



This Is Your Life Podcast

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Michael Hyatt

Michele Cushatt: Welcome to *This Is Your Life* with Michael Hyatt, where our goal is to help you win at work and succeed at life. My name is Michele Cushatt. I'm your cohost, and joining me in the conversation today is my good friend Michael Hyatt. Hey there, Michael.

Michael Hyatt: Hey, Michele. So good to see you and even better to hear you.

Michele: I agree. I would just like to say that both of us (for those who are listening) have experienced a few technical difficulties this week (today in particular). So yes, we just don't take it for granted when things work. Right now it happens to be working, so yay!

Michael: Yay!

Michele: Well, our topic today is one I'm really excited about, frankly, because you have taught me more about this subject than most people have.

Michael: Really?

Michele: Yes. I will explain to you why in a little bit.

Michael: Okay.

Michele: Before we dive into it, I just want to kind of acknowledge the fact that in our social media-rich world right now, we "talk" more than we've ever "talked" before. We write tweets. We post on Facebook. We provide pictures. We do Snapchat, Blab, Instagram, and everything else, so in some ways, we are talking all the time. Yet I would say that in all of the talk we do, we're probably worse conversationalists than we've ever been before. Would you agree or disagree with that?

Michael: I totally agree. I think it's really easy to be so focused on getting your message out that what should be a dialogue becomes a monologue because we're doing all of the talking. Yeah, it has to be a dialogue. That takes some intention. I don't think most people are born... I

remember years ago, I had coffee with a guy... This actually happened more than once, but I remember this one distinctly.

We went to Starbucks, and this was the first time we had ever met. He had asked for the meeting. He was a young, aspiring platform builder. I think I got maybe one or two sentences in over the course of an hour. He talked literally nonstop. He didn't ask me one question. He didn't know anything more about me than what he had known before he went to the meeting.

I knew a lot more about him. I guess he thought it was important that I know about him, but the result of that was that there was no real connection. I just thought, "Wow. He missed an opportunity, and we probably both missed an opportunity." But I didn't know what to do. I just thought it was so rude. I thought, "That's how a lot of people approach conversations."

Michele: Yeah. I agree. I'm putting you on the spot here because I didn't really tell you I was going to ask you this, but if you could describe our current culture of conversation or how we approach conversation in a couple of words, what would you say? How would you describe it?

Michael: Distracted. I think most of us, when we're in conversations, are thinking about what we're going to say next instead of listening to the people who are asking us questions or sharing important things. We're thinking about what we're going to say next. You can really see this in the presidential debates. Oh my gosh.

You know, they're talking over the top of each other. They're talking to somebody other than the person they're supposed to be having the conversation with. They don't answer the questions. This is true on both sides. I hate the current state of public discourse. It's very disturbing. I was going to say it's discouraging, but it's really more than that; it's disturbing.

Michele: It is disturbing because kind of the understanding of what conversation is about is that it's involving both parties. It doesn't seem that anybody cares about the other party. I don't necessarily mean political parties, but as we're talking, all we care about is getting our points across. We've lost this art of learning to listen and understand. We've become so defensive or unable to receive or process other people's comments, perspectives, or whatever. *Distracted* is a great word to describe it.

Michael: Yeah. I was thinking of how in the debates sometimes what you have is somebody making a point, and instead of asking for clarification, which would be refreshing... If one of your opponents said something you disagree with, how awesome would it be to model and enlighten yourself and the country by just asking a question?

“Well, what do you mean by that?” Then wait for a response. But they’re so quick to get in... It’s like a swordfight, really. They’re just going at each other, trying to land some blows that will take their opponents out. It’s very distasteful. It’s basically professional wrestling, but debate.

Michele: Yeah. I’ve also thought about how as I’m raising kids in this next generation, I don’t want to accept this lack of ability to converse and let it define my children. I want to do something very intentional about teaching them something different.

Michael: Yeah.

Michele: But if I want to teach them that, that means I have to become basically a student of conversation as well, which is precisely what we’re talking about today. Today’s topic is *six strategies to becoming a better conversationalist and why it matters*. It matters, I think, far more than we realize. If you struggle with conversation, if you want to learn how to improve... I have several friends to whom conversation doesn’t come naturally.

