

Captivate

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The world changed the first time I had my first meeting with Ronald Reagan in Geneva... I will tell you the moment. We had been sitting for four hours arguing back and forth... What happened was that we were in this mad argument, worse and worse, going nowhere, all of a sudden this President Reagan stands up and says 'this is not working' with this weird look on this face and he says how about we start fresh? My name is Ron, may I call you Mikhail.... At that moment the world changed. He was not evil. He was not horrible. He was such a nice man.

- Mikhail Gorbachev as related by Tony Robbins

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Chapter 1

Conversations Change the World

Conversations change people. People change the world. Conversations change the world.

It might seem like a stretch. But think back to the job interview you nailed (or blew). The date that went perfectly (or broke down completely.) Or the random encounter with that person who turned out to be your best friend (or the countless others that didn't). Mere seconds of conversation have the power to alter the course of your life.

It's miraculous then that we are never taught HOW to conduct conversations. How to navigate them so that we get more of the jobs, dates, and best friends we want. It's as if the world believes conversational skills can't be learned.

This is bogus. We all learn conversational skills – we just call them habits. Maybe your dad whenever asked the time, responds, "Time for you to get a watch!" Maybe one friend is instantly supportive when people talk about their dreams while another is sarcastic and dismissive.

Becoming a good conversationalist is all about developing good conversational habits. Habits that show who you are in an engaging way and encourage the other person to do the same.

This is NOT as simple as developing a "genuine interest in people" as some have recommended.

Take Dale Carnegie. He wrote one of my favorite books ever, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. I absolutely love his work and highly recommend it. But he oversimplifies. A prime example, which has since become conventional wisdom, is related in a story he tells in *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.

The story goes like this: Dale Carnegie is invited to a dinner party. He is

seated next to a botanist, a profession he finds utterly fascinating. For two hours, Dale probes the botanist about his career and life. Dale shares nothing about himself. At the end of the party, the botanist remarks: “That man is the greatest conversationalist I’ve ever met!”

The lesson? To be interesting be interested. Self-help gurus have since repeated it to the point of cliché.

Maybe you’ve tried that tact. You walk up to the CEO, having done your homework and ask a really astute question. Or you approach that person in the bar and try to get to know them by going into “interview mode.” Your intentions are pure. You really are fascinated.

But conversation falls flat. Every damn time. Why?

Because it’s not enough to be interested. The other person has to care about you before they open up.

Now in some environments you may not need to do much to get someone to care. At a dinner party, everyone is expected to care about one another. They have a baseline level of trust and respect for one another by virtue of their common acquaintance (hence why Dale Carnegie’s tactic worked with the botanist).

But if you want to go out into the wide world in this day and age, where most of us are introduced to hundreds of people each month and will only go on to remember less than 1% of them, you must distinguish yourself if people are going to remember you.

That is what this book is about. Read it and you’ll learn how to connect with people in just a few minutes. You’ll learn how to have conversations that stand out in people’s minds and make you someone they never want to forget.

Note: to get the accompanying 30-minute video on interacting with groups

delivered to your inbox, go here:

<http://www.charismaoncommand.com/groups>

Chapter 2

Mindsets

Mindsets matter. Sure, tactics are important. I'll explain to you how you've been answering, "Where are you from?" wrong your entire life and how to do it right. You'll learn the two modes of conversation that will make people warm to you in seconds. But all the tactics in the world are for naught if you come in with the wrong mindsets. It's not just what you say. It's how you say it and it's *why* you say it.

So let's dive into the mindsets that will allow you to connect with people.

Get your goal straight: to connect, not to "pass"

Have you ever tried "not to make a bad impression?" What happened? Likely, you succeeded in your goal. You didn't make a horrible impression. You didn't screw it up. Instead, you bit your tongue, went through the motions, and successfully flew under the radar.

Here's the problem: not making a bad impression isn't enough. Because not making a bad impression usually leaves you making no impression at all. Which is exactly the opposite of what you want to do if your aim is to make lasting connections.

So let's get this straight: the goal of conversation is not to avoid making a bad impression. Nor is it to be palatable to everyone. The goal is to make connections that turn into friendships, trusted business partners, and romantic relationships. To do that, you need to take "conversational risks." You need to reveal who you are and what you're about. This might turn some people off. You might make a few bad impressions.

