

CB006 - How To Grow Your Conversational Power

Hi there, welcome back to confidence bytes, my name's Stuart Elliott for this exciting show.

Now today I want to continue the theme from the previous show about good conversations and I want to specifically talk about acceptance and refusal in a two way conversation.

Now, if you think of a long term couple, quite often their relationship stales and they give up talking to each other. But why do you think that is?

Well, there are many, many reasons but one prime reason is that one or both keep refusing the other's offers. Now what do I mean by that?

Well, let's, let's think about it... You and I are having a conversation and you invite me to go for a Pizza and I say: "Mmmmm, I don't fancy Pizza, let's go for aa hamburger instead."

Now what have I done? I've just taken your offer, a perfectly good offer, and I've just refused it, I've said: "No. I don't like your offer, I want to have my offer, I want to make myself more important so I want to go and do my thing. I don't care about your thing."

And this can be a very subtle interchange and there are so many variations on it but it's something to become aware of because, over time, if I keep refusing everything you offer then you are going to stop wanting to be with me so much, you're going to stop making offers to me.

So we have to, as people in conversations, we have to start developing our awareness to hear when we're making these refusals, and we also have to be aware of the offers that people are giving us.

And there's a very good way of doing that. And that's by a game which one of my mentors, Igor Ledochowski's called the 'Yes, Let's' game and there's also a variation or similar game in 'Improv' by Keith Johnston, and t's really about building status in conversations.

So let's look at how you can play it...



Basically, every time your friend - well before you even have that you, you need to get together with a friend and what you need to do is, you need to set the scene. So let's say we're at an office party and every time your friend and you have an interchange one of you is going to make an offer.

The person who makes the offer then waits for the other person to accept it and make another offer. An you keep building and building on that and see where you go. And you can do it in two ways.

You can make it into a fantasy or you can make it into a realistic situation. So if we're at an office party - erm - we could start the interchange:

“Hey man, I'm Stuart. I've not met you before, are you new to the company?”

And you say to me:

“No, I work, I've been here a few years, I work in one of the back offices. I've not seen you either, what is your name?” - Sorry, not ‘what is your name.’ cos I've already told you that...

“My name is Mary.”

And I say: “OK Mary, great to meet you! - erm, you know, erm - would you like to go and get something to eat from the snack table?”

And you say: “Great idea! Let's go to the snack table...”

And then we're walking over to the snack table and you say: “look, look at those wonderful - erm, erm - hors d'oeuvres, let's grab one of the hors d'oeuvres.”

I say: “Great idea!” and we keep this banter going.

But, if at some stage you make me an offer, say “Would you like a drink of - erm - of orange juice?” And I say “no thanks, I'd rather have a glass of water.”

Bang! I've just refused you! And it's, it's quite subtle and we can keep doing that... you know, once or twice we can get away with it, but if we keep doing it in the conversation then eventually the other person just gives up.



So my suggestion is you play these games, you get realistic situations and you just walk through them.

And, you know, to give you an indication of how subtle it can be, one of my practice partners who I work with from my Hypnotherapy University - he and I were having this conversation, we were doing this game and he, he suggested: "Let's go for a drink? Let's go to that pub over there for a drink."

So I said: "Great idea." and we start walking toward the pub... And I say: "Here's the door, I'm walking into the pub." And as we walk into the pub, we get to the bar and I said: "OK, what would you like to have to drink?"

And he immediately felt that I'd refused him.

Now, from my point of view, I was being polite, I was being respectful to him because I was asking him what he wants to drink. But he took it the wrong - the other way, not the wrong way the other way. He said that he felt I'd refused him because he'd made the offer of let's go for a drink. He was expecting me to get the drink and give him a drink.

Now, I thought about this for a second, I said: "In my world if someone gives me a drink I'm not too happy about it because, you know, I want to drink something I like. I don't like people giving me things that maybe - er -perhaps I wouldn't like, I'd rather have that choice. So I can understand your point of view... so what about if I changed the wording to sayyyy... erm - I'm having a Bitter would you like the same?"

