

# Now we're talking



**THE ABILITY TO LISTEN AS WELL AS COMMUNICATE CAN HELP FORGE STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS**

WORDS LIZ McGRATH

When was the last time you had a real conversation with someone," wellness and success coach Georgia Bamber asks.

"And by conversation I mean a two-way interaction where you were open to exploring the topic at hand, rather than airing your own views and opinions? Using this criteria, there's a high probability that for most people it was a while ago," she says.

It's an interesting question and one increasingly being asked in a world where

technology, not to mention a global pandemic, is slowly slaying our ability to converse.

And it's costing us dearly, negotiation expert Sam Trattles says.

"We've become keyboard warriors," the author of *I Love Negotiating* says.

"People are so interesting, but with so many of our relationships through text or email, we're missing out on this wonderful opportunity to get to know each other better."

Psychologist Briony Leo, from relationship wellness app Relish, says we lose a

powerful social tool without face-to-face interaction.

"In terms of relationships, what we see is a gradual distancing and a loss of closeness," Briony explains.

"In our recent Relationship Health Survey, a large proportion of people said they felt ignored and rejected by their partner due to their mobile phone use.

"Face-to-face interactions are the most natural and most rewarding of all social interactions. They allow us to connect with others, open up, process how we're feeling, share our experiences."

## Two ears, one mouth

So, where are we going wrong? A lot of it is due to the fact that "most of us are pretty bad listeners", says Georgia, the author of *Achieve Anything You Want*.

"We get no formal training in how to listen, people just muddle their way through," she says. "You learn how to read and write and speak but no one teaches you how to listen."

It was the Greek philosopher Epictetus who said "we have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak", a sentiment with which Georgia agrees.

"Most of the interactions that we call conversations are something else altogether — fact-finding missions, attempts to persuade, time to show off, a chance to score points or complain, an opportunity to gossip and the list could go on," she says.

"Studies suggest that while 70 to 80 per cent of our waking hours are spent in some form of communication, we only absorb 25 to 35 per cent of what we're told."

Best-selling author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* Stephen Covey puts it like this: "Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply."

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"It's all about relationships and improving your conversational opportunities and being a better listener is the biggest facet of that," Georgia says.

"It greatly improves your ability to do your job. It leads to better collaboration. We often miss what is going on around us when all we want to do is shine. If people feel heard, you'll make stronger connections and grow your social networks."

Sam agrees and says "great listeners are also great negotiators".

"Every negotiation can be made smoother by making a conscious decision to listen more intently," she says.

"Asking good questions, looking for body language cues and thinking 'what about you' is your greatest currency in helping to get what you want with ease." 

## How to BE A GOOD LISTENER

### 1 Focus

"People engage in conversations thinking their brain doesn't need to attend," Georgia says. "Rein in your thoughts and refocus. Don't interrupt, let people speak. Don't be afraid of silences. Ask clarifying questions. Give a summation and keep checking in."

### 2 Be brave

Engaging in conversation, particularly with those you don't know, can be confronting, Sam says, but don't be put off. "There might be an awkward moment to start with where it feels like it's me versus you, but very quickly it becomes about 'us'," she says.

### 3 Think about intention

Georgia suggests thinking about what's behind the words. "If you're having a conversation with someone, think about the intention of what they're saying, the thoughts and feelings they're having. Reflect on what's going on with them so you're more compassionate and less reactionary. And as my mother would always say, ask people about themselves!"

### 4 Try "would you rather"

If you feel you know everything there is to know about your partner and there are no surprises left in conversation, try asking deeper questions and really listen to the answers, Briony says. "Even 'would you rather's', which are unpredictable and thought-provoking and allow you to see your partner anew, leading to deeper connection and intellectual stimulation," she suggests.



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