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Building HEALTHIER Relationships



- Increasing Meaningful Conversation
- Understanding Relationship Etiquette
- Overcoming Ways We Distance Others
- Improving Fitness of Body and Mind
- Helpful Resources to Explore

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5 Building HEALTHIER Relationships

5A LESSON
Increasing Meaningful Conversation



"Once a human being has arrived on this earth, communication is the largest single factor determining what kinds of relationships he makes with others and what happens to him in the world about him."

Virginia Satir, noted American author and psychotherapist. (1916 – 1988)

Conversation is a fundamental means of civilized communication. Learning to articulate in a comprehensive and thoughtful way is a critical aspect of our social education, contributing extensively to healthier relationships. By design, this lesson teaches you how to add vitality to any conversation.

5A

UNDERSTANDING THE NEED FOR MEANINGFUL GUIDANCE

Since conversation is a fundamental means of civilized communication, knowing important guidelines is critical to our social education. Learning to articulate well is not only about appearing intelligent and interesting to others. More importantly, it reveals much about our character, especially how thoughtful, diplomatic, and resourceful we are. Building such skills improves our sense of composure and connection with those in our immediate circle of friends and family, as well as others we encounter each day. The more meaningfully we learn to express ourselves, the more approachable we become.

Any test measuring our credibility would cover a wide range of skills we apply in meaningful conversation, including kindness, respect, and patience. Achieving a high score doesn't just happen. Thus, being aware of the dynamics of *meaningful* conversation, and learning to apply the elements involved is a distinct personal and professional asset. Yet building such skills requires significant educational direction and practice. Unfortunately, too many of us have only acquired an elementary level of understanding about this important subject.

Learning the elements of meaningful conversation is crucial for accurately evaluating our *existing* conversation skills. While learning what to watch out for, monitoring ourselves with sincere honesty can be quite revealing. Only by taking an *educated* and *honest* look at the quality of our current conversation skills can we recognize trivial, lethargic, or overbearing habits.

As we study aspects of healthy conversation, we begin to recognize that preplanning is involved with many details to consider. Practical steps, cues, and guidelines must be memorized for smooth and easy access. By learning to more carefully distinguish meaningful topics, necessary priorities, and valuable questions to bring to a conversation, we can develop a more delicate sense of what is fitting. Yet, as with beginning any new positive endeavor related to our well-being, what's important to do emotionally can be rather overwhelming and frustrating at the onset. So please be ready to increase your endurance for improving your conversation skills!

"Speak clearly, if you speak at all; carve every word before you let it fall."
Oliver Wendell Holmes: American author and poet. (1809 – 1894)

To assist in building your conversation skills, this lesson provides meaningful content, including an organized list of guidelines, cautious do's and don'ts, as well as practical steps. Resourcefulness is a necessary attribute for improving conversation. Before your next social occasion, please spend some time studying this lesson.

Understanding the need for meaningful guidance reminds us *of many lessons in life that require such assistance. With such direction, we become more self-aware of our current skills and learn to choreograph our conversation with a more delicate sense of what is fitting. Learnng to articulate well is not just about appearing intelligent and interesting. More importantly, it reveals much more about our character, especially our thoughtfulness, diplomacy, and resourcefulness.*

5A

LEARNING HOW TO PREPARE

Barbara Walters, a famous television personality of the 20th Century, stressed the importance of *preparation* in her book, *"How to Say Practically Anything to Practically Anybody."* She reveals that doing our homework is as essential for a successful party as it is for interviewing heads of state. While a TV host, she researched her own interviews and always had more questions prepared than allotted time for asking. Conversing at our best requires similar preparation. We must remind ourselves that awkward moments usually occur because we are unprepared.

No matter whether we are conversing with friends, family, or casual acquaintances, thoughtful preparation makes a big difference. This principle applies to those we have known all of our lives, as well as others we are about to meet. It makes no difference whether we are preparing to converse with the uneducated, mentally handicapped, impressive professionals, or heads of state.

When we schedule to attend special events, meetings, or parties, we easily emphasize dressing our best, but can ignore showing up in a way that helps us relate with others at our best, emotionally. To improve how we relate with others in conversation, we must set aside time for preparing the mind, so that we are truly ready to engage in meaningful conversation. According to Harvey Deutschendorf, an emotional intelligence expert, author and speaker, the following *seven* habits are key for building better relationships. They are relevant enough in conversation to list here.