Now he said: "It's OK, That is OK." He could accept that.

It's a very slight change and to me it's still, you know, in his language a refusal but he didn't see it that way.

So this is just an indication of how subtle it can be. And there's a wonderful book by Keith Johnston called 'Improv' I-M-P-R-O-V, you can get it on Amazon, and it's about improvisational theatre. And there are many, many exercises and, and activities, you know, based around this and 'Status' and all types of things. And I just want to read you a paragraph from it just to show you - erm, you know, how this can also play out in real life again.

So, Keith Johnston was saying: "In my own case I was astounded to find when I thought I was being friendly I was actually being hostile. If someone had said 'I like your play.' I would have said: 'No, it's not up too much.' perceiving myself as being



charmingly modest. In reality I would have been implying that my admirer had bad taste.”

Think about that...

How many times do you do something similar, how many times do you just brush-off a compliment like that? Your friend says to you: “Oh that’s great, that was a well done job, that’s really well done!” and you say: “Ach, it was nothing, it was too easy.”

What you’re doing by thinking you’re being modest is you’re saying she doesn’t know what she’s talking about because she thinks something’s difficult and hard to do when you, in reality, know it’s so easy and it wasn’t anything special so you’re putting her down. You’re telling her she’s a little bit, you know - erm,, short sighted or something like that.

And, you know, this is, this is a very subtle interchange we have all the time, we think we’re being modest, we think we’re doing right, and we don’t realise how much we could be hurting somebody. And, as I say, it builds up over time, over time, over time and eventually people stop complimenting, they stop making offers because they keep getting rejected.

And this can then sap your confidence, and from two points. One is if you’re the one who’s always being rejected your confidence goes down because you’ve just been told you’re a little bit silly because you don’t understand how easy something was. Another way is that your friends don’t want to talk to you so you think there must be something wrong with you and you don’t realise it’s just a subtle play on the conversation.

Let me give you another example - and I did this the other day! (laughing) And, you know, I know about it and yet I still did it! This is how insidious it is okay.

We try to elevate ourselves above the other person for recognition, and what I did, I was talking to some people on the phone and I said: “Oh, you know, um, I I I...” because I’m staying in China and the area I live in we have Typhoons at this time of year, it’s July. And, I was talking to them and I just said - erm - something about: “There’s a Typhoon coming but it’s not too bad.”

And what I was doing was, I was elevating my status above them because they’re in an area where they don’t get Typhoons, they don’t get very much bad weather like that. Or I will do it and say: “Oh, the temperature here’s 38 degrees, it’s lovely, I love it.” And they’re in an area where the temperature’s pretty cold, 18 degrees, 16



degrees. And I'm trying to elevate myself above them and I'm not realising I'm doing it. And maybe I'm making them feel a little bit lower in status and putting them down.

Now obviously, once or twice in a conversation is not so bad but it can keep happening, keep happening, keep happening. So I want you to think about that, I want you to listen, because once you become aware of it then it doesn't hurt so much. You realise that the other person doesn't know and they're not deliberately putting you down. It's just something that happens without them understanding what they're doing.

And this will give you a lot more confidence because you know how the conversations play out. You've become aware through the game I t... you know, I asked you to start playing with your friends, you've become aware of the subtleties of the conversation, you're listening to the wordplays and, you know, sometimes you will not see a change in their, in their... or sorry, you won't hear a change in their tone.

You might see a change in their body language and it's maybe in the face, it could be in the eyes twitching a little bit or a little sort of "What?", you know, if it's a fairly serious one or perceived to be a fairly serious thing but quite often body language is hidden in the face.

