owner with her own PR agency in New York City and Los Angeles. I count her as one of my best friends. We even became roommates for a few years. She hired me and my company to run two team building events for her agency. All of that would never have happened had I not first confirmed my close friends and then had the courage to invite Mallory to my party.

Your Core Group

At my first party, my friends from college formed what I call a core group.



Any time you host an event, always invite your core group first. These are your reliable and supportive friends and colleagues. They already know and like you. You can ask them for a favor or invite them to something without overthinking it. Because you already have a relationship, they're likely to say yes to your invitation.

Your core group will be an essential piece of your party puzzle. They'll show up and make you look good. They'll laugh at your jokes and be your party cheerleaders. They're people with whom you feel comfortable. They're also your support team and safety net.

In the next chapter, you'll see the exact words to use when inviting your core group. You'll first check whether they are available for your party. If they are, you'll ask them to confirm that they would like to come.

Inviting your core group first is a way to stack the deck for a successful party. Their RSVPs will build your confidence as a host to know that good people are coming. Then you will start inviting more people to your party.



Stack the deck for your party by inviting your core group first.

After you get five confirmations from people in your core group, you can begin to cast a wider net of party attendees, like other work colleagues and friends. I use the term “great guests” to refer to everyone you invite after your core group. It sounds better than “non-core guests” or “other people I work with.” This name represents who these people are to you: guests who it would be great to have at your party.

Creating a Core Group When You Don't Have One

If you just moved to a new city, or if you haven't been very sociable in the past, don't worry. Making friends and building a core group can be easier than you think.

Richard Garand in Calgary, Canada posted notes around his apartment complex inviting all his neighbors to his first party. It's not a core group in the traditional sense, but it still got him enough RSVPs to have the confidence to invite more people to his first gathering.

Try these ideas to create a core group when you don't have one:

- Join a local club for something you're interested in, like volleyball, poker, or Toastmasters.
- Look up event calendars on local media or Facebook groups to find interesting things to attend.
- Volunteer with a charity or religious organization.
- Attend Meetups (find them at www.meetup.com) especially for people who are new in town or looking to make friends.

Here are some more suggestions from people who read early drafts of this book:

“Look at organizations for ex-pats like InterNations. They have groups in over four hundred cities. I find ex-pats can be more open to connecting. Unlike locals, they don’t have established networks and might have just moved to a city.”

—Judhajt De

“I have invited a few very distant relatives that live in town to parties. For example, my mother-in-law’s cousin’s daughter. She’s someone I met once at a big family event, seemed cool, and it turned out we could be friends in addition to extremely distant in-laws.”

—Alex Gates

“For women looking to meet new friends, try the Bumble app and use the Bumble BFF setting. It’s a great way to connect. I met a number of new people using it and invited them to my parties.”

—Gena Stanley

“Join a recreational sports league in your area. I play on soccer teams and have made many friends over the years. My own Party Pro Tip: To maximize the opportunity of meeting people, play kickball because that sport has the largest teams.”

—Seth Hanes

“Reach out to people from your yoga, boxing, or gym classes. Invite the coaches and instructors too.”

—Rui Zhang

How Many People to Invite

For your first party, aim for fifteen confirmed guests. I’ve found that fifteen people at a cocktail party gives the best balance. With fewer people—like seven or eight—you’re more likely to get trapped in a single group conversation or have an uncomfortable silence in the room. The connections will be less free-flowing, and the room will lack energy. Any no-shows will hit you hard.

On the other hand, if you have too many guests—say, thirty—managing the logistics becomes a big challenge. There’s a lot of energy with a lot of people, but your party can descend into carnage. You might wake up in a pile of smelly wine bottles with rotten pizza crusts on the floor and a court summons for local noise violations. (It happens to the best of us.)

After your first few parties, you can experiment with hosting more or less than fifteen people. See how you enjoy the experience and adapt this formula later to fit your style.

Invite More Than You Need

Over-inviting is a natural part of party planning. If you want fifteen people to come to your party, you'll need to invite twenty to thirty people total.

It's unlikely that everyone will say yes. That's normal. Is it because they don't like you? Maybe! But probably not. Try to remember: people have a lot going on in their lives. I still frequently experience the feeling of rejection when guests turn down my invitations. Try not to take it personally when this happens. And besides, when have you ever liked someone less because they invited you to a party?

