

PROMOTING DISCUSSION SKILLS

SUGANTHAN R.

Assistant Professor,
V.S.B. Engineering College
Karudayampalayam (Po)
Karur – 639 111 (INDIA)

ABSTRACT

Almost three hundred years ago, British author and Politician Joseph Addison had this to say about it: “If the minds of men were laid open, we should see but little difference between that of the wise man and that of the fool. The difference is that the first knows how to pick and cull his thoughts for conversation ... whereas the other lets them all indifferently fly out in words.” And this is still true today.

Conversation, in part, is self-expression. It provides us opportunities for asserting our individuality, telling the world just how we feel. However, when discussion is entered into merely to “get something off your chest” it makes very bad discussion. It is too one-sided. No numbers of monologues ever add up to real discussion. At its best when discussion means the pooling of information, the sharing of interests, the bringing together of ideas. Discussion is a two-way thing, involving give and take, action and reaction. Indeed it is a many-way thing – the communication of many ideas among many people. In this connection, my paper consists of the following to promote discussion skills,

- SIX WAYS TO SPOT DISCUSSION TROUBLE**
- HOW TO FIND AND DEVELOP TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION**
- HOW TO PRACTICE THE ART OF DISCUSSION**
- SEVEN BIG DO’S IN DISCUSSION**
- SEVEN BIG DON’TS IN DISCUSSION**

SIX WAYS TO SPOT DISCUSSION TROUBLE

- Did I find it difficult to pick up a topic for discussion? Did I cause embarrassment by talking on some tabooed topic?
- Was adjusting to persons my problem? Did I get tongue-tied in the presence of certain individuals, or of certain types of individuals? Did I fail to give proper difference to older or more distinguished persons?

- Was my general attitude at fault in dealing with people? Was I dogmatic, condescending, and argumentative? Did I adjust well to the attitudes of others? To their changes in attitude?
- Did I have a trouble starting a conversation? Getting others to start?
- Did I fail to keep a conversation going? Did I let it bog down? Could I have moved more smoothly from one topic to another? Was I clumsy in ending a conversation?
- Was it some mechanical fault that made me ill at ease? Was it mispronunciation, forgetting names, overuse of slang?

HOW TO FIND AND DEVELOP TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

- You read newspapers daily, probably subscribe to a magazine or two; you listen to radio programs or watch television; you hear stories from friends; you go to church and hear sermons; you attend theater; you have a multitude of interesting experiences with customers, salespeople, colleagues, your family.
- These are all topics for discussion.
- When you come across a likely item in the newspaper, make a mental note of it. Circle it in pencil. Better still, tear the item out.
- Fix in mind the idea you find in a magazine: “Americans are perfectionists. They have a naïve faith that there is a best way of doing things, and they’re going to keep on trying till they find it.”
- Remember the pungent phrase from the speech or sermon: “Every man is an unrepeatable experiment.”
- Out of such materials, build your own storehouse of topics. If your memory is not good enough to store such bits, keep a notebook or a card file.
- Develop this material while it is still fresh in mind. Talk over an idea with family and friends. It may seem quite a different, certainly a fuller, and one when you have examined and explored its possibilities.
- If you keep on discovering and developing topics in these ways, you will never be at a loss for discussion.

HOW TO PRACTICE THE ART OF DISCUSSION

- There are very few practice exercises for discussion. One can rehearse the telling of a story. One can practice introductions. The best practice for discussion is discussion itself.
- Practice at home with your family. If you feel your weakness is topics, talk about the play you have all seen (or the movie, or the television programme). Try to keep the discussion going for a good while. Build discussions out of the events of the day as given in your morning newspaper. Bring half a dozen possible topics to the dinner table.
- Practice with your friends. Invite a few over for the evening. In planning the evening don't let it be all bridge or some other game. Reserve part of the evening for conversation. If you feel that an innate friendliness is one of your strengths, and wants to develop it, concentrate on an attitude of friendly interest in the talk of the others for that evening.
- Practice with strangers. Try to put the principles you have been reading about here into practice. Be on the alert for hints that will help you. Adjust to the other fellow. Try to talk. Be an alive, an interested, listener and talker.
- Most important of all, seek out discussion. Look for the situations in which discussions will develop. Cultivate a healthy, positive attitude toward meeting friends and strangers. Each opportunity to talk will provide practice. And as you improve, you will know more and more the stimulation and relaxation that good discussion offers.

SEVEN BIG DO'S IN DISCUSSION

- Be interested. Be interested in what's going on, what's being talked about, the other fellow, and what he is doing.

Be interested, not just in the one person you know very well, but in all the persons in the group. Let your gaze move from eye to eye. Pick out the person who hasn't said much, who looks ill at ease, and make a special point of talking to him.

- Be friendly. Discussion withers if you are critical of the persons present, or are caustic about their contributions, or show, by your expression, that you don't think much of them.
- Be cheerful, good-humored. Smile. Make it an interested, friendly smile. Show your good feelings in the way you say things.
- Be animated, and yet relaxed. You're alive, so let your face and gestures show it.

- Be flexible. Topics change, and people, and moods. Tenacity and rigidity has no role in discussion.
- Be tactful. Follow that old adage, think before you speak. Think first, not afterwards. That is the essence of tactfulness.
- Be courteous. One could make a presentable case for the idea that good discussion is good manners. It does mean having a general attitude of consideration for others.

SEVEN BIG DON'TS IN DISCUSSION

- Don't be dogmatic. Avoid the sweeping generalization, such as "All politicians are corrupt". Lord Acton took care to say, "All power tends to corrupt". Moderate your statements. Avoid all and always. Swing over to some and sometimes. Use a few, many, a great many, occasionally, infrequently, whichever you think is warranted. Learn the face-saving and argument-avoiding uses of: perhaps, do you think, last week I heard someone say that; may I'm wrong, but.
- Don't be condescending. An attitude of being superior to everything and everybody will soon leave you in splendid isolation. There are better amusements than sitting alone looking down one's nose.
- Don't be argumentative. Almost everybody likes a good fight-in the prize ring or the political arena. But almost no one is overjoyed to discover a battler in the living room.
- Don't be lifeless. The other fellow expects to get some response from you to his witticism. Don't force him to carry the entire burden of the talking.
- Don't be insincere. Praise people, but don't over praise them. Don't gush, don't be fulsome. And praise the right thing. If your hostess serves excellent food on acceptable but undistinguished china, praise the food, not the plates.
- Don't be egocentric. Express your opinions, certainly; state your reactions; but without giving the impression that you think the universe revolves about you. Don't talk in such a way that your topics can be described as "inflation and me," the Taj mahal and me," the supreme court and me," etc.

Finally, don't be a mumbler. Speak clearly. Speak up. Before a remark can be understood, before a question can be answered, before a joke can be laughed at, it must be heard, and it must be intelligible.



REFERENCES

- [1]. M Ashraf Rizvi, EFFECTIVE TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION (Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Limited. New Delhi, Fifth reprint 2007.
- [2]. Raymond V Lesikar, Marie E Flatley, Kathryn Rentz, Neerja Pande, Business Communication (Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Limited. New Delhi, Eleventh edition, Fifth reprint 2011.