



# Two Minutes of Uninterrupted Conversation

This activity is a great warm up for a difficult conversation where there are two or more distinct and conflicting points of view. It is also a great way to demonstrate the power of:

- Listening
- Suspending judgment
- Acknowledging another's point of view
- Inquiry

If you have a divisive issue to address, use the following exercise and elicit what they have learned by listening to each other before you dive into the issue.

An alternative is to go around the table and give each person two minutes to state their point of view, while the rest of the room simply listens.

## **Facilitator Instructions**

1. Determine a fairly controversial question that will elicit some impassioned, opinionated conversation. The question should be something people care about and can access fairly quickly via feelings, emotions, and/or points of view. E.g., "Are things getting better or worse in our group/organization? Why?"
2. Have people form pairs, "knees together."
3. Person A will go first, speaking for two minutes on their point of view.
4. Person B will simply listen. No speaking.
5. Time the two minutes. Call a close. "Speaker, thank your listener."
6. Have participants switch roles. Person B speaks for two minutes on their point of view.
7. Person A simply listens. No speaking.
8. Time the two minutes. Call a close. "Speaker, thank your listener."

## **Debrief**

1. Ask participants how it felt to be the speaker. Responses will range from, "I loved it – it was a great luxury to have time to speak my mind knowing I wouldn't be interrupted," to, "I hated it – it was hard to think of what to say and I was repeating myself, and I wanted some feedback."



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“Both responses are valid. Not often do we have the luxury to finish our thoughts, to talk through what we think, especially if we are extroverted thinkers. Many of us don’t know what we think until we talk ourselves through it. Often if someone comes to us with a problem and we let them talk about it until they have nothing left to say, they feel...

...relief and validation.

...decreased stress.

...like they may have solved their problem!

2. Ask participants how it felt to be the listener, not speaking. Responses will range from, “I loved it – I didn’t feel any responsibility to agree, disagree, weigh in, or prepare my rebuttal or comment, I could just witness and listen,” to, “I hated it – I wanted to jump in and commiserate, comfort, argue or ask a question, I felt like I wasn’t being a good listener if I couldn’t say anything.”

“Chances are the listeners did convey deep listening by nodding their heads, leaning forward, or listening with bright eyes. The speaker probably felt validated, even without words.”

3. Ask participants, “Did you learn anything by listening? What?” This is an opportunity to get info about the issue on the table before diving into the “real” dialogue.

“A study by the Center for Creative Leadership in Colorado determined the #1 skill of leaders is listening. Often when you listen, your people will talk themselves right into their own solution. And then thank you for helping them and being so smart!

“Deep listening is the first step to learning in public. Give the person time. Give yourself time. Suspend your judgment. This doesn’t mean you can’t have any judgment, but hang it out there for viewing, for reflection. Once they have been really heard, people are more willing and able to calm down, open up and hear you. Often all people need is to feel heard.”

4. The next part of learning in public is acknowledgement.

“The act of saying, “I hear you,” does wonders for calming someone down, reducing their stress. You don’t have to agree with them, just acknowledge their point of view—‘You must feel frustrated/scared/worried/relieved/excited.’ Avoid phrases like, ‘I know exactly how you feel!’ or, ‘Let me tell you about my same experience!’”

5. The third step is inquiry.

“Many of you wanted to jump in with questions. There are two main types of questions:

1) The kind that satisfies your own curiosity

2) The kind that helps another person gain clarity into their own problem

“Both are ok, but be aware of the kind you are asking. Often we ask questions because it is in service to our own understanding. The second type of question helps the person dig deeper. For example, ‘What color is your fear? What emotions are you feeling? Have you



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been in this situation before and how did you handle it?' These questions will help guide the person to think more deeply about their own situation."

6. Have participants return to their pairs. Give them four minutes for each person to say something that acknowledges their partner and to ask one thoughtful question.
7. Ask participants how they felt during the four minutes.

### **Conclusion**

Learning in public is about opening up to ourselves, each other, and ideas.