ASK THE PARTY PROFESSIONAL

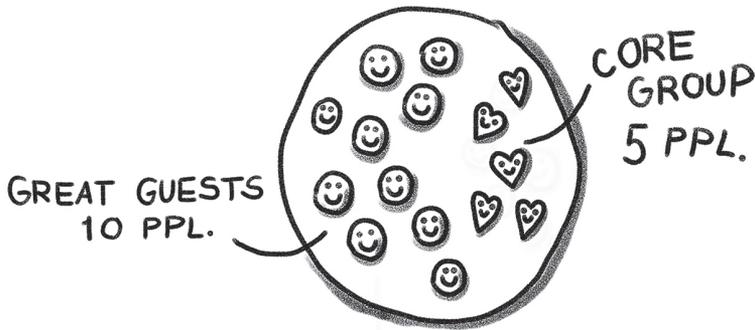
Q: What if only three people show up and my party is terribly boring?

A: This is a common fear for new hosts. It may have even happened to you in the past. But fear not. When you give yourself a long runway, secure your core group first, and use the framework from this book, you'll have plenty of time to build up your guest list, generate excitement, and then guarantee attendance for a fun party that almost everyone shows up for.

If you're someone who likes being over-prepared and you're still worried about what will happen if only a few people show up to your party, just have a board or card game on hand. Pick one that you like and that is easy to learn. I like the card games SET and Monopoly Deal. For a list of other games that work well at parties, see www.party.pro/games.

Who to Invite: Your First Party

It's fine to have a seemingly random group of connections at your party. In fact, it's what will make your event special and allow your guests to meet new and interesting people. The common thread is that everyone knows you.



Your first party should have fifteen attendees. It will be a mix of different people you know, including great guests and your core group.

Follow these guidelines for picking who to invite to your first party:



Do: invite friends, neighbors, classmates, colleagues, and their significant others.



Don't: invite important new relationships or critical work contacts.

DON'T INVITE VIPS...YET

Some people become so excited to host their first party that they rush to send invitations. They reach out to everyone they'd like to have at their party, including big business contacts and new romantic interests.

It's great that you're excited to show off your new hosting skills. You should be. But pace yourself. Don't start your hosting journey by inviting people who intimidate you or who you badly want to impress. Focus your guest list now on friends and colleagues. When your first party is a low-stakes affair, you'll avoid the stress of trying to impress VIP guests. Invite them later after this first practice party.

Who to Invite: Second and Third Parties

When you create your guest list for your second and third parties, then you can stretch yourself and cast a wider net of guests. Invite the same people from your first party, plus a few

more people you don't know as well or haven't seen in a while. This includes the following:

- Friends of friends
- Former colleagues and classmates
- Colleagues in other departments
- Sales professionals or service staff at your favorite local spots

You can also invite new people you meet. Liz Schwarzbach, a pharmacologist and business executive in Manhattan, says that her metric for whether to invite someone to an event is this:

“When I meet someone new, I ask myself: do I want to continue the conversation or see them again? If the answer is yes, then they would make a great guest for one of my parties.”

Be mindful of keeping a genuine interest in your guest list. You're not trying to use and abuse your old and new friends in a self-serving manner. This is what gives networking a bad name.

-  **Do:** invite new acquaintances who you would be excited to see again or continue a conversation with.
-  **Don't:** purely build a guest list based on “Who can I benefit from right now?”

WILDCARD — NEW PERSON



Every new person you meet becomes a potential party invitation.

How to Grow Your Guest List

If you're eager to grow your guest list, here are some things to try:

- **Invite everyone you might want to see again.** Follow Liz's advice. Invite anyone you meet that you might like to talk to again. Your guest list will naturally grow. It doesn't have to be some big, grand invitation. If you meet someone neat at work or in the grocery store, just mention you're having a party soon, and ask if you can invite them. If they say yes, take their contact details. If they say no, what's the harm? Either take their details and invite them to your next party, or continue on with your day.
- **Think about the people you regularly interact with in town.** This could be your barista or your workout instructor or the service staff at your favorite restaurant. Give them an invite.
- **Log on to Facebook, LinkedIn, or another social network you use.** Search for friends or colleagues who live in your city. We often forget about our loose connections and acquaintances we've already made through these networks.
- **Send your core group members a personalized message asking them to bring a friend to your party.** Give them at least one week's notice. For bonus points, provide them with a little script like this to make it easy to share:

I'd like to ask a favor: Will you help me out and bring a friend or colleague to my party? You can send them this message: "My friend Nick is hosting a cocktail party on Wednesday the 8th at 7 p.m. It will be fun! May I share your info with him to send you the information?"

