



Let's Talk - Communicating in Conversations

You talk every day. In fact, you probably speak to a wide variety of people every day--your family and friends, boss and coworkers, customers, and casual acquaintances. Especially at work, people are drawn to coworkers who are positive and engaging. They avoid talking with someone who makes conversation awkward, uncomfortable, or depressing.

Why people may not listen to you

It doesn't take a genius to know when people aren't listening, but it takes a smart person to avoid turning listeners off. The following pitfalls are common:

Making it about you. You may want to talk about your problems, or you may want to share your opinions. Many people will pretend to listen and often find a way to leave.

Engaging in one-upmanship. Insecure people often try to make themselves feel better by showing off how much they know. This behavior is like wearing a sign that says, "I'm insecure."

Trying too hard to be right. Feeling the need to be right stops conversations. If being right is your point, you are not conversing; you're trying to boost your ego.

TMI-ing. Lazy speakers go on and on. They provide Too Much Information. That's much easier than organizing their thoughts and presenting them in a few words. Long explanations are usually unneeded and unwanted.

Interrupting to give your viewpoint. Your viewpoint may be important to you, but is it important to your conversation partner? Wait to be asked before giving your opinion.

Failing to listen. Being a good talker comes back to good listening skills. For a strong conversation, you must intently listen, read your conversation partner's body language, and understand the vibes the speaker gives off.

Being a smart talker

Whether your message gets across the way you intend depends on how you speak and what you say. Start thinking about these ways to have good conversations:

- Use correct words
- Manage your body language
- Control your voice tone, volume, speed and pitch
- Show confidence
- Ask appropriate questions
- Listen intently

Action: Review the list of listening pitfalls. Are you guilty of any of these? If so, which ones? How can you become a better conversationalist?

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Note to instructors: Communication is listed by employers as the No. 1 soft skill leading to success at work. For the next several weeks and into the new year, *Career Headlines will focus on communication skills*. Fifty lessons on communication are provided in *Job Ready Career Skills*, attesting to the importance of this topic. The ten lessons devoted to Speaking are shown below.