That's okay. Instead of the whole world thinking, "Oh Charlie? Yeah don't really remember him, but he seemed okay," they'll either think, "Oh man Charlie is awesome!" or "Yeah Charlie, I don't really like that guy."

Here's the kicker. While it is impossible and inadvisable to try to make everyone like you, if you follow the presentation skills laid out in this book, very few people will wind up holding negative opinions of you. Even when you disagree with them, they'll respect the authentic manner in which you face the world.

The way to make more friends is not by being a "Yes man." It's by being unashamedly you.

Break people out of the Matrix

Most people walk through life on autopilot. A fine glaze coats their eyes. They are awake and functioning. But they aren't really alive.

That sense of malaise is the reason people jump out of airplanes, go to rock concerts, and play sports. Those things make them feel alive, excited, connected to their vitality. What if you could give them that same feeling just by conversing with them? Well, then they'd love you and want you around all the time!

Make that your goal. To wake people up. To break the spell of autopilot. Aim to get that smile that they don't normally let loose. Or to make them comment, "Hm that's a good question, I never thought about that!" When you rescue people from the purgatory of meaningless small talk, you're doing a good deed. So get to the real stuff that makes them wake up and care.

Look past what people are saying – what they feel is what matters

One of my favorite scenes in Good Will Hunting...

Shaun (Robin Williams) approaches Will (Matt Damon), holding Will's psychological evaluation in his hand. Inside the manila folders are pictures detailing the abuse Will suffered at the hands of his step father. Will sees it and remarks:

Will: "He used to put a belt a stick and a wrench on the table. Just say, "Choose."

Shaun: "Well, I gotta go with the belt there."

Will: " I used to go with the wrench"

Shaun: "Why the wrench?"

Will: "Because fuck him that's why"

The scene progresses as Will reveals the abuse he suffered at the hands of his foster parents. Shaun approaches him:

Shaun: "Hey Will...I don't know a lot. You see this? All this shit?"

Will: (nods)

Shaun: "It's not your fault."

Will: "Yeah I know that."

Shaun: "Look at me son. It's not your fault."

Will: "I know."

Shaun: "No, no you don't. It's not your fault."

Will: "I know."

Shaun: "It's not your fault."

Will: "Alright."

Will's literal words say, "I know. It's cool. I got it. No need to belabor the

point.” But his body language and play-it-cool attitude betray his true emotions. And Shaun knows enough as a counselor and an abused kid to know what he is struggling with.

He steps in, insisting that it’s not Will’s fault. Will tries to push him off. Shaun continues. And eventually Will breaks down sobbing.

It’s a beautiful illustration of a conversational mechanism people employ all the time. And while Will’s might seem like an extreme case, you probably encounter the same verbal misdirection every day. For instance, do any of the following look familiar to you?

“We’ll be right back, we’re just going to the bathroom.”

“So great running into you. We should definitely hang out sometime.”

“I don’t have time now, but let’s follow up on this next week.”

People don’t always mean what they say. To avoid ruffling feathers they lie. To avoid upsetting people, they feign interest when they feel none. To protect their reputations, they pretend everything is wonderful when they are hurting.

The best conversationalists don’t just engage on the literal, surface level of conversation. They listen instead to tonality, pay attention to eye contact, note shifts in body language. Like Shaun in *Good Will Hunting*, they figure out the real emotion behind the words and they address people on that level. The real level. Not what they say, but what they mean.

So if somebody flatly tells you “Yeah...everything is great...my job is...great,” don’t respond as if it were true. Respond to the emotion, in this case, the lack of enthusiasm. (You might joke, “Has your boss bugged the place or something? Because your words are saying one thing and your body language is saying another.”)

If someone tells you, “Oh wow, that’s really interesting,” with the tonality of a dead person, recognize that they probably don’t care. You might respond by

changing the topic or say, “You know what, you seem distracted. Tell me what’s on your mind.”

If they say, “Let’s hang out sometime,” with a complete disinterest, don’t expect to see them. You can reply, “Totally happy to make plans or not. Either way works for me. But if you do want to hang out, let’s get time on the calendar now. If not, no sweat at all.”

Call people out when their words and emotions aren’t congruent. Not to punish them. To let them know you know what’s really going on. To show that you are really listening, that you care about the emotions they really feel above the front they show to the world.

