



A Good Talk: The Story and Skill of Conversation

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A GOOD TALK is an analysis of and guide to that most exclusively human of all activities-- conversation. Drawing on over forty years of experience in American letters, Menaker pinpoints the factors that drive and enliven every good conversation: the vagaries (and joys) of subtext; the deeper structure and meaning of conversational flow; the subliminal signals that guide our disclosures and confessions; and the countless other hurdles we must clear along the way. Moving beyond self-help musings and "how to" advice, he has created a stylish, funny, and surprising book: a celebration of "the most exclusively human of all activities." In a time when conversation remains deeply important-- for building relationships, for relaxing, even for figuring out who we are-- and also increasingly imperiled (with Blackberries and texting increasingly in vogue), A GOOD TALK is a refreshing celebration of the subtle adventures of a good conversation.

A Good Talk: The Story and Skill of Conversation Details

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Julie says

i'm still kind of shocked by how disappointing this book was. it is such a strange situation because it is a fascinating subject and i was so looking forward to reading about it. it is clear that the writer is extremely knowledgeable and he seems like a nice person who is genuinely interested in what makes conversations good. the problem is that the book is ultimately so poorly written that it doesn't do its subject matter or the writer's passion justice.

one of the most obvious and strange problems is that he chose to use a transcribed conversation to illustrate some points. but not only was this very, very long, taking up a significant portion of the text but the conversation itself wasn't particularly interesting to "listen" to. most bizarre of all- the conversation was between himself and another writer. he defended his decision to highlight one of his own conversations by pointing out that every other attempt at recording two random talkers failed. but i found it to be just inappropriate and thought he really should have kept trying so that he could more objectively analyze a conversation.

in addition to very regular name-dropping throughout the book he seems to try way too hard to be funny and both of these practices had the result of being quite distracting and made me feel like he was more concerned with trying to impress readers instead of just writing about his subject. i kept finding myself wishing he would just give the reader the interesting information and insight i knew he possessed.

Jane says

Overwritten, arch, unfocused, and meandering. As if that weren't enough, at the end, we are subjected to his political beliefs. What a disappointment! I had hoped to learn something useful from this sophisticated gentleman.

Aleah says

I disliked this book a lot. I picked it up on a whim, thinking it would help me get rid of some of my social awkwardness. This book didn't affect my social skills at all. "A Good Talk: The Story And Skill of Conversation" is filled with nothing but cheap jokes and common sense situation events, like proof reading an email before punching the, 'Send' button.

This would have been a decent book if it wasn't for the confusing writing style. Daniel Menaker kept jumping from topic to topic and throwing in unnecessary jokes. His writing style is very distracting and personally, I don't think his words flowed smoothly. This is the first book I have disliked in a long time, and I am glad to see I am not alone.

Steve says

I received this book as a goodreads giveaway. In summary; A Good Talk briefly theorizes on the origin of conversation before presenting a conversation to be analyzed. The later part of the book explores some of the stumbling blocks to good conversation.

David Menaker has great fun in postulating the origins of conversation. His enthusiastic, tongue in cheek approach pulls us through the a brief, enjoyable exposition and history of conversations. At least, as he admits, from a Western society point of view. However, I did find myself getting impatient with the dialogues that were presented to be deconstructed. They were too lengthy, and not very interesting. Much shorter versions would have been adequate to illustrate the components/roles of conversation. I would like to eavesdrop on a good talk, but the ones presented here were not what I would consider good. Which was unfortunate. Could have used more analysis/ideas on what makes a great talk than what was spent on the inconsequential small talk presented in A Good Talk. Which I believe the book was not meant to cover, but I wish it did. So this wasn't exactly the book I hoped it would be.

Sehar Moughal says

I have read a few books on conversations and found this to be different. I really liked that Menaker has added a transcribed conversation as part of the text. Although - the analysis was disappointing. If you know the basic components of a conversation then the exemplar provided was excellent.

I found the author's pace really fast - it was like reading a commentary. For this reason, I would not recommend this book as an introductory text on communication/conversational skills. In saying that, I am glad for the historical lesson given in the second chapter (specially the mention of Socratic method of inquiry). Menaker's writing style is unique and I think most people won't appreciate his humour. Overall, this book filled a few gaps in my existing knowledge.

