



THE ART OF CONVERSATION

CHANGE YOUR LIFE WITH
CONFIDENT COMMUNICATION

JUDY APPS

"A really excellent, thorough, practical, entertaining and inspiring guide to generating great conversations with strangers, co-workers, friends, family, neighbours – anyone and everyone! It's wonderfully helpful on the mysteries of everyday, easy small talk, as well as of the deeper, more personal, heartfelt human connections we want to create in our lives. There are lots of useful example scripts and opening lines, activities and experiments for all occasions – and there's lots of encouragement along the way to take your conversational repertoire, your self-awareness, self-confidence and enjoyment in life to whole new levels."

Judith Lowe, PPD Learning Ltd, NLP Training Institute, London

"Whether you need step-by-step instructions for conversation, or more advanced tips, there's a part of this book that will suit you. Warm, intelligent and practical, at times Judy draws in seemingly unconnected skills and ideas, and then shows how much good conversation depends on unexpectedly varied things."

Christopher Miller, Founder, Investment Quotient

"In *The Art of Conversation*, Judy invites us into the inner workings of conversation. Melting the blocks that can prevent real connection, she shows how we can tune into the subtle nuances of the most simple to the more challenging conversations in a way that enriches our relationships and lives. A profound and delightful book that allows you to find and refine your conversational flow."

Clare Russell, your guide to living intuitively and Owner of Metalife Ltd

"Over the last 15 years I have watched hundreds of people learn to speak in public through the Toastmasters organization. Many become good enough to be professional speakers, most at least master the art – once they realize it's a conversation with the audience. But not everyone can master the unprepared conversation with strangers or friends. Learn to get it right with Judy's help."

Jenny Cutler, Founder of Image Counts, Author and Toastmaster

"*The Art of Conversation* does what it says on the cover. It provides the tips and content that makes for great conversations in a world where conversations are worryingly on the decline. The level of detail and understanding of how a conversation works is refreshing! This is definitely one for the recommendations list."

Jackee Holder, Coach, Author and Speaker

"There's much more to simple conversation than we might imagine, and Judy's humor and relaxed style are reflected throughout, making this an engaging and entertaining read. I particularly love the pauses for reflection and Judy's exquisite observations. I would recommend getting a copy of *The Art of Conversation* to discover its secrets for yourself!"

Karen Moxom, Managing Director of The Association for NLP, Author of *The NLP Professional* and publisher of *Rapport*

"Contains lots of great little stories which make the book a very easy read and, more than the stories, there is a lot of really practical advice on how to help your own communication stories so they become chronicles of success. There is

definitely something here for anyone wanting to lift their conversation skills to another level."

Paul Matthews, MD and Founder of People Alchemy Ltd and Author of *Informal Learning at Work: How to Boost Performance in Tough Times*

"The skill to converse doesn't come quite as naturally to people (anymore) as they might wish. In the digital world our conversations are often disjointed, and we spend more time alone in merely virtual relationships. Yet creating true connections, one-to-one, is still a great source of happiness. Successful conversations make satisfying relationships and give us hope for human society. Judy Apps' *The Art of Conversation* provides enjoyable help for skilling up – or for checking on the skills we think we have."

Sabine Frank, Director, Platform for Intercultural Europe

"This insightful book reveals the essential elements of powerful fluid conversations. It is for you if you are in any way interested in improving your relationships and in making conversation an enjoyable art and intimate dance."

Steve Nobel, Author, Coach, Writer, ex-director Alternatives, London (2000-2012)

"This insightful and beautifully-written book is quite simply a treasure trove. This book is practical but never boring. It shows how good conversation can be an enjoyable and life-enhancing skill. It helped me to understand how conversation works, how to deal with difficult situations, and what to do to make it even better. Most importantly, it also gave me the motivation, enthusiasm and self-confidence to go out and practice."

Celia Morris MBA Chartered FCIPD, Training and Development Manager at Mott MacDonald

"In *The Art of Conversation* Judy Apps delightfully engages us in a conversation about this most pervasive element of the human experience. Her book masterfully integrates principles of conscious communication into the dance of conversation. In the process we get an abundance of practical insights and methods for becoming an excellent conversationalist across all spheres of life. The writing is engaging, captivating, addressing nuance and subtlety with simultaneous sophistication and simplicity. I enthusiastically recommend this book to anyone dedicated to distinction as a communicator, and to coach and mentor others in that direction."

