

MODULE 2: COMMUNICATION

SESSION 5: CONVERSATIONAL SKILLS

Key Ideas for This Session:

- Good conversation is about give and take; it is a two-way street.
- Good conversation has more to do with your ability to listen and to draw another person out than it does with your ability to talk. Good questions cannot be answered by a simple “yes” or “no,” but rather, “how” or “what.”
- In a conversation, your attitude is also communicated by non-verbal behaviours.
- It is important to know what it is you are trying to say and the main points you want others to understand.
- Key verse: Colossians 4:6:
Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt.

What Helps or Prevents Us from Fully Connecting With Each Other?

Have you ever had a conversation with someone for an hour and yet it felt like it lasted only five minutes? Or how about a five-minute conversation that seemed to last an hour?

We all want our communication to be clearly understood by others. Though it may appear straight forward, good communication can be quite complicated. Many elements must be in place in order for it to result in a positive connection between two or more people.

Building good conversation is not only the connection between you and the other person but also their skills (and your skills) in communicating. A person’s ability to carry on a good conversation has less to do with their vocabulary than it does with having something to say and being able to present it in an interesting way.

Having good conversation skills is about drawing the other person out through active listening—getting the other person to engage and share and enter into the conversation. Have you ever met someone who is so busy trying to get across what they want to say that you have little opportunity to get a word in? The author, Stephen Covey once wisely said, “Seek first to understand; then to be understood.”⁷

A positive attitude reflected in the use of good language, thoughtful words and appropriate body language is important in conversations. Negative, critical, and hostile words reflect a closed off attitude. The nonverbal signals we send through facial expressions, posture, and even hand gestures also contribute to or detract from open communication and the building of trust. If our attitude is not perceived as approachable and accepting, those listening to us will not respond positively. They may even see us as dishonest.

It is not possible for us to control the communication barriers other people put up, but we can become aware of our own and learn how to avoid creating those barriers.

Think back to a great conversation you’ve had with someone. What made it memorable?

Have you ever found yourself in a conversation without being able to say much? How did it make you feel?

⁷ Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*

ROLE PLAY

Role play the following conversation to understand the issue from a different perspective. Use a self-centred tone of voice for the FATHER and a patient and polite voice for the SON.

SON: Hey, Dad, what did you think of our football game today? Did I play well?

DAD: Yeah, you guys looked great. You had three tackles, didn't you?

SON: Did you see that one where I—

DAD: Your quarterback—I think his name is Jake, right? He passed for nearly 300 yards. He should make the conference All-Star Team again this year.

SON: So should our running back. He ran for—

DAD: You know, I remember when I quarterbacked the varsity team to the state championship my senior year. What a time. It seems like yesterday.

SON: Sure, but what did you think of—

DAD: You know, your mother was homecoming queen. Did I mention that?

SON: Yeah, well, I better get going. I told the guys I'd meet them at the mall

Describe what you see happening in the conversation above. Would you consider it a one- or a two-way conversation? (Explain.)

The conversation began with the son asking a question. The father soon “hijacks” the conversation, taking it in another direction. If you were to overhear this exchange, how would you describe the relationship between the son and the father?

Proverbs 10:19 states:
Sin is not ended by multiplying words, but the prudent hold their tongues.

How do you think this verse applies to having a good conversation?

How can the use of “many words” lead to sin?

Colossians 4:6 says:
Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

What does it mean for a conversation to be “full of grace?”

In ancient times, salt was used both to preserve food and to give it flavour. It was used to “bring out the good qualities” and to “prevent contamination or spoilage.” How does this relate to good conversation skills?

Describe a conversation you had with someone that ended in frustration or hurt. Looking back, what may have been the issue?

ROLE PLAY

Role play the following conversation to understand the issue from a different perspective. Role play STRANGER 1 as sincere and interested; STRANGER 2 is distant and uncaring. The scene takes place in a diner.

STRANGER 1: Excuse me. Do you mind if I sit here?

STRANGER 2: (Not looking up from his newspaper) Yeah, sure.

STRANGER 1: I've never been here before. Any recommendations?

STRANGER 2: (Still reading) I'm just drinking coffee.

STRANGER 1: Alright, thanks. (Moves to another seat, picks up a menu.)

STRANGER 2: (Looks up briefly at STRANGER 1, then goes back to reading newspaper.)

Is it possible to force someone to communicate with you if they don't want to? Why or why not?

What communication barriers did STRANGER 2 put up?

How did STRANGER 1 respond to STRANGER 2's communication barrier?

In Acts 17:18, a group of philosophers are trying to pick an argument with Paul: *"Some of them ask, 'What is this babbling trying to say?' Others remark, 'He seems to be advocating foreign gods.' They said this because Paul was preaching the good news."*

Is it possible to speak the same language in a conversation yet not understand each other?

What communication barriers do you see happening in the above verse?

Ephesians 4:29 says:
Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

What do you think is meant by “unwholesome talk” or unwholesome language? How does this become a communication barrier?

Consider Proverbs 10:21 in your Bible:
The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of sense.

Explain how to build up another person through good conversation.

Break into small groups and discuss these topics if there is time or think about them during the following week:

- *Good conversation helps us live peacefully and joyfully in community with one another. Practice “the art” of good conversation with a friend this week. Prepare five great questions you could ask a person if you were just getting to know them and plan on building more questions and conversation from their answers.*
- *How can pride become a communication barrier?*
- *Locate these verses in the Bible and meditate on them this week: Philippians 2:1,2 “Therefore if you have any encouragement from being*

united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.”