



Intrigue Through Better Conversation
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Admit it: you've avoided someone because you just don't want to talk to them. They are negative or drone on and on without a breath. Worse yet, they are opinionated without the least interest in hearing your thoughts. You already have someone in mind, don't you?

A 2014 PEW Research Center study of 10,000 Americans showed that we are more than twice as polarized and least likely to compromise as we were in 1994. Through this blend of polarization and one-way social media blasts, we've stopped listening to one another.

All conversations today can evolve into an argument, from previously safe topics of weather, education and health to the obvious—politics.

Let's change that.

**“She had lost the art of conversation
but not, unfortunately, the power of speech.”
~ George Bernard Shaw**

Let's have stronger, healthier, more engaging, respectful and effective conversations.

A good conversation is inspiring and engaging. It's a balance of talking and listening.

One walks away feeling valued and understood with the benefit of having learned something new.

Leaders, consider your communication with your team. Colleagues, reflect upon how you honor or dishonor your peers. Friends, do you really know how those with whom you spend your time feel about topics for which you are passionate? Do you care?

Whether you are a leader, parent, colleague or friend, you have the ability to raise people up or diminish them. If you chose the former, look for ways to continually improve how you communicate. Turn a string of opinions and sentences into a worthwhile conversation.

Here are my Top Seven Tips to make a difference through better conversations:

1. Be open.

Enter every conversation with the anticipation that there is something new to learn. As Bill Nye says: “Everyone you'll ever meet knows something you don't know.”

2. Focus.

Stop multitasking. Put down your phone. Close your computer. Stop looking around the room for someone more intriguing. In social settings, George Clooney is known to give one individual five minutes of focused, undivided, attention prior to moving to the next person. A key to his success?

3. Ask open ended questions.

Conversations grow richer through questions. Consider the journalists probe of asking who, what, when, where, how, and why. You never know what this will open up. Added benefit: your speaker may learn something about themselves in hearing their inner thoughts spoken out loud.

4. Stay on topic.

Most people talk at the rate of 125 words per minute. However, we think as many as 400 words per minute. Since we think so much faster than people speak, our mind tends to wander. We interject irrelevant things that can turn the tide of an otherwise intriguing conversation. Stay with the topic at hand.

5. Request opinions.

Stretch your understanding on any topic. Prior to pontificating with your views or directives, ask for your listener's opinion. Rather than "Agree with me because I am the smartest person in the room!" Try "What is your take on this topic?" Rather than: "Do this!" try: "How would you approach this situation?"

6. Don't equate your experience with others.

If someone has just told you they've been fired or their dog died, avoid automatically jumping in with your own similar experience. At this moment, your experience is not important. What is important is that you listen, ask questions and be with them in this moment.

7. Listen.

The art of listening is the most important skill you can develop to enhance business or personal relationships. Buddha says "If your mouth is open, you're not listening." Why don't we listen?

- **Time:** We're always in a rush.
- **Control:** If we're not talking, we're not in control of the conversation.
- **Trust:** We simply don't trust what the other person is saying.
- **Pontification:** We're tired of hearing the same old views or complaints.

Leaders, are you basing significant decisions on what you already know? How limiting is that? What important information are you missing? Instead of searching for it on line, ask the experts right in front of you.

Become a more intriguing individual through admitting that you don't actually know it all. Ask the right questions, be open to continually learning something brand new, and honor others by listening and caring about whom they are and what they think. This just may change your world.

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