

COOL CONVERSATIONS!

by Carolann Philips

As the popularity and usage of Facebook and Twitter steadily increases, the ability to have a polite and interesting face-to-face conversation is soon becoming a lost skill. Electronic, impersonal conversations are however seldom instrumental in securing a job, negotiating a business deal or getting to know a life partner better! Conversation skills are a valuable tool for not only making a good impression but also reflect refinement, aptitude and confidence.

An ideal conversation is much like playing a game of tennis where there is equal opportunity for give and take, speaking and listening. It is an exchange of ideas and information. What then does it take to be a good conversationalist?

Begin by being relaxed. A relaxed person is a friendly person and this immediately puts others at ease. Smile pleasantly. If you are to interact with a stranger, use an appropriate greeting such as “Hello! My name is Carolann and I am Sarah’s neighbour. How are you?” This helps set the tone for an amicable exchange. Try to find something to admire in the other person – even if it’s as simple as their name. However, make the compliment as truthful as possible. Give exclusive attention to the person you are in conversation with. Maintain eye contact and show that you are listening by providing feedback, nodding or empathizing. Showing you understand the feelings of the other person is a unique quality of a good conversationalist. Reflect on the emotional content of what is

being said. For example, if your companion says, “I hate rain because the saddest thing in my life happened on a rainy day”, don’t say, “Oh! I don’t mind the rain. In fact, I love it!” Instead say, “The rain reminds you of bad memories?” Look interested and show that you are following the conversation. Focus also on the informational content. If she says, “I’m not used to this heat as I live in London”, it would be insensitive to respond with a comment such as, “Hmm. Have you seen Clash of the Titans?” Instead, say something like, “Yes. It’s turned really hot now. You live in London! What is it like to live there?” Minimize distracting mannerisms such as swaying to music or fidgeting with jewelry. This indicates a lack of interest in the other person’s words. Never rush the speaker and try to complete the line. Allow the person to finish what he or she is saying. Interrupting a conversation is extremely rude. Wait for an appropriate pause in the conversation if you wish to say something. It is often said that a good conversationalist speaks less and listens more!

When speaking, the golden rule to remember is to never speak uninterrupted for longer than a couple of minutes at a time. Avoid speaking of things that may be disagreeable or unpleasant such as politics, sickness, etc. Do not speak of anyone without, in imagination, having them overhear what you are saying. Refrain from arguments. Even if you do not agree, it is polite to acknowledge the other person’s point of view by saying something like, “That is a thought” or “Although I do not agree with you, it is a valid comment.” Ensure not to use absolute phrases such as, “You are wrong”, “I never...” or “Nothing like that!” Such comments not only bring the conversation to an end, but also may be insulting to the other person. Try not to repeat yourself and keep your comments relevant.

Keep in mind not to talk about yourself unless the other person shows a keen interest in knowing something particular about you. As you speak, ask open questions and encourage the other person to speak. This keeps the flames of the conversation burning. If you are in a group, do not whisper to those beside you when someone is speaking. It is also helpful to remember that using profanity undermines the quality of a conversation.

Conversing graciously is an artful skill that can be learned, practiced and perfected. Although this article does not cover all that there is to know, I hope it will serve as a guideline for more pleasant and fruitful discussions.

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Carolann has had the pleasure of delivering programs to a diverse clientele; from major airlines, leading banks, embassies, and reputed business houses to the modeling & fashion industry and royalty within the GCC. She is also a columnist for the 'Thursday' magazine, a local publication.