

**Excellence = MC<sup>2</sup>**  
Your Employee Assistance Program  
**1-800-899-3926**

# HEALTHY

## EXCHANGE

ANOTHER BENEFIT OF YOUR  
**EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

**VOL. 4, NO. 3**

## For Your Information

### BETTER COMMUNICATION FOR COUPLES

To improve communication with your partner, learn to better describe your own feelings. Don't assume that your partner automatically knows your needs, feelings or opinions without telling him or her. To express yourself clearly use descriptive "feeling" words like "sad," "happy," "excited," "angry," etc., sending clear "I" messages – not "you" messages.



### STRESS MANAGEMENT TIP

Work on your marriage, friendships and spirituality. Studies show that people who are satisfied with their marriage, friendships and spiritual feelings are better at coping with stress and live more fulfilling lives.

### DROWSY DRIVING

Drowsy driving is an impairment that compares to drunk driving, says the National Sleep Foundation (NSF). Numerous studies have linked sleep deprivation to slower reaction times, impaired judgment and decreased alertness. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports that you are three times more likely to be in a car accident caused by poor sleep than by drunk driving. Beware of drowsy drivers – and make sure you're not one of them. Organize your lifestyle to get regular, adequate sleep – 7-8 hours per night (the recommended average for adults).



## RELATIONSHIP IMPROVEMENT

# Six Common Mistakes That Spoil Conversations

by Loren Ekroth, Ph.D.

It's always easier to be aware of another's conversational mistakes than our own. Our own mistakes are so habitual, so well-intentioned, they easily escape our notice. We are just being ourselves, right? Nonetheless, others making mistakes can be our teachers, if only by serving as negative examples.

These conversational mistakes apply to both social and business conversations. They are mistakes because they injure the integrity of the conversation by blocking its flow, creating frustration, and reducing understanding and satisfaction.

Here are six of the most common mistakes that spoil conversations:

### 1. Blabbermouthing

Talking too much, way out of balance, going on and on without giving the other(s) their turn. The one who hogs the talk-channel soon frustrates others and they tune out the blabbermouth. Involved in their own monologues, blabbers feel some satisfaction in carrying on - even when they have lost the involvement of the (former) listener.

Some professionals suffer from the occupational hazard of this mistake - professors, clergy, speakers and trainers, and others who are paid to talk for a living.

### 2. The "take-away" and "me-too" syndrome

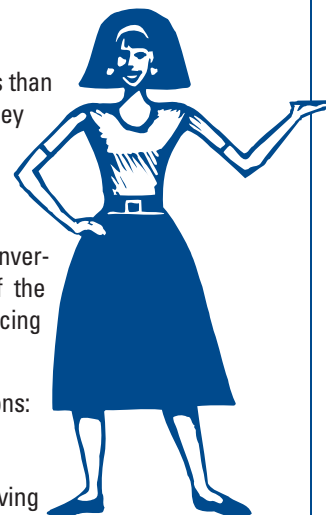
A talker begins a topic and the listener grabs it away and opens a me-centered monologue. You say, "I saw a great movie last weekend..." and the listener-soon-to-be talker says, "Oh? I saw one, too..." and begins to describe their experience.

The initiator of the movie topic is unable to complete their thought because it's been high-jacked. This is a very childlike and frustrating behavior, and eventually drives people away.

### 3. Unsolicited advice

Some people are quick to give advice as soon as the other person mentions a problem. "Have you thought of...?" "Why don't you...?" erupt quickly from their overflowing volcanoes of counsel.

Men seem especially prone to this tendency, although women are not immune from it. It is also prevalent among "professional know-it-alls" such as teachers, managers, administrators, and

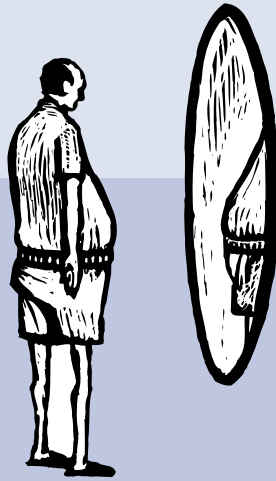


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## SELF-TEST

# Test Your Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is how we value ourselves; it's how we perceive our value to the world and how valuable we think we are to others. The link between low self-esteem and addictive disorders is well known. Take the quiz below to check your opinion of yourself:



	Yes	No
I feel at ease meeting new people	_____	_____
I take pride in my appearance	_____	_____
I enjoy taking on new challenges	_____	_____
I have close friendships of value to me	_____	_____
I can accept constructive criticism	_____	_____
I give myself credit when credit is due	_____	_____
I feel my own needs and feelings are important	_____	_____
I take some time every day just for myself	_____	_____
I accept changes as changes come	_____	_____
I can say "no" to others when necessary	_____	_____
I enjoy new experiences and situations	_____	_____
I can express my feelings to others	_____	_____
I am a creative, intelligent individual	_____	_____
I have something important to contribute to life	_____	_____
I am able to learn from my mistakes	_____	_____
I have as many strengths as weaknesses	_____	_____
I am not afraid to ask for help from others	_____	_____
I have beliefs which give my life meaning	_____	_____
I am able to receive love as well as give it	_____	_____
I can forgive myself when I fail	_____	_____
I keep the promises I make	_____	_____
I avoid abusing myself with alcohol, drugs and food	_____	_____
I make time for play as well as work	_____	_____
I am able to find humor in my life	_____	_____
I am basically content with myself	_____	_____

The above quiz was designed, not as a scientific test, but as a tool for becoming more aware of the ways we view ourselves and our abilities. If you suffer from feelings of low self-esteem, it may be helpful to speak to a professional who is skilled in working with self-esteem problems. **If you'd like help, contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for confidential counseling, referrals or information. We're here to help you.**

## SIX COMMON MISTAKES...

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some lawyers, ministers, and counselors.