- Follow up a few days later to ask each person in your core group who they are going to bring. It is important to ask them to "bring a friend," not just "invite a friend." When you explicitly state that you want them to bring someone, it implies you want them to follow through.
- Make a list of "super connectors" in your town and invite one or two. This could include real estate agents, salespeople, fundraising staff at a nonprofit, and recruiters. These folks have huge networks and are often receptive to invitations to meet new people.

Party People in Action: Mary Beth Yale

Literary Consultant in Mexico City, Mexico

Nick: Why did you decide to start hosting parties?

Mary Beth: Successfully hosting fun parties was a longtime goal of mine. I always imagined I'd be a

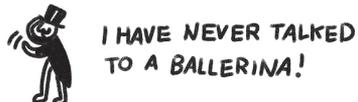
sophisticated adult once I did it. I often meet new people, and it's a bit overwhelming to plan a coffee or one-on-one meal. Parties are a sustainable and fun way for me to get a lot of great people in one room.

Nick: Who do you invite to your parties?

Mary Beth: I've hosted two parties so far. At the first, I invited a lot of my neighbors. For the second, I invited newcomers to the city. For example, I recently knocked somebody's drink over at a bar. He wouldn't let me buy him a new drink. So, I invited him to my next cocktail party. Turns out he is an author, and we have a friend in common who lives in Italy. It was awesome to see my friends making connections and to be the one facilitating it.

The Advantage of a Diverse Guest List

As you become more comfortable as a host, reach out to people who are less like yourself. When I throw a party, I focus on adding occupational diversity to my guest list. I invite friends who work in banking, dancing, and education in addition to those in museums, technology, and marketing.



I like what Joan Crawford said in 1971 in her book *My Way of Life* about entertaining people at home:

“The best parties are a wild mixture. Take some corporation presidents, add...a bearded painter, a professional jockey, your visiting friends from Brussels, a politician, a hairdresser, and a professor of physics, toss them all together, and try to get them to stop talking long enough to eat! It’s especially important to have all age groups. I’ve never noticed any generation gap...all the younger people I know are bright and attractive and have something to say and they dress like human beings. They love to listen, too. They make wonderful guests.”

The idea of having a diverse attendee list is timeless. Conversations at your party will be more unexpected and interesting.

Tyler’s Story: New Town, New Core Group

Tyler Vawser is the father of three young kids, a vice president at an education software company, and an extremely successful party host. (He’s the guy I mentioned in the Introduction.) Before he moved from New York City to Little Rock, Arkansas, I sat down with him and explained my party formula. We talked about why he wanted to become a host.

Tyler was moving to a new city where he didn't know anyone. He didn't yet have a core group of friends. His only contacts would be his wife's family, who had been born and raised there. He wanted to build his own network and land a great job.

When Tyler arrived in Little Rock, he heard from friends back in New York about a woman named Erica who had also moved to Arkansas and hosted parties in the area. Tyler reached out to her and asked if she wanted to co-host a small cocktail party with him. Not only did Erica say yes, but she invited a number of people she'd gotten to know while living in Little Rock.

Tyler relied on Erica to bring in a core group of friends, and their first event together was a success. Even better, by partnering with her, Tyler began to develop his own core group.

Since then, Tyler has gone on to meet dozens of new people through hosting his own parties. He even secured his executive job through someone he met at one of his events. The founder and a few other employees had been invited to his cocktail parties. When it was time to grow their People & Culture team, they thought of Tyler.

"There's a serendipity to these parties," Tyler told me. "I like seeing others make connections more than myself."

I love Tyler's story because it's a perfect example of how someone can start hosting parties, even without a strong base of connections. If you don't have a core group and you've tried everything listed in this chapter to build your own, make like Tyler and find yourself an Erica—someone who already has friends in the area—that you could co-host with.

 See www.party.pro/cohost for my best practices in hosting with a partner.

