MASTERING CONVERSATION

1 Warm up

Think about which subjects are appropriate to discuss in your country with friends, family, and work colleagues. Complete the table with a Y if the subject is appropriate, or an N if it is not.

Subject	Friends	Family	Work Colleagues
Politics			
Religion			
Children			
Food			
Weather			
Health			

Which subjects do you mostly talk about with each of the above groups of people?

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2 Vocabulary development

Before you watch, match the following words from the talk to the definitions.

Group 1

1. inspire	a. fail to notice something
2. trivial	b. of little value or importance
3. devolve	c. opposite e.g. points of view
4. polarised	d. to change from one thing to another, often to something bad
5. overlooked	e. to give somebody the desire, confidence or enthusiasm to do something creative

Group 2

1. condescending	a. behaving as though you are more important and more intelligent than others
2. balanced	b. occupy someone's attention
3. engaged	c. separated into parts
4. pontificate	d. to give your opinion in a way that shows you think only your opinion is correct
5. divided	e. when different elements are equal

In pairs, discuss these questions.

1. What subjects do you not enjoy discussing because you think they are too **trivial**?
2. What subjects in your country tend to **polarise** people?
3. Can you think of a time when something important in your business was **overlooked**? What happened?
4. What do you do to **balance** your professional and personal life?
5. What activities **engage** you the most? Why do you think that is?
6. Who or what **inspires** you most in your work life or your personal life?
7. Have you ever watched someone **pontificate** about a subject? What was it? How did it make you feel about them?
8. Have you ever experienced someone being **condescending** to you? What happened?

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3 Watch for main ideas

Watch the first part of the video (00:00-03:30) and complete the following sentences with the words you hear.

- In this world that we live in, every conversation has the _____[1] to devolve into an argument.
- The most_____[2] of issues have someone fighting _____[3] for it and against it.
- Pew Research did a study of _____[4] American adults and found that we are more polarized and_____[5] than ever before in history.
- A conversation requires a balance between _____[6] and _____[7]. We have lost that balance.
- According to Pew Research, about_____[8] of American teenagers send more than _____[9] a day.
- A high school teacher named Paul Barnwell realised that conversational_____[10] might be the single most_____[11] skill that we fail to teach children.

4 Checking understanding

Before you watch the rest of the video, in pairs, discuss these questions about the rules of conversations.

1. What do you think is meant by "go with the flow"?
2. How would you apply it to future conversations?
3. Why is "don't worry about the details of the story'"good advice?
4. Can you think of examples of conversations you have had where someone didn't follow this advice?
5. Can you write down some examples of open-ended questions that would be useful in the kind of social situations you find yourself in at work?
6. Have you had an experience where someone was talking about something that they clearly didn't know about? What happened?
7. Do you multitask? What things do you do that distract you from conversations you have? What could you do to ensure you are not distracted in the future?

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Now watch the rest of the talk and number the rules in the order that the speaker presents them. The first one has been done for you.

a. Don't think your experience is the same as someone else's.

b. Go with the flow.

c. Don't multitask. **1**

d. Listen.

e. If you don't know something, be honest about it.

f. Try not to repeat yourself.

g. Use open-ended questions.

h. Be brief.

i. Don't worry about the details of a story.

j. Don't pontificate.

5 Talking Point

With your partner or in groups discuss these questions.

1. What was your opinion on the talk?
2. Were there any rules which you would add?
3. Were there any rules which you didn't think were useful? If so, why?
4. Which rule did you think was the most useful? Why?

Extension task.

In pairs, choose a topic that you are both comfortable discussing. Imagine you are in a work setting and work for different companies. Practice discussing the subject and use the rules from the talk as a guide to help you.

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