

How to Have Impossible Conversations: A Very Practical Guide
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Chapter 1 When conversations seem impossible

Chapter 2 The seven fundamentals of good conversations

#1 Goals - Why are you engaged in this conversation?

- Reaching at least some mutual understanding, if not agreement
- Learning from each other - figuring out how other people arrived at their conclusions
- Finding truth - collaboratively figuring out what's true or correcting mistaken beliefs
- Intervening - Attempting to change someone's beliefs or their methods of forming beliefs
- Impressing - Parties may seek to impress a conversational partner or someone who may be watching
- Yielding to coercion - feeling forced to speak with someone

#2 Partnerships - Be partners, not adversaries

- It's easy to dislike someone who is mean-spirited, treats you poorly, doesn't listen or disrespects you
- From winning to understanding - You can't control someone else's behavior but you can control your own, even when hearing repugnant beliefs. When there's a comfortable conversational environment with civility and charity, you can think along with someone to understand their reasoning.
- Forming partnerships -
 1. Make your goals of collaboration and understanding explicit.
 2. Give your partner room to decline and walk away if they are uncomfortable.
 3. Ask yourself, not your partner: "How could someone believe that?" Be curious, not incredulous. Keeping this question in mind keep the conversation on track.

#3 Rapport - Develop and maintain a good connection

- Getting a stranger to be comfortable in discussing personal beliefs.
- Friendliness, comfort and trust - a connection reduces the likelihood of defensiveness
- Ask sincere questions as opposed to tactics
- Practices to build rapport
 1. Build rapport immediately from the start, don't start with substantive issues.

2. If you don't know someone, introduce yourself. Ask for their name in non-interrogatory way.
3. Find common ground
4. Do not parallel talk - do not interject your own experience or other references
5. Invest in the relationship, independent of your political views
6. Engage in substantive conversation only if you're willing to make time. Do not rush.
7. Be ready to talk about something else. Change subject if conversation gets sticky.
8. Avoid call-outs, except for severe infractions. Don't use moral instructions like "You should" or "You shouldn't"
9. Be courteous - please, thank you, I appreciate that

#4 Listen - Listen more, talk less. People have great satisfaction when they are heard.

Best listening practices

1. Go ahead... no you go.
2. Look directly at someone and turn your body toward them.
3. Do not finish your partner's sentences. Don't rush to fill silence with words
4. Pause. Let me think about it.
5. Distraction? Turn your back to it or identify it. "Is that distracting to you too?"
6. If unclear, "I'm not sure I understand. Can you explain that?" Avoid "That was unclear." or "That doesn't make sense."
7. When you sense fear, frustration, anger, outrage or disgust, pay attention to specific words. Acknowledge immediately. "I hear that. I think I understand your frustration."
8. If you start to fade, look them in eye and ask: I'm sorry can you repeat that?"
9. If both partners talk at same time and you let them finish, do not continue with words that first caused interruption.
10. Do not pull out phone.
11. Say I hear you to acknowledge you're listening.

#5 Shoot the messenger - Don't deliver your truth

Delivering messages does not work, they are often rejected. They accept ideas they believe are their own.

1. Distinguish between delivering a message and authentic conversation. Delivering a message feels like teaching. "If they only understood this point, they would change their mind." is delivering message.
2. Approach every conversation with an awareness that your partner understands problems in a way that you don't currently comprehend.

3. Don't meet their message delivery with your message delivery. Nobody likes to be lectured.
4. When you realize your partner is being a messenger, don't shoot the messenger. Ask questions to get conversation back on track.
5. Deliver your message only at partner's explicit request. "Thank you for giving me the opportunity to say that."

#6 Intentions - People have better intentions than you think.

Plato's dialogue "Meno" - People do not knowingly desire bad things. They act, believe and desire based on available information they have. One assumes someone with radically different belief is worse than they are. Assuming your partner has malicious intent will stifle your conversation.

1. If your partner assumes you have malicious intent, immediately convince them otherwise. Switch conversation from your intent to reasoning. "If something is wrong with my reasoning, let me know."
2. If you start to assume your partner has bad intentions, switch to curiosity. "Can you tell me more about where you're coming from?"
3. Admit frustration. "I want to understand where you're coming from. I'm also unclear about your intention. Could you tell me what is your intention? What would you like to get out of our conversation?"
4. Do not feed the trolls. You're under no obligation to engage someone whose goal is to irritate you.

