

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



463 How to Take Control of a Conversation

You're in the middle of someone telling a story, and it goes on and on and on. You want to be polite. You smile. You nod. What will you do if they don't stop? I'm Jerry Roberts and today, how to break through and gain control of a conversation that's out of control. That's coming next on The Extra Point.

You're in a conversation with someone or in a small group of people, and one starts talking about something and it goes on seemingly forever. You think to yourself, "I'm sure there was a reason I asked him the question, but now I can't recall what it was." It's kind of like the old saying: when you're up to your elbows in alligators it's tough to remember what brought you to the swamp in the first place.

Some people get wound up and go off on you. I've had people talk non-stop for five minutes, ten minutes, and they don't seem to breathe. They go from one story to the next and you can't get a word in. You look for an opening, an opportunity, anything.

Some people have this belief that if they monopolize a conversation, that's a good thing. If they're louder, talk and talk and talk, tell jokes and act in a highly animated manner — that they're putting on a show and are in control. I'd venture to say that the majority of people think this way, that somebody talking endlessly like that is in control. Do you feel that way?

Let me ask you a question. Would you like a simple method that will allow you to short-circuit an endless monologue, in such a way that won't seem disrespectful and will transfer control of the conversation back to you? Not only will you regain control but you'll earn the everlasting admiration of others who've been caught up in the marathon.

It goes like this. You wait for the slightest of pauses or the speaker to make any kind of

point. Even a vague one. It doesn't matter. You jump in and ask a question on anything they said. The wording should be something like, "I'd love to hear more about this topic, I'm sure we all would (if you're in a group), but I really need to ask a question."

They may be startled by you breaking in but will ask you what the question is. At that point drop the question on them, a narrow-focused question with a yes or no answer; or how long something took, perhaps how much something cost. You get the idea.

When they complete the answer you thank them, and then say, "It was very interesting talking to you today. Thank you, hope to see you again — bye now."

Inserting a question into a rant can also help in the workplace. It can quickly change a negative conversation to a positive one. Instead of trying to end a never-ending chat like the previous example, here you can ask a thoughtful and possibly complex question that will redirect a conversation toward a better conclusion.

The ability to ask questions is what gives us control of a conversation. Think about it, who has the control, the person being interviewed or the one conducting the interview?

Whether it's shortening a long-winded speaker, redirecting a coworker, or maybe a friend, if you can master the art of asking questions, you'll have gained a communications super power.

That's The Extra Point. Get out there and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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