AdultNonFiction Teton County Library says

TCL Call Number: 302.346 Menaker D

Diana's rating: 3 stars

I picked this book up hoping for some pointers on being a better conversationalist, and what I got instead was sort of an observation on how conversations evolved and what their components are. I did appreciate that the author applied humor to the topic, and wrote in a conversational style, and I will try to remember the three qualities of a conversationalist he called essential: curiosity, humor and impudence.

Deanna says

I won this on goodreads.

I flat did not like this book. I'm not saying this isn't a good book though. I am just saying I didn't like it.

The author was all over the place with random "humor" and conversation. The book seemed totally illogical. Which I think was the point. I was hoping for a Dale Carnegie practical and appropriate book. This is not it.

If you want to read a humorous book that talks about nothing, please read this book.

Scott Finlayson says

[the 4 stages involved in a good conversation, should you make it through all, are SURVEY, DISCOVERY, RISKS, ROLES. the acronym CHI (not

Dawn says

I'm at a loss for what caused me to put this book on my 'to-read' list in the first place. Perhaps it is because I do love the fine art of conversation. But, this book took a historical and, put simply, a boring take on the topic. Skimmed through 90% of the book looking for something of interest, but alas, found nothing.

Julia says

Just could not finish this book. Definitely wasn't what I was expecting, but I'm not sure what I was expecting. The sample conversation was dull and took up too many pages.

AnnaMay says

So, I'm still trying to figure out what exactly the point of this book was.

I was chuckling quite often throughout the first few chapters, I guess, but the book just never really took me anywhere.

I thought the name-dropping in the last chapter was lame.

I thought the sample conversation he included was cool in regard to subject matter (writers talking about how to get their gig working.) Other than that, though, this book came across as very indulgent on the author's part. He seemed to be having a great time writing it, but I just didn't come away a better conversationalist as a result.

I DID come away realizing that Menaker knows a lot of famous people (half of the references to people I was clueless on--who likes to read a book that makes them feel dumb but then leaves them dumb?) and he knows of a lot of other books about conversation.

I'm left kind of scratching my head and thinking, 'Okay. I read the book, but I just don't get it.'

He's very witty. I'll give him that. He included a few too many references to sex in his humor, though.

I guess 'good job' to Menaker for publishing a book. There must be SOMEONE out there who'll really dig it and benefit from reading it, I guess.

I'm out to find another conversation book that will help me hone my skills and be an enjoyable guest at a party.

Bill says

This book is complete crap. Let me sum it up for you - New York lefty writes book under the guise of how to understand 'conversation' and uses this premise to simply expose his hard-left point of view on anything and everything. Oh I forgot - lazy as well - half the book is simply a transcript of conversations with like minded people, who've also never been out of left-wing cocoon of New York liberalism.

Waste of money.

Freda Mans-Labianca says

A very informative and interesting book on conversation. Actually a lot better than I thought it would be. The one criticism I have is the long conversation between Fred and Ginger. For me, that was the most painfully boring part. The other aspects of the book were great. I especially enjoyed a joke that I will share;

After he'd used the toilet one day, a woman said to him, "Why, Mr. Johnson, your penis is sticking out." Johnson replied, "You flatter yourself, Madame-- it is only hanging out."

~Page 44.

That is one conversation, made up or not, that I won't soon forget. I suggest if you are curious about conversation, and the techniques in it, grab a copy. You may or may not like the book. It really is an acquired taste.

Aurélien Thomas says

Ah! A little book on the history and art of conversing. Coming from a journalist and writer I was expecting a light yet agreeable read, containing at least a few interesting tidbits on the topic. Well, bad luck! The whole is a complete waste and, ironically for a book revolving all around the art of a good conversation, dull to the point of being soporific, shallow to the point of being vain and, after we put it down (having learnt nothing!) cannot but feel relieved as when having just gotten rid of a bore!

You want to know more about the history and art of conversing? Go pick articles here and there on the internet, and you will learn more about it all than in this poor and badly written summary. His conversation analysis brings nothing interesting -they are just talks between his friends upon which he disserts with a stupefying banality. Worst: he just uses a very few references to illustrate his arguments, a tiny handful of books he hasn't even bother to read!

The good introduction was promising. The bibliography (embracing literature, philosophy and psychology)

is not too bad. The rest... Useless wind! Stay clear.

Michelle says

DUMB! This guy does not know how to write, he blathers on and on about stuff completely unrelated to conversation, and he has no research to support his claims! Recording an hour long conversation is not research, nor does it make thrilling reading material to read a script of. Honestly! What a dumb book! I thought it would be good because I'm really interested in conversation and language, but it was VERY disappointing.
