

How to have civil respectful conversations  
with just about anyone

# YES

## You CAN

# Talk Politics



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## DEDICATION

This workbook is dedicated to the thousands of Americans who have bravely crossed party lines at Crossing Party Lines meetings and in their real lives.

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# Preface

In 2016, I started a Meetup group for people to meet and engage in civil, respectful conversations between people with different political ideologies. That group, Crossing Party Lines, has grown into a national nonprofit with thousands of members from across the country. When I first told family and friends about the crazy new group I was starting, the most common responses were, “Good luck with that!” or, “Boy, do we really need it!” or, “If I come, will I be safe?”

Those three statements sum up America’s attitude toward talking with people on the other side: They believe it needs to be done, they are not sure it is possible, and they are afraid. I have written this workbook to address those three concerns.

I have used the skills and the methods in this book with thousands of individuals from all walks of life, across the political spectrum. They work. They have been proven to break down walls, build trust and respect, and minimize the risks. But for most Americans, the fear remains.

## People are afraid.

People are afraid to share their views with someone who sees the world differently. It’s not simply that they’re afraid the other person will disagree with them, or even the other person will have facts that run counter to their own. Here are the some of the biggest fears:

- That they will lose friends and family members.
- That their deepest concerns (whether it is that we are killing our planet or that the American way of life is under attack) will be dismissed and ignored and perhaps even ridiculed.

- That they won't do a good job representing their views or their side.
- That they will lose their cool and behave in a way that they are not proud of: ranting, name calling, and attacking people they care about.

Many Americans have attempted to talk across party lines. Many Americans are exhausted by those efforts. It's easy for us to blame the other person for not listening to what we have to say or for not being able to comprehend our message. That's not the problem, though. Nor is the problem that we are not trying hard enough, that we are not brave enough, or that we are not concerned enough.

The problem is that we didn't learn the skills that will make us successful.

Most of us were raised to believe the old adage that one should never talk politics, religion, or money. We have very few examples of respectful, productive conversations about those subjects. The political exchanges we have seen lead us to expect them to be more of a battlefield than a friendly conversation.

Over the past 10 years, many extremely knowledgeable people have produced great books addressing the need for talking across differences. A few introduce some of the skills that requires. Many are loaded with footnotes to help readers trust that what the author says is actually true.

Americans need to learn how. And they need to practice. So, I have tried to balance words with activities designed to help you develop the awareness and the skills you need to talk across party lines. I've also set up a website that allows you to connect with others who have purchased this workbook and want to find someone to practice with before taking their new skills out into the real world.

I came into this work through the back door. I do not have an advanced degree in any subject. But I am a lifelong learner. I am fascinated by neuroscience, psychology, sociology and all of the good stuff behind the work that I do. Five years and running hundreds of events at Crossing Party Lines has taught me both what we need to do, and why it is so darn difficult.

I embarked on my journey to learn to cross party lines for personal reasons. Not having a book like this to guide me through the work of learning to talk across political differences, I made pretty much every mistake a person could make. I had to crawl before I could walk, and it was a difficult journey that I have written about in my memoir.

## It doesn't have to be that hard.

All we need, all I needed, was someone to point the way, and this is what I hope to do for you.

There's nothing theoretical about what I do and what I teach in this workbook. It is grounded in science and experience. But I didn't develop a theory and then try to sell it to you. Everything you learn in this book came from me trying to find learn the skills and steps required to talk across differences. Each time I hit a bump in the road, I turn to science to find studies that addressed the issues I was having. I applied the science to my personal life. I then shared my knowledge with the members in my local crossing party lines group. Through trial and error I figured out how to teach others what I had learned. All that you see in this book has grown out of hard work, stubbornness, and a commitment to my country and my community. And all of it, has been or is, supported by science. I hope that you will find a mix that works for you.