David Wolf, Ph.D., MCC., Founder and Director of Satvatove Institute School of Transformative Coaching and Author of *Relationships That Work, The Power of Conscious Living*

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Judy Apps



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PREFACE

There's nothing more enjoyable than an afternoon with friends, just eating, drinking, chatting and having a good time. We were sitting there, reflecting on just how pleasant it was to talk with close friends and feel heard and understood, when someone remarked:

"Some people just don't *get* conversation, do they? I met an old friend the other day, and she talked to me for almost an hour while I just nodded and made encouraging noises. As she left, my friend said how lovely it was to chat to each other and how interesting the conversation had been. I'd told her nothing at all!"

We all recognized the scenario, and laughed. Our conversation turned to various conversational experiences; good, bad and often hilarious.

Frank turned to me. "Someone should write a book about the art of conversation," he said.

Thanks Frank. Here it is.

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I'd also like to thank my supportive family and the good friends with whom I've discussed this huge topic over the years. I'm lucky to have you all in my life.

INTRODUCTION

NORMAL AND EVERYDAY

Conversation! It's the most common thing in the world – so normal, so natural, so everywhere, so everyday. All over the globe, people are talking to each other. "It's good to talk," as the advert says. "Talking, talking happy talk," to quote the song.

Seeing that we all do so much of it, surely we can all *do* conversation? Humans talk to each other – we are essentially social beings; that's what we *do*. I'm pretty sure the caveman had some way of communicating to his mate, "How does that fire-making thing work?" Many of us don't think twice before we open our mouth to communicate – it's the most spontaneous thing in the world.

But *how* we talk, ah, that is the question. Most of us learned how to converse with other people haphazardly through copying the habits of our parents and carers. Most of us didn't learn the subtleties of conversation at school – at least, not formally! We never learned to appreciate the extraordinary potential of conversation, nor how to do it well. The art of conversation is perhaps the most commonly neglected skill on the globe. If you do command the art of conversation when you are young, you have a tremendous advantage in life in all sorts of ways.

The word "conversation" is a humble one. A thesaurus offers a long list of more weighty and impressive words to express the

idea of talking to each other. There's discussion, exchange, dialogue, discourse, parley, colloquy . . . You've probably seen books on persuasion, debate, tendering or selling. Governments engage in talks; national envoys handle negotiations; the media cover international summit conferences. But the common ingredient of all these grander concepts is conversation – it's the basic building block of our connection with each other. There aren't many days – depending on your circumstances – that you don't have several conversations! In fact, a day without any conversation probably stands out as an unusual day – a lonely day even.

THE KEY TO MANY DOORS

So if conversation is the basis of human contact, the ability to converse well with people has a lot going for it. Learn to hold a conversation skilfully and you have a magic ingredient for well-being, success and happiness in many areas of your life.

Take relationships: *how* you engage in conversation makes a profound difference to the quality of your connection with other human beings. It's the basis of building new relationships and making new friends. It's how you become intimate with someone. "How did Mary agree to marry you?" I asked a friend. "I engaged her in conversation – I mean, I chatted her up!" came the reply. It's the way you improve your current relationships and understand other people better. It's the way you heal relationships that are not working, whether on a personal or a professional level.

Conversation creates good times too. An entertaining conversation is a source of fun and laughter. Did you ever joke in the playground with school friends or whisper conspiratorially in class? Do you enjoy those special moments of snatched personal conversation by the water cooler at work, or chatting with a stranger in a pub – a place especially conducive to entertaining conversations? You may find out something interesting you

didn't know before. You may walk away from a conversation fascinated or amused, moved, enlightened or inspired.

In the workplace, the ability to engage confidently in conversation is a vital, though surprisingly untapped, skill that has the potential to take you far. It eases your relationships with colleagues and bosses. It serves you well in interviews, meetings and reviews. The ability to talk easily with anyone enables you to enjoy networking and make the most of opportunities that come your way. It makes you sound articulate and confident, able to hold your own in debate; it gets you noticed, furthers your career and smoothes your path to promotion.

