

Celeste Headlee: 10 Ways to Have a Better Conversation – Handout

- 1. Don't multitask.** More than just setting your device aside – be present. Be in that moment. Don't be thinking about another part of your day; if you don't want to have a conversation, don't! Don't be half in, half out.
- 2. Don't pontificate.** “If you want to state your opinion without any opportunity for response or argument or pushback or growth, write a blog.” Enter each conversation assuming that you can learn something new. As Bill Nye says, “Everyone you will ever meet knows something that you don't.”
- 3. Use open-ended questions.** Try on the shoes of a journalist, don't go for easy yes/no responses. Have them describe what they are feeling, thinking, or expressing. Don't do it for them. Liven up the conversation with open-ended questions and you're guaranteed a more interesting response.
- 4. Go with the flow.** Let thoughts come a go. Follow the conversation, not what you thought the conversation would be like. Don't hold on to questions just because they're really good questions. Listen, react, and keep moving with the conversation.
- 5. If you don't know, say that you don't know.** Don't make your talk cheap, err on the side of caution and always speak like you're on record.
- 6. Don't equate your experience with theirs.** Your experiences are never the same, no matter what the situation. Everyone is unique in their situations and how they feel and most importantly it's not about you.
- 7. Try not to repeat yourself.** Repeating yourself sounds condescending and creates boring conversations. And we do it, a lot. When you want to make a point it becomes a habit. Stop it.
- 8. Stay out of the weeds.** People don't care about the little details – the years, names, dates, etc. Leave them out. Focus on you, what you like and what you have in common with the person you are speaking to.
- 9. Listen.** This is the most important one. So many important, successful people have said it over and over again:
Buddha, “If your mouth is open, you're not learning.”
Calvin Coolidge, “No man ever listened his way out of a job.”
Steven Covey, “Most of us don't listen with the intent to understand. We listen with the intent to reply.”
So, listen. Yes, we all would rather talk. It gives us control, it gives us the center of attention, it gives us the ability to bolster our own identity. We also get distracted very easily when we can listen at about 500 words per minute and the average person speaks at 225. Listening takes effort and energy and is completely crucial for a great conversation. If you can't then you're simply just two people shouting out barely related sentences in the same place.
- 10. Be brief.** As my sister has said, “A good conversation is like a miniskirt; short enough to retain interest, but long enough to cover the subject.”

All in all: Be interested in other people.

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