#7 Walk away - Don't push your conversations partner beyond their comfort zone.

Know when to walk away, even if the conversation is going well. Putting pressure on your partner to continue discussion beyond their comfort level will shut down listening, encourage defensiveness and partner may double down on views, eroding rapport. People need time to wrestle with doubt, incorporate new information, mull over challenges and rethink their positions. "Thanks for chatting with me."

1. End the conversation if your primary emotion is frustration.
2. Breathe and don't feel pressured to fill pauses with words.
3. If someone wants to end the conversation, thank them for speaking with you
4. If you think you caused partner to doubt one of their beliefs, it's a good time to stop the conversation.
5. Thank your partner when they end the conversation

Chapter 3 Beginner level: Nine ways to start changing minds

#1 Modeling

Model the behavior you want to see in your conversation partner. If you want her to be patient and listen, you yourself should be patient and listening. If you want your partner to be open to changing her mind, be open to changing your mind.

A common fallacy - someone knows it, so I know it, the illusion of explanatory depth, the Unread Library Effect. Have participants explain policies as much as possible, how they would be implemented. Allow partner to do most of talking, less likely to feel you are trying to change their mind.

Modeling ignorance - how did you come to know that? Helps participant realize limits to their knowledge. 1. Creates opportunity for YOU to overcome Unread Library Effect, 2. Creates climate where it's okay to say I don't know. 3. Helps participant see gap between perceived knowledge and actual knowledge.

Ways to Model Better Conversation

1. Say I don't know when you don't know. Not a badge of shame, shows honesty and humility
2. If someone responds to your question with obfuscation, ask them to ask you the same question. Give them a succinct answer and then immediately ask them the identical question.
3. Model the behavioral traits of successful conversation - listening, honesty, sincerity, curiosity, openness, fairness, not assuming bad intention. Focus on justification for belief, humility, humor, give-and-take, willingness to change your mind.
4. Ask for explanation about partner's beliefs in as much detail as possible.
5. Expose your own Unread Library Effect - exercise: Pick political topics most important to you and try to explain how they work in as much detail as possible.
6. Avoid jargon - strive for clarity
7. Do not model bad behavior - do not interrupt people or treat them rudely.

#2 Words

James Damore fired from Google when asked for feedback about diversity, misunderstanding from Google's non-standard definition of "diversity" and "inclusion." Disagreements about definitions can derail conversations because words means different things to different people.

How to get on the same verbal page:

1. Define words upfront: What do you mean by X?
2. Try to understand the context in which a word is being use: I'm trying to figure out how to the word X is being used here. What would an example of that be?
3. Go with your partner's explanation after they defined it.
4. Be attentive to a word's moral implication - if a word has moral significance, your partner may have convinced themselves of the truth of their belief because they think it makes them a better person.

#3 Ask questions

Socrates method - Clear questions, unpacking erroneous beliefs. Calibrated, open-ended questions, not yes or no. Doctors shouldn't ask "Do you feel pain?" but instead "What can you tell me about sensations you are having?" Use how and why.

1. Once topic is identified, narrow it down and if participant doesn't agree with format, reform it.
2. If conversation goes astray, bring back to original question. Or if more interesting territory is touched, formulate new question
3. Be authentic - be sincerely interested in exploring answers. People distrust gimmicks.
4. Do not disguise statements as questions and avoid leading questions that carry an agenda. For example: How do you think the Republicans came to be indifferent to the plight of poor people?"
5. Ask calibrated How and What questions

#4 Acknowledge extremists

Passionate argument often paints you as a zealot or out of touch with reality. To win your partner's trust across a moral divide, you must demonstrate that you care about the values you partner cares about. One way to find areas of moral agreement is to acknowledge how extremists on your side go too far. Your partner does not trust extremists on your side, so this is easy point of agreement. Polarized media makes sure your partner knows a lot about the extremists on the opposite side. Extremism on one side drives people to reciprocate with extremism on an opposing side. Excusing incidents places you on the other side of the moral divide.

Disavowing extremists -

1. Identify how your side goes too far and if you can't you're part of the problem. Set aside your ego and social identity and find out what the other thinks your side is doing wrong.
2. Do not bring up extremists on their side.
3. Never defend indefensible behavior - take a stand against troublemakers on your side. Clearly state that extremists do not represent you, your views or your values. Stand for something larger than "your side" and instead, civil society, productive dialogue and compromise.
4. Identify extremists as fanatics, zealots and radicals.
5. Treat their side charitably, avoid characterizing their side as represented by their extremists or else it will trigger defensiveness.
6. Check yourself from extremism

#5 Navigating social media

Don't ask provocative questions on social media and expect civil discussion.