For me, it seems to be more automatic, but I know it’s not for so many people, so if that’s you, you’re certainly not alone. That’s what we’re going to unpack today. Michael is going to provide these six different strategies that will help you become a better conversationalist at home, in your community, in your place of employment with your employees or your employer, or just with friends, just around a dinner table with friends.

Like riding a bike or driving a car, it’s a skill that requires practice to improve, so we’re going to give you those strategies today, and then you’re going to have an opportunity to take those back to your real lives and put them into practice. Michael, go ahead and get us started. What is the very first strategy?

Michael: Yeah, the first one... I have to give credit where credit is due. I got this from Luci Swindoll.

Michele: Oh, by the way, I love her. She’s one of my favorite people.

Michael: She’s amazing, isn’t she? Yeah, some of you will know she’s the sister of Chuck Swindoll, who is kind of a world renowned, famous pastor, speaker, and author. He’s an amazing teacher and speaker. She is Chuck’s older sister and just a delight, one of my favorite people in the world.

Michele: She might not be happy with your pointing out the fact that she’s the older sister. I just want to speak on Luci’s behalf. Maybe she’d be fine with it.

Michael: I think she likes that.

Michele: Oh, okay.

Michael: She likes to boss him around.

Michele: Okay, that is true.

Michael: Yeah, so we were at her house one night for dinner, and there were probably about 12 of us. She has her dining room table in the middle of her library, which is really amazing because you're surrounded by all of these books. She stood up before we began. She prayed, of course.

Then she said, "Look. I only have one rule at my house. The rule is this. I call it the *one-conversation rule*. It basically means we're going to have one conversation. We can talk about anything you want, whatever you want. I have some questions prepared, but we don't have to do those. We can talk about whatever we want, but I'm just going to ask that there be no side conversations and that we have one conversation."

I have never found anything to be more transformative to conversation and to deep, intimate connection with people than this rule. The reason for this is that... You know, when a lot of people are talking, it's so easy to be distracted. You're kind of trying to be present with the person who is talking to you, but you're hearing these side conversations off to the side.

It becomes very distracting. It's very hard to engage like you need to. But when you establish the one-conversation rule, everybody gets a chance. You draw out the people who are not contributing or not speaking up, and you get a sense of what they have to say as well. So it's just an awesome rule to practice.

Michele: When I mentioned at the beginning of this that I have learned a lot about conversation from you... It all goes back to this rule because I have sat with you and your family or other mutual friends multiple times over dinner when we have observed that rule. I mean, it's a powerful thing.

Michael: It is. We went on a cruise with our entire team this last fall. We took everybody out to celebrate a goal we had hit as a company, so I took everybody on a cruise. Every night, we did this one-conversation rule. Megan, my oldest daughter who runs the company, had prepared just a set of three questions which were on a little tent card at each table.

Each night they were different, and it was really a lot of fun because we got to know each other at a deeper level than just superficially. There was some thought, intention, and strategy put into the conversation, so it was way different from just kind of showing up and (no pun intended) blabbing on about whatever occurred to us.

Michele: Yeah. I remember one night in particular... This was actually just this past September, and I hadn't seen you all in probably about a year. We sat around the table with Megan, your wife, and one of your other daughters as well. We just asked one question, and it took all of dinner for each one of us to take a turn and answer this one question. I mean, I'll never forget it. It's probably my best memory of that particular trip to Nashville.

Michael: Wow.

Michele: Just because we all slowed down long enough to actually listen to each other's answers.

Michael: That's another thing that I think is super helpful. Thank you for that. I think another thing that's super helpful is that when you do this as a family, you're teaching your children how to be conversationalists: how to listen, how to give other people the floor, how to be really interested and curious... Because the fun is when you ask the follow-up questions. You ask that one question, and then somebody will share something.

Then you ask that second question or that third question and drive the conversation even deeper. But I think this is one of those skills that are more easily caught than taught, and when you do it with your kids, it's phenomenal. I mean, we practice it literally at every family meal. We went out for dinner just impromptu last night with three of my kids, and it's just how we do it now. We don't even have to say, "Oh yeah, the one-conversation rule." We just get right into it.

Michele: That's great. I'm a big believer in it after learning it from you, which ultimately goes back to Luci Swindoll, so thank you, Luci.

Michael: It does.

Michele: All right. That first strategy in becoming a better conversationalist is to *establish the one-conversation rule*. This is a big one. I love the fact that we started out with that first strategy. What is the second strategy?

