10 ways to have a better conversation | Celeste Headlee

eslvideo.com Quiz by: rmd

1. Celeste has noticed a big problem. What is it?

○ a.) Our politicians rarely agree with each other.

○ b.) More than ever before, people aren't listening to one another.

○ c.) Conversations too often become arguments.

2. Why is Celeste worried about teenagers?

○ a.) They fight a lot.

○ b.) Instead of talking with their friends face-to-face, they text each other.

○ c.) They aren't doing well in school.

3. What does Celeste do for a living?

○ a.) She's a teacher.

○ b.) She's a professional interviewer.

4. What does she mean about rule number one?

○ a.) Pay attention to the person or people you're with.

○ b.) If you want to get out of a conversation, start using your phone.

5. What does she mean about rule number two?

○ a.) Be willing to listen.

○ b.) Be willing to teach people what you know.

6. What does she mean about rule number three?

○ a.) Ask complicated questions, like, "Were you terrified?"

○ b.) Ask questions that start with who, what, when, where, why or how.

7. What does she mean about rule number four?

○ a.) Don't interrupt with every idea and story that comes to mind.

○ b.) For more exciting conversation, share ideas and stories as they come to mind.

8. What does she mean about rule number five?

○ a.) If you're not sure about something, guess - especially if you're an expert.

○ b.) If you're not sure about something, say you don't know.

9. What does she mean about rule number six?

○ a.) Tell people when something similar has happened to you. For example, if someone tells you about a wonderful experience they had, tell them about a wonderful experience that you had.

○ b.) If someone tells you about a wonderful experience they had, ask them open-ended questions about it.

10. What does she mean about rule number seven?

○ a.) It's best to repeat your main points in different ways.

○ b.) Make your point, and move on.

11. What does she mean about rule number eight?

○ a.) You are the most important part of the conversation, thus details are appreciated.

○ b.) Fewer details often help streamline a conversation and help it flow better.

12. What does she mean about rule number nine?

○ a.) We should listen to understand, not to reply.

○ b.) We should listen to what we say and how we say it. Words are powerful.

13. What does she mean about rule number ten?

○ a.) Don't ramble.

○ b.) Conversations are like clothes.

14. An important take away from Celeste's talk is that we have better conversations when we _____.

○ a.) speak so that people will want to listen.

○ b.) listen to understand instead of listening to reply.

Gap-fill

Complete the sentences using the words below.

Wordbank

interactions **sustain** **equate** **requires** **retain** **coherent** **brief** **expert** **assume** **concept**

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1. "Everyone you will ever meet knows something that you don't." I put it this way: Everybody is an â€‹_____â€‹ in something.

2. Again, â€‹_____â€‹ that you have something to learn.

3. All of this boils down to the same basic â€‹_____â€‹, and it is this one: Be interested in other people.

4. A conversation â€‹_____â€‹ a balance between talking and listening, and somewhere along the way, we lost that balance.

5. One more rule, number 10, and it's this one: Be â€‹_____â€‹.

6. Don't â€‹_____ â€‹your experience with theirs. If they're talking about having lost a family member, don't start talking about the time you lost a family member.

7. We've all had really great conversations. We've had them before. We know what it's like. The kind of conversation where you walk away feeling engaged and inspired, or where you feel like you've made a real connection or you've been perfectly understood. There is no reason why most of your â€‹_____â€‹ can't be like that.

8. It might sound like a funny question, but we have to ask ourselves: Is there any 21st-century skill more important than being able to â€‹sustainâ€‹ â€‹_____â€‹, confident conversation?"

9. A good conversation is like a miniskirt; short enough to â€‹_____â€‹ interest, but long enough to cover the subject.

Transcript

All right, I want to see a show of hands: how many of you have unfriended someone on Facebook because they said something offensive about politics or religion, childcare, food?

And how many of you know at least one person that you avoid because you just don't want to talk to them?

