

Just a few words - The Art of Conversation by Richie Dayo Johnson



Opening a door is easy. Put the key in, turn it, and the door opens. Would it not be great if starting a conversation was this easy? It can be if you know how! Unfortunately, many people do not. They struggle with starting conversations. If they do break the silence, the conversation sputters and dies. I have noticed with keen interest over the past few months how many 'soi disant' upwardly mobile folks display this poor social skill in gatherings which could eventually lead to boring parties, embarrassing silences and low self-esteem.

Just as timidity is a disease, not being able to easily start a conversation hinders business success and enjoyment in life. James Baldwin writes, "In order to have a conversation, you must reveal yourself." Insecure people deflect compliments by asking "Really? Do you think so?" Or by listing reasons why they don't deserve the praise. Secure people accept the praise gracefully and without fuss.

The art of good conversation centres very much on your ability to ask questions and to listen attentively to the answers. You can lace the conversation with your insights, ideas, and opinions, but you perfect the art and skill of conversation by perfecting the art and skill of asking good, well-worded questions that direct the conversation and give other people an opportunity to express themselves. After all, we've been given two ears and one mouth so that we listen twice as much as we speak.

A good conversation could start with a non-verbal gesture. Psychologists say about 60% of communication is non-verbal. If locking eyes with a stranger feels uncomfortable, "Focus on the mouth and he or she will never know the difference" says motivational and relationship expert Rene Piane.

In order to be an excellent conversationalist, you must resist the urge to dominate the discussion. For those who enjoy talking, it takes a real effort to practice the fundamentals of excellent listening and to make them a habit. The very best conversationalists seem to be low-key, easy-going, cheerful, and genuinely interested in the other person. They seem to be quite content to listen when other people are talking and they make their own contributions to the dialogue rather short and to the point. They know the difference between listening and waiting for their turn to talk. Listening is the most important of all skills for successful conversation.

Whether it is between two people or among several, the conversation should shift back and forth, with each person getting an opportunity to talk. Conversation in this sense is like a ball that is tossed from person to person, with no one holding on to it for very long. If you feel that you have been talking for too long, you should stop and ask a question of someone in the group. You will be tossing the conversational ball and giving that individual an opportunity to converse. Well, you might be thinking, "What if the conversation does not start after I ask a question?" This will sometimes happen. When it does, just remember the door illustration. Turn the key over again and ask another question. The conversation will eventually start.

Ask open-ended questions that cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." Open-ended questions encourage the speaker to expand on his thoughts and comments, and one question will lead to another. You can ask open-ended questions almost endlessly, drawing out of the other person everything that he or she has to say on a particular subject.

Here are two things you can do immediately to put these ideas into action.

First, make a habit of asking good, open ended questions of others in every conversation and in response to problems or difficulties. This shows interest and increases your understanding. Second, take a deep breath, relax and let the other person talk more. Practice over and over until you become an excellent listener.

Mastering the art of conversation can enhance your power of self-expression. It can pay real dividends in business and social advancement, given added poise, self-confidence and personal effectiveness. Remember to watch your language because it is about subtlety and nuance. It is powerful and potent.

With words, we can woo or wound - that is why despots fear the words of an articulate opponent.

Dress to impress and look your best. Don't forget to put on a great attitude. It'll determine the rest of your day. Conversation is like a piano. Everything depends on how you play it. Remember, a warm smile before you begin to speak warms up your listener and ending with a smile puts him or her at ease with what they've just heard.

Cheers,

RDJ

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