Here are just a few of the things you will learn if you stick it out and work through to the end:

- To recognize the humanity of the person you're speaking with.
- Not to give away your power in the conversation.
- Not to feel the victim, and not to allow someone with a more forceful and confrontational communication style get the better of you.
- To keep your cool and use your listening skills to control the pace and the tone of the conversation.
- To use new skills for sharing your views in a way that gets the other person curious and makes them want to listen.
- To express your views in a way that helps others understand why they

make sense for who you are and how you have lived your life. And how you see the world.

- To get someone who is ranting about the political situation to calm down and participate in a meaningful conversation.
- To make other people feel heard and understood.
- To make a good case for your side.
- To bring morality into a conversation without making either person the bad guy.
- To bring conversations back from after they've been derailed.
- To separate the person from the party. To move from generalizations to specifics.
- To dig beyond what they believe to why they believe it.
- To figure out whether you're both arguing or talking about the same thing even.

### There is more to it than our facts.

So often the problem is not with what we say, but with what we leave unsaid or how we say it.

We forget the polite and civil and caring side of the conversation; the connection side of the conversation. We forget to acknowledge the similarities between them and us. We forget to let them know about our reasons for holding the views that we hold. We forget to thank the other person for sharing. Many people justify their views by sharing facts. Our facts support our views, but they aren't the reason we hold those views. Our reasons have to do with what we've seen and what we've done, what we believe, what we were taught, how we were raised, the people we know. Our reasons are about us. Our views won't make sense to another person unless they understand some of the ways that we are not them.

And

This is not the be-all and end-all of books on how to talk across differences. This book teaches you how to share your views, how to listen and be understood. It teaches you how to build the bridge of trust and respect that allows you to move on to deeper and more productive political conversations that cross the political divide. These are the foundational skills for talking across differences. For many people, they are all the skills they need to build (or rebuild) connection with friends and family members with whom they don't agree.

Those people who truly love to talk politics often want to take political conversations to the next level: to exploring options and trying to come up with the best solution for America. This requires advanced skills and a framework that allows them to work with people on the "other side" to find shared facts and to explore the scientific landscape in a way that addresses the concerns of everyone in the discussion. I will be writing these skills and frameworks in a follow-up book.

**Our political differences do not need to drive us apart.**

You may have been told that you should never talk politics, religion, or money. With this workbook, I give you permission. In fact, I consider engaging in political conversation to be something that each of us can do to support and improve this country that we all love.

# Lesson 16

## It Starts with Why

In the previous lesson, we saw how Larry's desire to be right led him to listen in a way that escalated the discussion until it ended with neither party winning. Larry probably didn't realize he could have chosen to participate in the conversation differently. If he'd known he had options, would he have chosen differently?

What about you? Would you, like Larry, choose to defend your position or listen to understand?

There is no right answer. In fact, the answer is likely to vary from situation to situation. It's worth asking, though. Figuring out why you want to participate before you enter the conversation is a lot like knowing where you are going before you pull your car out into the street. How else will you know how to get there?

## The Three Ds of Political Conversation.

People talk across political differences for many reasons. Most fit into one of three categories:

- To hear a wide perspectives of political views.
- To get a better understanding of the issues.
- To bring others around to the “right” way to view the issues.

People who want to convince others typically define success as winning. They bring an arsenal of facts with them, and when it’s their turn to speak, they present those facts as proof that they have come to the the only logical and reasonable conclusions. They choose to use their speaking time attempting to win a debate.

Debate is definitely an option, but it is not the only option. Let’s look at the three Ds of political conversation: Debate, Discussion and Dialogue.

*Table 4: Origins of The Three Ds of Political Conversation*

Debate	Discussion	Dialogue
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• from de- “down” + batre “beat”</li> <li>• “Quarrel”</li> <li>• “Dispute”</li> <li>• “Fight”</li> <li>• “Deliberate on pros and cons”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• from dis- “apart” + quaterre “shake”</li> <li>• “Agitate”</li> <li>• “Break up”</li> <li>• “Examine by argument”</li> <li>• “Investigate”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• from dia- “across” + legein “speak”</li> <li>• “To speak across”</li> <li>• “A conversation”</li> </ul>

Looking at Table 4, you can see how the origins of these three words reflect their differences.