1. Become a great listener
2. Ask the right questions
3. Pay attention to the whole person
4. Be consistent and manage emotions
5. Remember what may be important to others
6. Be open and share when the time is right
7. Be confident, humble, trustworthy, positive, and fun

Not listed, yet the number one golden rule is to *never* monopolize conversation. We must be watchful of our time-line when talking about ourselves and our own interests— as well as any subject-matter that we think may mesmerize our audience. Healthy conversation involves an interchange of comments, back and forth— akin to a slow game of table tennis. Additionally, healthy conversation requires the same navigational criteria we apply for carefully driving an automobile noted in Lesson 2C — e.g. paying attention to direction, as well as being cautious and courteous.

Effective, well-choreographed conversation necessitates an order of importance in our discussions: Warm questions to ask beyond, *"Hi, how are you?"* The way we think, the things we say, and the manner in which we say them does make a significant difference! We add more meaning to conversations by preparing to greet others warmly, and by contributing courteously and skillfully.

Learning how to prepare reminds us *that well-choreographed conversation doesn't just happen. Thoughtful preparation makes a big difference. We add more meaning to conversations by preparing to greet others warmly and contribute skillfully and courteously. When conversing, we must be careful not to talk too much about ourselves and our own interests. The way we think, the things we say, and the manner in which we say them does matter!*

By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.

Ben Franklin, 18th Century American Scientist,
inventor, statesman, printer, and philosopher. (1706 – 1790)

LEARNING APPROPRIATE CONVERSATION ETIQUETTE

Lacking training in the appropriate etiquette of meaningful conversation, people can easily approach it from a socially *deficient* standpoint, appearing rather self-centered, backward, or uncaring without realizing such behavior deficiencies exist. A less educated mode of understanding can also be misinterpreted by others as lacking attention, consideration, and friendliness. Asking meaningful questions and sharing the most valuable topics isn't always easy. Yet forgetting or not knowing to inquire about the significant events in other people's lives may seem cool or indifferent.

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12 Conversation Tips

1. Perhaps before meeting, share that you are studying *meaningful conversation* and explain your goals in choreographing conversation as part of practice and lesson homework.
2. Exchange cell phone numbers beforehand, in case either of you run late.
3. Ask the person to bring pictures of loved ones, as well as recent travels.
4. Be prepared, timely, alert, cautious, and courteous.
5. Above all, make sure you're not monopolizing the conversation. Being conscientious to ask questions and having a genuine desire to listen to other's input should lessen this problem.
6. Review and become familiar with this lesson's content to assure quality content and flow.
7. Watch for salient points to note and remember to discuss in future conversations.
8. Pay attention to the words brought up in conversation that can be associated with other subject-matter worth sharing. When we don't learn how to choreograph meaningful conversation, such association points are usually the driving force.
9. Remember that you are the student of meaningful conversation. Thus, do avoid being critical of what others bring or don't bring to conversations.
10. Memorize openings and comments you might consider in order of importance.
11. Memorize a reasonable repertoire of meaningful questions to ask.
12. Know that by eventually memorizing steps to conversation, applying them becomes easier.

Be sure to act respectfully toward other peoples' differences and sensitivities. Such communication requires us to be focused, open, and aware that some subjects could be toxic. When we understand how to communicate respectfully, our personal and professional relationships can more easily improve.

Lolly Daskal, CEO of Lead from Within, wrote an article in the January 2017 issue of INC Magazine explaining the common conversation mistakes noted below. Her full article, including effective ways to improve, can be found on the Internet at: https://www.inc.com/lolly-daskal/-do-you-make-these-dreadful-mistakes-in-your-conversations.html.

10 Dreadful Mistakes People Make in Conversation

1. Speaking but not really listening
2. Asking too many distracting questions
3. Rambling on and on with no end in sight
4. Not tasting your words before you spit them out
5. Acting confident but lacking confidence
6. Inducing an argument
7. Dominating the conversation
8. Endlessly interrupting
9. Sounding like a perennial expert
10. Speaking too fast

"Make a gift of your life and lift all mankind by being kind, considerate, forgiving, and compassionate at all times, in all places, and under all conditions, with everyone as well as yourself. This is the greatest gift anyone can give."

Dr. David Hawkins, psychiatrist, physician, spiritual teacher, lecturer. (1927 – 2012)

