

You Too can be a Great Conversationalist

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Social skills are often learned in childhood. We quickly adopt a style of communication that accommodates our comfort level. Few of us actually consciously choose our communication style. ***Even if you have the communication skills of someone raised by wolves, you can learn to be an engaging conversationalist.*** It's true.

Learn to be confident and captivating:

1. **Be a great listener.** Listening is half of any productive conversation. ***If you master listening, you're halfway home.*** Give your full attention to the other person and the conversation.
 - Look at the other person. You're not paying attention if your eyes are elsewhere.
 - Show interest in what is being said.
 - Ask relevant questions. If you ask interesting questions, you might not have to speak much at all. Focus on open-ended questions. If you ask someone whether they like the color blue, the answer will likely be yes or no. But ask them about their favorite vacation, and they'll talk all night.
 - Some people love to talk about themselves. Just ask a few questions and step back.
2. **Respect what is said.** You don't have to agree with it. This isn't the time to judge or criticize. You can expect the same treatment in return. Use the conversation

as an opportunity to share and learn.

3. **Ask for their opinion.** Nothing is more meaningful to a person than the request for an opinion. *It says that you trust them and value their judgment.*
4. **Be current.** Stay on top of the latest news and trends. Have you seen the most popular, current movie? What did you think about it? Do you have an opinion on global warming?
5. **Practice with the most uncomfortable looking person within sight.** At large social gatherings, there's always someone standing off by themselves. They'll appreciate the chance to be part of the action. You'll also have a chance to warm up in a non-threatening situation.
6. **Relax.** No one expects you to have the skills of a talk-show host. Just be yourself and give your best effort.
 - *If you find yourself getting nervous, ask an open-ended question and use the time to regain your composure.*
7. **Have a pattern to follow.** Have a set of conversation steps memorized and you'll never run out of things to say. Here's one suggestion:
 - Say "hello" in your own way and comment on something they're wearing. It might be their cool glasses, watch, or the color of their shoes.
 - Next, make a comment about something, or someone, interesting in the room. Maybe the cheese dip is the best you've ever tasted, or the man in the red shirt looks just like the mayor.
 - Ask about their profession. Follow up with several additional questions.

What do they like the most about their job? How long have they been working there? Keep peeling the onion.

- Inquire about their education, hobbies, how they spend their free time. Find common ground and allow the conversation to continue naturally.
- If the conversation is dying, find your next victim.

8. **Give compliments.** For a compliment to be effective, it must be sincere. ***Even the least egocentric of us love to receive a heartfelt compliment.*** Try to give one, honest compliment per conversation. You might even have a few compliments thrown your way in return.

Are you ready to be the life of the party? ***Social skills can be learned and developed.*** You'll be surprised by how quickly you progress. Socializing isn't complicated. With a minimal amount of time and effort, you can see significant changes.