Michael: The second one is to *listen with your heart*. You know, conversation is so much more than words, and sometimes it's the pauses. Sometimes it's the inflection of the voice.

Sometimes it's the body language. Sometimes it's the volume of the voice. It could be a number of things, but to listen with your heart means you're listening sort of at a multi-track level, not just to the words that are being said.

It's almost as if... You're just listening at a deeper level. I don't know how to explain it exactly, but it's a kind of listening with your whole being where you really want to hear from that person. It does mean you set aside your agenda. It does mean you stop thinking about how you're going to reply next. You're just listening to what that person is really saying, because it may be just beyond the veil of the words where they're communicating.

You know when you hear somebody talking and their eyes well up with tears? You realize there's something else there. I think that sometimes we feel that silence is awkward and feel the need to cover it with noise, and I think listening with our hearts means giving the other people the space to go ahead and cry if they need to or find the right words.

We make them not feel rushed. But really connect at a different level so people feel like, "I'm really being listened to." That's such a gift to give anybody: to just listen to them. I think that's one of the reasons therapy is so popular. In our culture, we have to pay to get somebody to listen to us.

Michele: You can say that again. We've lost that art of listening with the heart.

Michael: We have.

Michele: We really have.

Michael: Probably a lot of therapy... I believe in therapy, and I believe in counseling. I think healthy people get both. But I think probably a lot of it wouldn't be as necessary if we just had people who would honestly listen to us and help us process what we were going through.

Michele: Yeah, I want to kind of differentiate between listening with the intellect and listening with the heart, because what you're talking about takes the practice to a whole different level of intentionality, which you've mentioned before. When we listen to just words, that's when we get into the habit of feeling the need to chime in, hurry up and respond really quickly, or maybe even try to fix the emotion we're hearing, but listening with the heart just receives it.

Michael: Yes.

Michele: And holds it like... How do I say this? You kind of hold it like a treasure. Somebody just shared something valuable with you, and you hold it, process it, and consider it. I think that process of listening with your whole heart slows the conversation down.

Michael: Yeah. You know, there's a sense in which... I like the distinction you made between the intellect and the emotion. I think that sometimes it's just being empathetic, sharing that emotion with the other person. The older I get, the more easily I tear up anyway, and I think having raised five daughters has taught me to cry with them.

Michele: I was going to say, it's hopeless for you, man. I'm sorry, but...

Michael: But I do think that when you can (this could sound manipulative, and I don't mean it that way) mirror the emotion... Like if somebody is angry, there's some injustice that has been perpetrated and they're angry, you can just kind of share that a little bit. Or if it's sadness, hurt, or whatever it is... I think people need to feel like they're understood and especially like they're not alone.

Michele: Oh, absolutely. Without a doubt. In fact, we jump too quickly to try to fix things for them, but nobody can receive your attempts to coach, counsel, or fix them if they don't feel you understand them first. That's where it has to begin.

Michael: Hey, I have a question on that point for you.

Michele: Okay.

Michael: When you were going through the deepest, darkest part of your journey through cancer and your friends were talking to you... On this particular point, what was helpful and what was not helpful? Because I'm guessing that when people would say to you, "I understand what you're going through," that was probably not the right response, because there was no way they could understand.

Michele: No, they don't understand. What I have found again and again even in myself and how I respond to people who are in places of difficulty, severe or significant difficulty, suffering, pain, or whatever, is that we have this almost desperate need to alleviate pain because...

On one hand, we want to alleviate it because we care about the other person, but the truth is that somebody else's pain actually causes us pain because it opens us to the possibility that bad things can happen to us as well. So we have such a need to either deny pain or fix it, so we

either shut down and walk away or try really hard to rationalize it, explain it, or something like that.

The things that weren't helpful were when those people were almost compulsive in their need to either deny my pain or circumstances, kind of candy coat it or pretend it wasn't real, or when people tried to fix it. People wanted to give me lists of the diets I needed to eat, the Scriptures I needed to read, or whatever. Those things weren't helpful.

Those things that were helpful were when those people could listen with their hearts and actually enter into my pain. But it requires some sacrifice on the listener's part to be willing to just kind of sit in the mess with the other person for a time without feeling the need to fix it. I think that's the difference between talking at one another and having a conversation together. *Conversation* implies a partnership or a joint effort, whereas just talking at people isn't a joint effort at all.

