

TALK: HOW TO HAVE BETTER CONVERSATIONS

BASED ON TALK: THE SCIENCE OF CONVERSATION AND THE ART OF BEING OURSELVES BY ALLISON WOODS BROOKS



The TALK Maxims

Maxim	What It Means	Why It Matters
Topic	Choose and manage conversation topics	Move beyond small talk to deeper, more meaningful chats.
Asking	Ask more—and better—questions	Open-ended and follow-up questions build trust and engagement.
Levity	Bring humor, warmth, and personality	Makes conversations more fun and relaxed—not awkward.
Kindness	Prioritize others' feelings and needs	Listening, validating, and respectful language are key.

What Helps Make a Good Conversation

1. Start Simple, Then Go Deeper

Begin with easy topics like the weather or weekend plans. Once things feel more comfortable, move toward personal interests or feelings. Staying too surface-level can make the chat feel boring.

2. Balance Your Questions

Asking too few questions can make the conversation stall. Asking too many can feel like an interview. Find a balance—ask, listen, and follow up naturally.

3. Don't "Boomerask"

Avoid asking questions just so you can talk about yourself. Stay curious about what the other person is saying. It shows you care.

4. Use the "Call Back" Trick

Bring up something they said earlier in the conversation. It shows you were paying attention and helps build a stronger connection.

How to Handle Tough Conversations

Sometimes you'll need to talk about serious stuff—like disagreements, social issues, or misunderstandings. Here's how to keep it respectful and productive:

1. Take a Moment to Think

Before you respond, pause and ask yourself: *What do I want to get out of this conversation?* That helps you stay focused and calm.

2. Show You're Listening

Let the other person know you hear them. Try to find something you both agree on, even if it's small.

3. Soften Strong Opinions

Instead of saying something like "You're wrong," try: *"I think this, but I could be wrong."* It keeps the conversation open instead of turning into an argument.

4. Share, Don't Push

Use personal stories to explain your point of view. Focus on kindness and understanding—not trying to win or convince.

Why TALK Maxims Matter for Student Leaders

1. Build Better Friendships & Teams

Good conversation create trust and connection, which leads to stronger relationships and better teamwork.

2. Stand Out in Interviews & Group Work

Knowing how to listen, ask questions, and respond thoughtfully helps you shine in interviews, class discussions, and group projects.

3. Feel More Confident in Social Situations

Whether you're speaking in front of a class or just meeting someone new, strong communication skills help you feel more comfortable and confident.