When offered to friends and other peers, the advice-giver assumes the authority or even parenting role and that can be off-putting. Better to let the person finish and then, perhaps, to ask, "Are you asking for my opinion?" or "What alternatives have you thought of?"

### 4. Interrupting

This means butting in before your partner has completed the thought. Usually this is done because the interrupting people are impatient and are afraid of not getting their thoughts expressed.

Many of these interruptions occur on TV interviews when the host has guests with opposing views. The guests butt in, over-talk, even shout in order to get in their words. (According to some producers, this makes for exciting television. I think it simply creates an annoyance.)

### 5. Contradicting

This is the ultimate conversation-blocker. Although great in structured debate, direct disagreement is not helpful in conversation, which is at its best when it's mutual and collaborative.

"I disagree with you," or the more gingerly, "Yes, BUT" are in plentiful supply in many conversations and another form of the "I'm right, you're wrong" game. (If chocolate is right, must vanilla be wrong? Or just different?)

The better way is to hear out the point of view being expressed, check that you understand it, then offer, "My view is different from yours. Let me explain."

People who feel heard and understood are more likely to hear and understand someone expressing a different view.



### 6. Stingy contributors

This describes the people who listen, take and receive, but don't give.

They contribute little enthusiasm, information, self-disclosure, acknowledgement, compliments or other elements that lift a conversation. They like to "pick the brains" of others, but contribute nothing. They take few risks, and while others share personal experiences, the "stingy contributor" remains cool and contained with personal matters. This cautious, ungenerous style causes an out-of-balance conversation in which real trust can never exist.

When you find you are becoming frustrated or annoyed in a conversation, there is a good chance that the other party is exhibiting one of these mistakes. You are experiencing how these mistake patterns cause problems. With your

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## SIX COMMON MISTAKES...

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heightened awareness, now work to eliminate them from your own repertoire.

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## Additional Help

### Nine Little Things To Improve Conversation

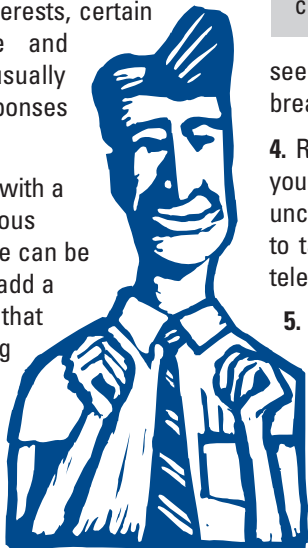
by Loren Ekroth, Ph.D

In serious conversation, and also in social small talk, little things can have a big impact. Here are nine little things you can add to enhance the quality of your conversations:

1. Use the other person's name from time to time during the talking, such as, "I agree with you, Betty, and will support your proposal." Our names are precious to us and nearly everyone has a feel-good experience when being addressed by name. "Gary, would you call me tomorrow with the quote?"

2. Instead of asking general questions such as, "How's it going?" ask specific personal questions like, "How does your son like dental school?" Being specific shows that you remember details about matters important to the other person, such as the family, special interests, certain challenges. Routine and general questions usually elicit only routine responses like, "Fine thanks."

3. Lighten up the talk with a smile. Even with serious topics, a friendly smile can be appropriate and can add a measure of good will that is helpful in advancing understanding (Being serious tends to suppress feelings and makes the tone of our conversation



# Talking To Your Aging Parents About Their Final Wishes

A recent survey by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) found that nearly 70 percent of adult children have not talked to their parents about issues related to aging and end of life. Experts recommend that discussions about end of life issues should take place when things are going well, before there is a crisis and decisions must be made hastily. Use the "40/70" rule, aging experts say. If you are over 40 and your parents are over 70, you need to be talking about the issues older people face. According to another AARP study, most elderly parents actually feel better about having these kinds of discussions as part of their planning for the future. Such discussions, they say, help them live life the way they wish.



## Tips for talking with aging parents

- Use your own planning, or a friend or relative's illness or death as an opportunity to start a discussion.
- Communicate directly and honestly. Let your parents know that you want to work together to meet their needs for the future.
- Avoid role reversal, where you become the parent. Treat your parents as equals. Your job is to allow them to retain as much independence and control as possible.
- Don't expect to work out an entire plan in one sitting. Expect that the discussion will be ongoing. Each time the topic is revisited, it should become more comfortable.
- Find out your parent's wishes. What is most important to them? What are their needs and concerns about the future? How do they want to be cared for as they grow older? How great is your parent's need for independence?
- Ask if your parents have worked with an attorney to draft important legal documents, including: a will or trust, medical power of attorney, financial power of attorney and living will. Be sure you are familiar with the purpose and importance of each of these documents.
- Involve the entire family. Siblings, spouses or other extended family members can participate in family discussions with your parents about their needs and help make decisions. They can also take turns providing care or other assistance.