Michael: That's good. I was talking to my daughter, Mary, who was going through a difficult situation, recently. I just listened to her, and one of the things I said to her was, "There's no way I can understand what you're going through, but I'm with you in this." She referred to it later, and I had never heard this term before, but I actually looked it up and studied it a little bit. She said, "Dad, you've really become good at holding space." Have you ever heard that term?

Michele: Yeah. That's exactly what it is. Yeah.

Michael: So you're not fleeing, but you're not kind of artificially trying to connect. You're just there with the person, holding their hand, praying, listening, or whatever it requires. But you're not pretending that somehow you get their pain, because there's no way any of us could get that.

Michele: Even if our circumstances are similar, we really don't understand another person's experience, because it's physically impossible for us to become them. So yeah, saying we understand is well intentioned, but it ends up being very trite, so it would be better to say, "I can't even fathom your pain, but I promise you I'm going to hang out with you in it until you can move forward."

Michael: I like that. That's good.

Michele: All right. The first strategy we've talked about as far as becoming a better conversationalist is to establish the one-conversation rule. Second, listen with your heart,

which is so much different from just listening with your intellect. It requires a little bit more of a sacrifice on your part to step into the other person's story. The third one is...?

Michael: *Be aware of how much you're talking.*

Michele: By the way, just a side note... This would be where I fail almost every time.

Michael: Well, me too. I learned this back when I was doing radio interviews for a book I had published that had really caught on in the late 90s. I was doing hundreds of radio interviews. I think I did over 1,000 or maybe over 1,200 the first year. During the very first radio interview I went on, they put me on hold and were interviewing another guest.

This guy would not come up for air. He would just talk, talk, and talk. He never gave the host an opportunity to talk. After a while, they flushed him. The producer came on the phone and said, "We're not going to have any more guests. Sorry." Then they flushed me. So I didn't even get to do that interview. I guess I was just guilty by association.

Michele: Oh no!

Michael: I think you have to be aware of how much you're talking, and there has to be some give-and-take back and forth. It can't just be one person doing all of the talking. Just be aware. You have to have self-awareness if you're going to be successful as a conversationalist. Some people just kind of careen from one speech to the next, and that's what...

As we began this show, I was talking about this young guy who took me out for coffee at Starbucks. That's exactly what it was. It was just one speech after another. I think that sometimes that comes from the need to prove ourselves or from insecurity in some way. I don't really think it comes from pride. Maybe it does sometimes.

But somehow we have to make a positive impression on that person, and we think that the more we talk, the more we share with them our victories, our accomplishments, or whatever, the more they'll be impressed. That's usually not what impresses us. I think one of the things we have to remember... I may have learned this from Dale Carnegie originally. Everyone's favorite topic is themselves.

Michele: That's just painful. I've heard that before, but that's just painful.

Michael: I know. I hate that.

Michele: It's true, but it's painful.

Michael: But I try to remember that. People who talk about you or want to hear from you in a conversation... You walk away from the conversation going, "That was amazing! We had an amazing conversation." Why? Because there was give-and-take. There was this awareness the other person had so they weren't dominating the conversation. I think it's true one on one, and I actually think it's true in small groups.

It's especially true if you're leading a small group or even with your family. I think that if you're leading, you need to be aware not only of how much you're talking but how much other people are talking. Sometimes the people who are reluctant to talk are the people who have the deepest reserves of thinking, feeling, and contribution. So you have to be able to draw them out. Sometimes if people don't jump in, I'll literally just ask them a question.

Michele: Absolutely.

Michael: I'll go right to them and pull them into the conversation.

Michele: Absolutely. My husband is one of those people. I can easily freight train right over him because I can talk without ceasing, so learning to slow down and actually ask questions... I mean, he's just a very deep pool of insight, and when I talk too much, I miss out on that gift.

Michael: That's good.

Michele: All right. So far, we've talked about three of the six strategies to becoming a better conversationalist. First is to establish the one-conversation rule. Second is to listen with your heart. Third is to be aware of how much you're talking. We have three more strategies coming up in just a moment.

All of these are so helpful, things you can put into practice immediately in the workplace, in your family, and with your friendships and relationships. So make sure you stick around. We have three more. Before we dig into those other three, Michael... You have had a lot going on personally with a little something called a book called *Living Forward*. Yes?

