

How to Get Out of (Or At Least Change) a Conversation You Don't Want To Be In

Don't get us wrong - "Talk To Me" is about any topic, with any person. But that doesn't mean that every once in a while, a talker won't take over with a gigantic rant or monologue that will drain every one around. In short, "Talk To Me" will not immediately rid the world of all its self-indulgent freaks at once.

This isn't meant to encourage getting out of difficult conversations – some of the best conversations are incredibly difficult – rather, this is meant to remind you that once in awhile, it's in everyone's best interest to simply change the topic, or start an entirely new conversation.

This is a highly subjective thing. The only real way to measure if a person is non-engaging is your gut instinct: if you and your fellow talkers start getting persistently bored, antsy, and want out, then you probably should do something about it.

Here are a few warning signs or likely suspects:

The Soapboxer - There are free exchanges of opinions, then there are walking bumper stickers. Except bumper stickers are short, and some soapboxers are more like football field stickers. "Talk To Me" is a chat room, not someone's personal radio show. At its better moments, the airwaves are shared.

The Creepy Flirt - There's flirting and there's creepy flirting. Many couples have met in front of a "talk to me" sign. But treating someone like they're some Myspace account muttering, "oh, baby," isn't exactly the spirit.

The Ego-Tripper – There are life stories, and there are "me, my life, and I" 4-part miniseries. Storytelling and shameless promotion are two different things.

The Abstract Theorist – There's intellectual discourse, and there's lofty abstractions involving matter and recidivism and quinoa and war which is intimately tied to a secret society of Illuminati warriors. Encourage people to talk about their world, not utterly random waxings.

The Attention Hog – The attention hog is a little bit of every one of these warning signs. In general, the attention hog will rarely ask questions of others, but quite happily and all-too-articulately answer just about anything asked of him/her.

Again, don't let this be an excuse to leave any difficult or long conversations. Some three hour conversations are amazing! Difficult conversations are fine. Predatory, creepy, or egomaniacal, not fine. Here's a different way of looking at it:

- Talking about religion, fine. Converting people on the spot, not fine.
- Talking about death, fine. Talking about how your death will be a the apex of humanity's self-realization...
- Talking about being homeless, fine. Cursing at all the people who won't give a quarter and throwing recycled Pepsi cans at them...
- Talking about politics, fine. Screaming that all Republicans are assholes when someone in a suit walks by...

Sometime you need to disengage. If you know how to handle the 2% of draining conversations, you'll be able to enjoy most of the day so much more. So if you're feeling stuck, here are a few thoughts:

- 1) *Derail the monologue.* Ask a new question. A harder question. Tell a bad joke. Mix it up.
- 2) *Challenge them.* Not in a confrontational way, but a Socratic way. Be a devil's advocate. Be assertive. Monologuers love to take advantage of people who don't have the confidence to challenge them.
- 3) If nothing works, stop making eye contact. Start to disengage.
- 4) Try to bring in another conversationalist. Say hello to someone else. Add another talker into the mix.
- 5) Shake the hand of the talker, announce your name, and say, "Nice to meet you!"
- 6) *Lunch break.* The last resort is to tap the foot of your talking partner, (or whatever code you've developed) that essentially means, "lunch break!" Stand up, walk away, and take a break.

These are just a few thoughts in the rapidly growing field of public diplomacy. If you have any thoughts/experiences you'd like to share, email the site @ www.talktome.org