

Connecting Through Better Conversations

Have you ever wished a conversation had gone better or planned for a future conversation, hoping it would go well? A new book from Heather Holleman, called “The Six Conversations: Pathways to Connecting in an age of isolation and incivility” speaks directly to our desire and ability to connect more deeply with others through better conversations.

Let’s start with the question “do I want to have better conversations?” Maybe your first answer is “my conversations are just fine,” and that may very well be true. Before you determine your final answer however, think about the last conversation you had where you felt loved, understood and connected to the other person or the group? Where you thought “WOW! That was a great conversation?” Now ask yourself, did you feel that the other person was genuinely interested in you? Liked and cared about you? Did you feel like the other person shared in the conversation and that a closeness was created? Great conversations are built on the vital fundamentals of interest, liking, caring and sharing. Like all skillsets, we can foster these conversational fundamentals through cultivating the following four mindsets:

- Interpersonal curiosity (“Be curious”)
- Positive Regard (“Believe the best”)
- Investment (“Express Concern”)
- Mutual Sharing (“Share your life”)

These mindsets help you learn the aptitude for positive conversations, those that include asking, complimenting, disclosing, encouraging, listening and inspiring. In the research world, these arts are aligned with the “closeness-enhancing behaviors” of openness, attention and involvement. Let’s look at these behaviors a bit more deeply.



Be Curious. So simple, and yet so important. Writer Dale Carnegie authored a book called “How to Win Friends and Influence People.” He found that “you can make more friends in two months being genuinely interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you.” How can you become more curious? Start with getting excited about all you can discover. Not sure how to start? Think about what would you ask if you were curious? Bob Tiede, author of “Now that’s a great question” suggests that if you are stuck, begin the conversation with the following: “I’m so curious. Tell me about _____.”

Believe the Best. Without believing the best, curiosity doesn’t become the superpower it can be. Your curiosity rings false, or self-serving if you do not have positive regard for your conversation partner. Imagine entering into a conversation with someone you feel judges or criticizes you, and think about your willingness to open up in that situation. If you need to practice, Bob suggests starting a conversation with “I’m so happy to be talking with you” or “I really enjoy connecting with you.”

Express Concern. Investing in your conversation, and your conversation partner means you are invested in the outcome, and you are investing time in the conversation because you care about what happens to the other person. Investment does not mean you take another’s problems as your own, rather that you

position yourself to be a support to others, care about them, and imagine your interconnectedness. Wondering how to do this? Find out what others are celebrating or concerned about?

Mutual Sharing. This may be the most challenging skill. Mutual sharing requires you to be vulnerable and share, in addition to expressing your interest in others. Be honest in answering the question “How are you today?” Be aware of what you are excited or worrying about. Sharing about yourself has the magical effect of making it easier for your conversational partner to share.

We all want to feel seen, heard, and understood. It is the core of our work around belonging. By practicing these skills, we can have more meaningful conversations, develop deeper, more satisfying relationships, and satisfy our biological need to connect. What might you do to improve your conversations today?