Michael: Yes. I'm very excited about it. At the time we're recording this, the book has just hit four bestseller lists. It hit the *Wall Street Journal* bestseller list. It hit the *USA Today* bestseller list, which I'm particularly proud of because that's all books in every genre, and it was in sixth place this past week. Then it hit the *Publishers Weekly* bestseller list, and then it also hit the *BookScan* bestseller list.

Michele: That's amazing. I mean, let's take a moment, Mr. Achiever, and just celebrate that. That's excellent! That doesn't happen without a ton of hard work and, of course, so many people who are rallying around you and supporting this book.

Michael: I'll tell you... I mean, it has been everything from the launch team who has been involved with this to my own team in planning the strategy and executing it. Even today as I'm looking at it, it's still in 86th place overall on Amazon.

Michele: That's amazing.

Michael: The fun thing is we're getting some great comments, some great reviews, right now. I know you got terrific reviews on your book too. But right now we have 205 customer reviews which average 4.9 stars.

Michele: I know. I looked at that this morning on Amazon for your sake.

Michael: You did?

Michele: Because I knew you probably weren't checking...

Michael: She jests.

Michele: So I checked that out. Yeah, I jest. I did notice how many reviews had come in and how well they were doing. One thing you want to make people aware of about this book... First of all, it's a book, okay? So it doesn't require a huge investment, but the payout from reading this book and putting into practice the principles taught in it are significant for your life because it's all about life plan. One thing you've made available to everyone is a free assessment tool. Would you like to tell them a little bit about that?

Michael: Yes. I'm not sure we even mentioned the title of the book, but it's called *Living Forward: A Proven Plan to Stop Drifting and Get the Life You Want*. At livingforwardbook.com, we have a terrific assessment. The assessment is called the Life Assessment Profile. It's pretty quick. It takes you about 10 minutes to do.

It's free, but it basically helps you to evaluate how you're doing in all of your major life accounts. It measures your passion and your progress. In our experience, it takes those two things for you to feel satisfied in life. For example, in your marriage, if you're not experiencing passion and progress, you're probably not going to be very satisfied.

We have a whole psychological model we've used, and we employed some experts to get us to that point. Again, it's free, and it will really help you get a grip on where you are in your life

and what you can do to improve so you can start planning your life, stop drifting, and start getting the satisfaction you want in the various components of your life.

Michele: Once again, that's the Life Assessment Profile tool. It's absolutely free. You can get more information about that at livingforwardbook.com. Just one more reminder... Regardless of your age, it is not too late. If you woke up this morning and you're still breathing, you can make the most of this gift of life you've been given. So check out livingforwardbook.com for that free assessment tool as well as links to get a copy of the book for yourself.

Michael: Terrific.

Michele: Once again, today we're talking about how to become a better conversationalist. We opened this whole episode by mentioning how, truly, over (I would say) the last decade, we have become somewhat atrophied in our ability to carry on a conversation. So today we want to counteract that atrophy with six strategies to becoming a better conversationalist. So far, we've talked about the first three: establish the one-conversation rule, listen with your heart, and be aware of how much you're talking. What is the fourth strategy, Michael?

Michael: The fourth one is to *hit the ball back over the net*. You know, nothing communicates value and respect to a person more than asking them what they think does.

Michele: I love this.

Michael: I remember I had this opportunity one time, Michele, back when I was (I think) 28 years old. I got to meet Dr. Billy Graham.

Michele: No way!

Michael: Yeah. The publishing company I worked for was his publisher, so I got to go to Anchorage, Alaska, to one of his conferences, and I got to meet him backstage. Two things were really remarkable about that encounter. First of all, I was terrified. That wasn't the remarkable thing. I suppose it was to be expected.

I was really scared because I was meeting this man who was a legend, this man who was extremely well known, this man who had been a counselor to many U.S. presidents and other world leaders. But when I walked into the green room, he stood up. I was the only other person in the room. He stood up, walked over to me, and said, "Hi, my name is Billy. What's your name?" I thought that was amazing. Like I didn't know... Of course I knew.

Michele: Did you know your own name at that point? That's what I want to know. Did you remember?

Michael: Well, it was just really... I think it showed tremendous humility on his part.

Michele: Yes.