Lead conversation

Most conversations drift. You need to steer. Assume the task of cutting boring threads of conversation and of offering new options. Encourage people to tell stories they mention in passing. Don’t wait to be invited into a group, introduce yourself. In short: lead.

Some people feel pushy when thinking about doing this. *Introduce myself to a group who is talking!? I don’t want to interrupt! Or, I don’t want to be pushy. Things should just develop naturally.*

Here is the truth: people often feel lost, bored and awkward. They are stumbling through the same banal small talk as you are. No one really loves it. They sense that maybe they’d like to branch out, but they don’t know how. They’re too anxious to try.

Do those people a favor. Take the initiative. Assume a leadership role in the conversation. This doesn’t mean you need to pontificate, but it does mean that you’ll offer conversational threads that allow people to get to know you beyond what is listed on your resume. You’ll guide the people you’re speaking with to do the same. You’ll crack jokes. You’ll cut through the BS small talk. You’ll maneuver conversation in directions that excite and intrigue

people.

Maybe this seems obvious. It's not. The near universal instinct is to follow. To wait for the other person to crack a joke before letting loose with your own. To wait for them to reveal a weakness before admitting any of yours. To only tread conversational ground that has already been covered.

The entire point of this book is to give you tools to overcome those temptations. Whether you're tempted to follow because of insecurity, uncertainty, or just plain passivity, you'll walk away with what you need to lead.

Know what people want and bring value

People don't want to talk about the weather or their weekends or even about their children (I know, a survey of common conversational topics would lead you to believe otherwise). What people really want is simple: to connect. Help them feel something and you'll be welcome everywhere.

Being a good conversationalist is not about being an expert on a topic. It is about making people feel the emotions they crave, namely happiness, excitement, and connection. You don't need to know about the TV show they are talking about or know the common friend they are discussing to add value. No disqualifying yourself because you don't have a shared history. You just need to make them laugh. To feel understood. To feel connected.

Assume familiarity

This is almost a summation of previous points, but it bears repeating because sometimes this is what clicks. You want to assume familiarity with people. You don't need the dance of "getting to know you questions" before cracking a joke. Skip the air of solemnity and small talking. Speak to people as if they are friends and they will become friends. This means: joking, being real, emoting, and expressing enthusiasm (all of which are discussed in detail in the following section).

Mindsets are essential. But mindsets alone aren't enough. Knowing "what to say" is really important too. Here is a breakdown.

Chapter 3

Chess Theory

A chessboard is set up the same way every single time. You've got a handful of potential first moves. A handful more decent responses. It's not until several moves into the game that it takes on it's own unique contour.

Conversations are the same way. You start with some variant of "Hi," then normally and handful of get to know you questions, ("What do you do?" "Where are you from?"). Even if you've met the person before, you're going to get predictable questions ("What's new with you?" "How have you been?") You'll be asked these same questions thousands and thousands of times over the course of your life.

If you haven't spent any time thinking about how to really make something of these questions, you're the chess player who gets mated in four moves. Take the time to nail the beginning. Don't be like this guy:

"Hey how are you..."

"I'm good. How are you...."

"Good, good. What's new with you?"

"Not much. What about you?"

"Same...."

"...Okay I'm gonna run to the bathroom. Later."

Or this guy

"Hey Jim, what's new? How was your weekend?"

"Good. How was yours."

“Good thanks!”

****awkward silence****

Don't let the awkward silence take your conversations over! Have killer opening gambits. Knock them out of the park. This gets you through those first minutes so that you're in a good position to actually connect with the person you're speaking to (and not just become another one of the people they shake hands with and forget about). This is equally true of the questions that you ask and the questions you receive.

“OK So what should I say?”

Let's start with the questions you might ask someone to kick off a conversation. Remember: the whole goal of conversation is to connect emotionally. So you should ask questions that elicit an emotional response. The reason so many of the questions people ask fall flat is because they don't do this. They never bypass the autopilot people live on.

So instead of, “How was your weekend?”

Ask: “What did you do this weekend that you loved?”

If they don't immediately respond with something that moves them, dig deeper. So if they respond with:

“Nothing really. It was kinda lame.”

“Oh really? Why?”

