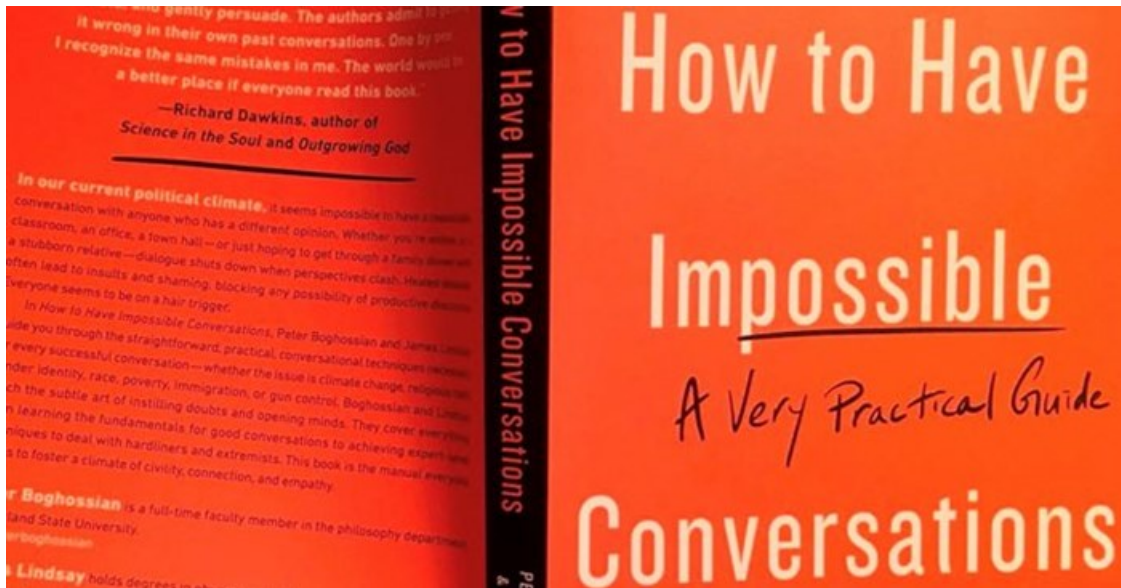


How to have impossible conversations, win friends and influence people

 ByBronwyn Williams

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I've just finished reading *How to Have Impossible Conversations: A Very Practical Guide*, by Peter Boghossian and James Lindsay. Unlike the title may suggest, the book is really more about the not-so-subtle art of *persuasion* - that is how to win people over to your point of view - which is, I am sure you will agree, a highly useful skill for anyone involved in marketing, communications, or, indeed, business at large.



One of the tactics for winning people over onto your side, which stood out for me due to its simplicity, is the four-step method known as 'Rapoport's Rules' designed by the Russian-American game theorist, Anatol Rapoport. It works as follows:

1. State your partner's position in your own words

Get your partner to confirm that you have in fact understood their position. If you are trying to win over a customer or partner in a negotiation process, this will involve articulating your customer's problem situation or explaining your negotiating partner's opening offer. Of course to get to this point, you will need to ask questions and listen carefully - asking questions and listening is the most essential part of any successful conversation!

2. State where you agree with them

After you have confirmed that you know what your partner is talking about and what they want and believe in relation to the issue you are attempting to persuade them on, tell your partner (or your prospect) clearly all the ways where you agree with them and all the points in their point of view that you get behind. This validates their position and helps you win them over.

3. State what you learned

Say what you learned from your conversation from your partner up until this point. This shows that you have been paying attention and that you are open to change your mind (or your offer) in light of new information. In other words, demonstrate that you are a reasonable person.

4. State your point, or make your counter offer

Only after you have listened, confirmed and learned from your partner or prospect are you permitted to make your pitch to get your point of view across or make your proposal. Just make sure your proposal supports rather than contradicts any of your good listening and learning work covered in points one through three.

Now, alas, if only the book's sometimes somewhat belligerent social-media celebrity authors could follow their own advice and stop arguing with people on Twitter. Of course, that is easier said than done. It is so much easier to talk and preach than it is to listen and learn.

So, next time you are pitching a proposal, conducting and negotiation or writing a sales letter or an advert, why not try use this simple four step formula to build rapport, gain trust and close the deal?

ABOUT BRONWYN WILLIAMS

Futurist, economist and trend analyst. Partner at Flux Trends.

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