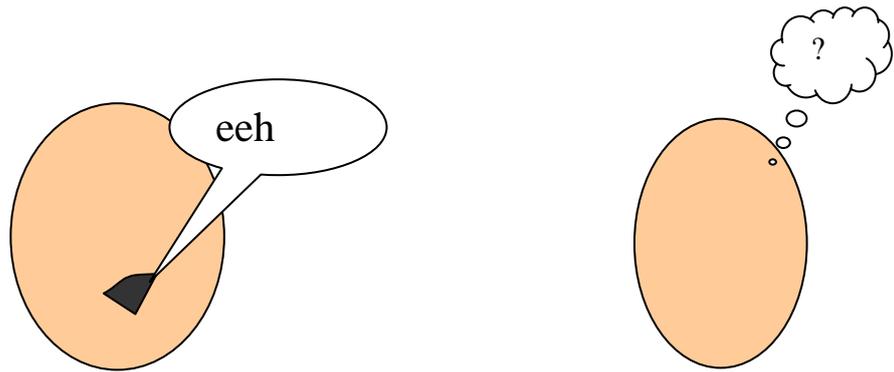


About talking



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In a conversation between two people, it is usually so that one of them (A) says something that the other one (B) responds to. Usually, there is a wide range of different answers B can give to A's statement or question, depending on a variety of circumstances. For example, consider the following simple conversation:

A: - Nice weather!

B: - Yes really!

Or

A: - Nice weather!

B - Do you think so? I think it's too hot.

Or

A: - Nice weather!

B: - Yes, but it will be worse tomorrow.

B's response will obviously depend largely on the actual weather conditions prevailing in the moment and his or her attitude to these conditions. In addition, the answer depends on where the conversation takes place, if it is in a noisy environment it is likely that answer will be shorter than if the circumstances are appropriate for small talk. Furthermore, it is crucial which relationship B feels that he/she has to A. If B is works in a shop and A is a customer, the answer is probably different compared to if B is married with A and he/she is in a bad mood. This can be discussed for quite some time, since there is no patent answer that always works best. The optimal answer for B depends namely on B's purpose with the conversation. And the best answer is the answer that suits this purpose the most. There are a number of relatively standardized situations where the purpose of the call, at least for one the parties is more obvious than in other situations, such as:

- Conversation between telemarketers and presumptive clients.
- Children trying to get mom or dad to buy them ice cream.
- Pickup at the pub.

Such situations are quite translucent as to what is appropriate to say in order to achieve the purpose. Phone vendors participate in introductory courses and have talk scripts to follow. Parents discuss among themselves and with good friends how to best tackle the children's wishes/nagging. What is appropriate to say in the restaurant environment with the aim of sharing the bed with someone have been discussed in several books and many of them who have been in such situations probably also have discussed the matter with his friends. In situations where the aim of the talk primarily is to amuse the participants, the methods are however less investigated. The purpose of this chapter is to, through questions to others, to some extent, determine how I could get better in these everyday conversations.

I therefore asked eight people to answer my questions (see Appendix) and all said yes. Four of them were men and four were women. They had an average age of 44 years (median: 45 years, min - max: 38-49 years), varying levels of education, professional, income, family and housing conditions.

It has happened, which I am ashamed of, that when someone has proudly told me about something that they have done. I have immediately over triumphed their performance, something that I sometime later on have regretted, since I think the people I talked to may not always have wanted that information. Instead, they might have been offended because they, for instance felt that they were not "seen". I.e. that their performance was not considered in relation to their abilities in the current subject. A reasonable reaction on their part would then be to feel compelled to prove that they have done more. Which in turn maybe lead to a kind of competition about who has performed the most. But on the other hand, a response that only contains an appreciative comment without any details on how I relate myself to the topic, may have been perceived as that I am ignorant or uninterested in the subject. With a risk that a potentially interesting conversation dies prematurely. Here are three examples:

A: - I have finally got started with running once a week.

B: - Once a week, myself, I run every morning.

