

**STYBEL
PEABODY &
ASSOCIATES, INC.**



Maryanne Peabody and Dr. Laurence J. Stybel are co-founders of Stybel Peabody Associates, Inc. Its mission is to partner with clients to insert “success” into successful C-Suite careers.

Core services: (1) Retained Search limited to Board Directors, CEOs, COOs, and CFOs. (2) 1:1 Coaching to Improve Relationship Management Effectiveness at the C-suite Level, and (3) Executive

Outplacement for C-suite Leaders and Partners.

For more information, contact
peabody@stybelpeabody.com

**

How to Boost Your Reputation and
Career.

Be known as a conversationalist.

There is a distinction to be made between communication and conversation. Communication is transmitting information in one direction. Examples include confirming dates, inviting people to a meeting, wishing a colleague a happy vacation, etc. Emails and texts are inexpensive and convenient ways to communicate.

Conversation, on the other hand, is about exchanging ideas with an attitude of respect. Email and texts are inappropriate media tools for conversation. (Stybel Peabody, 2020).

David Brooks is an American conservative political and cultural commentator who writes for *The New York Times*. He has also been a commentator on National Public Radio and the PBS Newshour.

How to Know a Person is Brooks' latest book. His interest in the skills of conversation is in line with what we see as the need to distinguish yourself at work in the age of [artificial intelligence](#).

Are You a Conversationalist?

Brooks writes:

“The purpose of this book is to help us become more skilled at the art of seeing others and making them feel seen, heard, and understood. When I started researching this subject, I had no clue what this skill consisted of. But I did know that exceptional people in many fields had taught themselves versions of this skill.”

The skill he refers to is
“conversationalism.”

Brooks has chosen a good word.

“Empathy” is the ability to understand

the feelings of others and is part of being a good conversationalist. A good conversationalist leads people on a mutual expedition toward understanding.

Are You Showing Others that You Are Paying Attention?

Multitasking is a vision of an ordinal approach to attention. We can pay attention “in degrees” while simultaneously performing other tasks. For example, our client was simultaneously meeting with us while

texting a customer. One of our colleagues told us that when she was in the hospital, her father sat next to her bed and read the newspaper. We have seen mothers play with their children while reading emails.

Engagement is a binary concept. People know when you are fully engaged. Some suggestions for showing you are engaged: lean forward towards the speaker, look directly into their eyes, and nod your head when appropriate. We recommend that at the beginning of a business meeting, take out your

mobile phone and show the other person you are shutting it off. This sends a symbolic message: “You are the most important item on my agenda right now.”

"Loud Listening"

Good conversationalists are “loud listeners.” You will hear them saying, “aha,” “aah,” and “mmmmm.” Such verbal [affirmations](#) do not imply agreement; they convey that you are taking the speaker seriously.

When you say, “Let me summarize in my words what I heard you say,” you are explicitly not agreeing with the content. You are summarizing what you heard and inviting the speaker to correct you if you misheard. You are explicitly telling the speaker that what was said was so important you want to translate the ideas into your own words.

Be a Mirror

Great conversationalists mirror their guests. For example, if you are having

dinner with another person and she orders a vodka martini, you would order the same drink. And if the other person orders sparkling water, you do the same. In *an earlier Psychology Today perspective*, we provide other techniques for using food to build empathy.

Mimic the other person's posture.

If the speaker crosses her right leg over the left leg, you do the same. Speakers are so deep into themselves that they do not pay attention to what you are doing

with your body. But an [inner voice](#) tells the speaker, “I can relate to this person.”

Smile when the speaker smiles. Frown when the other person frowns. Good conversationalists can even mimic the speed with which the other person vocalizes words.

Brooks relates an interesting research conclusion that underscores the importance of mirroring facial expressions. Patients who have had facial Botox injections are often less

able to furrow their brows. This simple physical limitation also makes them less able to perceive another person's worry.

Look for the 'Gem'

People may enter a meeting with you because of disagreement. The "gem statement" is a core value all parties can agree upon even though they may disagree on other things.

They may want to focus on what divides them. A conversationalist focuses on

what unites them. For example, “I appreciate that you and Janice have a profound disagreement over balancing cost versus responding to the dangers posed by cybersecurity. I also appreciate that you both are committed to ensuring that we do nothing to damage customer trust.”

Amid vocal contention, it is easy to ignore the gem that unites conflicting parties. The conversationalist is constantly looking for the gem.

Summary

We have discussed behavioral techniques you can employ at work to be perceived as a conversationalist.

Conversation is not the same as communication.

Having a reputation as a conversationalist is a good career strategy. Your company does not lack talent who know how to forcefully present their ideas while discounting contradictory ideas. How many colleagues are perceived as conversationalists?

Artificial [intelligence](#) will increasingly make it easy to obtain information and present information. Being perceived as a good communicator puts you on a path to be replaced by AI. If you have a reputation for being a smart conversationalist, your career is likely to have more longevity.

References

D. Brooks. *How to Know a Person: the art of seeing others deeply and being deeply seen*. New York: Random House, 2023

L. Stybel & M. Peabody.

“Communications In the Time of

COVID.” *Psychologytoday.com*,

2020, [https://www.psychologytoday.co](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/platform-success/202010/communi...)

[m/us/blog/platform-](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/platform-success/202010/communi...)

[success/202010/communi...](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/platform-success/202010/communi...)

L. Stybel & M. Peabody. “Get to ‘Yes’

Faster with Grapes.”

PsychologyToday.com,

2018, [https://www.psychologytoday.co](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/platform-for-success/201801/get-to-yes-faster-with-grapes)

[m/us/blog/platform-for-](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/platform-for-success/201801/get-to-yes-faster-with-grapes)

[success/201801/get-to-yes-faster-with-](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/platform-for-success/201801/get-to-yes-faster-with-grapes)

[grapes](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/platform-for-success/201801/get-to-yes-faster-with-grapes)

Stybel Peabody Associates, Inc. runs two monthly podcasts: (1) “Seat at the Table,” a case-oriented forum limited to invited Board Directors, and (2) “CHRO Forum,” a case-oriented forum limited to invited Chief Human Resource Officers.

Since 2011, *Psychology Today* has published Stybel Peabody’s perspectives on leadership and career management. There are nearly 700,000

downloads. Copy and paste the link
below into your web browser:

[https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/
blog/platform-success](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/platform-success)

Business leaders wishing a free 30-
minute consult can contact:

Maryanne Peabody

Stybel Peabody Associates, Inc.

peabody@stybelpeabody.com

stybelpeabody.com

boardoptions.com