“I spent the entire weekend deciding what colors we'd have for the wedding.”

“Oh god you mean deciding what color trim you need on the wedding plates? That has to be maddening.”

“Yeah! Same thing with the flowers. It’s like, who cares if we have chrysanthemums or roses? I just want the music to be good.”

In this case you dug to what they were actually feeling: frustration over wedding preparations. You met them there and commiserated. You related to them. You don’t need to dwell on the negative, but now that you’ve gotten an emotional response, at least you’ve woken them up. Now you can move in a more positive, lively direction.

“For sure. As long as you guys have the obligatory Journey song at the end of the night, it’ll be perfect.”

“Haha. I’ll make sure to put that in the DJ’s contract.”

“Are you nervous?”

“Just stressed about everything there is to do.”

“Don’t sweat it too much. The last wedding I went to, no one cared about the roses or chrysanthemums. As long as the bar was open people seemed to be dancing and happy.”

“Haha, that’s all I ask for!”

By digging past the initial lack of emotion to something that affects them emotionally (being a combination of stressed and excited about an upcoming wedding) you connect. Then you can move the conversation in a more positive direction by shifting their focus with lighthearted jokes.

Make this a habit. Substitute obligatory questions for ones that get to the emotions that drive people. For instance...

Instead of just asking, “What do you do?” follow up with, “Do you like it?” or “What about it do you love?”

Instead of just asking, “Where are you from?” Follow up with “What made you move?” “Are you happy you moved?” or “How do you like where you grew up compared to here?”

“What about when they still answer without any emotion?”

Sometimes you’ll ask people how work is going and with a flat tone and dead look in their eye, they respond.

“Fantastic.”

Clearly they aren’t feeling fantastic. So what to do? Cut through the BS. Respond with something that shows you are actually listening to how they feel, not just going through the small talk motions. Something like:

“Whoa there, ease up on the enthusiasm wild man! I’m gonna think you’re trying to get me to join the company.”

Or

“Haha, that bad, huh?”

Show people that you can read past the surface level of their responses (in a humorous way) and they will laugh and share their honest feelings

“What about when people ask me questions that are not really fascinating?”

So now you know how to ask fascinating questions. The problem is, most people won’t do the same for you. You’re still stuck with “What do you do?” “Where are you from?” bla bla bla.

So what do you do?

Come up with ways to answer these questions while steering conversation in a direction that will hook the other person's interest. Here are some guidelines.

- 1) Be punchy.
- 2) Be positive.
- 3) Reveal something about yourself that motivates you.
- 4) Don't ramble. Give them the option to ask you more.

I'll get to all of the elements shortly. In the meantime here are some examples that follow the guidelines.

"Where are you from?"

"I grew up on the East Coast, but ever since I've moved out West, I'm loving life. Back home it's all business. Out here, people seem to really take time to enjoy things. It's way more my style."

Or:

"Ever since college I have had a lot of homes. The one I like best and would like to claim as my own is Boulder, Colorado. If you're an outdoorsman like me you can't ask for a better place to live."

"What do you do?"

"So my job is in consulting but what I'm really passionate about is music. Next to sleep, it's my favorite activity – you can find me at pretty much any hour of the day playing one instrument or another."

Or:

"I'm a writer. I have always loved deeper conversations with people and writing is awesome because it lets me have those conversations with people all over the world – I just have to wait until they write back!"

Chapter 4

The Three Modes Of Conversation

You probably didn't know this, but there are three main "modes" of conversation that people typically engage in. Each has its own purpose. But only two of them are going to help you actually connect with other people. Unfortunately, those two modes are the ones we engage in least frequently!

To understand how we can tap into these "connecting" modes more, let's examine the mode most of us spend our time in...

Chapter 5

News (aka Fact-Sharing aka Boring Stuff)

News is the first mode of conversation. It includes any conversation where the primary goal is to communicate facts (or sometimes, just to fill up the silence).

Because facts are impersonal, most people feel safe in this mode of conversation. They don't have to expose themselves or feel vulnerable. So they talk about weather, sports, TV shows, or gossip. Basically they share the news with no sort of deeper meaning. They just share what is current with one another. For instance...

"Yeah we went on a trip to watch the Braves play. We took a train down to Atlanta and met up with some friends from college. After the game, we spent some time in the city, visited museums, went to a show at night and then came back home the next day."

