



Don't Worry, You Can Learn to Talk to People Again

After a year of isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many social habits that came naturally before may be difficult to pick up on again. For example, it used to be simple to break the ice about the weather, but now breaking the ice in a casual manner has gotten lost a bit. However, you can learn to talk to people again, here are some tips from people who need to talk to people every day for their job:

Embrace the Awkward Moments:

- Amanda Zion, a hairstylist is well-versed in making small talk due to it being a part of her job to engage with clients. Her golden rule is to acknowledge it aloud when feeling awkward.
- Example: "I'm sorry. I feel so awkward today."
- You can even break down the barrier with humor if you want.
- Example: "Wow, these 37 cups of coffee did not help!"

Use the Pandemic to Connect, But Tread Carefully:

Jennifer Hornbeck, a priest at an Episcopal Church has used the pandemic to connect with congregants when she cannot find anything else to talk about. This is an easy conversation topic because everyone has been through it.

However, this is not an innocuous topic because people have been affected by the pandemic differently.

Examples:

- Someone has lost someone due to COVID-19
- Someone has lost their job during the pandemic.
- Someone's mental health has worsened because of isolation or other factors.

You can help to solve this issue by sharing your own experiences from the pandemic first if you feel comfortable doing so. This will allow the individual to feel more comfortable with you and let them know they can open up but do not have to.

If you do not want to participate in the conversation, you can exit gracefully by saying something like "Yes these are hard times" and then changing the subject.

Interject a Little Positivity

- While commiserating over shared adversity can be a bonding experience, you do not want the focus of conversation with a new person to be negative.
- For example, if you are discussing getting vaccinated it is better to discuss what you are excited about doing now that you are vaccinated rather than going on about how bad the side effects were the day after.
- Offer compliments- People are self-conscious about their appearance after a year of isolation, so offering a compliment on something like someone's hair can help them feel more comfortable around you.

Don't Overthink It

- Meghan Dhaliwal works as a freelance documentary photographer. Her job is to capture people intimately without stepping over delicate boundaries.
- Her keys to making clients comfortable are to tune in to how the individual is feeling, match their energy level, and pay attention to their body language.
- If you are in a situation where you and/or the other person are nervous, start by asking a lighthearted question to give the individual to warm up to you and take cues from how they answer.
- Avoid planning the next thing you say as this prevents you from truly engaging in the conversation.

Practice Being in Control

- Make a goal to interact with at least one person each day to help relieve your social anxiety.
- Put yourself in situations where interactions will happen (for example running an errand) to help achieve this goal.
- If you meet someone you know you will see again, make a quick note of something you talked about so you will remember to ask about it next time.
- If you need time to collect yourself, keep a water bottle on you so you have a reason to stop talking and gather your thoughts. Nobody needs to know you are struggling.

If All Else Fails: Netflix

- Television is the largest sparker of conversation with anyone this year. Everyone has something to say about it, and it is a lighthearted conversation topic that will make you and the other individual comfortable with each other.

Burns, Holly. New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast); New York, N.Y. [New York, N.Y.]. 24 Apr 2021.

University Speaking Center, (336) 256-1346
For more resources check out our Website <http://speakingcenter.uncg.edu>