Michael: But the second thing he did was just start asking me all of these questions. I thought he was such a master question asker, and he was really interested. I mean, he was asking about my family and my work, and all of these different questions really communicated to me that he respected me.

So I think that whenever we get together and have a conversation with somebody else, we need to think of it like a ping-pong match or tennis match. You hit the ball over the net, and then you return it. We've used this metaphor with our kids again and again, but there have been a few tips I've found that are really helpful in terms of the kinds of thoughtful questions we can ask. Can I share those?

Michele: Yes, absolutely.

Michael: Okay. First of all, the best kind of question is an open-ended question. There's not a yes or no answer. That would be a closed-ended question. Basically, that kind of question doesn't generate any discussion. It can't go anywhere. Somebody answers the question, and that's it. You either have to ask another question or pick up the ball and start talking. But when you ask an open-ended question, you get far more interesting insights.

For example, instead of asking, "Are you happy with your results?" (that's a yes-or-no question), you could say, "Why do you think you got the results you did?" The first question could be answered yes or no. The second question is open-ended and invites reflection. It starts a discussion, and it might really lead to some interesting insights for both of you. So that's the first thing: ask open-ended questions.

The second one is to get behind the assumptions. You know, every business decision is based on assumptions. If you understand the assumptions as a businessperson, you can easily avoid making a bad decision. So it's often helpful to ask yourself first and then your teammates second, "What are you assuming in this scenario?" because the assumptions will tell you a lot, so you have to keep peeling the layers of the onion back, so to speak, until you get comfortable with the assumptions.

This is where a lot of people make mistakes. It's not that their thinking is bad; it's that the assumptions have led them down a wrong path. Then, third... Man, I have been guilty of this so many times. You need to get both sides of the story. It's so easy when you hear one side of the story to act on that information and then be embarrassed when you find out you had only heard half of the facts.

Michele: Mm-hmm. So true.

Michael: I've done that a bunch of times. You have to get both sides of the story so that if somebody comes in to you with something that seems open-and-shut and it seems like they've made their case and they're right... I do try to listen. I try to ask them a bunch of questions, but then I want to get the other side of the story. I want to withhold judgment before I say something. Then the fourth thing is to get comfortable with what I would call dead air. That's a radio term. It's not good in radio, by the way, but it is good in conversation.

Michele: Yes it is.

Michael: Most people get uncomfortable when things get quiet, and they feel the obligation to fill the space with chatter. You can learn a lot if you'll just shut up and let people talk.

Michele: Imagine that.

Michael: I know!

Michele: That was a very profound quote right there because it's true. I mean, just stop talking.

Michael: Yeah. My former boss, Sam Moore, at Thomas Nelson was really good about this. It would sometimes get really awkward because he would just be quiet. He'd ask a question, and then he'd just be quiet. Somebody would respond. They'd give him kind of the rote answer they had prepared, and then he'd just kind of nod but then not say anything.

They would volunteer all kinds of information, amazing amounts of information that you would have never heard or obtained in any other way. So just be quiet and listen. When it's with your friends or your family, sometimes it's in that pause that you'll go to the next level kind of on the elevator to get to a deeper level of conversation where people reveal more of what's behind their thinking and what's more behind the first-level answer.

Michele: Yeah. I think we forget that not everybody processes information at the same speed we do.

Michael: That's right.

Michele: I've had to learn this the hard way with the people close to me. They need time to think and process, and when I'm constantly chattering, I don't allow them or even myself to process the information that has been shared. So having an awareness and respect for that... You end up learning so much about another person if you will just be quiet.

Michael: So true. I mean, I can tell you from the talking side that my first answer is usually not my best answer.

Michele: Oh, goodness. Yes. I agree (not with you personally, but with myself). That didn't come out right, but you know what I'm saying.

Michael: Yeah. A lot of times, I'm thinking with my mouth open. I'm just kind of thinking about whatever topic it is, and I have to kind of work around it to kind of get it out. There's another principle in asking questions. That's helping people discover their own insights. Man, I still have to work at this because when I'm talking to somebody, like if I'm coaching somebody, I'm pretty intuitive. The answer is usually readily apparent to me. Do you ever have this?

Michele: Mm-hmm.