It's not that the topics of baseball, travel, college friends, or museums are inherently boring. In fact, there are plenty of ways to talk about those things in ways that captivate people. But when you share the story like an impartial reporter commenting on the happenings of the previous day, you lose people. So don't just share the news. Learn to operate in the two other modes of conversation.

Chapter 6

Fun

The second mode of conversation is fun. It includes joking, messing around, and everything where the goal is to spread laughter.

People may not care enough about you in the opening minutes of conversation to listen to your life story or even remember your name, but they are certainly available to laugh with you.

That is why “Fun” is incredibly powerful mode to begin conversation with. Share the news and you may bore people. Share your deepest values and people might wonder who the heck you are to presume they even care. But have fun people will line up to join in.

Here are a few guidelines to help you be as fun and funny as possible.

Choose infectious positivity - When people ask how you are, be “phenomenal” instead of “good.” Smile big. Laugh loudly. Talk about things that excite you and let it show in your eyes, smile, and tone of voice.

I’ve written about choosing and controlling your emotions at length before. If you want more on selecting your emotional state so you can “turn on” enthusiasm even when you’re clamming up, check out *Charisma on Command* on Amazon.

Mess with people - For a lot of people it’s that one irreverent uncle. Or the mischievous friend. There’s always that person in our lives that is a total goofball. They constantly mess with other people and create raucous laughter.

It’s actually not that hard to do. You just have to get in the habit of not answering everyone seriously all the time. So when you’re at a house party and you’re asked, “Who do you know here?” Try answering, “No one. I was

just walking past and heard music so I thought I'd come hang out."

Or when someone stops you and asks you for directions, tell them, and then say "That'll be \$35. Would you like to pay in cash or credit?"

Or when you're in an elevator and the person next to you says, "Third floor please." Respond: "Sorry, you can't go to the third floor. You have to come with me to the sixth. I don't make the rules. I just enforce them."

Now the key with all of these is that you create a moment of confusion, usually followed by understanding that you're joking and laughter. So smile. Communicate you're being facetious with your tonality and facial expressions. And after messing with people, actually tell them who you know at the party, send them on their way, or push the button for the third floor. You're not being a jerk. You're just providing a moment of humor.

Make your expressions and tonality match your words - Yes, there are a few deadpan comedians that get big laughs (Mitch Hedberg comes to mind). But these comedians have to constantly be clever. Writing jokes is hard work.

Want to be funny more easily, without waiting for that moment of inspired wit? Put on a voice. Gesticulate for emphasis. Play a character. In fact, take special notice of the times people around you laugh loudly. Usually it's because someone has made a joke while play-acting a character. Do this more often.

Recycle the things that make you laugh - We all have our go to jokes. For the past week I've been yelling "Classic!" in a goofy voice whenever something unexpected or random happens.

So when you spit out your cereal while watching TV or your friend makes you double over, take note of the quip that made you laugh. Most humor is highly portable. So think of other situations that joke might fit into. Pop your new joke into different contexts during conversation. Don't be ashamed. All originality comes from remixing pre-existing material. By reusing jokes, you

train yourself to alter them in ways that are unique to you, developing your own natural sense of humor.

Extra Credit: Take an improv class - Practice makes perfect. And there is no better way to practice improv comedy than by taking an improv comedy class. They have them in most cities; just Google “improv comedy + your city.”

Know this: you can absolutely learn to be more fun and funny. I’ve tried my best, but text is just not the best medium to convey exactly how since so much has to do with timing and inflection. Comedy just lends itself better to in-person training (or at least video).

To try and remedy this deficiency in text, I’ve also created some instructional comedy videos based off my improv training and life experience. You can get part one for free here:

<http://www.charismaoncommand.com/comedy>

Chapter 7: Values

“People don’t buy what you make, they buy why you do it.”

Simon Sinek was right about why people buy. He was also right about why people feel connected to anything, be it a company, a cause, or an individual (I suggest checking out Sinek’s Ted talk “Start with Why” for more on this theme).

It’s not small talk that does it. People connect over shared experiences, shared laughter, and shared values. Shared experiences come with time. Shared laughter is covered in the “fun” section. Now we discover how to connect over shared values. But first I need to tell you about Velcro...