- **Debate** is a fight or battle. Opponents use facts and logic to make the winning argument. On many high school and college campuses, debate is a respected form of communication, with clubs and competitions at

which judges decide who is the winner. In politics, debate has become an opportunity to get two or more sides in the room to pit their views against one another. It is the most common format for talking politics.

- **Discussion** is an investigation. Participants examine the facts of a problem or issue, ideally to arrive at a common conclusion or solution. The key here is that the participants must either trust that the facts are “true” or be willing to work together to uncover the facts. In the current era of fake news and misinformation, discussions tend to devolve into arguments over the challenges of identifying the shared facts to investigate.
- **Dialogue** is a conversation across differences. Participants speak and listen with the goal of understanding. Dialogue can be the first step toward discussion, building the bridges of trust and respect that makes it possible to find shared facts. The focus, however, is on understanding and connection, not results.

When two people enter into a conversation without first agreeing on which of the three Ds it will be, the conversation tends to devolve rapidly. In addition to the challenge of listening to ideas and views that run counter to their own, participants must deal with frustrations and judgements about how the other person is participating.

**Debaters** report feeling dissatisfied with dialogue because it doesn’t “go anywhere.” Having come prepared to win, they can find discussion frustrating when the discussion “goes into the weeds” rather than proceeding in a direct path to them winning.

**Someone expecting a discussion** can feel angry with the debater’s goal of winning through a prepared battle plan: They want collaboration, which begins with trusting the other person has something to offer. In dialogue, they are often frustrated by too much emphasis on feelings and beliefs.

**A person hoping for a dialogue** can feel hurt or angry when they find a debater treating them as an opponent rather than a friend or someone worth talking to. They can feel unprepared in a discussion when they aren’t ready to present the facts that support their views.

## Activity 16.1 – Why you talk

How you participate in a political conversation is always your choice and often varies according to who you are talking with and what you are talking about. When is each conversational style right for you?

	Who with?	Why this style?
<p><b>Debate</b></p> <p>Using facts and logic to make the winning argument</p>		
<p><b>Discussion</b></p> <p>Examining shared (agreed upon) facts to arrive at a common conclusion</p>		
<p><b>Dialogue</b></p> <p>Speaking and listening across differences with a goal of understanding</p>		

## Yes, You CAN Talk Politics: Listening

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Why you talk was designed to help you translate why you want to talk politics into an understanding of how you want to talk politics. Your choices are simple:

*Table 5: Which Conversation Style do you Want?*

<b>If you want to...</b>	<b>Choose</b>
Win, change minds, or prove yourself right	Debate
Collaborate on a solution	Discussion
Better understand another person and their views	Dialogue

Most people who attend the events we hold at Crossing Party Lines start out in debate mode, not because they want to debate but because they think that's what political conversations are supposed to be. Crossing Party Lines moderators shift the conversations away from debate toward dialogue by resetting everyone's expectation and presenting the basics of how to dialogue. Prior to attending a Crossing Party Lines event, many participants did not even know dialogue was an option.

When Crossing Party Lines members shift from debate to dialogue they experience a shift in the way they view themselves in relation to political conversations. They start out assuming the goal is to win, that their opponent is the enemy, and that they will be able to prove themselves right and the other person wrong. A failure to agree with them indicates a deficit in their opponent's reasoning or their own preparation.

As they shift into dialogue they start to see the other participants as fellow human beings who present a puzzle for them to solve: how it is that the other person's views make sense to them? This leads them to explore why their own views are right for them. They present their ideas and facts as an explanation for their views rather than as weapons to prove other people's views wrong, and they come to expect others to do the same.

These shifts lead to shifts in the assumptions people bring to a political conversation.