Avoid combative conversations on social media - they rarely stay limited to two thoughtful evidence-based participants. Twitter limits characters, short bursts, getting heckled by peanut gallery. People do not go on social media to have their view corrected but to have their views confirmed. If they share what outraged them, they want others to be outraged too. If you disagree with a Facebook post, you may experience cognitive dissonance, leading you to want to correct their belief, thinking you're doing them a favor by repairing their faulty reasoning. You're more likely to start an argument that hurts the relationship and further entrenches their views. Public conversations put your pride on the line, we cling to views even more than when in private conversations.

Best practices for engaging conversations on social media:

1. When a post is “deleted” it still remains on servers.
2. Never post when you’re angry.
3. You do not owe a response to anyone social media because they’ve engaged you.
4. Never argue on Twitter
5. Avoid religion, politics and most philosophy
6. If you can’t control yourself, use an anonymous Twitter account and rage at the ether.

#6 Don’t blame, do discuss contributions

How do those blamed respond? They deny culpability or shift to someone else or double down on that behavior. Blame ends goodwill and puts those blamed on the defensive. “Whataboutery” looking for scapegoats on the other side. Blame is past tense and judgemental. Instead of blaming, invite participants to look for what contributed to the result. What are the constellation of factors? The honey method instead of the vinegar method.

How to shift away from blame

1. Use the word contribution
2. Avoid saying X caused Y, especially in complicated systems
3. Don’t say “both sides do it.”
4. If you cannot avoid blaming, ask your partner: “Can you please help explain the logic of xxxxx uses to justify their actions?”

#7 Focus on epistemology

The study of knowledge, how we know, how we came to this belief?

Personal experience and feelings

Culture - it’s “true” because everyone believes it

Definition - it’s truly good or bad because of how the speaker defines the subject

Religion - it’s true because it’s taught in holy book or place of worship

Reason - it’s true because it can be reasoned to

Evidence - it’s true because there’s sufficient evidence to warrant belief

Simple ways to discuss how people know:

1. Make a brief positive statement before probing someone’s epistemology
2. How did your partner come to know that? “That’s an interesting perspective. What led you to conclude that?” Outsider questions help partner understand how unfamiliar people would view such beliefs. “Would a reasonable person draw the same conclusion?” If partner says yes, respond: I want to be open and reasonable and I’m having trouble drawing the same conclusion. How do I get there?” or “How come there are divergent opinions?” Subtle ways to invite people to reflect on their epistemology.
3. Start conversation in wonder - How did my partner arrive at this conclusion? What was their reasoning process?

4. If someone's reasoning makes no sense, there's a good chance they reason that way to justify a moral belief that cannot otherwise be justified. Ask for an example of the same reasoning in other contexts, would it make sense in another situation?
5. Try to derive other conclusions from their reasoning process.

#8 Learn

Claiming no one can really know the answer to something closes off the possibility that one's belief could be incorrect. If you are unwilling to seek truth collaboratively, can't intervene in someone's thinking and civility seems difficult, you can switch to a learning frame, to understand your partner's thinking, especially dogmatists.

Conversational techniques to switch to learning frame

1. Learn your partner's epistemology - How do you know that?
2. Be explicit - I want to learn. What more can you tell me about xxxxx so I can learn where you're coming from?
3. If civility is your primary goal or if productive conversation is impossible, make learning your go-to. If you just want to get through a family reunion, learning is your emergency exit.

#9 What NOT to do (reverse applications)

- Conversational behaviors to avoid:
 - Discourteous
 - Displaying anger
 - Raising your voice to talk over someone
 - Intentionally disrespectful
 - Ridicule or blame someone
 - Laugh at someone
 - Attack a position before understanding it
 - Display unwillingness to hear your partner's arguments
 - Adopt the least charitable interpretation of someone's words
 - Accuse someone of being stupid if they say they don't understand
 - Punish people for making mistakes or asking for more information or feedback
 - Lash out at someone for speculating
 - Attack a person for holding a belief rather than the belief itself.
 - View people as being ignorant, incompetent, negative or disruptive
 - Be dishonest with yourself about what you believe
 - Pretend to know something you don't know
 - Fail to say "I don't know" if you don't know
 - Focus on the belief itself instead of how the belief is know - "The death penalty isn't murder because he deserved it" vs. "What are the reasons one would think the death penalty is justified?"
 - Suggest that a person can't really know something because of the color of their skin or immutable attribute.
 - Don't change your mind when presented with new and compelling evidence.