Velcro Theory

Have you ever looked close at a strip of Velcro to see how it works? Basically one end, the soft one, is made of thousands of little loops. The other strip, that scratchy side, is made of tiny nylon hooks.

When you press the two strips together, voila! Hundreds of hooks catch on the loops and it sticks. You have to peel the strip off because you can only break the bonds of a fraction of the hook/loops at a time. If you tried to break them all at once it’d be very difficult (which is why Velcro works so well).

Okay, material design coursework aside. The point is that Velcro works because there are hundreds and thousands of hooks and loops. Not every hook catches. Not every loop gets used. But when you place them together some of them will catch. They connect.

Conversation works the same way. If someone asks me where I’m from and I say, “Philadelphia.” I’ve given them one loop. Maybe they can connect with Philadelphia. Maybe they can’t. If I say, “Philadelphia, but I live in Las Vegas.” I’ve given them two loops. Twice the chance that they can connect.

But what if I really want to increase my chances of connecting? Then I should throw out more loops! Like this:

“I was born in Philadelphia, but I live in Vegas. I’ve never loved a place more. It is full of people who are coming to have the best 4 days of their lives. You get to share in that excitement every single time you meet someone. Plus the people who live here have all worked in the service industry, so they have no sense of entitlement like I encountered in other cities. Add 300 days of sun a year and it is the perfect place for me.”

There are dozens of loops that the other person can hook onto in those sentences.

...so back to values.

You may have a completely different background, ethnicity, hobbies, and job than the person you’re talking to. On the surface level you have nothing in common. But when you drill down to your values and motivations, you can relate to just about any human on the planet.

So share those values early! Take the boring News-mode example from earlier:

“Yeah we went on a trip to watch the Braves play. We took a train down to Atlanta and met up with some friends from college. After the game, we spent some time in the city, visited museums, went to a show at night and then came back home the next day.”

Look what happens when you include some values in that story.

“Yeah we went on a trip to watch the Braves play. We took a train down to Atlanta and met up with some friends from college. It was such a long trip, but so worth it to see old friends! I feel like I’ve gotten so “grown up” and hanging out with friends from school is an amazing way to goof off act like a kid again – which is something I love to do....Anyways, after the game we

went to a museum and saw some of the most amazing art I've ever seen. I'm more of a music guy myself, but have you ever seen art so good that you felt transported? These paintings were that good. I couldn't help but gape and wish I'd spent more time learning to draw in high school."

Now this story has several hooks that people can relate to, even if they've never been to Atlanta (feeling like a grown up wanting to be childlike, being moved by art, loving music). It will be so much easier for them to respond with something they care about that makes conversation easy.

Like, "Oh man, I used to love drawing as a kid! I would always redraw the comics I read."

But let's push further. Let's say you're the person listening to this story. And let's say you don't know anything about Atlanta or comics or drawing. You can still connect by sharing a related value (what you loved doing as a kid) or by asking them to tell you more about WHY they loved comics and drawings.

In sum: the values mode means guiding conversation towards the underlying motivators, emotions, and values that make people do the things they do. When you get down deep enough, you'll find you can understand and relate to just about anyone.

But wait – DON'T take the easy connections

Most people have never thought about connecting over values. So they share where they live, where they went to school, and where they work, hoping to hit on a commonality. When it turns out they are speaking to an alum from the same university, they feel saved. They can talk about their football team for five minutes before conversation runs dry again.

Try on this counterintuitive tactic: don't reveal surface level commonalities. If you grew up in the same city, don't mention it immediately. Same goes for the same school or having recently visited the same country.

Why? Two reasons.

First, it forces you to go deeper. Instead of treading conversational water: “Oh you grew up on third street? I grew up on sixth. Right by the old apple tree. Wow.” You have to work to connect over fun or values. This builds much better habits.

Second, when you don’t reveal every interesting thing about yourself at the first opportunity, but rather over the course of conversation, you cultivate a sense that you have true depth.

For instance, I’ve lived in Brazil, so I have strong Portuguese skills. I’ll often meet Brazilians. If I immediately speak Portuguese and tell them I lived there, they respond with a warm smile and we’ll speak about Brazil for a few minutes. But if I don’t, something much cooler happens. We speak for 10 minutes about other subjects. They start to bucket me in their head as a typical American. And then out of nowhere, I’ll drop a few lines of Portuguese.

