

FREE FIRST CHAPTER

HOW TO TALK TO ANYONE LIKE YOU'RE AN EXTROVERT

The Magic Of Conversation

Discover The Secrets To Talking Confidently And Naturally To Friends, Family, Workmates, And Even Strangers — Chapter One. About a 18-minute read.

The 70-year-old family business was facing a serious crisis due to competition and wrong decisions made by the CEO who was in charge for the last twenty years.

The business climate was not good at the company, with cost cuts, lay-offs, and a high level of uncertainty and anxiety that affected everybody. John, the 32-year-old marketing director, was named for the CEO position. It was a big and stressful challenge, mainly because although he was a director, his uncle, the old CEO, never delegated real important tasks to him.

John felt quite insecure about making decisions and maintaining control. So, he did the next best thing: he sought the help of a big consulting company that had served the company for a long time. On the same day, three experienced consultants were there, helping him make a complete diagnosis of the situation—and giving him much needed security.

At the end of the second day of exhaustive analyses, talking to leaders, reading reports, and meetings, the consultants went to John's office. The young executive honestly asked them, "What does the situation look like? I am not prepared for the challenge because I was the marketing director, but my uncle did not delegate important things to me. I am confused and want you to tell me what I should do."

The consultants answered, "Simply take care of communication. Through your body language, words, and commitment to working with your staff and your partners, you will transmit peace of mind to everyone. Just talk to people and exchange ideas. The machinery will work efficiently because the company has all the conditions to overcome this crisis, and your staff knows exactly what to do."

Five years later at a meeting of businesspeople, John, the now experienced CEO, said: "It was the wisest advice I ever received. When you have a problem of any nature, rely on communication as the path to a solution."

That's it. There is no novelty here. What do leaders do? They talk all the time according to many studies I have read from the 1980s until now*. They do not have time to read, ponder over plans, reflect freely without interruptions, or make complex calculations. They just talk to negotiate, solve conflicts, motivate people, clarify strategies, brainstorm, and sell ideas. As a professor, I always put my MBA students in front of the class to present projects, and explain to them that leadership is mostly focused on oral communication.

Do you want to engage your team, encourage cooperation, reduce stress in the workplace, create a dream team, and establish a supportive network within and without the organization? Improve your communication. Do you want to grow, do more for your organization, and achieve success? Improve your conversation skills.

In fact, do you have any problems at work, in your family, or social life? Use your conversation toolkit because most probably the solution will be a good conversation, or at least it will be a great part of the solution. Well-developed conversation skills make you more productive, less stressed, and happier.

That's the theme of this book. It will discuss all the main aspects of personal communication, such as reading other people, cultivating the right attitudes, developing empathy, being alert about body language, and using your body to strengthen your messages. In summary, it will present information and ideas that can help you become an excellent communicator. If you want, the magic will happen.

I have worked as a consultant, Master's in Business Administration (MBA) professor, and trainer for the last five decades, observing organizational, business, and career dynamics. I interact with frontline workers, entry-level professionals, executives, and top executives, with special interest in business and communication, the areas of my master's and PhD degrees, respectively. I bring my readings and observations to discuss with you. It is not simply a book of techniques, but an invitation to sincere reflection that I hope can change your life.

What are your biggest problems and objectives today? Use your conversation toolkit, and the solutions will come. I hope to help you in this journey.

José Antônio Rosa, PhD. in Communication Sciences

Chapter One: The Magic Of Conversation

How Can You Harness The Power Of Speech To Become More Loved, Influential, Productive, And Happy?

Growing up, I was a serious and reflective boy, with little interest in playing with the gang. My preference was to stay at home or in other places where adults talked about their lives and everyday matters. One of my favorite speakers was my dad, the mayor of the small city where we lived.

One day, there was a failure in the water supply service in the city, and the entire population was temporarily without water. You know, in a small town, every inconvenience is the mayor's fault, from a meteor crash to a kid showing up with stinky feet. So, my father was to blame for the lack of water in the citizens' homes.

