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Shall we talk?

Who was the last person you talked to? Your family? Friends? Or your colleague? Can you name any of them, or do you simply find it difficult to recall that? How well did you master that particular conversation? Or how badly you had screwed it up? There are a few types of conversations, like conversation with our souls, beloved ones, families and pets. Each type has a different purpose and deserves our attention in learning how to master the art of conversation. I would say, if we want to achieve a particular purpose, we need to learn to master the art of conversation.

Let's start with having a conversation with our soul. It's a way to know more about ourselves, and to help yourself reflect on your everyday life. Most of us are too busy with our studies and work and by the time we go to bed, we have not got any time to reflect on ourselves, like our achievements or different significant moments. As a result, all these feelings and thoughts are buried in our hearts and somehow, we become more stressed and upset as life goes on. Does it sound like you? Do you share the same feelings too? I myself find it extremely important to have a conversation with my soul regularly. The easiest way to do so is to write down all my thoughts in a secret diary, with me being the only reader. Letting my thoughts go free and having this personal conversation with my soul helps me relieve my stress and fix my past regrets. I also have something to look forward to every day. Writing the diary is a precious ME time as well.

How about having conversation with others? Does personality matter when it comes to mastering the art of conversation? Are you an introvert or an extrovert? How do you start a meaningful conversation with both introverts and extroverts? First, think before you speak. We've already told the introverts to make concessions for extroverts that like to think out loud, but sometimes it can help make it less confusing. And if that's not an option, let them know that you are thinking out loud so they can become more attuned to your conclusions than your process. Second, speak slowly and calmly. Introverts are not slow but they need some time to process their speech. Think of the difference between savoring your food. Introverts savor conversations. They like gaps between sentences so they can experience the aftertaste. You will often 'see' them thinking during those pauses. It will be worth the wait because they will then contribute to the conversation with value.

When conversing with others, we must bear in mind the skills behind. Active listening is crucial, and it means paying attention to the person who is communicating with you. People who are active listeners are well-liked by their co-workers because of the respect they pay to those people around them. While it seems simple, this is a skill that can be challenging to develop and improve. You can be an active listener by focusing on the speaker, avoiding distractions like cell phones, laptops or other projects, and by preparing questions, comments or

ideas to thoughtfully respond. One great way to be a better listener is to focus on what people are actually saying. In addition to the content of their communications, you should also pay attention to their facial expressions, body language and tone. Instead of preparing what you will say next, simply take in what they are saying. If you need a moment to digest what they've communicated, simply ask them for a moment to think and prepare a thoughtful response.

Here, I must draw your attention to one alarming phenomenon. Young people don't seem to treasure the opportunity to converse or communicate with others anymore, especially with their parents. Because of this, the generation gap between them has widened a lot and parents and children don't share any common topics anymore. Do you realize that our parents have struggles like we do? Living in Hong Kong feels like living in a pressure pot for both parents and children. When we are struggling with our daily studies, jam-packed schedule, overwhelming assignments and assessments, our parents are equally frustrated and tortured. It's surely not uncommon to be back home, 'interrogated' by our parents about our school performance. It is also understandable why most parents initiate conversations with their children with the following favorite rhetorical questions: 'Have you finished your homework? When is your test coming? How come you are always playing on your phone when I am back from work?' Such parents don't have much time to understand their children or explore

their thoughts as they don't have the mood or patience to talk to their children after an exhausting day of work. Hardly do parents realize that it is important to maintain a parent-child relationship by having a meaningful conversation on a regular basis.

The adults are equally reluctant to talk. Being overwhelmed by work stress and perhaps social expectation, most adults seem to have even more difficult times than school kids. Many simply give up finding someone to talk to. Consequently, many of the depressed adults resort to alcoholism, smoking or drug abuse in hopes of easing their pressure. For those who have family responsibilities, their children may probably suffer as well. Not many parents are free to start a good conversation with their children although their kids are yearning deep inside 'Mum and dad, shall we talk?'

Given the above observations and analysis, I am sure you agree with me that it is really important to have conversations with others in order to enhance communication and relationships. When we talk with others, we are looking for advice and inspiration and we want to share with others who are empathetic. It feels so good to be able to find someone who can understand you and share the same feelings. Their feedback may help you do an in-depth reflection as well. One of the most important things of mastering the art of conversation is to listen to others with empathy. If you are willing to let someone talk to you

freely and you try to listen with empathy, you are already playing an important part in mastering the art of conversation. Of course, you must pick the right time, the right place and the right mood to talk. If you enjoy being in the conversation, even if it is just about some boring, silly things, you would still reap the benefit of having a relaxing and fun conversation. After all, not all conversations have to be that serious.

Remember, we can all play a part in reviving the art of conversation. All it takes is determination and joint effort. Next time when you bump into someone who looks a bit anxious and upset, or when your parents are back home, go and say ‘Shall we talk?’.