Exercise: The Art of Conversation Quick Write

Quick Write: Take two minutes and respond to these questions:

Do you think people enjoy engaging in conversations with you?

Do friends initiate contact with you, call you on the phone to chat, or ask for your advice?

Are you usually the one to end an interaction, or do you find people trying to escape from you while you’re still talking to them?

Becoming a good conversationalist is an art form. It involves learning a craft, but the good news is that it can be learned if we practice the skills used by good conversationalists. Typically, extroverts like to dominate the conversation with topics that interest them or with anecdotes about their own lives. Although these topics are stimulating to the speaker, they may be boring the audience to death.

If you want to get someone to like you, be interested not interesting. Here are tips for becoming an interested conversationalist:

- Ask questions about the person’s life or interests. When the person responds, play off the last comment with another question. Try to ask questions concerning information you’d like to know about the other person.
- Receive the information. Make mental notes of the responses someone gives you to questions as if you will have to repeat them at some point in the conversation.
- Use comparisons to talk about yourself in the conversation. When you want to insert something about yourself in the conversation, compare the similarities and differences between your lives, interests, and family to the information already given you by the other speaker.
- Be engaged with the other person by making eye contact. When we’re talking to someone, it’s important to be looking at the speaker, not the action that may be going on in other parts of the room—a gesture that makes us appear distracted. Try to respond to what is being said and avoid planning what you want to insert into the conversation on a different topic. Be fully present.
✓ Be aware of nonverbal communications. If you want to put the other person at ease, notice your own body language. For instance, crossing your arms over your chest tends to send a negative message whereas making eye contact, nodding in agreement, and overlapping hands in front of you indicates that you are open and listening.

✓ Use humor. One of the best ways to put someone at ease is to make a joke about your own discomfort in a social setting. Consider breaking the ice in a new conversation by telling a quick funny story about yourself. I often start conversations when I’m walking my dog who is overly friendly by saying, “If my dog had a Facebook account, she’d have 150,000 friends.”

It may surprise you that nearly half of the communication during a typical conversation occurs without spoken words. Oftentimes, actions do speak louder than words.