You know, it used to be that in order to have a polite conversation, we just had to follow the advice of Henry Higgins in "My Fair Lady": Stick to the weather and your health. But these days, with climate change and anti-vaxxing, those subjects -- are not safe either. So this world that we live in, this world in which every conversation has the potential to devolve into an argument, where our politicians can't speak to one another and where even the most trivial of issues have someone fighting both passionately for it and against it, it's not normal. Pew Research did a study of 10,000 American adults, and they found that at this moment, we are more polarized, we are more divided, than we ever have been in history. We're less likely to compromise, which means we're not listening to each other. And we make decisions about where to live, who to marry and even who our friends are going to be, based on what we already believe. Again, that means we're not listening to each other. A conversation requires a balance between talking and listening, and somewhere along the way, we lost that balance.

Now, part of that is due to technology. The smartphones that you all either have in your hands or close enough that you could grab them really quickly. According to Pew Research, about a third of American teenagers send more than a hundred texts a day. And many of them, almost most of them, are more likely to text their friends than they are to talk to them face to face. There's this great piece in The Atlantic. It was written by a high school teacher named Paul Barnwell. And he gave his kids a communication project. He wanted to teach them how to speak on a specific subject without using notes. And he said this: "I came to realize..."

"I came to realize that conversational competence might be the single most overlooked skill we fail to teach. Kids spend hours each day engaging with ideas and each other through screens, but rarely do they have an opportunity to hone their interpersonal communications skills. It might sound like a funny question, but we have to ask

ourselves: Is there any 21st-century skill more important than being able to sustain coherent, confident conversation?"

Now, I make my living talking to people: Nobel Prize winners, truck drivers, billionaires, kindergarten teachers, heads of state, plumbers. I talk to people that I like. I talk to people that I don't like. I talk to some people that I disagree with deeply on a personal level. But I still have a great conversation with them. So I'd like to spend the next 10 minutes or so teaching you how to talk and how to listen.

Many of you have already heard a lot of advice on this, things like look the person in the eye, think of interesting topics to discuss in advance, look, nod and smile to show that you're paying attention, repeat back what you just heard or summarize it. So I want you to forget all of that. It is crap.

There is no reason to learn how to show you're paying attention if you are in fact paying attention.

Now, I actually use the exact same skills as a professional interviewer that I do in regular life. So, I'm going to teach you how to interview people, and that's actually going to help you learn how to be better conversationalists. Learn to have a conversation without wasting your time, without getting bored, and, please God, without offending anybody.

We've all had really great conversations. We've had them before. We know what it's like. The kind of conversation where you walk away feeling engaged and inspired, or where you feel like you've made a real connection or you've been perfectly understood. There is no reason why most of your interactions can't be like that.

So I have 10 basic rules. I'm going to walk you through all of them, but honestly, if you just choose one of them and master it, you'll already enjoy better conversations.

Number one: Don't multitask. And I don't mean just set down your cell phone or your tablet or your car keys or whatever is in your hand. I mean, be present. Be in that moment. Don't think about your argument you had with your boss. Don't think about what you're going to have for dinner. If you want to get out of the conversation, get out of the conversation, but don't be half in it and half out of it.

Number two: Don't pontificate. If you want to state your opinion without any opportunity for response or argument or pushback or growth, write a blog.

Now, there's a really good reason why I don't allow pundits on my show: Because they're really boring. If they're conservative, they're going to hate Obama and food stamps and abortion. If they're liberal, they're going to hate big banks and oil corporations and Dick Cheney. Totally predictable. And you don't want to be like that. You need to enter every conversation assuming that you have something to learn. The famed therapist M. Scott Peck said that true listening requires a setting aside of oneself. And sometimes that means setting aside your personal opinion. He said that sensing this acceptance, the speaker will become less and less vulnerable and more and more likely to open up the inner recesses of his or her mind to the listener. Again, assume that you have something to learn.

Bill Nye: "Everyone you will ever meet knows something that you don't." I put it this way: Everybody is an expert in something.