- Obfuscate
- Deliver messages
- Fail to acknowledge vulnerability
- Insist that the extremists on your side are acting rationally
- Correct someone's grammar
- Call someone out for moral transgression in a way that distracts from the flow of their message
- Interrupt
- Finish other's sentences
- Bully someone into having a conversation
- Let yourself be bullied into having a conversation
- Look at your phone while having conversation
- Name-drop
- Be negative and complain
- Brag
- Refuse to disengage until there is a burned bridge

Chapter 4 Intermediate level: Seven ways to improve your interventions

#1 Let friends be wrong. Don't make friendships about agreement. Friendships based solely on religious or political agreement are rarely sustainable. If you engage on a disagreement, make sure you really understand how your friend arrived at that their conclusion.

How to let friends and others be wrong

1a. Say I hear you and let your friend speak without interruption, without personal criticism, condemnation, correction, rebuttal, defensiveness or refutation. Listening will relieve tension.

1b. If you don't understand, put the lack of understanding on yourself. Don't say "you're not making sense."

2. If addressing a disagreement that is a dealbreaker, approach in private and with sincerity. Explain that the belief is upsetting and you want to talk about it. Better to discuss and part ways than harbor anger and resentment. Make sure you're motivated out of a genuine concern for their well-being and not a desire to be right.

3. Healthy meaningful relationships are often unnecessarily ruined over a stubborn need to feel vindicated, to correct someone's behavior.

#2 Build Golden Bridges

A Golden Bridge allows partner to change mind gracefully and avoid social embarrassment.

Example: "Everyone makes mistakes." "Expertise is the result of learning from many mistakes."

Give escape route from embarrassment or humiliation. Make it easy to admit ignorance or revise belief.

How to build Golden Bridges

1. Give your partner the same out you would want, not to feel stupid, incompetent put on the spot or on the wrong side of the issue.

2a. Do not put a toll on the Golden Bridge - If they change their mind, do not say "I told you so!"

2b. Do not shame people. "You should have known that. It's about time."

3. Build a Golden Bridge when you feel under attack. If someone attacks you personally, recast the attack as being about the issue. Listen, but do not counter-attack. "The way my position on gun control is stated might lead someone to believe I don't care about children." I hear concerns about xxxxx, I share them. I want to get to a solution that keeps children safe. How could we solve that problem?"

4. Build a Golden Bridge to escape anger. "These issues are really frustrating, I know. They get to me too."

5. Build Golden Bridges by explicitly agreeing. "We have more in common than we thought." Try to switch problem to collaborative frame.
6. Build Golden Bridges to alleviate pressure to get everything right on an issue. "No one is expected to know everything."
7. Reference your own ignorance and reason for doubt. "I use to believe X, Y, Z and it turns out those beliefs were wrong. When I learned A, B, C I changed my mind. People do not knowingly desire bad things."

#3 Language

Shaping language during hostage negotiation, re-framing hostage-taker and negotiator as collaborating on the solution that is presentable to officers' superiors.

Depersonalize: Avoid using "your statement" or "your belief" and instead use "that statement" or "that belief."

Small and effective ways to change your language

1. Use collaborative language - "How do we know that?"
2. Use neutral language, instead of "your belief" use "that belief" or "one's belief"
3. Speak about ideas and beliefs, not the people who hold them.
4. Use "I'm skeptical" instead of "I disagree."

#4 Stuck? Reframe

Re-framing a negative as a positive. "Come with me to do chores" vs. "Spending time with me."
Gun control re-framed from politicized issue to safety issue. "As a parent, guns make me nervous around kids. How do you deal with that?" Appeal share identity.

How to reframe a conversation when you get stuck.

1. Reframe around commonalities.
2. Reframe the question to be less contentious
3. Figure out what you need to say for them to respond with "That's right."

#5 Change your mind

"I really never thought about that before. I've changed my mind."