*Table 6: Assumptions Behind Debate vs Dialogue*

Assumptions Behind Debate	Assumptions behind Dialogue
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am right.</li> <li>• You should listen to me because my views are right.</li> <li>• Once you understand, you'll agree with me.</li> <li>• As my opponent, you're the enemy, and it is ok to attack you.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mine is one of many useful perspectives.</li> <li>• My views are right for me.</li> <li>• You might understand me without agreeing with me.</li> <li>• I appreciate hearing views that are different from mine because they help me see the bigger picture.</li> <li>• You are a fellow American and it is not ok to attack you.</li> </ul>

## Activity 16.2 – Exploring assumptions

Take a moment to consider your assumptions about debate and dialogue.

1. Do you assume you are right? Or do you assume your views make sense for you while other views might make sense for people whose lives and experiences are different from you own?

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2. Do you see the person you are speaking to as your enemy or as a fellow American?

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3. Do you believe that once someone understands what you have to say they will agree with you, or do you believe it is possible to understand and still disagree?

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4. Do you believe others should listen to you or that you should both listen to each other?

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# Lesson 17

## Active Listening

In Module 2 we defined success from the speaker's point of view:

**Success in talking politics = being heard and understood**

This definition holds true whether the conversation is a debate, a discussion, or a dialogue:

- You can't win a debate unless your opponent understands your arguments well enough to agree that yours are better than theirs.
- You can't discuss an issue unless the person you are working with understands your contributions to the discussion.
- You aren't having a dialogue across differences unless the person you are speaking to understands your point of view.

In this lesson we will see what success in looks like from the listener's point of view and introduce you to the technique that will help achieve that success.

## Yes, You CAN Talk Politics: Listening

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While the goal of speaking is the same for all three Ds, the goal of listening is not the same.

- In a debate, the goal of listening is to find an opening to talk or a flaw in the other person's argument. ***The speaker's message matters less than their mistakes.***
- In a discussion, the goal is to listen to understand the facts as a first step at examining them. ***The facts are what matters.***
- In a dialogue, the goal is to listen to understand whatever it is that the speaker wants to share. ***The person is what matters.***

Notice the greatest disconnect between the speaker's goal and the listener's goal occurs when they debate.

The goal of speaking in a debate is to be understood so the superiority of their argument is apparent. The goal of listening is to catch one's opponent when they slip up on anything from not recalling the exact details of an event to a failure to present sufficient evidence. In other words, both sides want to be understood and often neither side wants to understand.

For the purposes of this workbook we assume the goal of listening is to grant the speaker's wish - to be heard and understood. When listening,

**Success = understanding what the speaker is attempting to communicate**

## Activity 17.1 – Setting the intention to understand

For many, defining successful listening in a political conversation as “understanding what the speaker wants to communicate” can take some getting used to.

Before proceeding, take some time to explore this for yourself. Before the last few political conversations you participated in, how much thought did you give to what success in listening would look like?

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If you thought about it, what was your intention?

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How successful were you? How could you tell?

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Is there any reason you would not want to set your intention to understand?

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## Yes, You CAN Talk Politics: Listening

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We usually hear what a person is saying when they speak to us. Or rather, we hear their words as they speak. If our intention is to listen to understand, we need to be able to verify that we have understood the meaning behind the speaker's words. We know what we heard. How do we know what they meant?

The simple answer is: **Just ask them!**

The more complete answer is: **Use active listening.**

### Use Active Listening to get the message straight.

Active listening is an approach to listening designed to ensure that the speaker feels heard. In this case “feeling heard” refers to both the speaker’s experience as well as the information they present. It combines listening, comprehension, and validation. It is called “active” because it involves actively focusing your attention on what a person has to say as opposed to passively letting their words fall upon your ears.

There are three steps to active listening.

1. Focus your full attention on the speaker.
2. Reflect back what you heard.
3. Give the speaker a chance to correct or clarify until they feel understood.

