

The Art of Conversation

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Election season calls for many things: candidate merchandise, politics trending on social media, political campaigns, frantic, last-minute registration to vote, and, of course, debate. Arguments are rampant during the months leading up to the election, and after a while, they can get tiresome. Friends and family get frustrated with one another for having conflicting opinions. People get tired of seeing the same tweet, NowThis video, or CNN article being shared over and over again. It doesn't take long before people get sick of this repetitious cycle. So, inevitably, people stop listening to one another. This is where the biggest problem of our election begins.

We've all heard the standard arguments against the primary candidates: Hillary Clinton is a lying, crooked, insincere criminal, and Donald Trump is a sexist, racist psychotic with the temperament of a five-year-old. Hatred towards both candidates is so evident that I have not been in a single situation in which a supporter of either candidate has shared their beliefs without being shamed. So much negativity amounts from political discussion that it has backfired and caused people to do the most unproductive thing possible: removing themselves entirely. Tasty, a food page on Facebook, shared a video on the night of the final Presidential Debate, titled "Take A Break From The Debate: Watch This Giant Cookie Slowly Bake". The video has over fourteen million views.

To be honest, I don't blame those who chose watching a cookie bake slowly over watching the final debate, because frankly, they didn't miss much. Both candidates spent so much time cutting each other off that there wasn't much to actually be heard. We've gotten to a point in our society where even our presidential candidates don't listen to each other. These are the people that are meant to represent our nation. How will we be able to consider each other's opinions if even they aren't listening?

I started off this article by writing about one candidate in particular, but I soon realized that the issues surrounding the election are more of a reflection of our society than of one person. The truth is, there is no particular candidate that is causing our society's lack of acceptance towards opposing views. While one may be perpetuating it more than the other, bigotry has always been an imperative issue America faces. Our society cannot progress unless we fix this problem. Not everyone needs to have the same opinion, but every opinion deserves to be heard.

We are lucky enough to live in a society in which we are able to speak our opinions. Freedom of speech is a privilege that many are denied, so it is a shame that many waste it. Being a minority or majority opinion should not discourage a person from speaking out. It can be uncomfortable to have an outnumbered viewpoint, but that should encourage civil discourse, not eliminate it. Contrarily, it can also be too comfortable to have a dominant perspective, as these stances are

less challenged. Majorities and minorities must communicate with one another. Everyone can learn from discussion, even if it doesn't change anyone's opinions. Everyone must listen for the sake of listening.

So if you feel like you keep hearing the same opinion, start a discussion with someone you might disagree with—not with the intention of changing their opinion, but to better your own. If you feel like you don't actually know or care enough to engage in discussion, read or watch the news. Being aware of the world's problems is the first step to fixing them.

“The art of conversation is the art of hearing as well as of being heard” -William Hazlitt. Listen to people, and listen with the intent of learning from them. You may be surprised about how much you agree with one another once you stop trying to make others agree with you.