Their jaws drop. They’ll start interrogating me on where I lived in Brazil and why I speak so well. They start to ask more questions of me, sensing that my life is more fascinating than I immediately let on. By the end, I’ve made a much more profound first impression.

So stop jumping to connect over surface level commonalities (this includes high schools, country of origin, language, same taste in music). Let the fact that you grew up near their hometown go unsaid. Instead, push past those layups to connect over fun and values. When it eventually comes out that you grew up five minutes from one another, it’ll produce much more of a reaction.

Chapter 8: Keeping Conversation Going

So now you're talking.

But what happens when after 10 minutes, that dreaded moment rears its head?

The awkward silence!

What should you do when you feel like a particular conversational topic has expired?

Well, let's take a step back...

Who does the awkward silence seem to occur most with: strangers or friends? Undoubtedly, strangers. But why? You'd think there would be so much more interesting ground to cover with strangers. With friends, you know how they feel about the most important topics. You're left with just random stuff that pops into your head. Yet you still can find yourselves talking for hours in a stream of unrelated randomness. Without any sort of agenda, conversation just flows.

This is exactly the point. When you feel like you've run out of things to say with strangers, you haven't actually run out of things to say. You've simply run out of things that have passed your internal filter of "good enough to say to a stranger!"

This is why you can talk for hours nothing with people you know well. Why you can turn a conversation about "nothing" into something you both really cherish. It's not just because you have common interests. It is because neither of you has a very high threshold for what is "good enough" to say. If something pops into your head, you blurt it out.

This is also why it is much easier to speak to people when you've had a few drinks. It's not that you've suddenly become more clever or interesting (sorry

to burst your bubble!) It's that you've lowered your inhibitions. You say what comes to your mind without thinking if it is "good enough" to vocalize.

The key here is that you are not anticipating too far ahead. You need to trust yourself to adapt on the fly.

Here is an example:

I was working with a client who was also working with a personal trainer. She recounted a story from the day she met him.

"He asked me, 'So what's your story?' and I was just so taken aback. It's such a big question. I didn't even know where to start. So I just mumbled something awkwardly and then got quiet."

"Well what was going through your head?"

"Nothing."

"No that's not true. Something was going through your head. You just didn't think it was good enough to say. So what was your thought process?"

"I guess, 'Oh wow this is awkward. I can't even answer a simple question about my life! Now he probably thinks I am a weirdo...'"

"Great! Use that."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean imagine what would have happened if you'd dropped the filter and said that to him. What would it have gone like?"

"Well I suppose I would have said, 'Oh wow this is awkward. I can't even answer a simple question about my life! Now you probably think I am a weirdo...'"

“And what would he have done?”

“Laughed probably. And clarified his question.”

“Exactly! The point is that what you are thinking is always good enough – at least better than saying nothing because you only want to sound super clever all the time.”

The difficulty for everyone—my client, you, the best conversationalist on the planet—is not in coming up with something to say. It is in getting in touch with your thoughts and trusting yourself enough to simply state them. Will they always paint you as a genius? Certainly not! But by speaking, you’ve given both you and the person with whom you’re speaking a starting point. Now you have some Velcro hooks which either of you can latch onto.

So for example, the other day I was out speaking with a girl at a club. I didn’t have anything to say, but I noticed that she had a very genuine smile whenever she spoke to people. So I told her what was going through my head:

“You know you have such a genuine smile? It makes you look like a first grade teacher. I feel like I just want you to read me a picture book.”

When you remove the filter, what you say will rarely be brilliant. But it will provide you with enough “hooks” to start to restart conversation.

Note: if you’re absolutely stumped, I find a great way to start or restart a halting conversation is to simply say, “So what’s your story?”

Play “Reminds me of...”

So once you’ve cleared the filter, the goal is to drive conversation back to something that is fun or fascinating to both of you.

You don't want to be trapped with just sticking to the literal words at hand. So if we're talking about the weather today, I shouldn't be limited to just talking about the weather this week. I want to be able to make conversational leaps.

One of the best tools to do this is, "Reminds me of."

"Reminds me of" consists of thinking not just linearly (i.e. weather today > weather this week) but in larger leaps (i.e. weather today > gorgeous weather > the vacation I took last year to Costa Rica when it was sunny and then poured on us as we hiked up a mountain.)