A: - I have finally got started with running once a week.

B: - Great, that will be rewarding within a few months.

A: - I have finally got started with running once a week.

B: - Great, I myself started that way a few years ago and now I'm very energetic and I can run a couple of times a week.

Which of these should I choose (question 1 in the Annex)?

Five of the eight respondents felt that the best answer is one that encourages the speaker and then describes some of the listeners' own experiences in the subject. The other respondents thought that it was the next best option. The other two options: to simply say something encouraging, or to just say something about the own performance without saying anything encouraging, was ranked about as bad. Though as seen in the Annex the respondents had to relate to an ailment, and in those cases its maybe more comforting to hear that others suffer from similar afflictions, compared to when ones performances are over triumphed.

I have noticed that those who are reasonably professionals in asking questions, i.e. radio journalists, rarely comment the answers to their questions. Instead, they respond to them with a humming sound, sometimes complemented by a supplementary question. It that how we want people to respond? Myself I get the feeling that the person is either not listening or did not understand what I said, if the reaction consists of only an "mmm" sound. I rather appreciate an evaluative comment that makes me understand that the listener understand what I'm saying. But what do others prefer (question 2)?

The respondents thought (see table 1), as I do, that the best response indicates that the listener understands the situation. Secondly they ranked humming combined with a supplementary question. It is somewhat surprising because, in my experience, there rarely is anyone, other than radio journalists, who do so. Simply hum, however, was ranked the last among the options. Even lower than the response that indicates that the listener does not understand. Maybe because in the latter case the speaker knows that the listener has understood it wrong, maybe since him or her, with good conscience, then can explain again. But if the person hums the speaker hovers in uncertainty of whether further explanation is needed or not.

But even if the listener has the ambition to always respond in a way that both encourages and shows that he/she has understood, it is sometimes impossible. Sometimes because you do not have a clue about where the speaker wants to end up. In this situation it is likely that an attempt to ask a question of type "E" becomes one of type "D". And then, according to the results, it might be better with a response of type "B", if the following question makes sense. Otherwise, "C" is the least bad option. However, I rarely hear someone use the questions of that type. As far as I remember, I have actually only met one person who used such questions, and I liked it.

Table 1. Which response is best?

<i>If you tell something that you think is interesting or important, what kind response do you prefer (grade, 5 = best):</i>	Participant number:								Average
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
A. Only a humming sound.	3	1	3	1	2	1	1	2	1.8
B. A humming sound and a question.	5	3	2	3	4	4	2	4	3.4
C. A question likes, for example: is that good or bad?	2	2	5	5	3	2	4	1	3.0
D. An evaluation of what you said that gives you a hint that the listener hasn't understood.	1	4	1	2	1	3	3	3	2.3
E. An evaluation of what you said that gives you a hint that the listener did understand it in the same way as you.	4	5	4	4	5	5	5	5	4.6

I am pretty often asked by acquaintances how the weekend had been. After I have answered I face the choice to either ask the same question in return, even though I know what the answer will be, or to ask a question that I do not know the answer to. Other times it has on the contrary been me who started to question and then I get the question back, and then I regretted that I started because I then had to admit that it did not happened anything. What do people in general want? Does that who asks courtesy questions generally want to have the same questions asked back?

Among the respondents (question 3) there were slightly more (4 persons) who always wanted to get the same question returned than the option: "No, I have no need to tell the listener if he/she does not seem to have any interest in knowing" (3 persons) or "It depends on the question"(1 person).

Thus, the results give no guidance at all. Which in itself is some guidance, because it suggests that there is no silver bullet solution for this. But often, it is not such problem, since many do not give any time for a corresponding counter question, because they says something else that requires a response or comment. Then it feels weird to go back to the previous topic.

