

## **Business Conversation**

In the course of climbing the corporate ladder, or of just managing the little corner of the world you occupy, you have to communicate with people. It's not always easy, but you have to do it.

Some of this communication amounts to simple conversation, and it's been dawning on me for a long time now that a great many young people don't know how to have one. In fact, a great many older people don't know how to have a conversation, either.

### **Ten Conversation Tips**

Frankly, I don't see how people can advance in their careers if they don't know how to have a conversation. For most people, work -- not investments -- is their livelihood.

So I thought I'd offer up a few basic ideas on how to have a conversation with someone you just met.

#### **1. Begin by knowing that the people you're talking to mostly want to talk about themselves.**

They want to talk about their lives, their tastes, their views. To the extent that you let them do that, you facilitate conversation and good feeling.

A simple way to begin a conversation is to ask a person the most basic question: "How are you today?" The person will usually give a cursory answer such as, "I'm fine. How are you?"

If your conversation partner goes off on a long tangent about what she had to eat that morning, what she bought that afternoon, and how her mother treated her that evening, you're warned to simply terminate the conversation at once and go on to the next person.

Otherwise, you might continue by asking, "Where are you from?" This usually allows for the next rule of conversation:

#### **2. Establish common ground.**

For example, if your conversation partner is from Idaho, talk about how often you've been to Idaho and how beautiful it is there. If you've never been to Idaho, talk about how you've heard it's beautiful there and how much you've always wanted to visit.

This helps to establish the next rule:

#### **3. Say kind, generous things to your conversation partner.**

Talk about how beautiful his home area is. Talk about how you have seen the mountains there and how fabulous they are. Talk about how bracing the air there is.

Or, if you can't think of anything to say about the person's home, offer compliments about something else. Talk about how nice her hair looks or how nice his suit is. People like to be complimented. If they don't like to be complimented, they're not well in the head and you ought to leave them well enough alone.

If they react negatively to compliments, again, move on to the next topic or the next person.

#### **4. Keep your comments brief.**

Don't respond to a question about where you're from with a long, detailed answer about all the places you've ever been. Talk about how you are that day in a short, punchy way. Answer in detail only if your partner asks in detail.

You know how you don't like to be bored by long answers? Everyone else on the planet feels the same way. Brevity is a good way to make friends. You never want to be so brief as to be rude, but again, brief is good.

#### **5. Get back on common ground again as soon as you can.**

Ask what your colleague or neighbor does for a living. If he or she does anything at all, say how interesting that is. Ask for an explanation of what it is if you don't understand.

I've had some of the most interesting, revealing conversations of my life just by asking people what they do. What does a "chemical engineer" do? Just by asking that I learned volumes about how the energy business works. What does a petroleum geologist do? What's sedimentary rock and how do you get oil out of it? I learned all this just by asking people what they do and then asking for more explanation.

People want to talk about their lives, and you oblige them, make them like you, and learn from them by allowing them to talk.

This is especially true in job interviews. You want to allow your interviewer to do a big chunk of the talking. In so doing, you learn where to make your points, where to keep quiet, and how to explain yourself so you fit into the interviewer's world.

#### **6. Don't brag unless you do it in a funny way.**

Don't tell people how much money you make. Don't tell people how cool you are. No one likes a braggart. No one likes to feel small compared with anyone else.

Just be modest about your achievements. Even if the person you're talking to brags, don't brag yourself.

**7. Unless you're specifically asked about it, don't talk about religion at all.**

You're very likely to make enemies and not at all likely to make friends if you bring up religion. Most people have different views about religion from yours, and you can scarcely conceive of a better way to alienate people than trying to press your religious views on them.

**8. The same goes for politics.**

You can hardly hope to meet someone whose political views exactly match yours, so you can easily offend by pressing your views on someone else. Just smile and listen quietly and go on to the next thing.

Unless you meet someone who says, "I know you and I totally agree with you," don't get into politics at all.

**9. If you talk about current issues, do so in a genial, friendly way.**

Don't start fights about Hillary Clinton or George Bush or anyone else. Just smile and laugh about it, and if the person you're talking to insists on saying provocative things, change the subject.

If the person persists, say you have work to do and, with a smile, go on to something else.

**10. Make whatever points you need to make in a hurry and then leave.**

Don't feel your time and your conversation partner's time have no value. Time is everything in life, and you oblige people by saving their time.

In a job interview, for example, make whatever points -- always complimentary -- you care to make, answer questions, and then leave. But leave with a smile and a firm handshake.

You'd be amazed at how many people don't know any of these rules. If you do, you're way ahead of the game.

Credit – Ben Stein