#6 Introduce scales

When conversations get stuck, "on a scale of 1 to 10, how confident are you that X belief is true?"

How to bring numerical scales of intervention.

1. On a scale of 1 to 10. How confident are you that X is true? If partner says 9 or 10, it's important to figure epistemology that led them to conclusion. If they give low number, explore why confidence is so low.

2. When there is disagreement on yes/no question, use scales to clarify extent
3. On sticking points, use scales to measure how intensely a belief is held.
4. Use scales to help your partner reverse their thinking. "What would it take to move from an 8 to a 6?" or "Just out of curiosity, why wasn't you give it a score of 9 or 10?" Helps partner reveal their doubts.
5. You can let partner use scales to walk you step by step through their epistemology. They can clarify what you are missing. "I'm a 3 on the issue. I'm not sure how I would get to where you're at, a 9. I want to see what I'm missing. Would you walk me through it?"
6. Keep a log of your conversations. Note what lowers confidence levels and what does not. Refine. Discard. Repeat.

#7 Outsourcing

Turning to outside information. What sources or experts should one trust and why? Is there agreement on an external source? If not, need to understand why a source is considered authoritative.

Best practices for bringing outside information into your conversations

1. Use outsourcing toward end of a conversation. "I'm not sure about that. If I could be shown reliable data, I'm open to changing my mind."
2. If stuck, ask "How would an independent neutral observer figure out what source of information to trust?"
3. Alternate ways to phrase outsourcing. "What specific evidence could we find that might settle this?" "What evidence is there that could persuade an independent observer or reasonable person?"
4. Combine outsourcing with Golden Bridges - Let's set this aside for now and come back to it later when we have more information."
5. If partner says "there's no point in seeking evidence because no evidence can change my mind" then that belief is not based on evidence.
6. Outsourcing only works with empirical questions, not moral questions. Limited options: "I don't recognize X as a moral authority."
"The issue I have is that there are different people who profess to be moral experts but they still have conflicting views. "The problem with bringing in moral experts is that one has to already buy into the moral system before deferring to that person's moral authority.
7. "Whose expert opinion can I read to gather more information?" "What is the best argument against that position?"
8. Ask "who are the three best experts that disagree with that position?"
9. If stuck "how about we use only statements/information/evidence both sides would agree upon?"

Chapter 5 Five advanced skills for contentious conversations

Listen and retain so that you can state your partner's position accurately before you openly disagree. Eliminate the use of the word but.

#1 Keep Rapoport's Rules

Before criticizing:

1. "I'm going to re-phrase this. If it isn't what you're saying, let me know. I don't want to misrepresent your position."
2. List points of agreement, maintain common ground and collaborative framework
3. Mention anything you have learned from your partner. Modeling mutual respect even if there is not reciprocity.
4. Only then begin rebuttal or criticism

#2 Avoid facts

Some partners will not accept evidence and do not formulate their beliefs on evidence.

Other factors like moral values and social proof also form strong beliefs.

Offering evidence may backfire and redouble the partner's commitment to their beliefs.

The chief psychological and social reason for rejecting evidence is deeply caring about being "good." Anti-vaxxers care about being good parents.

First, do no harm. This is a conversation, not a debate. Introducing facts will lead partner to develop and rehearse defense against challenges to beliefs.

1. Ask questions that expose problems and contradictions
2. Focus on epistemology. Understand the link between how they came to know something and their conclusion
3. Ask what evidence would lead them to change their mind? "What if the experiment can't be replicated?"

There is only one time where you may introduce facts: When your partner explicitly requests facts. Invite your partner to check the facts independently.

"I could be wrong about this, it's my understanding that xxx"

"What evidence would convince you that Trump colluded with Russia?"

"It would be false."

"What if Putin admitted it on TV?"

"He would be just saying it to ruin the United States' reputation"

"What if Trump confessed to collusion under oath?"

"I don't know."

If your partner recognizes conditions under which his belief could be false, that belief is disconfirmable. If he says there are no conditions where his beliefs can be false, they are immutable to evidence.

People are prone to seek out confirming evidence for their beliefs and while being blind to contradictory evidence.