A similar situation occurs when someone asks how I'm doing. This simple conversation opening gives me the option to either answer with standard response like "good," "just fine", "great", or to reveal that I feel a little cold, have slept little bad or some other more honest report about my situation. The advantage of the first type of response is that it allows us to more quickly slip into interesting questions instead of talking about minor flaws in my welfare, and secondly, it does not force the requester to show compassion. The main disadvantage is that it usually is not entirely true. If I almost always was on top, it would surely soon become my normal state and then great would then be something even better. Moreover, the effect, for those that on their questions about health always get answers like "just fine", the effect might be that he or she believes that everyone else walks around in a constant euphoria. Which might make the questioner might feel sadder than necessary. But it is perhaps quite obvious to everyone that the question is just asked out of courtesy and that no one really is interested in an honest answer?

The results of this study suggest, however, the opposite, as none of the participants prefer answers like "great" or similar (question 4, table 2). It is somewhat strange because the most common answers are things like "great" or other superlatives. Three respondents instead said that they always want an honest answer, but I find it hard to believe. Moreover, it is a wish that is hard to live up to, since what is an honest answer to such a question? And how egocentric can one be when telling about ones situation at the moment? Though there were almost as many who felt that "C" or "D" is the best.

Table 2. Appropriate response to polite questions.

<i>If you ask someone about how life is, what answer do you prefer:</i>	Number of yes
A. Great, fine, just fine, or similar even though the person has his/her everyday ailments and problems.	0
B. An honest answer if I have time to listen else something that doesn't force me to ask follow-up questions.	1
C. If it is someone I care about, I want an honest answer otherwise not.	2
D. A moderately honest answer is always the best, i.e. I do not want to become embroiled in some emotional misery, but prefer when someone replies things like "a little pain in the foot, but otherwise good" rather than "just fine".	2
E. An honest answer is always best.	3

Some people almost always use themselves and their own feelings, or their immediate environment as argumentation and reference material. I think this may be a bit tiring. In addition, it gives, according to me, low credibility to the claims presented. What does other think about that?

A high proportion of the participants seem to like it (question 5), because it was a dead heat between those who preferred references to subjective sources (I think= four respondents) as "objective" ditto (it was written in the newspaper=4 participants). But no one liked the third option, to refer to another person (Donald says ...). So the results provide no guidance, except that it suggests that it provides poor credibility to a statement, when referring to a third person.

A relatively common and problematic situation arises when I get invited for dinner and the food is not according to my taste. Even if the host does not ask how it tastes, I think that it is expected of me to say that the food is tasty. A silence in that respect can be interpreted as that I think it is no good. If I then lie and say that it is good, I can either support my lie through taking more of it or risk that my host suspect that I'm lying. Though to tell the truth is probably worse, because it shows that I care so little about my host that I am willing to hurt him just not to compromise on my honest ness. According to a guidebook¹ in conduct, the guest should take a little bit to taste, even if the food does not attract. If it then turns out that it tastes bad, the guest should primarily torment himself anyway through eating it, or alternatively, leave the food on the plate. The authors give, however, no guidelines for what the guest should say about the food's taste or other qualities. But what action do the interviewees prefer if they are hosts or hostesses?

Five of the respondents (question 6, table 3) ranked the option that the guests ask for extra seasoning the highest. In second place came the option that's about that the guest is playing so well that the host does not notice that he/she is suffering. The majority also had the same view of the inverse relationship, if they were invited to dinner (question 7). As only three of them in that case would choose one of the options that allow the host to understand that they do not like the food, before the option to pretend to like it, or to ask for extra seasoning. Thus, in the future, when the situation arises, I will ask for extra seasoning.

Table 3. What should I as a guest do if the offered food tastes bad?

<i>If you invite someone for dinner and he does not like what you serve, do you prefer that the guest (grade, 5 = best):</i>	Participant number:								Average
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
A. Forces himself to eat the food without saying anything In order not to hurt you.	3	4	2	1	2	1	1	1	1.9
B. Claiming to be full after one bite and then leaves the rest on the plate.	2	1	5	3	3	3	3	4	3.0
C. Asks for extra spices, more sauce or the like and thus succeeds in making the dish edible for him or her.	1	5	3	5	5	5	5	2	3.9
D. Acts so well that you do not notice the suffering and you therefore get the impression that the food was appreciated.	4	3	4	4	4	4	2	3	3.5
E. Tastes the food and then leave it on the plate without comments.	5	2	1	2	1	2	4	5	2.8

¹. Manners & etiquette - written and un-written rules that make it easy to socialize, Charlotte and Clara Thompson, Semic Press 2001.