### Give your full attention.

Active listening starts with giving the speaker your full attention. Be curious. Do your best to ignore the urge to defend (or even take offense) or to correct them. Take time to consider what they mean, in the context of who you know them to be.

Most importantly, try not to make it about you. If they use words you would use, don’t assume they mean the same thing you would mean if you spoke them. For example, if the speaker makes a comment about the role of corporations in our lives, don’t assume they are talking about multi-national corporations. They may be thinking about small mom-and-pop LLCs.

While you give the speaker your attention, also give them cues to the fact that you are paying attention.

## Activity 17.2 – Assessing your strengths as a listener

Think back that last few political conversations you participated in.

Which of the following did you do to indicate that you were paying attention to what the speaker was saying?

- Made eye contact
- Nodded
- Leaned closer to them
- Uttered words or sounds like “Uh,” “hum,” “yeah,” “go on”
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

What percentage of the time you were listening were you giving your full attention to the speaker?

When you were not completely focused on the speaker, what were you thinking about?

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If asked, could you repeat what they said?

- Yes
- No

At the end of the conversation, could you explain why their position makes sense to them?

- Yes
- No

## Reflect back.

The second part of active listening is to report back to make sure what you heard was the message the speaker intended to send. People used to traditional political debate will be expecting you to push back, not check in that you heard correctly, so it's important to let them know ahead of time that you are about to tell them what you heard.

- “What I’m hearing is...”
- “Sounds like you are saying...”

The proper introduction primes their amygdala to hear your words as a question not an attack and reduces the likelihood of them taking offense before you can complete your first sentence.

After the introduction, you share your interpretation of what they said. How you say it is up to you. Two possible options are paraphrasing and parroting.

## Paraphrase.

Paraphrasing uses your own words to report what you have heard. If you can translate someone else’s words into concepts that make sense to you, then paraphrase and get their agreement that you heard correctly, you can be pretty certain you have understood them.

### **Example 1:**

A proponent of stronger gun laws says:

“Children are dying. Every week, some kid gets killed by a family-owned gun.”

Some possible ways to reflect back what you heard might be:

“It sounds like you are worried about children and statistics you’ve heard about accidental gun deaths are one of the reasons you believe we need stronger gun laws.”

Or

“What I’m hearing is that you want stronger gun laws because of the children who are getting killed by family-owned guns. Is that right?”

**Example 2:**

An opponent of entitlement says:

“These people on food stamps all have a nice phones and probably cable TV. Why? Why do they deserve those luxuries? They aren’t even paying for their own food!”

Some possible ways to reflect back what you heard might be:

“It upsets you when you see people on food stamps with cell phones and other luxuries that you have to work hard to pay for. Is that right?”

Or

“It sounds like it riles you up to see your tax dollars subsidizing a luxurious lifestyle”.

## Parrot.

Parroting uses the speaker’s own words to report what you have heard. Technically, parroting refers to repeating most or all of the speaker’s words. A common variation is to reflect back using only some of them. Use parroting when the speaker is very literal and is not satisfied when you paraphrase.

Just be aware that parroting doesn’t guarantee the speaker will agree that you heard correctly. Sometimes speakers don’t recall what they said. In this case, ask for clarification.

**Example 3:**

A member speaking against the electoral college says:

“As President Carter pointed out, Trump’s presidency is illegitimate. He did not win by a majority. We need to get rid of the electoral college. It’s unfair and archaic.”

Here is one possible way to parrot what you heard:

## ***Yes, You CAN Talk Politics: Listening***

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“So, you agree with President Carter that Trump’s presidency is illegitimate because he did not win by a majority and you think we need to get rid of the electoral college because it is unfair and archaic.”

## Activity 17.3 – Reflecting Back

Below are three statements taken from actual political conversations. How would you reflect back to the speaker? Write your response.

“I hate the phrase 'government dollars.' It's taxpayer dollars. It's the money I earn and have to pay as taxes. When I hear people saying the government should pay for healthcare for everyone, even people who make bad choices about their health, I get riled up. Why should I have to pay for other people's bad decisions?”