15 Steps to Meaningful Conversation with Friends and Family

1. **An Industrious Greeting—** Start conversations with an enthusiastic, "Hi, (person's name), how are you!" or "*Hi,* (person's name), *Good or Great to see you!"* If the other person says *"Great to see you!"* first, do consider reciprocating with the same words to avoid the appearance of one-upmanship. If a male/female interchange, and you think that *"Great to see you!"* may give the person the wrong idea, stick to *"Good to see you."*
2. **Concerns/Compliments—** If in person, look for anything different or unusually new about the way the other person looks. Complimenting a new hair style, weight loss, something striking they're wearing, a sizable bandage, or even a *"Thank You!"* for a gift they brought for you is a meaningful way to begin conversation.
3. **Health issues—** Ask about recent health problems or other concerns. This is when your note-taking can assist in prompting your memory of previous conversations or concerns you learned from other sources. Also, inquire about the health of other family member or mutual friends. Appropriate questions could include *"How've you been since your surgery?"* or "How's your mother doing since her accident?" Perhaps add encouraging comments as well.
4. **Appreciation/Thanks—** Consider *"Thank you!"* acknowledgements for any recent help, favors, courtesies, gifts, appreciations, and other gestures of kindness.
5. **Last Visit/Memories—** Ask or comment as to how long it has been and/or what you both did the last time you were together. If possible, have someone take a photograph while together for you to post on social media and to help you remember this occasion.
6. **Asking/Sharing Meaningfully about Others—** Ask and share worthy news about family and mutual friends/acquaintances, especially regarding significant issues, and events.
7. **Asking/Telling about Upcoming Events—** Consider asking and telling about upcoming events that the other person would enjoy hearing about or enjoy attending.
8. **Asking/Telling about Recent Experiences—** Consider asking and telling about recent events in your life or what you have learned, received, or shared that may be of interest to others. Highlight travels, movies, hobbies, sports, new restaurants or recipes, people who you have visited, as well as other experiences.
9. **Encouraging/Uplifting Comments—** If the person is having a rough time, emotionally, due to troublesome events in their lives, encouraging and uplifting help and support would certainly be meaningful. Perhaps interject motivational comments, or suggest counseling assistance as well as related self-help reading material.
10. **Weather Issues—** Whether ugly or beautiful, hot or cold, sunny or rainy, comments about the weather often spice up a conversation. Such comments can be mentioned whenever fitting, including the beginning or end of conversation.
11. **Holidays—** Mention holidays early on or whenever fitting in conversation. Inquire about others' plans, and close with a kind comment, such as *"Have a safe and pleasant holiday!"*
12. **News/Current Event Comments—** Current events provide interesting topics for conversation. Review the newspaper, Internet, and other resources. Major catastrophes or other eventful news may be shared early in conversation. Consider an appropriate time for sharing other local/national/international news, special restaurants, movies, sports, hobbies, etc.
13. **Humor—** Light-hearted comments may be appropriate at most any point in conversation, but shouldn't be offensive or too subjective. Consider sharing uplifting cartoons, jokes, or other entertaining comments.
14. **Close with Warm Comments—** While conversing, watch for a subject of value that is being discussed to refer back to in closing your conversation. Be sure to mention that you enjoyed the conversation and look forward to seeing or speaking with the person again.
15. **Define the Highlights—** Depending on the length of the conversation, defining the highlights may be cumbersome. To prevent overwhelm, excuse yourself for a brief pause at some point, and find somewhere quiet for reviewing and noting the highlights. Written notes not only assure a documented record, but also assist with memorization.

"Nothing that I can do will change the structure of the universe. But maybe, by raising my voice I can help the greatest of all causes – goodwill among men and peace on earth."

Albert Einstein: German-born theoretical physicist. (1879 – 1955)

Learning appropriate conversation etiquette reminds us *how deficient we may be in understanding, no matter whether we have a high school education or a PhD. A less educated mode of understanding may be misinterpreted as a self-centered, backward, or uncaring personality, suggesting that we lack attention, consideration, and friendliness. Understandably, learning appropriate conversation etiquette can improve our personal and professional relationships.*

PLANNING INTRODUCTIONS, STARTERS, AND CLOSURES

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Just as an introduction and conclusion can be the most difficult part of writing a paper, beginning and closing conversations can also be challenging. To ease the strain, compose and memorize a few all-occasion comments. When you are scheduled to attend a function that you know will include strangers, review what you have composed and memorized.

When entering a room where several existing conversations are in progress, scan the room for anyone still alone to start a conversation, rather than walking up to a group already conversing. Nonetheless, if you start conversing with someone and a third person comes up to you, be sure to bring them up to date on the subject of your existing conversation right away.

Below are a few beginning and closure ideas, both personal and professional. Do scan the Internet for additional ideas. A helpful networking link is https://www.themuse.com/advice/nonawkward-ways-to-start-and-end-networking-conversations.

