

Making a Difference

2020 Book Selection

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October is
**CONFLICT RESOLUTION
MONTH IN COLORADO**
Listen. Talk. Work it Out.

Inspiring the use of constructive problem solving in Colorado.

"THIS BOOK IS NECESSARY" —*AMAZON*
**WE NEED
TO TALK**

HOW TO HAVE
CONVERSATIONS
THAT MATTER

CELESTE
HEADLEE



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Why read We Need To Talk?

The state of conversation today can seem grim. Technology and shortening attention spans have made real connections rarer and more difficult. We all avoid hot-button issues and conversations with those we disagree with, fearing a shouting match or a total impasse. It seems like the nation is breaking into separate camps that hardly speak the same language, with no hope of coming together or finding common ground.

But it doesn't have to be this way — we can improve our ability to have meaningful conversations and connect with those we don't see eye-to-eye with. With careful focus and practice, we can improve our ability to speak with one another through empathy, active listening, and emotional recognition. Headlee says that "the best conversations happen between two people who are considering each other." If you can learn to really, sincerely consider another person as you talk with them, then you'll find that you learn more, appreciate more, and understand more. And with luck, they'll feel the same about you.

Talk it Out



The Talk it Out 2020 campaign is offering solutions to create constructive communities and policies.

Guiding Questions

Despite our attempts to have “logical” and “fact-based” conversations, the reality is that emotions are inherent in all human communication. Headlee views emotion not as a flaw, but as a fact of life in conversation. Learning to recognize how emotion shapes our communication and accounting for the effects it can have is vital to effective conversations.

Question: Can you think of a conversation you were having that was completely derailed because one person would not recognize, acknowledge, or respect the emotions of another? What could be done differently next time?

These days it can seem that engaging in difficult conversations is nearly impossible, but Headlee presents five strategies to better navigate exchanges with someone you don’t agree with: be curious, check your bias, show respect, stay the course, and end well. Approach the conversation from a place of genuine curiosity and respect while recognizing your own biases that might color your impression of the person or topic. Focus on listening not to agree or disagree, but to empathize and understand. Don’t bail on the conversation if it gets rough and be sure to end on a positive note: thank them for their time, honesty, and good conversation.

Question: Which of these steps is the most difficult for you? Which ones do you think you excel at?

To Headlee, empathy is both a difficult skill to master and vital to having effective conversations. Your brain is hardwired to make comparisons to your own life and draw conversation back to your own experiences: watch your “conversational narcissism” and focus on really listening to the other person.

Question: Headlee tells the story of trying and failing to comfort her grieving friend by interjecting her own experience of grief. Reflect on a time when “conversational narcissism” caused you to derail or devalue a conversation — what can you learn from this example?

Humans subconsciously reject information that goes against their prior beliefs and biases, which means if your goal is to change someone’s opinion in a conversation, you’re not likely to succeed. Think hard about what you can get out of the conversation, even if it turns sour. Be open to new ideas, and focus on opening someone’s mind up to new ideas rather than beating them in a debate.

Question: Has a conversation with someone ever opened your mind to new perspectives or ideas? How did the person bring about that openness, or was it a mutual feeling?

Utilizing the skills of productive conversation like utilizing empathy, speaking with purpose, and practicing good listening requires a lot of energy, focus, and training. We shouldn’t expect to be good at it right away and should be able to recognize when we simply don’t have the energy or focus to do it correctly.

Question: What is one thing you can do in your day-to-day life to improve your empathy or listening skills?

-Headlee makes a big point about how technologies like social media and email make communication easier but also less effective and less “real.” She believes that the “messy” parts of a conversation that technology edits out — such as pauses, facial expressions, tangents, and awkward moments — are actually a vital part of making ourselves understood and connecting with others.

Question: Give one example of how technology has improved the communication or conversation in your day-to-day life and give one example of how it might be hurting the conversations in your life. For example, technology lets me communicate with family and friends who live far away, but I feel like I don’t see people in person as much as I would like.