Body language is more observable in the body because we're trained, from a young age, to keep our expressions off our face and, you know, I'm, I'm a good example of that. I have a 'wooden' face, especially on video (giggle) you know, it's a lot of effort for me to learn to smile and to expand my emotions into my face because over the time, you know, when I was younger I was shy and I put on this front.

And I thought everybody would like it because it's a sophisticated front but they took it as standoffish. Now I've realised that and I'm working on making my face more expressionable.

So this is something that, you know, you need to become aware of. Look at the whole body and when you're having the conversation and you think there's a refusal see what their body does, and if you want to find out any more about body language there's a really good book.

It's called - erm, and I can't... it's called every... no, what's, 'What Everybody's Saying' and it's written by a guy called Joe Navarro who used to be an FBI agent and interrogator and he's got some really interesting information in that book about the



subtleties of body language and how you can't just take one little thing - you've got to take all the little things and put them into a big picture.

So if you want to know more about body language that's a really good resource for you to get.

And think about it when you're talking with your friends in a normal conversation: do they suddenly do 'this' or do they make a... have a reaction or is there a different tone in their voice or do they go quiet and start, you know, being a bit more 'considering'?

Is that because of something you've said unintentionally's hurt them or unintentionally has put them down because you've tried to elevate your status or you've made them feel a little bit silly.

Here's another example of it, and this again's from Keith Johnston - erm, where's it gone?

Here it is. It's about two people. One's reading a book and the other one comes up and says: "What are you reading?"

And the person who's reading says: "No, War and Peace."

And the person who asked the question says: "Oh! That's my favourite book."

And then 'B' starts to feel a little bit 'brrrr' because he's struggling to read it, he's not finished it and you, by saying "That's my favourite book.", you're implying that you've read it more than once because it's your favourite.

And that's putting him down because now he feels a little bit inadequate compared to you.

So if you change it and you say erm: "What are you reading?" and he says "War and Peace" and you say: "Oh, I've always wanted to read that." He's now feeling better because he's now, you know, keeping his status.

Now you could also say: "Oh I started reading that as well but I found it very difficult. I'm on page ten..." or twenty, "What page are you on?" Or you don't even specify the page, you ask him what page he's on. And you say: "Okay, I haven't got that far."



He's still keeping his status, he's still feeling, you know, elevated in the conversation. You're not putting him down by saying "Oh, I've read that many times."

So think about what I've said, I would seriously suggest you play this back many times and listen to it because there are so many subtleties.

Get a friend, talk to them about what you want to do with the 'Yes, Let's' game and set the scenes and just listen for how many times you subtly put the other person down.

And here's another way we do it:

We have a, a relationship, you know, maybe it's, it's, it's a friend relationship, or a husband wife or a couple relationship, it doesn't matter. And one says to the other one, and says: "Would you like to go 'somewhere'?" or "When would you like to go 'somewhere'?"

And you say: "Ach, I don't know. It's up to you, you choose, I'm happy with anything you choose."

You know, they've made you an offer and you've just pushed it back in their face! You know, it's so simple, so subtle but it happens all the time.

You keep doing it and guess what?

You're going to have communication problems.

And I notice myself doing it with my wife. She says: "Would you like to go somewhere tonight?" and I say: "Well, it's up to you, I'm not bothered."

Instead of saying: "Yes, that's a great idea!" - and that makes her feel good because she's had a great idea - I say: "Ach, I don't know." so it makes her feel bad. So eventually, over time if I keep doing that she will stop making offers and then we don't go out. Then we have a boring existence and we, we wonder why there's no communication.

So become aware. Listen carefully to the conversations you have with your friends and everybody else. Pick up the subtleties, start learning about them and see how you can modify your language and try it and see what happens.



And I can guarantee you'll start having better conversations, and when you have better conversations people will like you, and when they like you, you'll like yourself because you feel more confident in yourself.

It's, it's a wonderful spiral!

So you go away, practice the game. Get confident everyday, get more confident everyday.

And thank you... And I'll see you next week.