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“Climate change is not a political issue. It's a scientific issue. We need to get politics out of it and start educating people about the facts. They are right there.”

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“These people on food stamps all have nice phones and probably cable TV. Why? Why do they deserve those luxuries? They aren't even paying for their own food!”

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## Give the speaker a chance to clarify.

The purpose of reflecting back is to find out whether you received the message the speaker intended to send. In a political conversation, the person you are speaking with may be surprised by this new approach.

At any time, and especially while you and the speaker are developing a dialogue-rapport, it's can be helpful to end with a question that lets them know you are open to being corrected if you have gotten it wrong.

“Did I get that right?”

“Did I hear you right?”

“Did I get it all?”

Very often, the speaker will agree that you heard them correctly or realize that they hadn't expressed themselves as well as they had hoped. Checking in with questions like those above gives them the invitation to explain themselves more fully.

*Table 7: Making Sure Reflecting Back Doesn't Come Off as an Attack*

Phrases that let them know your intention is to reflect back, not argue:	Ways to invite them to respond and, if necessary, correct you
“What I'm hearing is...”	“Did I get that right?”
“Sounds like you are saying...”	“Was that right?”
“I'm not sure I'm with you but...”	“Does it sound like I understood?”
“If I'm hearing you correctly...”	“Is that what you were saying?”
“It sounds like what's most important to you is...”	

## Activity 17.4 – What's your reflecting back style

Throughout the day, look for opportunities to reflect back what others are saying to you. This need not be in the context of a political conversation. Any conversation will do.

Test out each of the introductory phrases in Table 7. Experiment with the check-in questions.

Which introductory phrases felt most natural to you?

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Which wrap-up questions did you find yourself using most?

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How did people respond to your attempts to reflect back?

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Reflecting back is the most important skill presented in this workbook. Can you see its value?

- Yes
- No



One of the good things about active listening is that you don't have to agree with the speaker to reflect back what you've heard and verify that you got the message they wanted to send. It's not always easy, though.

At some point you are likely to be emotionally triggered by what the speaker says. If what they said was rude or inappropriate, don't bother reflecting back. On the other hand, if it's just that you feel passionate about the topic and the speaker's words pushed your buttons, here are some things you can do:

- Take a minute to process - but let them know what you are doing: "Wow. That really pushed my buttons. Give me a minute to process..."
- Give them a chance to clarify or explain: "I may not be understanding you correctly, but I find myself taking what you said personally. What I thought you just said is XXX. Is that what you meant?"

### It takes practice.

Active listening takes practice. PLEASE practice using the phrases in Table 7 out loud. That may sound crazy, because they are just phrases. But, the more comfortably these phrases roll off your tongue, the easier it is to reflect back what you hear. With enough practice, reflecting back can even become a new autopilot program that kicks in whenever you hear views that are different from your own.

My personal experience has been that once my brain was programmed to respond with phrases like, "Let me see if I heard you correctly..." or "What I'm hearing is..." it became easier to listen attentively. Those phrases prime my brain to fill in the blanks that followed!

Find your personal favorites: the ones that feel most natural to you. Then bring them into your day-to-day conversations. Unlike some new communication skills that only apply in certain situations, there is almost NO situation where using these phrases is inappropriate.

# Lesson 18

## Digging Deeper

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The active listening you learned about in the previous lesson is the key to making sure you understand the speaker's message. Understanding what they said doesn't always lead to understanding why their views make sense to them or why they said what they did.

If your goal in listening is to give the listener the experience of being heard and understood, you may need to dig deeper. Great listeners follow reflecting back with questions that shed light on the thoughts and feelings that led up to the statement the speaker just made.

In this lesson we'll move from understanding what they have said to understanding

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A speaker can feel heard and understood without you agreeing with them. All they really need is to know that you can see how their position makes sense to them, based on who they are: What they've seen and done, what they believe, how they view the world.