Michael: But if you just kind of blurt it out and give the person the answer, it's usually not as insightful or helpful to them as it would be if you would ask the questions, lead them to that conclusion, and kind of hold your own conclusion loosely, as if you kind of had it but maybe you didn't have it. Sometimes if you ask an open-ended question, they'll get to an insight that's far deeper than what you could ever get to, and it will have a more profound impact on them because they will have arrived at the answer themselves.

Michele: Yes. Yes, exactly. I'm that person who is resistant to somebody telling me what to do or what to think, so if somebody comes out and just bluntly says it, I'm much less likely to learn from it than I would be if they would just allow me some space to come to that conclusion through our conversation.

Michael: So true. So true.

Michele: All right. Were those all of the types of questions you were going to share?

Michael: Well, there's another one that's useful in a business conversation, and that is to understand the difference between facts and speculation.

Michele: Okay.

Michael: One of my former bosses told me, “Make sure you tell me what you know and what you think you know, and make sure I know the difference.” When people make statements about things, sometimes we think they’re based on the facts, but some of them may be speculation. So one of the questions I like to ask is, “Do you know that to be a fact?” because people, especially in our world of sound bites, will quote all kinds of things or quote some source they’ve heard about.

But I think that sometimes we just have to ask the question, “Do you know that to be a fact?” or, “How do you know?” Now I used to get (I won’t tell you which of my relatives used to send me these things) these crazy e-mails that were forwarded to me from a relative. They would make some outrageous claim about some celebrity or some political figure. I would go to this website... I think it’s called Snopes. Have you ever done this?

Michele: Yep. Snopes.com. Absolutely.

Michael: It verifies rumors.

Michele: And like 99 percent of the time, it’s all rumor. It’s not true.

Michael: I know! I would end up taking the link from that page that dispelled the rumor and sending it to this family member. Finally, I got them to see... “Why don’t you check this first before you pass on this rumor?” I think that to ask that question, “Is this a fact? Is this source credible...?” It’s not because you’re trying to interrogate them, but you don’t want to make a decision based on bad information, so sometimes you have to drill down and make sure something is credible and based on fact.

Michele: Right now we’re talking about the fourth strategy, which is to hit the ball back over the net. In the process of conversation, make sure that if you’re speaking, you also hit the ball back over the net with another question to ask the other person. Michael has just given us about six or seven different types of questions you can ask in your effort to hit the ball back over the net. We’ve covered four of the strategies. What is the fifth?

Michael: The fifth is to *ask follow-up questions*. You know, the best listeners I know never stop with one question. That’s kind of the easy thing, and certainly your first goal as an improving conversationalist is to ask that first question, but don’t stop there. Hit the ball back over the net, but don’t stop with that. Again, it’s kind of like peeling an onion. You want to ask follow-up questions, going deeper each time.

Sometimes, just for the fun of it, I like to see how many questions I can ask in a row without commenting. My daughter, Megan, is the best I’ve ever seen at this. She’s just really great at

stacking questions. It has a way of making you feel honored, like she's genuinely interested to know what you think, how you feel, or what your perspective is.

So to ask that second question... Ask, "Why was that important?" "Why did you do that?" "What was behind that?" or just something that goes a little bit deeper. I almost said to do it like an investigative reporter. People don't want to be interrogated. That's not what I'm talking about, but what I'm talking about is cultivating a genuine sense of curiosity so you get the story behind the story.

Michele: Exactly. You said it so well. Follow-up questions communicate interest. We can sometimes get in this habit of... We know asking questions is important in conversation, and we almost do it robotically or by rote.

Michael: Yes.

Michele: The follow-up questions actually communicate that we're engaging with what they're saying, which is so critical to actually becoming a conversationalist.

Michael: Yep. So true. It's so important.

Michele: All right. Hit the ball back over the net and ask follow-up questions. What is the final strategy?

Michael: The final one is to, *when you're listening, provide positive feedback*. Now I've seen people who don't do this at all (like when I've been interviewed for television). Sometimes there's something called an off-camera interview where somebody is asking you questions off camera and not giving you any feedback. They're looking at the next question, and you're just kind of talking in the room. Have you ever had this experience?

Michele: Yeah. It's not fun.

Michael: It's not fun.

Michele: I need feedback.