#3 Seek disconfirmation

Three categories of disconfirmable belief:

1. Not disconfirmable: Partner is claiming to be absolutely positive about belief. Approach: In the form of a question, present a possible state of affairs or reason, but not evidence, of how their belief could be in error. Shift away from epistemology - what about someone who disagrees? Why would someone be a bad person if they disagree?
2. Disconfirmation but under wildly implausible conditions. Most significantly, people who hold wildly implausible disconfirmation conditions may fully understand disconfirmation, epistemology and how to access the tools of science. They may believe somewhere there are the bones of Christ but if you present some bones and claim they belong to Christ, they will seek evidence to disconfirm you. They know their belief is not objectively disconfirmable. They may feel the moral need to continue to hold the belief to compensate for difference between their confidence and the lack of evidence. Your partner may have received training in apologetics or indoctrination as part of political or ideological activism. Ask them why different criteria would not work. If these avenues lead nowhere, ask about morals, values or identity. "What value does believing in Bigfoot provide over not believing in Bigfoot?" Can kind, decent, loving people not share the same beliefs?
3. Beliefs are disconfirmable. Partner can provide reasonable conditions under which they can change their mind. Help clarify precise conditions and don't become messenger if partner is vulnerable.

"I just want to make sure I'm clear: There is NO evidence , even hypothetically, that you could encounter that would make you change your mind?"

If you ask on a scale of 1 to 10 on their certainty, and they say 9, ask what made them not give a 10?

Epistemological questions:

Then the belief is not held on the basis of evidence right?

Moral questions:

"How is it a virtue not to revise this belief?"

"Who are some examples of people who don't hold that belief who are good people?"

Failed to use disconfirmation questions:

Think back five years ago. Were your beliefs identical to what you hold now? If they say their beliefs changed, ask how do they know they won't view differently later?

#4 Yes, and...

Eliminate "but" from vocabulary, it evokes a defensive posture.

Saying interesting doesn't mean you agree. Fuzzy meaning.

#5 Dealing with anger

Anger derails conversations

Anger seeks its own justification, assumes your partner has bad intentions

Understand how anger works. Don't meet anger with anger. Don't blame. Discuss contributions.

Don't make negative assumptions about

Mastering anger - Do pause. Seize on any point of agreement

Do not say "I know you're angry" instead use "Our disagreement seems pretty deep and I get how it's frustrating."

Chapter 6 Six expert skills to engage the close-minded

#1 Synthesis

You and your partner agree to help one another understand what each of you is not understanding, not to produce agreement, a back and forth like a dialectic, Socratic method.

Step 1. Present your idea

Step 2. Invite and listen to counter-arguments to your idea. Prepare to have your beliefs be undermined. Have your partner expose one clear flaw in your reasoning and the way in which your moral bias may have led you to commit that error. Don't proceed to step 3 until you can accurately re-state your partner's criticism of your argument.

Step 3. Have your partner employ those counter-arguments to generate specific ways to disconfirm your belief.

Step 4. Use the instances of possible disconfirmation to refine your original position.

Step 5. Repeat. Begin with your new refined position and run through another iteration. Even the argument between atheism and belief in God can be refined by understanding the meaning of the word God.

#2 Help Vent Steam

Sometimes people need someone to listen to a rant. Once finished, ask them to tell you more, a conversation deepener. How has this situation made you feel? Once your sure they are finished, use the first three of Rapoport's Rules: 1 - Clearly re-express your partner's argument, 2 - list points of agreement, 3 - mention what you've learned.

Your partner may feel frustrated and talk through personal barriers. Let your partner feel heard and understand what is causing distress. "Yeah, that's incredibly frustrating.." Pause after your partner says something to make sure they finished their thought. Gently encourage your partner to describe their feelings, not just express them. Conclude with an offer to help, what can I do? When they finished venting, leave it.

#3 Altercasting

Controversial technique

Present a hypothetical example where your partner is cast into an alternate role where it is easier for them to be influenced. Let them visualize themselves as a moral person, careful thinker or civil communicator then to encourage self-generation of solutions or behaviors within that role. Technique uses a self-internalized, manufactured pressure to conform with a role and may lead to the individual to persuade themselves to act or think in certain ways.

This is potentially manipulative. A person can also be cast into a negative role and be induced to live up to negative casting.

Altercasting can take their favorite solution off the table. If your partner goes along with the thought experiment it might result in them self-generating more moderate solutions.

Altercast conversational virtues: You strike me as the kind of person who's civil, someone's who's good at conversations."