Skilful conversation helps you to uncover the truth and make wise decisions about people. Then you recruit with discernment and give responsibility to the right people. The best negotiators have highly developed conversational skills. How do you influence and persuade other people of your point of view, or indeed sell them an idea or a product? You'll probably be most successful through engaging them in conversation.

In today's world there are many ways to learn, but it is often said that the best teaching is a conversation with an open channel between teacher and pupil. Lucky is the child who learned good conversation early. "The most influential of all educational factors is the conversation in a child's home," asserted William Temple, inspirational Archbishop of Canterbury during World War II. Excitement and motivation in learning are aroused by live conversation. You may remember a particular schoolteacher who had a major influence on you through inspirational conversation.

Educational discourse goes right back to the Greeks and earlier. Socrates was renowned for his much imitated method of philosophical enquiry. In our own times, some of the most exciting scientific discoveries have been the outcome of conversations

between experts of different disciplines. The discovery of DNA, successes in magnetic resonance imaging, chaos theory, radar, human genome sequencing and manned space flight have all been the result of scientists from different disciplines talking to each other, sharing information and sparking ideas off each other. Multidisciplinary conversations have become a major pursuit in universities around the world.

When we look at leaders and politicians, the ability not only to speak articulately but also to engage in robust dialogue is a vital skill, yet given strangely low priority in the state educational system. In policing and the law, fact-finding and interrogating demand a highly skilled command of conversation. On a world scale, conversation between civilizations builds bridges and promotes peace. As the television producer Mark Burnett once said, "I learned first hand that there would simply be no wars if people engaged in real conversation."

Conversation is the basis of the helping and healing professions, counselling, therapy, mentoring and coaching – highly skilled vocations where a good part of the skill lies in the ability to hold a simple conversation with subtlety and intuition.

Good conversational skills can transform every aspect of your world. At its best, it can lead you to experience some of the most rewarding and profound moments of your life. The simplest conversation can hold a hidden thread of the most intimate and beautiful connection . . . if you know the secret.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS AND ISN'T

In this book you'll discover how conversation functions and how to make it work for you. Books already exist on making friends and influencing people, networking for success, holding assertive conversations, difficult conversations, persuasion and much

more. We will explore some of these areas too, but if you understand how conversation itself works, and can *do* conversation at it's simplest, you have an invaluable tool to use in every part of your life for pleasure, profit and love. You could choose to read 25 books on 25 different *kinds* of conversations, but the key *is* conversation itself. With this practical knowledge you can do it all!

So explore its hidden parameters and build your self-confidence, starting from here and now.

The first part of the book shows you how conversation works like a dance, with both parties equally engaged. The connection they build between them is key, and I give you lots of hints and tips to help you connect well with people. I offer practical help if you're daunted, nervous, don't know what to say, or ramble and rattle on. I show you how to manage your state, trust yourself and feel more comfortable talking with people. Finally, I introduce you to the practical basics of getting a satisfying conversation going and how to keep the other person interested. Learning how to listen dynamically is an important element, with more to it than meets the eye – or ear!

In the second part of the book you build the skills to be a powerful communicator. You find out how to influence the other person and to direct the talk towards particular outcomes. I introduce you to a powerful method for taking conversation to different levels, so that you are able to move a conversation from everyday comments towards greater understanding and intimacy. You discover how to express yourself more powerfully and authentically with voice and body language, and how to use intellect, feeling and intuition as you speak.

In the third part of the book you take conversation out into your daily life to deal with common difficulties you might encounter, such as getting stuck or dealing with people who play mind

games. You discover valuable skills for disagreeing with people without losing connection, and for confronting others when necessary.

This leads us in the final part to explore the beautiful depths and possibilities of communication with each other. There are conversations that changed history and changed the world, and there are conversations that change *your* world.

ICONS TO GUIDE YOU

You'll find icons scattered throughout the book to guide you to particular features and focus on important bits.



This icon offers the opportunity to reflect upon an important point in the text. It often captures the essence of what I've been discussing in a particular section.



