Last week we discussed about how to start a conversation. This week we will discuss how to take forward the conversation. This is the sixth instalment of the Guidance Note Series on "Developing Communication Skills".

Guidance Note Series 6
Developing communication skills

Amitava Basu



Introduction

To continue the conversation after starting it you need to begin with simple questions like, "What have you been up to?" or "How is your family doing?" Of course, the questions will vary with the person with whom you are conversing familiarity, relationship, age and the likes. The idea is to take what you learn during this brief talk and turn it into a conversation. To move from small talk into real conversation, you may keep the following four cardinal principles in mind.

Listen

Listen with sincerity to what the other person is saying and carefully observe how the person is responding to you. For example, if the person seems hesitant in talking on a particular topic that subject may be something with which he feels uncomfortable to converse.

You need to realise the response of the other person and adapt yourself to switch over to other topics that could be of interest to him. Like shuffling cards till you find the right one, keep looking for topics that encourage conversation. And, you will win.

Body Language

Watch the reactions of the person with whom you are conversing. If the arms are crossed or there is display of nervousness, then it is not the appropriate time to talk. Sometimes, conversations just make people nervous or the person could be mentally tied up on some other matter. Depending on the reaction, you can either request for some time later to talk or simply say sorry for taking time of the person.

It is important that you pay close attention to "how" the person communicates and not just what he says.

Dealing Questions

If it so happens that questions become the main part of the conversation, you need to turn this around. How to do it?

Answer a question and share more of yourself so it can lead into a good conversation. For instance, someone asks about your studies, you should reply to the question, but then lead into how you would like to have more time for your hobby. Do not be shy of disclosing a little more of your personality your interests, opinions, likes and dislikes. The more you do, you find ease in progressing the conversation.

Wrap Up

And, if you still find that the conversation is not progressing far, just end it politely. There is no pint in tying up time that can be better spent. But do not get disappointed. Actually, you have laid the groundwork for your conversation with the person for next time. The next time you speak with the person you can talk about why you had to rush off or ask how the rest of his day went.

A Caution

Finally, there is a word of caution. Small talks usually tend to become overtly polite and boring, but you can avoid this if you try to follow these four rules. Try out and see the result!

Quotes

"Education is the knowledge of how to use the whole of oneself. Many men use but one or two faculties out of the score with which they are endowed. A man is educated who knows how to make a tool of every faculty--how to open it, how to keep it sharp, and how to apply it to all practical purposes."

-- **Henry Ward Beecher**

"Mentoring is all about people -- it's about caring, about relationships and sensitivity. As it becomes increasingly in vogue it is becoming too formulated -- concerned with performance metrics, critical success factors, investment and spending. It'll be a disaster."

-- **Rene Carayol**