

Better Conversations

Part 1

Help Other People Listen

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| <i>The Problem</i> | It can be hard for people to pay attention to what you're saying for any number of reasons. How can you help whoever you're talking to feel more engaged in the conversation? |
| <i>The Premise</i> | Traditional storytellers (and politicians, protesters, and others) use call-and-response techniques to engage audiences of all ages. The interaction captures listeners' attention and transforms the group into a kind of temporary community. It's a great strategy, but it doesn't readily scale down; in one-on-one conversation or even with a small group of people, call and response would be weird. |
| <i>The Application</i> | <p>There are more subtle and conversational ways to elicit someone's interest. "If we're smart, we're always asking questions," says Reverend Robert Jones, a storyteller and musician. "We don't just tell you a story. We ask you things that give you an opportunity to give us feedback even when we know the answer."</p> <p>He recalls the example of asking a group of kids about the name of the children's game Telephone. "When I describe what a folk tale is to a kid, I'll say, 'It's kind of like a game that you guys played when you were little,'" he says. "I'm appealing to their sense of fifth-grade sophistication. 'What's that game called that you guys played when you were little where I whisper something in your ear then you whisper it in someone else's ear?'"</p> <p>"I know the answer before I ask it. But the important part is that I'm seeing if you're clicked into what I'm saying. I'm giving you a chance to participate in a story. It doesn't have to be a young audience."</p> |
| <i>How It Works</i> | As simple as it sounds, try asking a question the next time you're facing a difficult conversation. The content of the question doesn't matter, so long as it's relevant to the topic at hand. It could be the title of an old film, the year something happened, or the name of a politician. This tiny act of participation will set the stage for deeper collaboration. |

Find the full toolkit on the [More than One Story Resources](#) page.