

Contributing Good Information To Conversation

If we are well-informed, then the goal in conversation is to select subjects in which all those taking part have an interest. When two people meet, the overlapping of their experiences produces subjects for conversation. Mutual experiences develop interest. How enjoyable it is to talk to someone who visited Mexico last summer as you did! What fun it is to talk to someone who is interested in fly-casting, as you are! So, the good conversationalist is, first, well-informed, and, second, one who chooses from his information a subject that is interesting to the person or persons to whom he is talking. The technique of a good conversation begins with the selection of a topic in which you believe others have an interest. Then, make a sincere effort to determine if others participating in the conversation are really interested. Finally, if they are not interested and cannot participate, change the subject to something in which the interest is more general. A conversation must not be one-sided; everyone participating must contribute information and interest. Conversation can be improved if those taking part will contribute good information and ideas. Just because you know a lot about a subject does not insure a successful conversation. Those concerned must correctly choose appealing topics to make a conversation interesting. The selection of what to say in a conversation is a different kind of skill from those discussed above. It requires making a choice between the things that are available to say. How can your choices be improved? Draw others into conversation with topics of interest to which they can contribute. Contribute materials that are needed to bring others into the conversation. Suppose the subject is fishing, and the group has been concentrating on salt-water fishing. If you know that one of the group fishes mainly in Minnesota's freshwater lakes, you might ask: "How does this compare with fishing in Minnesota, Harry?" Contribute what you believe to be your special knowledge. Perhaps in Maine last summer you learned some special information about whaling customs from an old sea captain. Such new information should appeal to the group. Answer the questions asked of you, but keep your answers short. For example, someone might ask, "Didn't you catch big bass up in Michigan last summer?" Answer the question but do not go on and on, putting in all the details. Give someone else a chance to talk. Contribute ideas and information on the conversation at hand. Change the subject only when the group will benefit. If the subject is fishing, do not abruptly shift the topic to sailing unless you ask permission of the group to do so. You might say, "If you don't mind, I'd like to shift the subject of conversation to sailing." When stating an opinion, give your reasons for holding such an opinion. There is nothing more deadly to conversation than the person who is "for" or "against" something but will not say why. He may say, "I do not believe in having any fish and game laws." When asked why not, and told that this might lead to a serious shortage of fish and game, he simply says, "I'm just against them, that's all." This refusal to clarify is harmful to constructive conversation. If these suggestions are kept in mind when talking to others, you will find that conversation can be a very enjoyable pastime.

About the Author

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