

UNIVERSITY *of* WASHINGTON

Total Talent Management

Moving the Conversation Along

BE BOUNDLESS



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Moving the Conversation Along



Initiating a conversation is one interpersonal skill, maintaining it is another. An engaging and effective conversation is one that “flows” and “goes forward.” To be able to keep a conversation from being stuck, it’s best to know techniques in moving a conversation along. In this module we will discuss techniques like asking for examples, using repetition, using summary questions, and asking for clarity and completeness.

Asking for Examples

One way to get a conversation partner to elaborate on what they are sharing with you is to ask for examples. Examples make a specific general statement, and give an insight on the particulars of a disclosure. It can also serve to illustrate principles shared, or personalize an experience.

The following conversation excerpts illustrate how asking for examples can move a conversation along:

Excerpt 1

Person A: C.S. Lewis is one of my all-time favorite writers.

Person B: C.S. Lewis? I am not familiar with his work. *Could you give an example of what he has done?*

Person A: Well, he wrote the Chronicles of Narnia. It’s a children’s series with seven books. I find it very inspiring.

Excerpt 2

Person A: This is a great company to work for. They really care about their employees.

Person B: *In what ways do they care for the staff?*

Person A: Well, their medical aid program is a good example of how they prioritize health and security. All ABC Company employees are registered with a private insurance firm from their first day of work.

Person B: Wow. That’s very generous. *In what other ways are they employee-oriented?*

Person A: The staff members are also scheduled for an annual week-long retreat, all expenses paid for by the company.

Using Repetition



Questions are not the only powerful tools that you can use to keep a conversation going. Repeating certain words, phrases, or even statements that

a person discloses to you can also maintain the momentum of your talk, or urge it to a new direction.

In what way can repetition keep a conversation going?

Repetition can be a way of saying “*please go on*” or “*tell me more.*” It is a technique of acknowledging that you have heard what the other person said, and or something about their disclosure has picked your attention. It is an encouragement for them to elaborate.

Repetition is also a way of focusing a conversation on an interesting aspect. Your choice of what word, phrase, or statement to repeat will signal to the other person what you’d like to hear more about. One way you can use this technique to your advantage is to repeat a word, phrase or statement that you feel has a lot more story to it. You may also zero in on what you think the other person likes to talk about more, or what you yourself find intriguing.

Lastly, repetition can also be a way of communicating your reaction to what the other person said. Varying the intonation and pitch of your voice can inject your repetition with emotions of surprise, shock, excitement, or confusion.

The following conversation excerpts illustrate how repetition can move a conversation along:

Excerpt 1:

Person A: Mark and I have been married for 40 years now. We’ll be renewing our vows in April.

Person B: *Forty years.*

Person A: Yes. Amazing, isn’t it? It wasn’t always easy but we made it through. Very few people who married the same time as us are still together now. I know am one of the lucky ones.

Excerpt 2:

Person A: I can’t believe it! The guys threw me a surprise party.

Person B: *The guys threw you a birthday party.*

Person A: Yes! It really made my day.

Note that in repetition you don’t necessarily have to repeat the same exact phrase. You can make changes necessary to make the repetition more effective.



Using Summary Questions

Another way to keep a conversation moving is to summarize what has been discussed, or what you heard from the other person, every now and then.

A summary can communicate that you are really listening, and that you have taken stock of everything the other person has said. More so, it gives a sense of movement to the conversation, because summaries say that one part of the conversation is over, and that it’s time to move on to another part.

Note that in repetition you don't necessarily have to repeat the same exact phase. You can make changes necessary to make the repetition more effective.

The following conversation excerpts illustrate how summary questions can move a conversation along:

Excerpt 1:

Person A: I'm really geared up for this coming marathon! I changed my diet, hired a trainer, and I've been practicing 3-4 hours a day. I've never felt more in shape; I feel that I have a real shot at winning this!

Person B: *You're really invested in this marathon; you really think you have a chance to win?*

Person A: Yes. Amazing, isn't it!

Excerpt 2:

Person A: I want this project to be the one of the most successful for this trimester. We've had a run of bad luck the past month, and we need a big break to recoup it all. Judging by the projections the accounting department made, I think we're right on track!

Person B: That's great! How can I help?

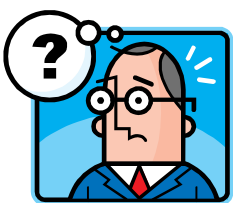
Person A: We need a design person. You're good at art, right? Can you make us a logo?

Person B: Sure. Just give me the specs you want and I'm on it.

Person A: And a pamphlet as well? One that has all of the company colors in it. Same with the logo!

Person B: No problem. *Let me see if I understood you right. You need a pamphlet and a logo with the company colors in it. Is this correct?*

Person A: That's it. Thanks!



Asking for Clarity and Completeness

Here's another way of moving a conversation along: asking for clarity and completeness.

It is important to verify your understanding of a communication, and see if you have accurate and or complete information. Often, a speaker presumes that he or she is understood, and therefore tends to miss on certain details. They may think that they have the same frame of reference with the other person, and consequently does not need to expand on the meaning of their statements. At times, intense emotions, like excitement can result in lack of clarity and completeness in communication.

Asking for clarity and completeness can give your conversation depth and richness of idea. It can also communicate your sincere desire to understand what the other person is saying.

The following conversation excerpt illustrates how asking for clarity and completeness can move a conversation along:

Excerpt 1:

Person A: My 7-year old daughter wants to become an actress! She's been begging me to enroll her in this intensive acting community workshop, but I'm afraid it will just spoil her.

Person B: *I don't understand. What do you mean by 'it will just spoil her'?*

Person A: You know...I think it will indulge her too much. I want her to grow up disciplined by school and household chores. I don't want her to be like many young stars nowadays, who doesn't seem to know what's real and what's not.

Person B: *I think I understand what you mean. Are you saying that she'll miss the normal demands of everyday that keeps people grounded?*

Person A: Exactly!

Further Study

To learn more about interpersonal skills, consider our in-person offerings such as, [Building Better Teams](#), [Courageous Collaboration](#), [Increasing Your Influence](#), and [People From Pluto: Effective Communication Strategies](#). Further trainings to develop Interpersonal Excellence will be shared here in the Leadership Café, on all of the [Competency Guide](#). Subscribe now to [The Learning Lab](#), an online platform featuring Business Skills & Productivity, Leadership Development, and Office 365, powered by Skillsoft Percipio and customized for UW learners.