

5 Psychological Hacks to Make You a Better Business Conversationalist

Becoming a better business conversationalist means approaching your conversations like a master craftsman.



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November 21, 2018

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Relationships are the lifeblood of business. You know this as well as I do -- without building relationships with people, you're not going to do well in business.

Building that capability takes time, though. It's not easy and it doesn't come naturally for everyone. I've had to work at it, and so do you -- it's a lifelong process.

Becoming a better business conversationalist means approaching your conversations like a master craftsman, constantly figuring out a better way to do things or a better way to relate to the people you come in contact with.

It takes effort. It takes consistency. And it takes a willingness to learn from your mistakes.

There are shortcuts you can take, though. Psychology has opened up the human mind to us, and business leaders have found ways to be better at conversation by applying some of those insights to their [networking](#) and business meetings.

I've had success with these tips, and you can, too:

1. Keep notes when you meet people.

This sounds simple, and maybe not very psychologically motivated, but there's a reason for it.

One of the keys that's brought up [over and over again](#) in conversation help articles is asking follow-up questions. When you're in a conversation, keep an eye out for things you can ask follow-up questions about.

Find things that seem like they're important to that person. For example, if you're in someone's office and it's decorated with sports memorabilia from her alma mater, you know she's deeply loyal to that sports team. Ask questions about it.

Or maybe you're in conversation and the person mentions taking his child to soccer practice. You know he has kids -- ask about his family! Show an interest, and make it genuine.

Then after the conversation, jot down a couple of notes somewhere on what that person likes, what he or she is into at the moment, and any ongoing projects that were mentioned.

We like to be appreciated, and we like to be listened to. Jotting down those notes will help cement some things in your mind that will show that person when you next meet them that you were actually listening, not just nodding your head and playing along.

Even just the act of taking the notes will help you remember the information. If you have a chance to look at it before meeting with that person next, so much the better. But, you're already better off.

2. Openly admit when you don't know something.

This tip should be used in moderation -- sometimes I've had to hold my tongue until I could dig into something a bit more -- but this is a key to getting someone to open up.

We love to talk about ourselves. If you find something that's obviously an interest for the person you're talking to and you don't know much about it, don't be afraid to say, "I've never heard of that. What is it? How does it work?"

You can often learn more about the way someone thinks by asking them a question and letting them educate you than you can in a back-and-forth conversation.

3. Use the power of personal favors to your advantage.

Doing something for other people or having them do something for you is a powerful tool, and one that can charge up your business in ways you might never have expected.

Asking for favors and offering favors to people in conversation makes your relationship stronger. For example, asking someone to do something small (like hold your jacket for a second) while you're working on a deal can actually make them better-disposed toward you, in an example of what's called the [Ben Franklin effect](#). People who have done you a favor already, even a small one, tend to like you a little better and be more likely to accommodate you in the future.

4. Be genuine -- always.

Everybody knows the "used car salesman" type. You can probably think of someone who fits that description -- I can for sure. That oily, pushy, overly friendly sort of person who tries to get close to you, but always seems like he's in it for himself.

Famed entrepreneur [Gary Vaynerchuk](#) notes that there's a dark side of sales that's easy to give in to: "It's the temptation to do whatever it takes to make the sale even though it might not be good for the customer. It's the side that doesn't care about repeat sales, and only goes for short-term conversion ... I honestly believe that a great salesperson is the pinnacle of human behavior."

Good salespeople are not like that.

Vaynerchuk's idea of a salesperson is someone who's about doing what's best for the customer -- and ideally it's a win-win. If people want to walk away, he'll let them. There's no point in trying to convert someone who has real reasons not to want what you're offering.

When it comes to business conversation, you can never make it about yourself. Everything you say and do has to be motivated by "how can I help this person," or "how can I get to know them better," or "how do I fill their needs." There may be ways that they can help you, too -- but it has to be in the context of you helping them as well.

People can detect if you're only in it for yourself, or if you're being fake. Be genuine.

5. Recognize that you can't please everybody.

The [80/20](#) rule is a famed business axiom: 20 percent of your customers will provide 80 percent of your sales. I have a variant on that: 20 percent of your customers will also provide 80 percent of your headaches. And it's usually not the same 20 percent.

There are some people you'll deal with who will always want more. You'll get a sense for this pretty quick. Maybe they're the uber-pushy type that always request more because they're looking for "marks" to take advantage of. Maybe they're going through a rough patch in their personal lives and are taking it out on their business partners.

Whatever it is, don't let yourself get sucked in. If you're dealing with someone who's **really getting your goat**, take a step back and evaluate. Set some boundaries, and make sure you don't focus on "this person is so difficult -- why do I have to deal with them?"

Be solution-minded. Do what you can for them, but make sure you don't get sucked into negativity. That will help you focus on improving your other interactions with people and not getting so stressed that you can't handle it.

Business conversations can be hard, but these five psychological hacks will help you make the most of every situation you find yourself in. Make sure you follow these and you'll find that you're a smarter, more capable, more effective business communicator.