On that complicated day, he and I were at the door of the house when we saw that, in the distance, a VIP was coming towards us, furious. It was Alice, a successful and easily agitated merchant, who everyone feared, because she makes scandals and people hate them. "Whoa," I said to Dad, "I swear she is coming to kill you because of the water. How do we get outta here scot-free?"

"Well," he replied, "with the only effective and possible way for the moment: with a good conversation."

Then she arrived, with no "good morning," no "hi, folks," no good conversation opener. She attacked the problem directly with a high, furious voice. After hearing thirty or forty sentences, my father invited her to enter and take a seat.

My father just listened calmly with a caring expression, looking into her eyes. As the conversation progressed, she became calmer, more understanding, and more friendly. One hour after she arrived, a calm and smiling woman left our house — still without running water, but happy.

I later told my father that I swore he wouldn't be able to handle that stormy encounter. He replied, "It was easy-peasy, son. I'm good at it. That's why I am the mayor."

The main lesson I learned from this episode is that good conversation solves problems, improves people's understanding, and makes people happier.

So, want to have fun? Want to get along in the best way with other people? Want to solve your problems and help people solve theirs? Want to contribute to social peace? Want to lead and become your city's mayor? In short, do you want to grow in your social and professional life and increase your potential for success and happiness? Become skilled in interpersonal communications by studying, observing, and doing. Each challenge you overcome in practicing will bring a great return.

What Conversation Really Is

Defined in the simplest way, conversation is a sequential exchange of information, a turn-taking process*. As a guideline, be careful with your turns and respect others when talking. Many people these days are very eager to talk but unwilling to listen.

As "all men seek one goal: success or happiness," as posited by Aristotle*, conversation is a goal-oriented process where people try just to have fun or to share information, build

rapport, or persuade each other.

As conversation is a human process, objective rationality is just one aspect, but emotions are always involved*. Saying a "smiling hello" to the mailman makes you and them feel good. The emotional burden in conversations can vary greatly from situation to situation: from almost zero to a heart attack.

Your words can anger, disappoint, alienate, or sadden someone. Alternatively, you can and should also improve a person's self-esteem, self-confidence, optimism, and trust in life and in others; in short, you can improve people's happiness.

Two questions for you:

1. What was Alice's goal?
2. Why did father give her such a long first turn in the conversation?

During that time, I tried to guess it. Maybe Alice just wanted to scold someone to calm her fury. I knew something for sure: there were strong emotions involved. Now, I know that my wise father realized her goal, and I also understand why he gave her such a long turn in the conversation. She certainly wanted to pressure my father to solve the problem, but mostly she wanted to talk, because talking heals our wounds.

That's why, in all societies, ways were developed to let people talk. For example, religions usually have confessions in their traditions. There is also the Wailing Wall. Freudian psychotherapy, based on structured conversation, became known appropriately as the "talking cure"*. By allowing her time to speak, Dad let Alice calm down, control her emotions, and cure herself for the conversation to be successful.

The idea of talking cure brings quite a very important point, I want to share an experience with you:

During the end of the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s, I worked for a human resources (HR) consulting firm. At that time, many companies were downsizing, which meant there

were mass layoffs. Many of these companies offered support to the laid off people for career continuation, and I was part of a team that provided training for these people shortly after they were laid off.

Guess what the first part of the training event was? It was asking people to talk about their history, situation, and future. In that process, they understood their situation better, recovered part of their broken self-esteem and self-confidence, and acquired a glimmer of hope. I learned that it works very well for all kinds of groups: blue and white-collar, from different areas, regions, and ages.

One more important observation about what conversation is: when two people are involved in a dialog, in fact, there are more than two “people” on stage. Why? People have roles to play in their social lives. Conversation is always a role-playing process, which means it is impossible just to be yourself because your role will be present and influence the process*. Roles are sets of social expectations and rules we must adhere to in different social contexts to function effectively. Each person has many roles and personas expected to behave accordingly.