Occasionally, I get annoyed on someone and then feel like debriefing my feelings face to face with someone who knows that person. But I understand that some people do not like to discuss the negative characteristics of someone who is not present. One explanation for this, as I heard, is that anyone who speaks badly about someone who for the moment is not present, will speak badly about you when you are absent. But is that really true?

A majority (6 of 8) seems to think that the explanation given above, about why one should not speak badly about others, is true. Because they said they have had been in groups where any absent person became the subject of the others criticism (question 8), regardless of whoever it was. And these six people also believed that it is common. The other two said they did not recognize themselves in that the subject of criticism can be anyone in the group and I share that view. Though whether it's normal or not, the results suggest that many people think it is normal.

Slightly more of the participants prefer to be confirmed in their complaining (4 persons, question 9), compared to being contradicted (3 persons). And since I knew the respondents well, I can say that I very rarely heard criticism of someone not present from one of those who prefer to be contradicted. In addition, the difference between the sexes is large in this matter, as all women except for one prefer to be confirmed, while two of the four men would be contradicted. The last of the four men replied that it totally depends on whether the criticism is justified or not.

Overall, this shows that criticism of someone who is not present too many people really is a touchy subject, especially among men. So sensitive that some even prefer to be contradicted in the criticism rather than to be confirmed. Even though that probably is an unpleasant experience.

When someone calls a friend or acquaintance to ask something, it is common that the conversation begins with some small talk not associated with the case to make. It turns, however, sometimes out that the called party does not have time to talk. Some start by saying that they do not have time to talk, others will wait until after the first greetings are done, while others brings it up way into the conversation. These three options might look like this:

B: - Hello Bengt here, I can not talk now, I can call you later.

Compared to:

B: - Bengt!

A: - Hello Bengt! What's up? Do you have a nice weather?

B: - Well thank you, it is good and the sun is shining, but I can not talk right now. Can you call later?

Or:

B: - Bengt!

A: - Hello Bengt! What is the situation? Do you have nice weather?

B: - Well thank you, it is good and the sun shines.

A: - Can I borrow your tent?

B: - I can not talk right now. Can you call later?

I do not know which option I, as callers think is the worst of these three. The first feels very impolite and terse. The second and third is somewhat more pleasant to hear. But then it is my "shame" that I interfered, without checking if Bengt had time to talk. All three cases, however, in my opinion, is better than not to respond at all, since then I have no "proof" that Bengt know that I want's to speak with him.

According to the aforementioned guidebook¹ about how one should behave the caller shall, after the presentation, ask if the called is having his dinner, and if so, would it be better to call a little later. Which does not give a particularly exhaustive guidance, because someone who constantly asks that would appear as an idiot.

The respondents' answers give no guidance (question 10). Besides that the majority prefer to directly be interrupted (6 persons), Compared to that the listener waits until the issue is addressed, and then says that he/she does not have time to answer (2 persons).

Sometimes I wonder if there is something wrong with my hearing. Other times, such as in a noisy environment or if the person whose voice I do not perceive is speaking very low, I know that the fault is not due to any gaps in my hearing. Either way, it does not feel good to ask someone to repeat what he just said, especially if it happens several times during the same conversation. The worst case is if, when I hear what he said, it is revealed that it was not important, but, for example, simple courtesy phrases. Though I think it is even worse to guess what people are saying. And the most embarrassing situations arise, in my opinion, when I guess wrong and he/she in an annoyed way corrects me. How do the interviewees think that I should act (question 11-12)?

In the case of non-essentials as many (4 persons) prefers that the listener directly pretends to hear as those who prefer to take it several times. However, if there are important things discussed all but one would prefer to take it several times rather than that the audience pretends to hear.