A Note (and Tips) for Readers with Kids

Little humans aren't intentionally excluded from my book. But *The 2-Hour Cocktail Party* was written and tested at a time when I and most of my friends didn't have kids.

Having children at a party often results in the divided attention of your guests. Kids can be a crutch for introverted adults to avoid grown-up interaction. Friends of mine who have kids and host parties recommend getting a sitter to help child-wrangle. They also recommend throwing a parallel kid party in a separate area of the home.

“Getting a babysitter was a huge help. It's fun for the kids and fun for the parents to be able to give their full attention to their guests and the purpose of the event.”

—Crystal Zurn

“If we don’t have help, my husband and I will be distracted from our party. Without dedicated family or friend assistance, we have to take turns disengaging from our guests to prevent the death and dismemberment of our two active children.”

—Caroline Raasch Alquist

“When we hosted a party for couples, my wife and I hired a babysitter for parents who couldn’t get one themselves. The kid space was completely separate from the party. Parents only went upstairs to check on their children once or twice throughout the night. It worked great for us because having a babysitter removed a huge barrier to entry for our friends to attend.”

—Justin Evans

When your kids get a little older, you may want to include them in your events. Have them welcome guests or help with snacks.

Just make sure they have their own name tags.

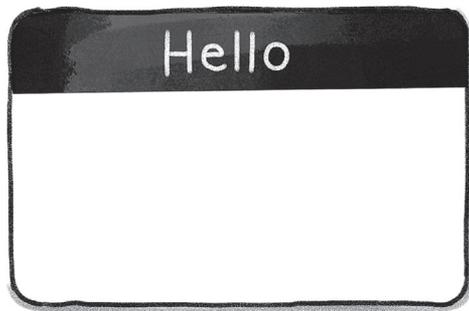
CHAPTER CHECKLIST

- Make a list of five to ten people who can be in your core group.
- Start making a longer list of the great guests that you'll invite. Include neighbors, friends, classmates, and colleagues.
- You'll want fifteen total people to come to your party, which means you might need to invite twenty to thirty.
- Don't invite important new relationships or critical work contacts yet. Plan for your first party to be a practice run where the stakes are low.

CHAPTER 5

The Magic of Name Tags

A party without name tags is like a museum without labels for the paintings. You may think that name tags make events cold, bland, formal, or fake. I'm going to convince you otherwise. Watch me.



Name tags make it impossible to forget someone's name.

The Big Benefits

On a practical level, name tags make it nearly impossible for guests to forget each other's names. This reduces potential embarrassment. I'm not great with names myself, so I rely on name tags heavily as a host.

Name tags also boost your guests' confidence because they:

- Reduce social anxiety and make introductions easier.
- Show that this is a safe opportunity to approach strangers.
- Place everyone on equal footing. Even famous celebrities and public figures have to wear them.

The One Where I Forgot Her Name

I know from experience how embarrassing it can be to forget the name of someone who has just introduced themselves. Some years ago, my then-girlfriend and I attended a large corporate event in the SoHo neighborhood of Manhattan. When we arrived, we bumped into a woman who I'd met a few times before. I knew she ran a successful business in New York City with dozens of employees and Fortune 100 customers. But I blanked on her name. It totally slipped my mind.

As I walked up to her, she greeted me warmly and said, “Hello, Nick! It’s so nice to see you again.” Her arms were open; there she was, smiling, ready to give me a big hug, and I couldn’t remember her name. I was mortified. Thinking fast, I introduced her to my girlfriend in the hope that she’d mention her name back. She didn’t.

I felt embarrassed and frustrated. Embarrassed because I’d forgotten this woman’s name. And frustrated because it would have been so easy for the hosts to avoid this situation just by giving everyone a name tag. I could tell she knew I’d forgotten her name and I potentially missed out on a deeper connection because of it.

Forgetting someone’s name is normal and has nothing to do with their level of importance. This CEO had made a huge impression when we previously met, but I just couldn’t remember her name. Using name tags ensures this doesn’t happen to anyone.

My colleague Michael Alexis shared this advice for when you forget a name and don’t have the aid of a name tag:

“Tackle it head-on. Raise your brow and say something like, ‘Can I confess something? I don’t remember your name. Will you please remind me?’ It’s normal to forget a name. It’s more awkward to pretend you didn’t.”

Being sincere in moments like this can actually help people trust you and bring you closer together.