Number three: Use open-ended questions. In this case, take a cue from journalists. Start your questions with who, what, when, where, why or how. If you put in a complicated question, you're going to get a simple answer out. If I ask you, "Were you terrified?" you're going to respond to the most powerful word in that sentence, which is "terrified," and the answer is "Yes, I was" or "No, I wasn't." "Were you angry?" "Yes, I was very angry." Let them describe it. They're the ones that know. Try asking them things like, "What was that like?" "How did that feel?" Because then they might have to stop for a moment and think about it, and you're going to get a much more interesting response.

Number four: Go with the flow. That means thoughts will come into your mind and you need to let them go out of your mind. We've heard interviews often in which a guest is talking for several minutes and then the host comes back in and asks a question which seems like it comes out of nowhere, or it's already been answered. That means the host probably stopped listening two minutes ago because he thought of this really clever question, and he was just bound and determined to say that. And we do the exact same thing. We're sitting there having a conversation with someone, and then we remember that time that we met Hugh Jackman in a coffee shop. And we stop listening. Stories and ideas are going to come to you. You need to let them come and let them go.

Number five: If you don't know, say that you don't know. Now, people on the radio, especially on NPR, are much more aware that they're going on the record, and so they're more careful about what they claim to be an expert in and what they claim to know for sure. Do that. Err on the side of caution. Talk should not be cheap.

Number six: Don't equate your experience with theirs. If they're talking about having lost a family member, don't start talking about the time you lost a family member. If they're talking about the trouble they're having at work, don't tell them about how much you hate your job. It's not the same. It is never the same. All experiences are individual. And, more importantly, it is not about you. You don't need to take that moment to prove how amazing you are or how much you've suffered. Somebody asked Stephen Hawking once what his IQ was, and he said, "I have no idea. People who brag about their IQs are losers."

Conversations are not a promotional opportunity.

Number seven: Try not to repeat yourself. It's condescending, and it's really boring, and we tend to do it a lot. Especially in work conversations or in conversations with our kids, we have a point to make, so we just keep rephrasing it over and over. Don't do that.

Number eight: Stay out of the weeds. Frankly, people don't care about the years, the names, the dates, all those details that you're struggling to come up with in your mind. They don't care. What they care about is you. They care about what you're like, what you have in common. So forget the details. Leave them out.

Number nine: This is not the last one, but it is the most important one. Listen. I cannot tell you how many really important people have said that listening is perhaps the most, the number one most important skill that you could develop. Buddha said, and I'm paraphrasing, "If your mouth is open, you're not learning." And Calvin Coolidge said, "No man ever listened his way out of a job."

Why do we not listen to each other? Number one, we'd rather talk. When I'm talking, I'm in control. I don't have to hear anything I'm not interested in. I'm the center of attention. I can bolster my own identity. But there's another reason: We get distracted. The average person talks at about 225 word per minute, but we can listen at up to 500 words per minute. So our minds are filling in those other 275 words. And look, I know, it

takes effort and energy to actually pay attention to someone, but if you can't do that, you're not in a conversation. You're just two people shouting out barely related sentences in the same place.

You have to listen to one another. Stephen Covey said it very beautifully. He said, "Most of us don't listen with the intent to understand. We listen with the intent to reply."

One more rule, number 10, and it's this one: Be brief.

[A good conversation is like a miniskirt; short enough to retain interest, but long enough to cover the subject. -- My Sister]

(Applause) All of this boils down to the same basic concept, and it is this one: Be interested in other people.

You know, I grew up with a very famous grandfather, and there was kind of a ritual in my home. People would come over to talk to my grandparents, and after they would leave, my mother would come over to us, and she'd say, "Do you know who that was? She was the runner-up to Miss America. He was the mayor of Sacramento. She won a Pulitzer Prize. He's a Russian ballet dancer." And I kind of grew up assuming everyone has some hidden, amazing thing about them. And honestly, I think it's what makes me a better host. I keep my mouth shut as often as I possibly can, I keep my mind open, and I'm always prepared to be amazed, and I'm never disappointed.

You do the same thing. Go out, talk to people, listen to people, and, most importantly, be prepared to be amazed.