"Reminds me of" can also be used to re-spark conversation with someone to whom you've already spoken. For instance, last night I was out at a bar with an extended group of friends. I was standing watching a drummer play a solo. We'd already exchanged pleasantries so I didn't have any questions to ask many of the people. Still, to re-spark conversation, all I had to say was:

"This guy is amazing. He reminds me of Travis Barker from 182."

Or:

"This club is so cool. It reminds me of a 1920's speakeasy mixed with a rave."

Use "reminds me of" in conjunction with the fun and values modes of conversation to rekindle any conversation and move it in a direction that will keep people captivated. It's also a fantastic tool for connecting with someone with whom you may not have much in common because it allows you to trade stories based on whatever is happening around you.

Chapter 9

Signing Off

A good conversation has a sense of completion. Or at least a sense of “to be continued.” It shouldn’t just decrescendo until it trails off into nothingness.

So don’t just allow conversation to dissipate then slowly shuffle away, hoping the other person doesn’t notice. Sign off.

You don’t need some incredible excuse to walk away. You don’t have to invent a story about running late. All you have to do is say what you’re going to do. Throw the person’s name in there to show you’ve been listening and a touch for warmth and you have a great sign off for any occasion.

“Well, I’m going to go talk a walk around the party and say hello to a few more people, but it has been a pleasure talking with you, Mike (handshake and walk off).”

“I’m going to get going to the gym now, but awesome bumping into you Cindy (hug and walk off).”

Include those three elements (saying what you’re leaving to do, say their name, and touch) whenever ending conversation and you tie a nice little bow on every interaction.

Now there are sometimes when you want more than just to say goodbye. Say you’re new in town and you’re speaking to someone you think might become a friend. Or you’re talking to someone in your industry and you’re hoping to land an interview. Or you’ve had a great conversation and now you’re wondering if they might be interested in a drinks and a date.

You need to move from conversation to, well, something else. It’s not enough to mesmerize people with your conversational repertoire. You have to lead the next step of the interaction as well.

The sign off is still very simple. The only thing that changes is that instead of saying what you're about to do, you explain why and how you'd like to keep in touch.

"Hey, I'm going to get going, but you seem like a ton of fun. I'm new in town and am always looking for cool people to hang out with. Let's trade numbers and we can find a time to head to the arcade."

Or:

"So this has been a really eye opening conversation. It sounds like you love your company. Do you guys happen to have any open positions? I'd love to talk again and see if it might make sense for me to make a career move."

Or:

"This has been really fun! I'm glad I got a chance to meet you. Unfortunately, I've got to run, but I'd love to meet up again and go salsa dancing."

If the person is open to this general invitation, then you make more specific plans that include the exact time and place. This allows you to rework plans in person instead of playing phone tag if it turns out one time won't work for them.

"Great. How does this Wednesday evening work at XYZ arcade? Oh Wednesday, you're busy...hmm...how about Saturday? Does that work? Awesome! I'll give you a call Friday to confirm."

After you exchange numbers or emails you can sign off officially with their name and a touch.

"Alright, I'm on my way and will call you next week. Take care, Tom (shoulder pat and walk away)."

Chapter 10

Other Resources

So now you know everything from how to start a conversation, to how to keep it interesting, to how to say goodbye. With all these tools you should be well on your way to making an amazing first impression on anyone you meet.

Now there is obviously much more that goes into being a charismatic and magnetic personality. I specifically kept this topic narrow so it could be most effective for people specifically interested in the mindsets and tactics for conducting a good conversation. But if you are interested in other topics, here are some resources you might like:

Group Conversation – I have a longer course on this, but I put together 30 minutes of footage for you that will help you take charge and be a leader in group contexts. Delivered to your inbox for free.

<http://www.charismaoncommand.com/groups>

Charisma on Command – The most complete piece of writing I have on how to be more charismatic and how to turn it on at a moment's notice. Going far beyond conversation, you'll learn the beliefs, emotional control, body language, storytelling mindsets, and presentation skills that will make you a magnetic personality from the boardroom to the bar.

Find it here: <http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00MX95J48>

And of course, if you have any questions, you can always drop me an email. I'd love to hear from you!

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