Since I as a listener often does not know if what is said is important or not, when I do not hear it, the results indicates that I in the future should ask for repetitions until I am sure I heard correctly.

Several I know have a habit that once I share something that for the moment bothers me, they try to give me a solution to the problem. Which sometimes, for various reasons, can be annoying? Unfortunately, I am too often like that myself. Sometimes I have also experienced the opposite, i.e. I described a problem for someone who I think can help me, to get some good advice, without getting anything but sympathy and comforting words as an answer. The latter gives me the feeling that the listener do not care about me and my problems. But it really may be that they do care, but that he/she for my sake doesn't want to "write me in the face" what I should do, because he or she does not want to be served ready-made solutions.

According to a famous book about the differences between men and women written by John Gray² women talk about their problems to create closeness and not necessarily to get help to solve them. Men, however, only talk about problems if they really want to be helped to find solutions.

The interviewees answers (question 13) suggests that it to some extent is true, since three of the four men said they always want the listener to come up with a solution, while three of the women and one of the men claimed that they sometimes want a solution and other times not. Only one of the respondents, however, was so "feminine" that she never wants anyone to come up with solutions to her problem. A possible conclusion is that one should be more careful to give advice if it is a woman who describes a problem than if it is a man and vice versa.

An alternative conclusion could be that when we have problems with physical solutions, like suggestions for an appropriate store for a specific purchase or a construction solution, we are happy to receive practical advice. Unlike if the problems are of emotional nature, then we primarily are looking for emotional support. If it is true, then persons that are more pondering about problems that have physical solutions more often like to have hands-on advice than the contrary, persons who more often is pondering on emotional problems. If the former is more common among men, the effect on group level would be that men more often want practical help with their problems, than women.

² Men from Mars and women from Venus, by John Gray, Bromberg's publishing house, 1992.

One of the reasons why I sometimes do not want to be proposed solutions is that if I do not like the proposal, I face dilemma: Either explain why the proposed solution does not work in my case, or thank for the proposal and then pretended to forget it.

In the former case, I am often forced to elaborate on the problem. As the listener, judged by the proposed solution, did not understand. And the effect is a conversation that is not so funny.

In the latter case, it feels like I'm lurking the person and it is also not fun. The very least funny effect evolves if the person later, with anticipation in his voice, asks if I did as he suggested.

How do the interviewees think that I should act (question 14)?

The answers unfortunately gave me no clear guidance as it was a dead race between those who prefer that someone they gave some advice on an issue thanks and says that it is good, but then “forgets” it, compared to those who prefer that the listener directly explains that the advice is bad.

Sometimes it has happened that I tell something I heard from a friend, and then the listener smoothly or mockingly claims that it is a tall tale. Then I felt ashamed as a dog. Nevertheless, I have done the same thing myself when I have had the opportunity. Sometimes, however, it has not been a good idea as we have ended up in a situation where I then have to prove that it is a tale, and in the end, we have almost quarrelled. Which has made me think about whether it would be best to never speculate on whether something is a tall tale or not.

Judging from the respondents' answers (question 15, table 4) most storytellers prefer to hear that it's a tall tale (options A and B), compared to formulations where the word "tale" is not mentioned (answer C). Oddly enough, the "hard" variant (A) was rated as high as the more elusive variant (B). Thus, I might continue writing people in the face, in this regard, when the opportunity arises.

Table 4. What if it is a tale that is told?