I'm so bad with names that I've written the names of first dates on the inside of my hand to not forget. I was only caught once. (There was no second date.)

The Deeper Purpose of Name Tags

Let's get philosophical for a moment. Why are you interested in hosting parties? Probably because you want to meet new people and bring your friends together. You either are or want to be a "people person." You'd like to make new connections and deepen existing relationships.

Perhaps you're also interested in improving your public speaking. Or you want to get better at facilitating groups for some professional ambition. Maybe you want to find a new job or recruit new clients.

Cocktail parties can do all of this and more. They're places where you, your colleagues, and your friends can meet great new people. It's easier to meet people in an environment that facilitates and supports that goal. Name tags signify that there are no cliques at this party. It's important to show that guests haven't walked into a group of best friends who already know each other. They've walked into a room of potential new connections.

Name tags are a badge guests wear that say they're ready to talk to other people. They're a welcoming and unifying visual signal. Name tags are a humbling feature that tie your party together and put everyone on the same level.

Imagine a charity sports event where everyone is wearing the same color T-shirt. Or a business conference with branded name badges and lanyards. Participants are aligned. At a structured cocktail party, name tags play the same role. When everyone wears a name tag, everyone is on the same team.

**PARTY PRO TIP**

Name tags are especially helpful when you mix friend groups. Your guests will talk to new people and not stick to their cliques.

Start Using Name Tags at Your First Party

Make name tags part of your hosting strategy from the beginning. If you do this for your first party, you'll build the confidence to keep doing it later. This is especially helpful when you expand your network and start inviting people you don't know so well.

Some hosts object to name tags because they find them too formal. They claim they want to keep the vibe of their party "chill" and believe name tags are incompatible with that. It's a bit odd to use name tags at home, they say. This is an understandable first response.

Hosts—and sometimes guests—frequently resist name tags. This resistance is one of the biggest reasons I'm so vocal about using them. If you are hesitant about using name tags, push through that feeling for your first party. You'll see that it'll be worth it.

Name tags are as much for you as they are for your guests. I helped a newly married couple who had just moved to Texas.

They planned to host their church group using my party formula and invited every member over to their house. At first, the guests didn't understand the purpose of the name tags. After all, they already knew the names of everyone. But their hosts didn't. By agreeing to wear name tags, the guests made it easier for the hosts. The hosts could meet new people, connect names with faces, and be present in the conversations. They didn't have to get distracted trying to memorize a dozen new names.

Practical Matters

When your guests start to arrive, your number one priority is to warmly welcome them into your home. Give them a hug, a fist bump, or even a very animated smile. Say that you're happy they came. Your number two priority is to give them a name tag. That's how important this step is. If you see people walking around your party without name tags, pull them aside and get your naked guest a name tag as soon as possible. Don't let them move a muscle—except their name-tag-getting muscle.

Write First Names Only

Don't use your guests' surnames. Their first name is faster to write and easier to read.

Use Large Capital Letters

Your priority is legibility at a distance, not penmanship. Write names in block letters with a black marker.



Do this: a first name written in big, clear letters is easy to read.



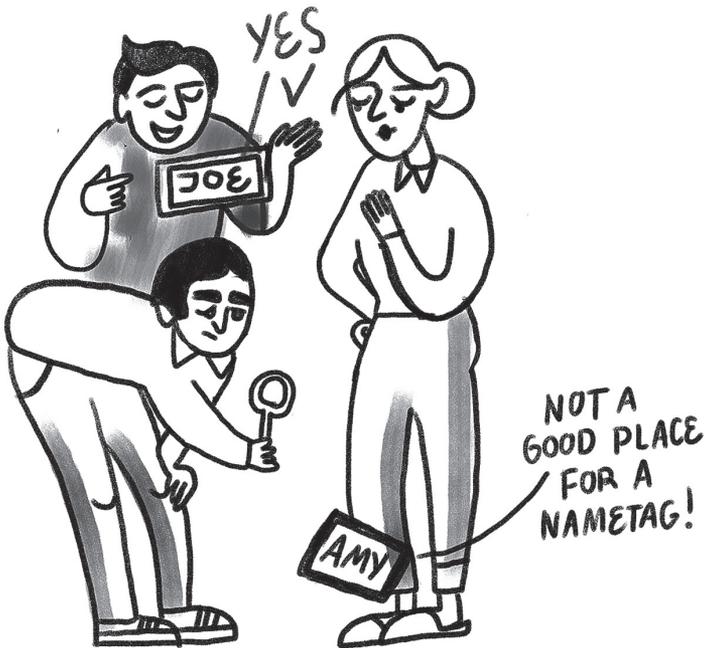
Don't do this: a full name written in cursive with a pen is harder to read.

