

SERIES E: Topic 3

Making Conversation

Talking is how we teach, and listening is how we learn.

To keep your conversations moving along, avoid asking closedended questions like “Do you like your job?” or “Do you live nearby?” which can be answered with a “yes” or “no.” Ask openended questions such as:

What do you do for a living?
What’s your opinion?
Can you tell me about...?
Why...?
How did you...?
How were you able to...?
What is your favorite...?
What do you do for fun?

Avoid giving one-word answers. Help the other person keep his side of the conversation going by giving him some things to ask you about.

Tips for Good Conversations

- Never say anything bad about yourself or another person.
- Practice being outgoing, warm and friendly with everyone until it is natural to you.

- Everyone knows something very interesting, and it will please you both if you can get them to talk about it.
- Practice finding the favorite interest of others using the fewest questions.
- Reveal personal information at the same rate your conversation partners reveal information about themselves.
- Proceed as if the other person is far more interested in hearing what they have to say than what you will have to say. Direct the conversation back to them as much as possible.
- When joining a group of people you don't know, start talking to the person who appears to be the most approachable or the one who seems most left out.
- Concentrate on getting to know two or three people better—learn what they do for fun and/or for work, or where they grew up.
- Remember your shyness makes the other person responsible for entertaining you. Put his comfort ahead of your own.
- You show appreciation when you let the speaker know you are paying attention. Occasionally ask a question like, "Can you tell me more about...?" or by redirecting the conversation back to his subject if he gets sidetracked.
- Before you change the subject to what you want to talk about, comment or ask the other person at least three questions about his current subject. (See Dave's "3 to 1 Rule" in the next section.)
- Make eye contact frequently.
- Be aware that most people get more information from your body language and tone than from your words.
- Compliment people for what they can do, have done, or are trying to do.

- Words that exaggerate or are extreme, like “hate,” “always,” “never,” “should,” “can’t,” “only” and “have to,” actually have less power than words that are accurate.
- If you can make someone feel better about herself she will feel better about you.
- Avoid trumping (having a bigger, better or more exciting tale to tell).
- Ask people about their feelings, their experiences, and theirreactions.
- Don’t finish other people’s sentences, and don’t start talking until they stop.
- Find out the other person’s opinion on controversial subjects before you blurt out your own point of view—especially if you have strong feelings about the topic.
- When you find a good listener, be merciful. He is entitled to as much speaking time as you are.



ASK YOURSELF

What is my weakest communication skill?

Which of the changes above would help me most now?

Who will I practice my new skills with first?