<i>You tell something that you heard have happened to an acquaintance of an acquaintance and the listener realizes that it is probably the case of a tall tale, what do you prefer (3 = best):</i>	Participant number:								Average
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
A. The listener says that it is a tall tale.	1	3	3	3	1	2	1	3	2.1
B. He / she says type: strange I have heard that before, but then there was another person, it may be the case of a tall tale.	2	2	2	1	3	3	2	2	2.1
C. The same as i alternative B but without saying that it might be a tall tale.	3	1	1	2	2	1	3	1	1.8

Quite often, when someone makes an exposition which I suspect will be long, I face the dilemma whether I should wait until the end of it with my questions, or if I should take them gradually during the storytelling time. The benefits of the first scenario are that the narrator will not be interrupted and that some issues become outdated as the story develops. The disadvantages are that I have to keep all the comments in my head while I take in and ponder the rest of the story, and that all comments will be unnaturally stacked when the story is finished. The options can be illustrated by the following examples:

A: - I went to Västerås last weekend. On the way there we passed a major traffic accident, which meant that we were stuck in a traffic jam for hours.

So when we arrived there, we had missed half the first half of the match.

Furthermore, we did not have time to eat in advance, so I had to buy five hot dogs.

But my team won, so it was worth it.

B: - Was it a hockey game?

A: - Yes.

B: - Was there a lot of cars involved?

A: - Yes, at least five cars.

B: - Wasn't it pretty cold last weekend?

A: - Well it sure was ten degrees below zero, but I had my warmest clothes on.

B – Did you eat dinner on the way home?

A: - Yes, we stayed at a pizzeria.

Or:

A: - I went to Västerås last weekend.

B: - Was it a hockey game?

A: - Yes, and on the way there, we passed a major traffic accident, which meant that we were stuck in a traffic jam for hours.

B: - Was there a lot of cars involved?

A: - Yes, it was at least five cars and when we arrived to the stadium, we had missed half the first half of the match.

B: - Wasn't it pretty cold last weekend?

A: - Well it sure was ten degrees below zero, but I had my warmest clothes on. Furthermore, we did not have time to eat in advance, so I had to buy five hot dogs.

B – Did you eat dinner on the way home?

A: - Yes, we stayed at a pizzeria. But my team won, so it was worth it.

How should I act in this respect (question 16)?

All four women and one man thinks I should take the issues as and when they arise. But two of the other men prefer to have all the questions and comments made after the story is finished. While it for the last man does not matter. So there is, based on the results, no clear approach which is always the best in this matter. Except, perhaps, that women more often than men, wants the events to be told in dialogue form.

It happens, albeit rarely, that a friend praises me for a piece of clothing that I wear. Which makes me happy, but sometimes the praising makes me wonder if it might mean that my other garments, according to the person, are ugly. On the other hand, it is even more rarely happening that someone tells me that a garment is ugly. Though the few times it has happened, it has been far more valuable to me than the times I received praise. Because it is much easier for me to do something about an ugly garment, i.e. threw it away or save it for the next time I paint the house. Compared to trying to find more garments similar to the nice one, the next time I buy clothes. I wonder what other people think and how I should act in case any of my friends happen to have particularly ugly or good looking clothes?

Most interviewees think apparently not as I do, since they prefer to get praise for the nice garment compared to criticism for an ugly one (5 of 8, issue 17). Thus, I might stick to praise in the future. In addition, maybe I should not trust that others will help me to sort out even my ugliest clothes.

It happens that someone tells me a story that they have already told me earlier. Maybe because they, as well as I, have a hard time keeping track on which I have already told a story. If it happens I have the choice to quickly stop the narrator and tell that he has already told me or to wait until the story is told and then tell him that it is a rerun, or not to pretend that it's a rerun. The first variant might embarrass the speaker less, but it feels brisker. The third is probably nicest, though it may give the impression that I, as a listener am forgetful or a bad listener. Which of these responses does other prefer (question 18)?

The option ranked highest was to be interrupted immediately, pointing out that the story is already told (table 5), compared to that the listener does not pretend that he have heard the story before, or to tell when the story is fully told. The least uncertain conclusion from the results is that at least I should not select the last variant.

Table 5. What if someone tells the same story that he has already told before?