Make Sure Guests Wear Their Name Tags in Places Where They're Easily Visible

There's not much point in wearing name tags if other guests can't see them. For most people, the best place is the upper chest and lower front shoulder area on their right-hand side. That's the side most of us shake with. It is the easiest place to see a name tag when you meet somebody as your body moves forward to shake hands.

At a recent party, one of my guests didn't want to wear a name tag. She placed it on her pant leg, so it was hidden and inconspicuous. This friend had just started a great new job at the American Museum of Natural History. I was excited for my friends to meet her, especially because the nature of my company's work lends itself to supportive connections among museum workers. But because no one could see her name tag, she didn't look like she belonged at the party.

Eventually I asked her to leave.



Make sure guests place name tags where they are easily visible.

Just kidding. But I did ask her to move her name tag and make it more visible. You can joke about this kind of attention to detail, but it's what turns a good event into a great one.

ASK THE PARTY PROFESSIONAL

Q: What if someone is wearing a silk top or a fancy suit and they don't want to wear a name tag?

A: Quality adhesive name badges remove cleanly and are "dry clean only" friendly. They won't damage the fabric. See the ones I like best at www.party.pro/supplies.

Do Not Write Out Name Tags Before the Party Begins

Handing out pre-written name tags feels like a conference rather than a cocktail party. And if you pre-write them, your guests can see if there are no-shows. Instead, write out name tags as your guests arrive. It shouldn't take more than five seconds. This way the name tags feel fun and spontaneous. Ask your guest their name if you've forgotten it, how to spell it if you're not certain, and then write their name tag.

Make Sure You Write All the Name Tags

Don't let your guests write their own names. Write the names yourself. Left to their own devices, your guests may use

hard-to-read writing. Or worse: dodge their responsibility and not do it at all.



Do: write first names only, in large capital letters with a black marker.



Don't: use fancy handwriting or ballpoint pen.

After moving into a new house in Texas, Amy hosted a party with name tags. Unfortunately, she didn't make sure that her guests all wore one. Instead, she left them out on a counter and casually assigned the responsibility to a friend. One guest didn't want to give his real name. He asked the person responsible for name tags to write "Superman" instead. Soon another guest saw that someone was using a joke name and asked for "Batman." Ultimately, half the party's guests sported real names, a quarter gave joke names, and another quarter didn't wear name tags at all. Those who wore them as intended ended up feeling foolish.

Enforce the Wearing of Name Tags

Name tags work best when 100 percent of your guests are on board. Your party is only as strong as the weakest link. If one or two people stop wearing them and new arrivals see the policy is negotiable, the whole system is threatened. Make someone

a new tag if they “accidentally” lost it. Be kind but firm. You’re creating a great space for new relationships to grow.

The Final Word on Name Tags

As Dale Carnegie, author of *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, says, “A person’s name is to him or her the sweetest and most important sound in any language.” The easiest way to make that sweet sound happen is to use name tags. Save your guests from embarrassment. Make it easy for everyone to remember names. All it takes is a simple name tag.



CHAPTER CHECKLIST

- Buy name tags before your party. Have twice as many as you may need. At the time of publishing, I like the Avery brand sized $2\frac{1}{3} \times 3\frac{3}{8}$ ” best. Find links to the ones I currently like, and my reviews of others, at www.party.pro/nametags.
- Write your guests’ first names in large capital letters when they arrive. Use a thick black marker.
- No exceptions: you must use name tags for everyone at your party.

**THE END OF
FIRST CHAPTERS,
PLEASE [EMAIL ME NOW](#)
FOR THE NEXT FILE**

Hi! Nick Gray here!

The next chapters are the real MEAT and BONES of party planning!

I really, really, really want to share these to you so you can see how TACTICAL and SPECIFIC I am going to get with my party-planning advice.

Thanks for reading the first five chapters, and for agreeing to write an honest review about it.

Email me nick@party.pro and ask for the next chapters.

NICK GRAY