#4 Hostage Negotiations

1. Use minimal encouragers - "I see. Okay." to show you are listening.
2. Mirroring - Repeat the last few words and rephrase as questions, to keep person talking and volunteering more information.
3. Emotional labeling. Recognize person's strong feelings. "You sound pretty hurt about being left. It doesn't seem fair." Effective with people who are in crisis, inadequate, borderline, dependent, suicidal or angry and need to be defused.
4. Allow the person to save face gracefully. "It's a difficult and complicated problem. It's just so easy to not get it exactly correct."
5. Deal with small issues first. Try to build a climate of success.
6. Use specific examples or case histories rather than statistical information.

#5 Probe the Limits

Unmask disingenuous statements. When you encounter an impossible belief

1. Attempt to re-express your partner's view clearly.
2. Explicitly confirm that you've understood their belief correctly. If you possess a characteristic they've targeted (race, gender, etc) then politely request permission to ask question so you might learn. "I'm not trying to convince you of anything. I'm curious and would like to ask some questions to learn more."
Optional: "Have you always held this belief or it is relatively new? How did you come to this conclusion? Do a lot of other people believe this too?"
3. Try to understand the limits of their belief in practice. Ask if a belief holds in other more extreme contexts: "If you do not trust white males, would you let a white male ER surgeon operate on you to save your life?"
4. Is there any circumstance that might lead you to act inconsistently with the belief? If they say no, continue with examples and how belief can be maintained in practice: "If you wouldn't fly on a plane with a white male pilot, how would you know what race the pilot will be when booking tickets?" If they say yes, there are exceptions, ask what makes that example special?
5. Once it's established that it's impossible to hold one belief and act upon it, ask how one can tell when to act to act upon belief and when to make an exception? If you have not demonstrated that the belief is impossible, then your partner is either lying or delusional, or you are mistaken and they do live in accordance with their belief.

#6 Counter-Intervention Strategies

If you think someone is trying intervene in your cognitive process, you have three options:

1. Go with it. You will most likely learn something, learn mistakes you are making or even change your mind.
2. Refuse to play. Say something close-ended like: "Not really" or don't say anything.
3. Use counter-interventions. If you can't walk away, these counter-intervention techniques can be used but are dishonest. Use only if you are sure someone is attempt intervention.
 - 1- Partner can't intervene if the do not have accurate read of your confidence in a belief
 - 2- Offer the illusion of success. Claim "you've changed your mind."
 - 3- State that you have doubt about your doubt. Your partner may still want to introduce doubt. Use reverse altercasting: "I have doubts about your argument but I'm not sure they are justified. Do you think my uncertainty about my doubt is justified?"
4. If your belief is strongly held, state the actual confidence in your belief and add that you'd rather not hold that belief.
5. If someone is peppering you with rapid fire questions, interrupt with "ah" or "umm" and pause for several seconds to break their questioning.
6. Direct intervention reversal. If they ask you how confident are you in your belief, it reveals an attempt at intervention. Respond: "If you don't mind, why are you asking me this question?" "Are you trying to intervene upon my beliefs to change them?" The reversal intervention: "On a scale of 1 to 10, how confident are you that my beliefs should be the ones to change?"

More ethically suspect techniques for derailing or reversing interventions:

- Intentionally damaging rapport
- Invent your own epistemology (claim your cat guides you in truth)
- Change the meanings of everyday words and alternate between different meanings
- Offer wildly disconfirmation conditions and claim that because they cannot be satisfied, you're even more confident that you possess the truth. "If I was provided the criminal record of every refugee, I would change my mind on immigration but since that's impossible, my belief stands."
- Profess a type of relativism by claiming that statements are just true for you.
- Claim to change your beliefs several times over the course of the conversation
- Feign radical domain-specific ignorance, you don't even know the rudiments of what you're arguing.

Chapter 7 Master level: Two keys to conversing with ideologues

When conversing with an ideologue, it is almost always about identity issues, morality, what it is to be a good or bad person. You must learn how to (1) Engage someone's moral epistemology and (2) Become proficient at speaking in other moral languages

#1 How to move the unmovable, conversing with an ideologue

You might observe extreme hypersensitivity, hyper-defensiveness, overt righteousness, unwillingness to hear an opposing view, disproportionate levels of anger, sharp and unfair accusations and demeaning or vilifying epithets, weaponizing moral language: "You just don't care about dead children." Give and take conversation seems impossible.

