

# Meaningful Conversations

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## Listen to Learn

### **Don't equate your experience with theirs**

It is never the same and it is not about you.

### **Talk less & focus**

"Most of us listen with the intent to reply." (Stephen Covey)

Don't multi-task: Taking in info and finding solutions are DIFFERENT steps.

### **Build empathy & emotional fluency**

Emotional vocabulary creates more understanding, not more emotion.

Look for the impact of your words and actions.

Expand your comfort zone: Read and experience feeling like an outsider.

### **Don't try to convince**

Stop with "but..." It rarely works anyway. Try, yes...and...

## Extend Better Invitations

### **Deeper & Open-ended Questions**

*Tell me something about your project/goals/trip/process/experience...*

*Can you tell me something about your story?*

*What aspect of your life/culture/ identity makes you the proudest?*

### **Ask for more & check-in**

*How so? And what else? Because? Can you tell me more?*

*What else do I really need to understand?*

*What was useful or important to you about this conversation?*

### **Avoid asking for the "most" or "best"**

*Can you share a high and a low about...?*

*What is motivating and what is bringing you down about this process/job...?*

## Reveal Yourself

### **Admit what you don't know**

*I don't know about that. I don't have any advice. I just want to listen and learn.*

*I grew up having more than enough, so I sometimes make assumptions about people who have less, but I am sure I have no idea what it was really like.\**

*As a straight person, I am sure I have some misinformation about gay people, but I am willing to unlearn it.\**

### **Be authentic**

People are more willing to talk about emotions and feelings than we imagine.

Build connections and trust first; Vulnerability and openness are essential.

Do not expect IMMEDIATE reciprocity: build a relationship

### **Imagine the other person has a hidden amazing talent**

Have things you want to discover: Be interested in other people.

"Everyone you meet knows something that you don't." (Bill Nye)

## MORE EXAMPLES:

### Open-ended Questions

*Can you help me learn to anticipate your needs so I can be a better host?*

*Tell me something about your project/goals/trip/process/experience...*

*Tell me something I could do to make this process more comfortable for you?*

*Could you tell me something about you that would help me serve you better?*

### Deeper Questions

*Can you tell me something about your story?*

*Are there things that I do that make you feel like an outsider at work?*

*In what ways does being White/Latino/Hispanic/African American/Asian/Native American/Pacific Islander etc. impact your personal life? Your professional life?*

*What do you value most in a friendship?*

*Tell me about your most important memories/values/ambition/interests?*

*Have you always felt respected at work?*

*Given the choice of any experience in the world, what would you want?*

*Is there something that you've dreamed of doing for a long time?*

*When was the last time you felt really listened to at work?*

*When was the last time you really felt effective at your job?*

*What is your most treasured memory?*

*What was your family like growing up?*

*Do you ever sing to yourself?*

*If you could retain either the mind or body of a 30-year-old, which would you want?*

*If a crystal ball could tell you the truth about yourself, your life, the future, or anything else, what would you want to know?*

*Is there something that you've dreamed of doing for a long time?*

*Why haven't you done it?*

## What if I say the wrong thing?

### Lead with empathy and clear intentions.

*I don't know if this is an unfamiliar situation for you or not,  
but I am going to do my best to treat you as a guest in my house.*

### Just apologize; don't explain.

Authenticity comes with some risk: take it. Mistakes are guaranteed.

Diverse groups do better work BECAUSE they take longer and interrupt assumptions:  
more meaningful conversations work the same way.

### Persist and Practice

The perfect thing to say to one person is the wrong thing for another.

**Rise to the level of your aspirations, not down to the level of your training.**

### References

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