<i>You tell something you already told the listener before, which response do you prefer then (grade, 3 = best):</i>	Participant number:								Average
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
A. The listener directly points out that you already have told the story to him/her.	2	1	3	3	1	3	3	2	2.3
B. He/she pretends like you haven't already told it.	1	3	1	2	3	2	2	3	2.1
C. He/she waits until you have told the whole story and then says that you have told it before.	3	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	1.6

It sometimes happens that others misunderstand things that I tell. Sometimes the misconceptions may have negative consequences, such as if it is a question of directions. Then it is obviously an advantage if I explain again. Other times, such as when dealing with pure chitchat, an explanation will lead to that the conversation is disturbed and thus becomes less entertaining. Knowing this creates in such situations, a small dilemma. Should I correct the listener's perception with the risk that the fluidity of the conversation will suffer? Or is it best to let the listener live with the misconception for comforts sake? What do those who misunderstood prefer?

The answers (question 19) suggest that in general it is best to explain again until the listener seems to understand. Since six of the participants chose that option, even if it is about pure chitchat.

Sometimes when I walk into an ongoing conversation, I think that I do not want to trouble the participants through asking if what has been said so far, but I still don't want to be quiet. Maybe I also think it is a little exciting to, as quickly as possible, guess what they are talking about and as proof of that I guessed right, I, as soon as possible, do a comment. Some times have I met irritated eyes, other times surprised ditto, but usually it does not result in any, for me, noticeable reaction at all. So what do people think?

Many interviewees claims, to my surprise, that they prefer that the new participant asks for a brief summary (question 20, table 6) compared to that he guesses right on what was previously said, and says a relevant comment. And the majority thought, of course, that the worst option is if the new participant guesses wrong and comes with an irrelevant comment. These results suggest, therefore, quite clearly that the alternative to ask for a summary is the best choice (since when guessing there is always the risk of guessing wrong).

Table 6. What should be the one who comes into a call to do?

<i>You're talking to someone and a third person joins you and do (rank what you prefer, 3 = best):</i>	Participant number:								Average
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
A. The person guess what you're talking about and say something that is highly relevant.	1	3	2	2	2	3	3	3	2.4
B. The person asks you to repeat what has hitherto been said.	3	2	3	3	3	1	2	2	2.4
C. He / she guess what you're talking about and says something irrelevant.	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1.3

Finally, I have the habit to, in a rather straightforward way, correct statements that I think are wrong, so that there will be no confusion as to what, in my opinion, is correct. I suspect, however, that not everyone appreciates my frankness. It turned out, unfortunately, that my suspicions may be true, because it was just one of the respondents that in these contexts appreciate a straightforward manner (question 21), compared to the "softer" options. Given how they responded to this question, and given that all participants know me and the way I converse very well, I think I can not get a clearer sign on that I should quit the habit.

Appendix. The questions in the interviews

1. You tell someone that you have an ailment of some sort and the one you talk to has a similar ailment but worse, what do you prefer (grade, 3 = best):
 - A. He/she responds through describing his own ailment.
 - B. He/she answers something with the purpose to console and then tells about his/her own ailment.
 - C. He/she answers something with the purpose to console and then asks about your health in general without mentioning his/her own problems.
2. If you tell someone something that you think is interesting or important, what kind of response do you prefer (grade, 5 = best):
 - A. Only a humming sound.
 - B. A humming and a supplementary question.
 - C. A question likes, for example: is it good or bad?
 - D. A valuation of what you said that gives you a hint that the listener hasn't understood.
 - E. An evaluation of what you said that gives you a hint that the listener did understand it in the same way as you.
3. If you ask someone you know how for instance, weekend or holiday has been, do you want that the respondent asks you the same thing?
 - A. Always.
 - B. It depends on the issue.
 - C. No, I have no need to tell the listener if he/she does not seem to have any interest in knowing,
4. If you ask someone about how life is, what kind of response do you prefer:
 - A. Great, fine, just fine, or similar even though the person has his/her everyday ailments and problems.
 - B. An honest answer if I have time to listen else something that doesn't force me to ask follow-up questions.
 - C. If it is someone I care about, I want an honest answer otherwise not.
 - D. A moderately honest answer is always the best, i.e. I do not want to become embroiled in the worst emotional misery, but prefer when someone replies things like "a little pain in the foot, but otherwise good" rather than "just fine".
 - E. An honest answer is always best.
5. Which of these introductions do you think gives the most credibility to the following:
 - A. I think that ...
 - B. I have read in the newspaper that ...
 - C. My husband ...
6. If you invite someone for dinner and he does not like what you serve, do you prefer that the guest (grade, 5 = best):
 - A. Forces himself to eat the food without saying anything in order not to hurt you.
 - B. Claiming to be full after one bite and then leaves the rest on the plate.
 - C. Asks for extra spices, more sauce or the like and thus succeeds in making the dish edible for him or her.
 - D. Acts so well that you do not notice the suffering and you therefore get the impression that the food was appreciated.
 - E. Tastes the food and then leave it on the plate without comments.
7. If instead you are invited for dinner, how would you then prefer to rank the alternatives?
8. Have you been a member of a group where any absent person, as a rule, been subject to the criticism of others, regardless of who it was and if so, do you think it is common?
9. If you say something unfavourable about an absent person to someone who also knows the guy. Do you then prefer to:
 - A. The one you talks to confirms your opinion.

