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# How to Talk So People Who Disagree with You Will Listen

Proven strategies for communicating effectively and empathetically with people who don't share your views.

BY [DIANA BAND](#) / AUGUST 20, 2018



Have you given up on trying to change the minds of people who disagree with you? You know living in a bubble won't change anything and will only make partisan culture worse, but how do you communicate effectively with someone who sees you as the enemy (and vice versa)?

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Justin Lee, author of *Talking Across the Divide*, has proven techniques for strategic dialogue that not only gets us talking, but helps break through barriers to getting our message heard. Strategic dialogue isn't

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about agreeing that everyone is right or that all beliefs hold equal weight, but about listening and sharing with tact and empathy. The better we understand someone we disagree with, the easier we can reason with them. Below, the five barriers you've likely run into — and how to get past them.

## Barrier #1: Ego Protection

We've all had a conversation that ended badly with someone who didn't share our views. You made a solid point; they felt attacked. Before you knew it, they jumped from point to point, and you both grew angry and frustrated. This is what happens when we hit the Ego Protection Barrier. Because we don't want to feel stupid or villainous, we go on the defensive when someone points out we're wrong. To get past this barrier, we must first ask the other person why they feel the way they do on a topic, listening for the underlying interests supporting their positions. Then we repeat their story back to them, allowing them to correct our mistakes. This helps transform us from accuser to friend, and we can better tailor our case to address their concerns.

## Barrier #2: Team Loyalty

We're all guilty of siding with our chosen teams — it's only human. Unfortunately, these loyalties can blind us to facts and adversely affect our judgment. To break from the bubble of our own teams and communicate more effectively with the "other side," we need to seek out opinions and perspectives that don't align with our own. We also need to look for opportunities to redraw team lines by focusing on commonalities. After all, it's easier to make a case to someone based on a shared identity. And if the other person brings up their team? Subtly reinforce that teams aren't always right by gently asking them about times they've disagreed with their team, or ways they differ from most members.

## Barrier #3: Comfort

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When we ask someone to reconsider their position on an important issue, it's the emotional equivalent of asking them to get off the couch and go to the gym. In much the same way we aren't motivated to work out until we don't like what we see in the mirror, it can be necessary to use strategic dialogue to push someone out of their comfort zone so they can reconsider their position. One effective way to do this is through a personal story. Unlike statistics and sources, a lived experience can't be argued with. Use your personal connection to an issue as a way to bring empathy into the equation, giving the other person a reason to feel uncomfortable with their status quo.

## **Barrier #4: Misinformation**

Social media allows misinformation to spread like wildfire — largely because a lie is so often simpler than the truth. Misinformation can be a huge barrier to successful dialogue, but there are ways you can fight it. Start by educating yourself on the existing misinformation surrounding your topic; you can't fight fake beliefs you don't know about. Also, employ your personal story whenever possible because again, it's tough to refute.

Moreover, if you're still hitting a roadblock, like a self-proclaimed expert? Ask careful, non-condescending questions to understand their view better. When you give someone a chance to explain their knowledge, it provides an opportunity for them to realize on their own that they might not know as much as they think they do.

## **Barrier #5: Worldview Protection**

Trying to get someone to change a worldview — a core belief that shapes them — is like trying to uproot a tree with your bare hands. This is an especially tough barrier that often requires starting small, and sometimes your most significant accomplishment is getting the other person to agree to continue the dialogue in the future. When trying to change these deeply-rooted positions, it's essential to determine a person's motivations and underlying concerns — a person's objection to change can run far deeper than what's expressed on the surface.

While you might think a worldview is nuts, understanding how it shapes someone's opinions are incredibly valuable in crafting an argument they'll be receptive to.

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