Dad was not just himself when talking to Alice. He was first and foremost the mayor, because that was the persona she came to see. He was also her friend, a man, and my dad (because I was there, watching the fight). Alice was a frustrated citizen, a friend, and a woman.

Even I, who was just observing, had my role as a curious son to respect. For example, I couldn’t take part, talk, or bother them.

Here’s the last observation about conversation for now: It is a powerful tool humans use to build “reality,” which means it is a process where people jointly construct meaning*. The result is reality—things as we see them socially, and also our singular view—things as we see them individually. It includes big metaphysical subjects: the purpose of life, who we are, and what is next. It also includes things pertaining to our daily lives: the role of the mayor, who Alice is, whether the boy should hear the conversation.

Provocative questions for you:

1. Who do you think you are? How many contributions from other people are included in your self-image?
2. How many years does it take a person to get rid of a painful self-image that their parents "constructed"?
3. How much of the image of person X or Y is just a perception created by you?

Have you ever asked other people who you really are in their eyes? We often don't want to know and prefer to maintain our illusory self-concepts. Or we are often embarrassed to ask. Both situations result in barriers to our complete self-knowledge and growth. Remember the ancient advice from the Oracle of Delphi, given by Socrates as one of the first steps towards personal excellence: Know yourself.

How To Talk Like A Pro

Conversation is a very complex process, isn't it? It involves people with varying skill levels, different values, emotions, roles, and momentary states. It is affected by the situation or context that brought the actors together, such as a water supply problem. And it is regulated by culture and other items of the broad environment—technology, economy, politics, laws, climate, and many more. Looking at the whole picture, it seems that we must be a mixture of artists with doctorates in Psychology to perform conversations with excellence, but it is far from this.

Remember that it is mostly a natural process, developed instinctively by humans over millennia. Therefore, the knowledge is already within you, and the mechanics of the skills are also there. You just need to reconnect with your inner master and artist. Expressed academic, common sense, and recorded knowledge will help you do this.

I asked my father what the most relevant rules for being "good at conversations" would be and researched the literature. I also added my 50 years of experience leading people, teaching, and training. The answer to "How to speak like a pro" will be endless because it is

subject to lifelong learning. But to begin with, let's discuss some of the most important points below.

Authenticity

Authenticity refers to being genuine, true to yourself, and expressing thoughts and feelings in a way that is consistent with your values and beliefs*. The authentic person reveals himself as a human being, even when performing his role. They do not try to pretend to be someone they are not; they don't pretend to have qualities they don't possess; they abandon any type of mask; they do not worry about exposing their status or importance; and they act as equals.

On the contrary, an inauthentic person tries to hide their true inner self, wear social masks, and tell lies about their thoughts, feelings, values, and important beliefs.

You cannot be fully authentic because you have to respond to the demands of the roles*. But you can be aware of the role and your true self and bring as much authenticity to the dialogue as possible. You can do this by reminding interlocutors who you are outside of your role. My father reminded Alice that he was a weak, stressed human being and her friend, at the same time in the role of mayor.

Connecting With Yourself And Others

Many times, people act or say things and then regret them. Why? Due to the demands of everyday life, they end up forgetting who they are, what they want, and what they seek to achieve in life. So, to do the right thing and have adequate speech, it is essential that the person be able to connect with themselves. Understanding your own thoughts, feelings, values, and beliefs—where they come from and how they affect you—is the first condition for connecting with yourself.

Ideally, in a conversation, both parties should have a clear understanding of themselves. But achieving a good level of self-knowledge is not easy. We tend to consider our thoughts, values, and beliefs as the truth, forgetting that they are the truth only for us. They are the

result of social education in the family, in groups, at school, and in culture, not universal and objective concepts.

We also consider our feelings as if they were part of us and not as momentary situations that can be controlled and changed. Like a Buddhist teaching says, they are running through our minds. If we don't grab them, they will pass away, like a cloud in the sky*.

