



# The Fine Art of Big Talk

Scott Huckaby's Toastmaster CTM #7  
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## Applying your Skills – Objectives:

- To bring together and apply the skills you learned in the preceding projects.
- To organize your speech in a logical manner.
- To research the facts needed to support your speech.
- Time: five to seven minutes

Mr. Toastmaster, ladies and gentlemen...

Do you ever find yourself in boring conversations where you'd like to move on to something worth talking about? Have you ever had a conversation that felt like a waste of time?

I often feel like it is too easy to get stuck in the rut of superficial chit-chat with people. And the problem with small talk is that it usually comes in large doses. Since this has been a recurring problem for me, I researched a strategy for getting beyond small talk as part of my preparation for this presentation. You may benefit from the solution I've come up with as well.

First of all, I'm not opposed to small talk. Small talk certainly has its place. There is a book in print titled, "*The Fine Art of Small Talk*" by Debra Fine. The subtitle of the book is, "*How to start a conversation, keep it going, build rapport, and leave a positive impression.*" These are all good things to be able to do and I'm sure there are plenty of people who can benefit from this book. Some people couldn't even start a conversation if the weather didn't change occasionally.

But my problem is not small talk, it's what I'll call big talk. I needed a plan to move a conversation beyond the insignificant and inconsequential into something with more meat on it. In my research, I

found an article by Kima Jude that was originally published in HomeLife magazine, titled "*The Art of Conversation.*" This article proposes four steps to turn a dull conversation into something memorable.

The first step is to **reveal something of yourself**. This is probably the chief reason why I often find myself mired in mundane conversations... big talk is riskier than small talk. But if you want someone else to wade into the deep end of the pool, you need to be prepared to jump in yourself.

Big talk is riskier than small talk because sharing feelings and opinions exposes a person to a potential rejection. However, if you give even a limited revelation of your self, it shows that you are willing to be vulnerable and opens the door for the other person to reveal deeper things about themselves.

For example, if you mention that you are still pretty tender about the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, this gives the other person permission to share their concerns as well. And the resulting discussion may help you both better understand why it happened.

The second tactic to bridge from small talk to big talk is to **ask a thought provoking question**. The friends we admire most are those who ask us important questions that we can answer.

You can move a conversation into topics of substance by asking the other person their opinion on the latest headlines, movies or books. Religion and politics are subjects that can certainly get you into a deeper discussion.

I think there is a conspiracy in our society to keep people from having deeper discussions because topics such as politics can polarize people. But opposing opinions do not have to lead to an argument, Hannity and Colmes notwithstanding. People can agree to disagree in a civil discussion that will help them both grow wiser. Nothing lowers the level of a conversation more than raising the voice.

I am a political conservative and my brother is a Connecticut liberal so we had some pretty lively conversations when I saw him last Thanksgiving. My brother didn't change any of my opinions and I don't think I convinced him to see things the way they ought to be either but both of us grew in our understanding of each other's perspective. Both of us should be better at making our point the next time we get together.

There is extra pressure from society to avoid religious topics because it is not politically correct to try to impose your beliefs on others. But this attitude is pretty illogical if you think about it. Those who fear discussing religious topics must believe that a simple conversation can brainwash a person. Certainly there is such a thing as brainwashing, but this only occurs in cases where there is coercion by some sort of threat. Brainwashing is not a concern in a pluralistic society such as ours where it is possible to have a free and open exchange of ideas.

Conversations do change opinions from time to time but this is a good thing... Contrary to the conventional wisdom, most opinions need to be changed. It is amazing how an opinion based on truth has a way of winning out over a belief based on erroneous assumptions. So go ahead, bring up that religious topic, you may be pleasantly surprised where it leads.

The Third element to employ in big talk is to **listen**. And I don't just mean listening for the other person to catch their breath so that you can start talking again either. If you are not a

charming conversationalist, you may still be a big hit as a charming listener.

Active listening can be hard work. To engage in big talk, it is necessary to actually understand what the other person is saying. You should show you are interested in what they have to say by leaning in, maintaining eye contact and being ready to clarify what they say. You may need to restate what they said in your own words to verify that you understand.

The fourth step to develop a big talk conversation is to **ask the hard follow-up question**. This is where you bridge from the general to the personal and thus get into some real solid food of a conversation.

Jesus Christ was the master of big talk. We can learn a lot about how to engage in big talk ourselves from the account of His conversations in the Bible. For example, Mark Chapter 8 describes an occasion where Jesus initiated a conversation with His disciples by asking them, "*Who do the people say that I am?*" After listening to what the disciples had to say, Jesus got personal with a tougher question: "*Who do **you** say that I am?*" This then led to an important discussion about His mission and our purpose.

Well, I hope you'll find this 4-step plan to turn small talk into big talk as useful as I have. And you've been warned: if you find yourself in more than a 30-second conversation with me, you should be expecting, "the hard question!"

Mr. Toastmaster...