



The rule of three questions

It has been said that everyone's favorite topic is themselves. After all, it's the topic we know the most about. Who better an expert about ourselves than ourselves? The irony of this observation is: in a conversation between two people who only discuss themselves, neither one gets to discuss their favorite topic! In other words, when you always make yourself the sole topic of conversation, you alienate others.

I have observed many frustrating conversations that went something like this (the names are completely fictional)...

Jeremy: Hi Mary, how was your weekend? Do anything fun?

Mary: Oh yeah, I hung out with some friends and we had a great time!

Jeremy: Nice! So did I. Me and a couple of my old college buddies met up at a bar and had a few drinks. We then tried that new tapas restaurant down on 5th. It was awesome. Then we met a few other friends and went to see a comedy show at the Laugh Factory. I forget who was performing but the skits were so funny....and on...and on...and on...

It's like Jeremy just asked the question so that he could talk about what HE did that weekend. He wasn't interested – or so it seems – in what Mary had to say. We have all been witness (or victim) to these conversations way too many times. That's why I came up with *The Rule of Three Questions*. It is simple really... The rule states that you must ask the person with whom you are engaging in a conversation at least three questions before you think about turning the topic of conversation to yourself. In doing so, you really let the person know you are interested, you care and – most importantly – you are listening.

So let's replay the conversation using the the rule...

Jeremy: *Hi Mary, how was your weekend? Do anything fun?*

Mary: *Oh yeah, I hung out with some friends and we had a great time!*

Jeremy: *Nice! What did you guys do? (QUESTION 1)*

Mary: *Well, we are all friends from high school so it was great to just catch up. We started off with a happy hour at one of our old favorite cocktail lounges called "The Hitch." We had a blast and then went to see that horror movie – we are all suckers for a screamer. Then we grabbed dinner and came home way too late.*

Jeremy: *That sounds fun! I've heard of The Hitch. Don't they specialize in pre-prohibition cocktails? What do you recommend? (QUESTION 2)*

Mary: *Yes! I had a Daiquiri and it was awesome. Jennifer had a mojito and it was alright but a bit too sweet. I definitely recommend anything with Bourbon...the manhattans were to die for.*

Jeremy: *Ahhhh...manhattans...a lady after my own heart. That sounds amazing. I never figured you*

for a scary movie buff. What's your all-time favorite? (QUESTION 3)

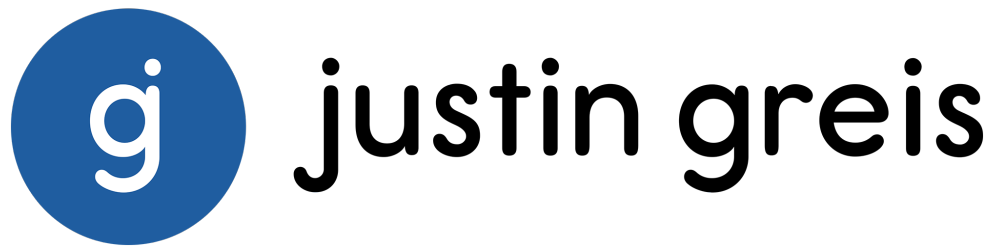
Mary: *Gosh, that's a hard one! It's probably Paranormal Activity. I couldn't sleep for weeks after watching that. They have gone down hill since the first one but the original movie was just so freaky.*

Jeremy: *Yikes, I can't stand those movies... I get too little sleep as-is. If I watched those movies, I would NEVER fall asleep. This weekend was a busy one for me too. Me and a couple of my old college buddies met up at a bar and had a few drinks...[the story continues]...*

Notice the difference? Before Jeremy ever turned the conversation towards HIS weekend, he asked Mary three questions, and better yet, the questions built on one another... I have seen too many ping-pong conversations that seemed like the participants were volleying the word "I". When asked, people generally do not realize they are doing it; it is just how conversational styles have naturally evolved to focus on themselves.

But I submit to you this: the best *leaders* are *listeners*. But it takes practice! After all, we must resist the urge to talk about our favorite topic and make sure we are listening to someone else talk about theirs.

Give it a try and let me know how it goes!



hi, i'm justin
(nice to meet you)

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