

Body Language

Behaviors To Avoid If You Want To Have A Powerful Conversation | By Laura Schwartz

Last month in TCW, I revealed that as a senior in high school I was—and this comes as no surprise to my friends or my friendly opponents on the Fox News Channel—voted Most Likely To Never Stop Talking. My high school alums and my audience today may view what I do as just talking. But I don't look at what I do as simply "talking"—I look at it as "conversing." "Talking," is just the rattling off of prepared points or gossip. "Conversing" is intriguing, it's investigative, it's discussing; it's a sharing of information and ideas.

Let's face it—if we can't converse in the workplace or at the restaurant, we're not going to find ourselves climbing any corporate ladders or even going out on a second date. Last month I wrote about four "talking" habits you need to avoid if you want to have a powerful conversation. Now I want to go over some other key conversational No-No's. Because whether you're at a "social" event or professional conference, you're on the virtual clock. Although your job may be 9-5, your career is 24/7, and as social as any event may appear...it's business.

ELEVEN CONVERSATION DON'TS:

1. Compliments

The color brown never looks good on anyone's nose. You can tell when people are sucking up to you, and you can be sure that they can tell when you're sucking up to them! Keep it simple, compliment on the obvious—such as a new dress or tie—but stick with just one compliment, otherwise it loses its charm.

2. Me Too

Slipping into the automatic "me too" response can be easy, especially when we're bored. It's also a way of adding something to the conversation when we either aren't listening or are unfamiliar with the subject. If you agree with someone on an issue or topic, increase your credibility by stating *why* rather than just saying, "me too."

3. Bad Breath

Anyone can suffer from the garlic chicken satay, but there's absolutely no bigger conversation killer than bad breath!! You don't have to walk around carrying a box of Tic Tacs in your handbag (so everyone knows where you are by that jingling sound). Just have a few loose mints in your pocket and use discreetly, when needed. Remember too, these are good things to share, so if someone asks you for one, be polite and give the minty goodness.

4. Small Spaces

Personal space is another consideration when trying to grab the attention of others. Captivating your audience is not the same as cornering a couple of office mates so they can't escape. Be respectful of everyone else's personal space—give them at least a foot.

5. Lack of Eye Contact

Keep it! Nothing is worse than when you're trying to have a conversation with someone who's constantly looking around—at everything but you! You have no choice but to think they're searching for someone better to talk to. Learn from others' annoying habits and keep your eyes in the conversation!

6. Gestures

Gestures are great—as long as you're not making them through your car window at 70 MPH. Hand gestures can reinforce your idea and peak others' interest. Just be sure not to point. Relax your hands, make open gestures and keep them in your space! Use them but control them—there's a fine line between gesturing and flapping like a bird.

7. Scowling

Even if you aren't a warm person, more people will be inclined to interact with you if you smile and look friendly. Remember, misery invites misery! Don't be a part of the bitter circle because no movers and shakers will want to join a negative bunch.

8. Fidgeting

Unless you're the only one sitting down and there's a bright light overhead, there's no reason to fidget. This includes bouncing your knee, playing with your hair, licking your lips, biting your nails—you get the point. These behaviors only make you appear nervous and send the wrong signals.

9. Cursing

When have you ever used an Andrew Dice Clay monologue to impress your boss? It's amazing how many people use curse words in the most inappropriate ways. Screen yourself and filter your mouth. If you want to strengthen your statement, do it with substance, not slang.

10. Gossip

So the office gossip cornered you in the middle of the event—no matter how much you may want to hear the juicy news, do not stay and listen—and do not share any information! Just call your friends in the mailroom the next day—they're the ones who know everything!

11. Knowing It All

Nobody knows it all so don't try to act like you do. Recall the guy in your class you never liked—the Know It All? Take a lesson from him and ask questions to those in your conversation when you're lacking information. People love to feel like experts, why not let them?

So, get out there and be voted the best conversationalist! If you can converse well, it will pay off in raises, promotions, friends, a date or maybe even a mate! ■



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