**Recommended Reading:** *How To Care For Aging Parents* by Virginia Morris. A very comprehensive resource on the medical, emotional, legal and financial issues involved in caring for an elderly parent.

seem flat). Relax, drop your shoulders and breathe.

4. Respect people's time for talking so that you don't hold them hostage. If you're uncertain ask, "Do you have a few minutes to talk now?" This is especially useful for telephone conversations.

5. Give the other converser their turn to talk. You can do this by talking in paragraphs, not chapters, and then signaling it's their turn with a question like, "What are your thoughts?"

6. Adjust your voice controls for easy listening. These include speed,

volume, pitch and tone of voice, so that listening to you can actually be pleasurable.

7. Share some information of value to the other, perhaps a tip like, "I just found a great car mechanic, who does good work and is really reasonable." Or, "I know you like history, Fred, so you might enjoy that new film June and I saw last week. It's about the Civil War."

8. When you're with someone, give your full attention. The gift of your presence and attention is quietly powerful and strengthens relationships. Fully engaged listening is rare

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## SIX COMMON MISTAKES

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in our multi-tasking worlds of work and home. When you listen, just listen. Don't wander.

9. End your conversation gracefully and not abruptly. When appropriate, thank or compliment the other person when you are ending. "I really enjoyed talking with you and understand the situation much better now. Thanks a lot."

These little things add a quality of civility and care to any conversation. Ultimately, they mean a lot because your attitudes tend to be reciprocated. When you pay attention and include these little things, others will often do these same things for you and that makes for a satisfying talk.

### Your EAP is here to help

If you need help with any personal, family or work-related concern, contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP). We can provide you or your dependents with short-term counseling, referrals or information to help you face life's challenges.

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## Did you know?

Your EAP Website offers:

- Employee/Customer Satisfaction Surveys
- Administrator Satisfaction Surveys
- Articles & Newsletters
- Quizzes & Self Assessment Instruments
- Tips on Stress Reduction
- Management and Human Resource Tips

Forgot your password? Ask your Human Resource specialist for the password or call the EAP at 1-800-899-3926.

[www.theemployeeassistanceprogram.com](http://www.theemployeeassistanceprogram.com)

# Strategies to Decrease Emotional Overeating



According to the American Psychological Association's 2009 Stress in America survey, almost half of Americans (48 percent) reported overeating or eating unhealthy foods to manage stress. Many people use food to fill emotional needs, contributing to overeating and being overweight.

Do you use food to:

- ▶ relax or calm your nerves?
- ▶ comfort yourself?
- ▶ numb yourself from emotional pain such as sadness, hopelessness, rejection, or anger?

### Tips and strategies

If you're prone to emotional overeating, you can take steps to regain control. Below are tips to help decrease this unhealthy habit:

- 1. Learn to recognize true hunger versus emotional eating.** If you ate just a few hours ago and don't have a rumbling in your stomach, you're probably not really hungry. When you feel the urge to eat, get in the habit of asking yourself, "Is it physical hunger or is it emotional or stress-driven hunger?"
- 2. Know your triggers.** Use a food diary to identify when and why you eat for emotional reasons. Keep an accurate record for at least one week of what you eat, how much you eat, how you're feeling and how hungry you are. Ask yourself: What happened today to make me feel this way? You may become aware of situations or feelings that trigger you to turn to food.
- 3. Face difficult emotions and stress-producing problems head on.** Work on ways to face difficult emotions and stressful situations other than reaching for food. Acknowledge and address feelings of anxiety, anger or loneliness. Look for solutions to the difficult issues in your life. Talk them over with a friend or counselor, or write in a journal. Finding ways to express your feelings constructively can help clear unwanted eating patterns.
- 4. Find alternative behaviors to eating.** Instead of turning to food, take a walk, practice yoga or meditation, listen to relaxing music, take a warm bath, read a good book, engage in a hobby, work in your garden, or talk to a supportive friend. Exercise regularly and get adequate rest. Each is proven to reduce stress, improve your mood and help control appetite.

## Employee Assistance Program 1-800-899-3926

- Personal / Work Stress
- Marital / Family Concerns
- Alcohol / Drug Concerns
- Frustration / Anger / Sadness

**CALL FOR FREE  
CONFIDENTIAL  
HELP**

All of us experience personal, family or work related problems now and then.

Sometimes, even ordinary problems can become overwhelming. It is at these times, your **EAP** can provide free confidential assistance.

Employees or family members can call to receive telephone consultation and/or to schedule an appointment with an **EAP** specialist.

Read Healthy Exchange online: [theemployeeassistanceprogram.com](http://theemployeeassistanceprogram.com)

Newsletter comments welcome at: Managed Care Concepts

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