- B. He defends the absent person.
10. If you want to tell something to someone who does not have time to listen, do you then prefer:
- That the person directly interrupts you and tells that he/she does not have time to talk.
 - That the person waits until you have said what you had to say and then tells you that he/she does not have time to respond.
11. If the one you are talking to can not hear what you say, but what you say is really unimportant, what do you prefer (grade, 3 = best):
- That the listener asks what you said and you have to take it several times.
 - He/she asks once and then pretends to hear.
 - He/she immediately pretends to hear.
12. If the one you are talking to can not hear what you say and what you want to say is important, what do you prefer (grade, 3 = best):
- That the listener asks what you said and you have to take it several times.
 - He/she asks once and then pretends to hear.
 - He/she immediately pretends to hear.
13. If you tell someone about a problem you are experiencing, does it mean that you (grade, 3 = best):
- Always wants that the listener tries to help you to come up with a solution.
 - Sometimes wants help with a solution and sometimes not.
 - You never want someone else to serve you solutions to your problems.
14. You give someone a piece of advice on an issue that he has described to you, which do you think is the best:
- He/she thanks and says that it is good, but then "forgets" it.
 - He/she immediately explains that the advice is bad.
15. You tell something that you heard have happened to an acquaintance of an acquaintance and the listener realizes that it is probably the case of a tall tale, what do you prefer (grade, 3 = best):
- The listener says it is a tall tale.
 - He/she said type: strange I have heard that before, but then there was another person, it may be the case of a tall tale.
 - The same as i alternative B but without saying that it might be a tall tale.
16. If you tell a long story about something that you, for example, have experienced, do you prefer to speak undisturbed until you have finish the whole story. And that the listener waits with comments and questions until you're done, or do you think it is better that the questions are asked as they show up.
17. Let's say you're wearing a garment that your friend thinks is exceptionally neat and one that he/she thinks is the opposite, which would you prefer:
- He/she praises the neat garment, or
 - Says a delicate comment about that the "ugly" garment is not so neat.
18. You tell something that you have already told the listener before, what response do you prefer (grade, 3 = best):
- The listener directly points out that you already have told the story to him/her.
 - He/she pretends like you haven't already told it.
 - He/she waits until you have told the whole story and then says that you have told it before.
19. If someone in a chitchat situation says something that you misunderstand and you therefore respond in a way that is incompatible with the person's actual thought, what do you prefer then:
- The person explains again.
 - The person spins on the new thread.
20. You're talking to someone and a third person joins you (what do you prefer, 3 = best):

- A. The person guesses what you're talking about and says something that is highly relevant.
- B. The person asks you to repeat what has been said so far.
- C. He/she guesses what you're talking about and says something irrelevant.

21. If you say something to a person who rightly know you're wrong, what do you prefer then:

- A. The person bluntly says that you are wrong, or:
- B. Says it with words like: I do not think that's right since ...