Finally, our own experience also teaches, but at the same time, it conditions our opinions, making us think that the right ideas are the ones we have. This is where prejudices against people, behaviors, lifestyles, and more come from.

In addition to developing self-knowledge, it is essential to understand our interlocutors, their needs, emotional states, desires, and the roles they express in dialogue.

People also differ in their communication styles. Some people are more detailed in their speech, others are more succinct; some elaborate their ideas in a longer way, others are quick; some speak more, others speak less. Ultimately, everyone has their own way of communicating. A good communicator seeks to accept each person's style and flexibly adapt to it. As Stephen Covey said, "Seek first to understand, then to be understood."*

Finally, we need to help others get to know themselves better, too. In conversation, for example, you can remind people about their roles, the parties' common interests, and the shared core values. Just like my father did with Alice, remembering her role as a friend. As soon as he could speak, he said, "My dear friend Alice." This helped her connect with her inner being and also achieve the greatest authenticity possible.

Be Present, Here And Now

People can be in a state of absence while doing things in life, as ancient Greek philosophers observed, and modern researchers also claim. This is not being aware of yourself, not being aware of the situation or of the presence of others, and not being able to achieve plain attention. For example, is a parent really present in their child's soccer game, emotionally

and physically, or is there only the body while the mind is occupied with the shopping list? How about bumping into a dear friend in the store and not realizing you know them?

To achieve the highest levels of authenticity and effectiveness in communication, entering a state of presence or mindfulness is essential*. This means observing yourself, others, and the situation, abandoning disturbing ideas from the past, future, and elsewhere. It's taking control of your presence, here and now. It makes it much easier to control your emotions, gain mental clarity, and understand the relationship process.

Develop Empathy

If you really connect with the other inner being and enter a state of presence, empathy will arise; that is, you will think, feel, and see things like the interlocutor. This will be instinctively perceived by them, and a strong and natural positive response will appear. This creates a deep understanding between people. The good news is that empathy and sensitivity in general can be learned and developed. Anyone can learn to be more sensitive to the pain, needs, anxieties, and hopes of others. I meant that every person could learn to become a good person.

Practice The 3 Gs

Maintain a firm commitment to conversation excellence and to the 3 Gs: good intention, goodwill, and good manners. This means your sole focus will be on helping the dialogue process reach maximum efficiency. You will not use conversation to show power or personal importance, to show how interesting you are, to send hidden messages, nor to present veiled threats.

My father didn't react to Alice's emotional outburst, right? Instead, he just watched and let her fully express her feelings. If he had interpreted this as an attack on his personal worth or his authority as the mayor and responded in kind, the dialogue would certainly not have ended on good terms. Instead of being a reactive person who acts without thinking or like a

robot who won't abandon their programming, he changes the tone and puts it on the right track, which means he acts as a transitional figure, as Covey said*.

Action Steps

Here are some experiential exercises that can help you:

Difficult Conversation Analysis

Take a conflict situation conversation that happens at work or at home. Think about a) the roles involved, b) the emotions shown by people, and c) the actors' performances. After that, discuss with a sensible colleague or family member and draw conclusions about what could be improved in the conversation process.

Empathy Improvement Game

Take a person from your everyday relationship and list 10 things you think you know about that person's feelings and values. Make sentences like:

1. They hate this or that.
2. They love...
3. They believe in...
4. They don't want to be...

After making the list, talk to the person and ask about each item. Then, evaluate your success rate and discuss the matter with the person.

Take The Courage To Get To Know You

Let's do an experiential exercise that requires courage: choose the three most important people in your daily relationships at work and the three most important in your family. Ask them, "Tell me three things you think I am." Be emotionally prepared to listen. Then listen to the answers without commenting. You will reflect on them alone, later. Tell people that you will not comment on their responses.

Reflect deeply on the answers, considering that people are right because either you really are what they said or because socially you appear to be that. Remember that to others, you are only what you communicate. So, think about who you are and what you communicate.

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