Personal introduction/starter ideas:

Research tells us that the most effective way to strike up a conversation is a simple, *"Hello, how are you?"* You can also ask something relevant about the event, such as *"How's the wine?"* or *"Do you live locally?"* or *"Have you traveled very far for this event?"* A few introduction ideas may be:

1. *"Hi! I don't think we've met. I'm _____ and you are…_____?"*
2. *"Hi, I'm Jay Smith and this is my wife, Laura. We met the host and hostess at a fund raiser for cancer research, and you are …_____?"*

Professional introduction:

"Hello, I'm Jay Smith. I'm a sales rep for 1-2-3 Company in Chicago."
If the person doesn't respond quickly, ask: *"And you are…_____?"*

Possible additional questions or comments could be:

1. *What brings you here?*
2. *How do you know the host/hostess?*
3. *How long have you lived in _____?*
4. *Where are you from?*
5. *What are your favorite restaurants in the area? I like _____.*
6. *We certainly have lovely/had bad weather lately…*

Personal/professional goodbye ideas:

Say something related to what the person mentioned s/he would be doing after your visit, such as attending a picnic or seeing another mutual acquaintance, with perhaps *"Don't eat too much at the picnic!"* or *"Say hello to _____."* If a holiday is approaching, a pleasant goodbye would be to say, *"Enjoy the holiday!"*

Possible additional comments could be:

1. *Keep safe!*
2. *Good luck with _____!*
3. *Take care!*
4. *Have a good week!*

"To handle yourself, use your head; to handle others, use your heart."

Eleanor Roosevelt, an American political figure, diplomat, and activist who also served as First Lady of USA for twelve years. (1884 – 1962)

Planning for conversation starters and closures reminds us *that just like writing a paper, planning such openings and conclusions can be difficult. When we take time to compose and memorize a few simple conversation starters and closures, we have a better chance of meeting more people, relating well, and leaving a lasting good impression.*

IN CONCLUSION: Increasing Harmony in our Interactions

Learning to improve our conversation skills is an important part of our social education, considering that it is the main means in which we express ourselves. We no doubt strengthen our relationships when we learn to more meaningfully communicate. Yet, improving our skills requires significant educational direction and practice. Building such skills improves our sense of composure and connection with those in our immediate circle of friends and family, as well as those we encounter each day.

Lolly Daskal mentions in her INC Magazine article that conversation is like driving. *"We all want to think we're better than most people, but many of us fall prey to common mistakes and have room for improvement."* She tells readers that if you have dreadful conversation habits, do something about them, especially if you seek to have an impact, make a difference, and succeed in your endeavors.

Do you remember studying the multitude of pages in your Driver's Handbook as you prepared for your driver's test? The number of rules and guidelines that we all had to learn was overwhelming in the beginning, but most of us passed the test, received our license, and proceeded to drive in an educated manner. When everyone knows and follows the guidelines in the Driver's Handbook, we experience harmony on the roadways. Can we even imagine the chaos on the road if we didn't have to take a test and follow rules and guidelines?

Unlike the harmony of the roadways, many people lack knowledge about meaningful conversation guidelines and will be oblivious to follow your lead. Thus, as you learn to pay close attention and harmoniously interact with others, you will undoubtedly recognize their conversational deficiencies. As was mentioned earlier regarding your overall EQ study, you will need to remind yourself not to fault others for conversation skills they are lacking. Instead, perhaps share that you are studying about meaningful conversation in an effort to improve your skills, and maybe others will consider studying, too!

As you study this lesson and it's supplements, please remind yourself of the similarity with learning rules and guidelines for meaningful conversation and what you had to learn to harmoniously drive on the highway. Sure, you will experience some frustration as you study and begin applying your knowledge in conversation with others. Yet, similar to practice driving, meaningful conversation also gets easier with practice.

With this lesson and the myriad of other resources available, you will surely continue to improve the way you choreograph your conversations. There are a tremendous number of specifics to understand for improving conversation, so we encourage you to explore other resources. An excellent book to start with is *"The Art of Civilized Conversation"* by Margaret Shepherd.

On the Internet website, *ScienceofPeople.com*, a behavioral researcher named Vanessa Van Edwards, has shared a list of *Ten Steps to the Perfect Conversation.* Vanessa says that the art of sparkling conversation is one of the most requested topics at her website. Also, Dr. Loren Ekroth, a thoughtful leader in the field of conversation skills, offers free subscriptions to a weekly newsletter at his website, *conversationmatters.com*, that can also be very helpful.

In closing, remember that our conversation skills assist others in assessing our character and intelligence, as well as our attitude toward them. A lack of study and preparation can easily distort such an assessment. The more we understand about meaningful conversation, the more we are able to reveal a realistic picture of our true character and emotional intelligence.

"The real art of conversation is not only to say the right thing at the right time, but also to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment."

Lady Dorothy Nevill, English writer, hostess, horticulturist, and plant collector. (1826 – 1913)

NOTES



"You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you."

Dale Carnegie, an American writer, lecturer, and the developer of famous courses in self-improvement, salesmanship, corporate training, public speaking, and interpersonal skills. (1888 – 1955)