You haven't really completed the third step in active listening, giving the speaker a chance to clarify until they have been understood, until their remarks make sense to you. Again, this is not about agreeing with them. It's about recognizing that their position makes sense based on how they experience the world.

Getting to where you understand how their remarks make sense to them often requires asking questions that are less about the views and more about the person. Things you can ask about include:

- Who or what they care about (why it matters to them)
- What their values, attitudes, and beliefs around the subject are
- What they bring to this issue from their lived experiences:
  - o Past experiences, education, training
  - o Books they've read
  - o People they know
- Assumptions they make

Learning about a person on this level also increases the civility and respect in a conversation by illuminating the human connection between yourself and the speaker.

## **Activity 18.1 – What do you want to ask about?**

Think about a friend or family member whose political views are different from your own. What questions could you ask them to gain insight into why they vote the way they do?

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Think about a someone you don't know well who likes talk politics with you. What questions could you ask them?

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## How to Ask

People are primed to see attack or danger when entering into a political conversation. This is especially true when you ask for clarification. They are likely to fear that you are trying to trip them up or find a way to prove them wrong.

You can avoid this by asking your questions in a way that reassures them that you want to understand, not argue.

*Table 8: Adding Context to Questions*

Instead of ...	Try...
Why do you think that?	I'm not sure I'm following. Can you help me connect the dots?
Where did you get that information?	That's interesting. I've also heard things that contradict that. With so much information out there, how does anyone know what to believe or trust?
Why does it matter to you?	What I'm curious about is what concerns you the most.
What's the problem?	Why do you think we need to be concerned about this now?

Notice that the initial questions began with one of the 5 W's - WHO, WHAT, WHY, WHEN, WHERE. Questions that begin with these (and HOW) can sound confrontational. You can reduce the chance of the speaker taking offense by elaborating, making it clear why you are asking.

The examples in Table 9 illustrate three techniques for providing more context:

1. Adding "you" to the question in a way that communicates that you want to hear their thoughts.
2. Linking the question to specifics the speaker has shared before.
3. Linking the question back to you and your desire to learn more

## Activity 18.2 – Avoiding confrontation

Notice how each of the examples below uses one or more technique for reassuring the speaker that you are asking out of a desire to understand, not trap them in a logical, moral, or factual error.

Circle or underline the language used to reassure the speaker. Label each one with the number that represents the technique(s) used:

1. Adding “you” to communicate that you want to hear their thoughts.
  2. Linking the question to specifics the speaker has shared before.
  3. Linking the question back to you and your desire to learn more.
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- I hear that you care about <the issue.> Can you help me understand what matters most to you about it?
- Who do you see as being negatively impacted by <the current situation>?
- You mentioned <group or term they mentioned.> Can you be more specific? Who/what are you referring to?
- What do you think is at stake here?
- Why is <the issue> important to you now, at this time?
- I get the sense that you have some personal experiences with <the issue>. Can you tell me more about that?
- I’m curious. Do you personally know anyone who would be impacted by <the issue>?
- Do you have any thoughts about why your perspective on <the issue> is different from mine?
- Do you think being <older, younger, a boomer, a millennial> gives you a different perspective?

## Activity 18.3 – Adding context to your questions

Designing questions that contain reassurance that you are asking to understand, not trap the other person in a logical, moral, or factual error takes practice. In this activity you will explore “Here’s why I’m asking.”

1. Choose two of the questions for digging deeper from Table 8.
2. Think of ways you can make the questions sound negative, critical, or judgmental. (Tap into why they might take offense to understand what not to say or do.)
3. Come up with two or more reasons why you might be asking those questions in your quest for understanding.
4. Pick your top reason and rewrite the questions adding the context .

First original question:

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Your version, which communicates “Here’s why I’m asking.”

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Second original question:

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Your version, which communicates “Here’s why I’m asking.”

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