This icon invites you to watch out for particular traps or difficulties in conversation. Heed these and you'll make great progress!



This icon suggests activities for you to try in order to hone your conversational skills. Conversation is a practical pursuit and you'll get the most out of the book by having a go, without worrying too much about getting things right the first time you try them.



This icon gives you stories and anecdotes, both to inspire you and show you what to avoid! They are all genuine examples from real life, though I have changed the names sometimes to protect the privacy of the people involved.

So now you're ready to go. Read the book from cover to cover, or dip in and out of different sections – whatever suits you best.

Of course I can't pin down the full range of glorious, moving, world-changing, creative, exciting, sexy, gentle, compassionate, kind and moving conversations over the globe. But even to explore a little our communication with each other opens up a chink on a world that deserves our close attention. Enjoy the book, and happy talking!

"Speech is civilization itself. The word, even the most contradictory word, preserves contact – it is silence which isolates."

– Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*

Part One

Introducing Conversation

THE DANCE OF CONVERSATION

"Con conversationally, we were Fred and Ginger – spin, slide, shuffle, bend."

– Marisa de los Santos



I remember one Christmas, at about 8-years-old, suddenly finding myself alone for a moment in a room with an uncle I rarely met and being completely tongue-tied. What on earth could I say? I think he must have felt the same, for the silence seemed to go on and on. I can still remember my acute embarrassment. You may have examples of your own from social occasions, networking events or other one-to-one encounters, where the awkwardness that crept into the situation stole every thought from your head. I just couldn't figure out how conversation *worked*. What *did* one say?

1.1 A dance for two

Conversation is clearly about talking, but talking doesn't make a conversation. George Bernard Shaw once commented to a young lady that she had lost the art of conversation but not, unfortunately, the power of speech! If everyone talks incessantly without listening to anyone else, there's no conversation. It's just people talking one after another or, more often, one over another. You've probably found yourself in a group at some time where everyone's busy expressing opinions and no one's listening to anyone else. It isn't a very satisfying experience.

The word "conversation" is made up of *con*, "with" and *versare*, "turn". Conversation is turn and turn about – you alternate.



Conversation is all about taking turns. It's a dialogue, not a monologue. You share the talking time; you also listen and acknowledge.

One person may talk more than another, just as in a dance one person may perform more complicated steps than another, but there's equality in conversation. It's very hard to have a good conversation with someone who intimidates or patronizes you or with someone who is intimidated by you.

The to and fro of a good conversation feels easy and natural, with both parties taking part and responding spontaneously to each other. Mme de Staël, a great French conversationalist of the eighteenth century, described conversation as a means of "reciprocally and rapidly giving one another pleasure; of speaking just as quickly as one thinks; of spontaneously enjoying one's self".

In the dance of conversation, both players take part in the steps of the dance with their thoughts, feelings and body language. You don't shut down your listening to think of what to say next or to make unspoken comments internally. The dance doesn't stop. The art is as much in drawing out the other person as in airing your own thoughts and opinions. There's mutual respect for each other – I'm okay, you're okay. In most conversations you don't make it deliberately difficult for the other person to dance their steps – you facilitate their moves, even when they appear clumsy.

When musicians and actors want to describe a particularly satisfying performance, they often call it a "conversation" to describe the feeling of connection that travels both ways. "My stand-up is quite good now – it's just like a big conversation each time", says the comedian Eddie Izzard. "A good quartet is like a good conversation among friends interacting to each other's ideas", suggests the saxophonist Stan Getz. "When I play live, it's a conversation that we're all having with the song", says the singer-songwriter Tori Amos.

A SUBTLE HUMAN ART

Like music, good conversation is a subtle art. When you converse with someone, you are doing many things simultaneously. You are listening to what the other person has to say, while picking up the nuances of voice tone and the clues in their appearance and body language, and at the same time you are in a state of readiness to respond easily and naturally with words of your own. No wonder doing it well takes practice!

In 1950, the computer scientist Alan Turing tested to what extent computers could learn how to converse naturally. He published a paper on artificial intelligence, *Computing Machinery and Intelligence*, in which he described a test where a subject attempts