THE LITTLE GUIDE TO
AMAZING CONVERSATION
The Art of Sparkling Conversation

Conversations are like sports.

Just like football or soccer, you hone your conversational muscles. You train for difficult topics. You re-play miscommunications in your head.

And just like elite athletes, you need a conversational game plan.

How can you make dazzling conversation with anyone you meet? How can you get business and connections and dates out of your meetings? I want to show you that there is both an art and a science to effective communication in this step-by-step guide to awesome conversation.

Let’s do this!

Vanessa | Science of People
Conversations Matter

The Goal: Conversation is the key to connection. It helps us get to know someone, build relationships and understand inner passions and desires.

The Problem: Too many of us get stuck in the awkward pattern of going to an event and not being sure what to say or do.

The Solution: The Science of Conversation can be used in any situation: professional—networking events, business meetings, with colleagues, romantic—dates, flirting and social—parties, new friends.
Step #1 Intention

A conversation without a game plan is like driving without a map. Before any social interaction, set your intention, know your crowd and do your research. Answer the following:

- **Who**: Who is hosting the event?
- **What**: What kinds of people are going?
- **When**: When is it and what’s the schedule?
- **Why**: Why are you going?
Step #2: Openers

What is the best conversation opener you have ever heard?

What is your go-to conversation starter?

The hardest part of a conversation is the opener, but don’t worry:

• First, research has found that the most effective conversation starter is a simple “Hello, how are you?”

• Second, use context to help. Ask how the wine is or comment on the venue.
Step #2: Openers

1. Hey, how are you? I’m ____.
2. So, what brings you here?
3. How’s the wine?
4. How’s the food?
5. So, how do you know the host?
Step #3: Sparks

The most charismatic people look for conversation sparks. They bring up topics, look for ideas and ask questions that spark energy or get the person excited. Keep the conversation going and avoid lulls or directionless chitchat. Try:

• Have any big vacation plans coming up?
• Tried any new restaurants lately?
• Working on any personal passion projects?
1. What are your favorite restaurants around here?

2. Keeping up with ___sport recently?

3. Working on any exciting projects?

4. What a beautiful/cool/ugly/bizarre venue. Have you been here before?

5. Did you see that viral _____ YouTube video? It was all over my social media today.
Step #4: Eyebrows

Here’s a fun one: The eyebrow raise

Across cultures, the eyebrow raise is what we do when we hear or see something interesting.

When you see someone do it in conversation, it often means you have said something engaging or brought up a topic that piques their curiosity. The eyebrow raise is the physical indicator of a spark. It clues you in to a topic that they might like discussing.
Step #5: Stories

Stories are incredibly powerful.

Here’s why:

• When you tell a story, your brain syncs up with your listener.

• Stories capture the imagination

• No one has heard your stories before. Since they are unique to you they cause sparks that make you memorable.
I have a story about the power of stories:

I was listening to the Tim Ferriss podcast and his special guest was professional climber, Jimmy Chin. Jimmy was asked to give advice to first time climbers. At first he was giving general advice and listing off gear. Then he started telling a story of his first time climbing.

As soon as he started the story, I was sucked into it. I leaned in, gasped at the surprises and held my breath for the ending. Not only did the story mentally capture me, I also felt a *physiological response* while he told it.
Step #5: Stories

- What are your favorite stories to tell?
- What is a story you can tell to back up a claim?
- How can you answer in anecdotes?
WARNING

Stories are great, but don’t be a conversational narcissist.

Make sure you do equal talking and listening by asking for their stories as well.
Step #6: Reciprocity

One of the biggest deal breakers in conversation is a little something called “Conversational Mooching.”

You know when you ask someone a question and they answer, but don’t ask you back? Like you ask them where they are from and they say “New York”.. and then silence. We expect reciprocity in conversations.

• When we share something, we want someone else to share something.

• When we ask a question we want them to answer and ask us back.

• Be sure you are not a moocher and give back as much as you get.
Don’t Be a Conversational Moocher

• When someone asks you something, ask back!

• If you told a story, ask for theirs.

• If you tell a joke, ask if they have heard any good ones recently.
Step #7: Stop Using Social Scripts

Did you know? The best things happen outside of your comfort zone.

Here’s my challenge for you:

Start asking the questions that matter.

Be bold.

Have more quality conversations and less quantity conversations. It’s refreshing to talk about more meaningful areas of our lives.
Step #7: Stop Using Social Scripts

Here are some ideas:

• What makes you happy on a day to day basis?

• If you had to pick any character in a book, movie or TV show who is most similar to you, who would you choose? Why?

• What’s your biggest regret?

• When you were growing up, what was your dream job? Is any part of that still true?
Step #8: Add Value

Leading psychologist John Dewey discovered one of the most fundamental aspects of people. He found that there is one thing that every person on this earth wants:

*To feel important.*

Once someone has the basics of food and shelter all they want is to feel cherished, valued and worthy. When we are interested, we are more interesting!

- **Psychology:** If you can make someone feel important by valuing their opinions, time or feelings, and being interested YOU will be attractive and interesting to them.

- **Challenge:** Next time you are at an event or out with a friend approach all conversations with one goal: Make whoever you are speaking with feel valued.
Step #9: Protoconversations

Research has found that at a minimum, 60% of our communication is nonverbal with some studies finding up to 93% of what we communicate is not the words we say but how we say those words.

I call the nonverbal part of a conversation the Protoconversation, since it is happening behind the words.