Template:

1. Acknowledge their intention and affirm their identity as a good, moral person - especially if you find their beliefs repugnant.
2. Change the subject to underlying values.
 - "These beliefs are important to you. What informs you of these beliefs?"
 - "How did you derive those beliefs?"
 - "What values would have to change for your view to no longer be true?"
 - "What conditions would have to be different for your belief to be false?"
3. Invite a deeper conversation about those underlying values, beginning the shift from beliefs to moral epistemology.
 - "How does someone know that acting in that way makes them good?"
 - "What attributes define good people?"
 - "Do good people think about things in a certain way?"
 - "How does (your belief) relate to being a good person?"
 - "What if a person believes that for a different reason?"
 - "Which values motivate you to feel this way and believe that?"
 - "Do you think you would be a less moral person if you abandoned that belief? Why?"
 - "Should someone who doesn't hold that belief be judged as less moral than you?"
 - "How would you interpret an example of a person who you know is a good, moral person who does not hold that belief?"
 - "What if someone holds a similar conclusion but they arrived at it by different means? Would they be correct?"
4. Induce doubt in their moral epistemology by helping them question the way they derive their moral beliefs. Very few of us have given careful consideration to how we arrived at the answer to the question: What should I value? Few people have deeply considered meanings and implications of terms like justice, fairness, loyalty or truth. Our "guts" or intuitions, society, family, religion, culture and so on offer the illusion that we've grasped timeless moral truths, therefore how to uphold them, how to spot transgressors and how to punish violators. Rarely have we deeply pondered whether or not the process we use to come to moral knowledge can be relied upon to yield truth. Almost everyone has

brittle moral epistemology and this is the entry point in a belief intervention, to introduce doubt, the gateway to humility.

5. Allow the tether between the belief and the moral epistemology to sever on its own.

Moral epistemology operates in more complex milieu than factual knowledge. The gaps lies between facts about gun deaths, immigration, policy, etc and the underlying issues about emotion, morality or identity. Most people have an acute awareness of lack of good reason for believing what they do, inviting discomfort and resistance.

These conversations may place a wedge between someone's moral epistemology and the beliefs they reached via that epistemology and lead to an "identity quake." They may turn on you for disrupting their core values and stop trusting you. Be realistic about success, your partner's moral attitude may only move in tiny increments. Let them convince themselves that their confidence in their beliefs are overinflated. They may revise their beliefs and these revisions may need time to stick.

#2 Moral reframing

The gap between your moral intuitions and your partner's can be partially filled by morally reframing conversations. Recasting an idea or claim in moral terms that are less likely to evoke a defensive posture and more likely to resonate with your conversational partner.

Moral institutions - tendencies to lean towards certain core values (sanctity of life, freedom, safety, purity) than others. Jonathan Haidt's research on how liberals and conservatives have different moral intuitions.

Six moral foundations

Care vs. Harm

Fairness vs. Cheating

Loyalty vs. Betrayal

Authority vs. Subversion

Sanctity vs. Degradation

Liberty vs. Oppression

Conservatives tend to respond to all six moral foundations with propensity towards loyalty, authority and sanctity and less of a leaning towards care. Liberals are most concerned with care and fairness, then liberty with the other three foundations almost absent. Libertarians are most concerned with a particular aspect of liberty while the other five foundations are less important.

- Read materials from people with different moral outlooks
- Have real time face to face conversations
- Befriend people from different faith traditions or no faith traditions
- Practice with friends who occupy a different moral space

Home in on particular words and terms. Remembering how your partner uses particular words can help in future conversations

Listen to your own moral dialect like an outsider. You may uncover a semantic disagreement. Ask yourself what YOU mean by a label like racist.

How to reframe a conversation morally

1. If talking to a conservative, invoke leadership, freedom, family, responsibility. For a liberal, invoke the disadvantaged, poor, victims, harm. Themes resonant with both (liberty, decency, morals, equality, fairness) may still have different means and need to be tailored.
2. Ask "Can you think of a sentence in which the word X (example: equity) could be substituted for the word "equality" and the meaning of the sentence would not change? If the answer is no, ask "Why did you use X instead of Y?" If the answer is yes, ask them to read the sentence and figure if it is perfect synonym.

Words people use trap them in a particular frame of mind. Asking disconfirmation questions helps your partner cast doubt on their word choice and thus the moral infrastructure upon which they travel.

Interpret incommensurable moral disagreements as opportunities to learn a different moral language.

Chapter 8 Conclusion