

## Why haven't you asked me anything about my life?



Recently, my wife and I had dinner with someone we hadn't seen in years. We peppered him with questions about his work, his kids, old friends we had in common, his recent travels, even his views on random topics like internet security and the rise of China.

We weren't feigning interest either. We were genuinely curious. He responded with interesting and insightful answers. He was polite, engaged, willing to talk about whatever we brought up.

And then he left.

Later, as we debriefed the night, we realised that over a three hour period he hadn't asked us a single question. Not one.

He'd shown no interest in what my wife did for work, how old our kids are now, or what we'd been doing for the past decade.

The thing is, that's a pretty common social experience for us.

People seem more than willing to answer our questions. In fact, they seem to enjoy our curiosity about their life and opinions. But there's so little interest shown in us.

Shouldn't there be some natural desire to ask people what makes them tick, what they like doing, who they like being?

I'm getting to point now that when it happens again I might just let my eyes roll into the back of my head, throw my wine on the floor and go home.

Unless it's happening in my own home, of course (I don't want to have to clean up the wine).

## *Just ask some questions, people!*

I mean, enquiring about another person really shouldn't be an acquired skill. It should be innate. It should be, well, *human*.

And yet, I'm realising more and more that so few people in this world know how to have a meaningful exchange with another person. Conversations feel like talk-show interviews where I'm the interviewer.

My wife, Caz, suggested we should make up cards like those left on the dinner table by restaurant reviewers: "*You've been visited by the New York Time food critic. Check for your review coming soon.*"

Only she fantasizes about slipping people a card that reads, "Your conversational skills have been reviewed and you received an F for not asking us a single question." Maybe it's because most of our conversations these days are online. We 'talk' with our fingers. Briefly. Staccato-style, in texts and emojis. We've learned how to express, not enquire.

Maybe it's because we've spent so little time conversing face-to-face that we've forgotten that, you know, it's both nice and polite to ask someone something once in a while. Or perhaps instead, we've spent so much time on social media we're only ever seeing the world through the lens of ourselves. And then because of that, we already think we know what's news with someone else. No questions are required. Maybe it's gendered and men like being the experts, if only on their own lives. Well, I'm calling BS on all that.

## *Let's start a conversational revolution!*

Let's commit to showing a real interest in others. Make it your goal to never leave a social situation without getting at least one new piece of information about every person you had a conversation with.

And when you're in a conversation with someone who's more than willing to answer your insightful questions, but completely disinclined to ask you anything, call it out. Say something like, "Sorry, I've been dominating by asking all the questions. I suppose you've got lots of questions about my life?"

In short, folks, ASK MORE QUESTIONS. We need to foster a culture of genuine curiosity in each other.

by Michael Frost