The Question is: How can you use your body to increase engagement and have awesome conversations?
Step #9: Protoconversations

- **Keep your toes pointed towards the person speaking.** I know this seems silly but our brains pick up on people’s foot direction and use it to gauge interest. As you are listening to someone, you can make them feel valued by keeping your toes and torso pointed at them as they speak. It’s kind of like nonverbally telling them, “I’m with you! I hear you! Keep going!” And that is the best compliment you can give someone.

- **Use a triple nod.** Studies have shown that people will speak 3 to 4 times longer if you do three slow nods in a row when they have finished speaking. It’s like a nonverbal ellipses (think ‘…’). So, when someone finishes their statement, look them in the eye and nod three times as if to say, “keep going.” They often will continue and you end up having a much deeper conversation.

- **Commit to total engagement.** I’m totally calling you out on your fake trip to the bathroom, pretending to check your very important email or looking over their head as you talk to them to see who might be more interesting. Stop it!
Ready for an advanced technique? This one is called ‘Bookmarking.’

The bookmarking technique is when you add markers or emphasis to a certain part of the conversation that can create a deeper connection. Bookmarks are verbal markers you say to make it easier to follow-up or have something to talk about in the future.
Here are three easy ways to bookmark:

• **Future Mentions**: Let’s say you are talking about conferences and someone mentions they are going to the same one as you in a few months. If you like the person, you can ‘bookmark’ it by saying something like, “I’m headed there as well, we should get coffee after one of the sessions.” This is a bookmark that you can follow up on later.

• **Inside Jokes**: These are my favorite—they are very rare but are lovely when they happen. Let’s say you are chatting with someone and something interesting or funny happens. You can create a bookmark and then mention it to repeat the laugh again later.

• **You Have to See…**: Sometimes you can bookmark with a follow-up mention. I often bring up books, videos or articles I like to people while speaking to them. If they give me an eyebrow raise and seem interested I will bookmark it by saying, “I’ll be sure to Tweet you the link so you can check it out!” I love doing this because I get to share something I like and they will often send recommendations back to me.
Step #11: Exits

You’ve started a conversation, sparked stories and gotten to know each other—now you have to end it. Sometimes the art of the last impression is just as hard as nailing the first impression. Exit gracefully with your bookmarks (step #8):

• **Future Mentions:** “Well, I can’t wait to see you at that ____ coming up—I’ll email you!”

• **Inside Jokes:** “It was great laughing with you. I’ll be sure to ____ in the future ;)”

• **You Have to See:** “I’ll be sure to send that link your way, great talking to you!”
Step #12: The Post-Mortem

I know after an event or date you can be tired and all you want to do is flip on some Netflix and call it a night. But, take a few minutes to do a post-mortem.

This can be in your head as you drive home, talking with a spouse or roommate or writing in a journal. Answer the following three questions:

• What went well tonight?

• What did I learn?

• Who should I follow-up with?
Step #12: The Post-Mortem

The art of conversation is a skill—you have to keep learning and honing your ability. Your post-mortems can help you identify patterns and remember to follow up on bookmarks, LinkedIn connections and promises.
Each generation has a unique communication style. Here are some tips for communicating with each one:

- **Gen Z (born after 2000):** Get right to the point and use their preferred mode of communication. Shoot them a text? Send them a Gchat or Facebook message? You get the idea—go where they already are.

- **Millennials (1980-2000):** Ask their opinion, value their ideas and let them help construct the solution with you.

- **Gen Xers (1965-1979):** This group values shared responsibility. Address their needs and take pressure away from them.

- **Boomers (1946-1964):** Respect should be paramount. Boomers want respect from their younger counterparts, and they fear losing the traditions they hold dear.

- **Silent (born before 1946):** Let them communicate with you however they want. Listen and learn.
Whether you’re talking to someone you just met, getting to know a 
colleague better or learning more about your parter, your 
conversations can be dynamic and sparkling.

Here are my fave conversation starters for:

- Strangers
- Acquaintances
- Friends
- Partners
Stranger Conversation Starters

1. Have you been to an event like this before?

2. What was the high-point and low-point of your day so far?

3. What did you think of the speaker/presenter?

4. Tell me about you.

5. How do you know the host?
1. What personal passion projects are you working on right now?

2. What was the highlight of your week?

3. Is this your busy season? Is this a busy time for you?

4. Given the choice of anyone in the world, whom would you want as a dinner guest?

5. What are you up to this weekend?
1. What do you value most in a friendship?

2. Would you like to be famous? In what way?

3. What would constitute a perfect day for you?

4. Name 3 things you and your friend appear to have in common.

5. For what in your life do you feel most grateful?
Partner Conversation Starters

1. If you could wake up tomorrow having gained one quality or ability, what would it be?

2. What is the greatest accomplishment of your life?

3. If you could change anything about the way you were raised, what would it be?

4. Is there something you’ve dreamt of doing for a long time? Why haven’t you done it?

5. What is your most treasured memory?
Want to dig a little deeper?

Learn how to inspire, influence and engage people in this life-changing 30-day program. If you want to succeed in business, life and love you need to master the science of interpersonal intelligence.

Master Your People Skills
Congratulations! You are well on your way to having sparkling and dazzling conversations with everyone you meet. I’m doing a happy dance in your honor!

Conversation is the heart of connection. Be interested, abandon social scripts and dig deep with the people you meet.

Refer to this little guide before your next networking event, party—anytime you need a little boost to get your conversational juices flowing!

xoxo, Vanessa