Michael: I do too. One of the best interviewers in that kind of situation that I've ever met in my life is our mutual friend, Stu McLaren. Stu is nodding. He's smiling. He's totally engaged. That encourages you. It makes you want to share more. It makes you reach deeper for the content. I actually had the bad habit of providing no input because I thought, "Well, you know, this is what senior-level executives do. You just kind of sit there with a poker face. You don't show your hand, and you just let people talk."

Then I kind of noticed that people locked up. I had a consultant one time who asked me, “Are you mad?” She pulled me aside during our break. We were having this financial review meeting, and I was listening to our different managers of our divisions go through their results for the previous month. I would just have this scowl on my face, and I would kind of listen. I nodded a little bit, but I was pretty poker-faced. She asked, “Are you angry?” I said, “No. I’m fine.” She said, “Well, you might want to tell your face.”

Michele: Ahh! You were probably so surprised, I would imagine, because it had never occurred to you or connected with you that your face was not offering feedback.

Michael: It had never occurred to me.

Michele: Or at least not the right feedback, I should say.

Michael: It took some rewiring to get my face connected to my heart.

Michele: Yes.

Michael: You may remember this, but I even had this problem in public speaking. I remember Brian Scheer, who was my booking manager, used to say to me, “You have to smile more! You have to smile more!” I said, “I am smiling!” He said, “No you’re not.” I said, “I am smiling!” He said, “Okay. Watch this video and tell me if you’re smiling or not.” I was like, “Oh my gosh! I’m not smiling!”

So, literally for two years, I worked on smiling. Dean Rainey (my video producer), Stu McLaren, and Megan all worked with me on just smiling on video. It’s more engaging. People feel like they’re talking to a real live person. So I think that as a conversationalist, you have to do that too. You have to smile. You have to encourage. You have to draw them out. It’s not just your words, but it’s your body language.

Michele: Yeah. I think it’s important for us to remember a lack of feedback is still feedback. It’s just not what you want to communicate.

Michael: Yes. Well put.

Michele: So even not saying anything is feedback, but it’s creating a negative environment you don’t want to create. The other thing I thought about... Sometimes people will ask me if I have any feedback for radio interviews, like any tips, and the first tip I give for radio interviews... Now imagine you can’t see facial expressions, you can’t...

Michael: I know what you’re going to say.

Michele: Yeah. It's to smile. People can hear a smile over the airwaves, so even if they can't see your face and they can't see the twinkle in your eye or the smile on your face, they can hear it.

Michael: Yes.

Michele: Even if you're on the phone, smiling is feedback people can hear.

Michael: My dad used to tell me this when I was a telephone sales rep. He'd say, "Make sure you're standing and you're smiling." So I would always sell on the telephone while standing and smiling. For some reason, that didn't translate into the world of public speaking, but... I don't know. I just didn't connect it, but now...

Michele: That's good advice, though. I mean, that's great advice.

Michael: It is, isn't it?

Michele: There's something about standing, and there is something about smiling that people can hear.

Michael: Yep.

Michele: It breaks down walls, and yes, I've had the same thing as a public speaker. My intensity about my topic has stolen the joy from my face. So I've had to learn the same lesson. Can I just say after watching you for the last number of years that you have come a long way with your ability to smile on video and while speaking?

Michael: Thank you.

Michele: Well done.

Michael: Thank you. Thank you.

Michele: Your team is earning their pay.

Michael: Good.

Michele: All right. Today our topic is six strategies to becoming a better conversationalist. I can't even tell you how much Michael and I fully believe in the importance of this topic. Michael has delivered six strategies. To recap, they are... First, establish the one-conversation rule. Have only one conversation at a time at the dinner table or in a group. That way, everybody is engaged in a single topic and listening. Second, listen with your heart.

The third strategy is to be aware of how much you're talking. We could all benefit from that. Fourth, hit the ball back over the net in the conversation. Fifth, ask follow-up questions, which is kind of the proof that you're engaged with your heart and your mind. Sixth, provide positive feedback. It lets the other person know that, yes, you're engaged, but it also communicates a sense of safety, that they can continue to talk and dialogue with you.

Those are our six strategies today. As we conclude this episode, let's take this conversation to the home, which we've talked about a little bit. I'd love to just ask you personally, in addition to that one conversational rule, how you have used these six strategies very specifically with your wife and then with your children and grandchildren when they have come home to visit. How do you keep from becoming lazy in conversation with them?

Michael: Well, it is easy to become lazy. I think it's particularly easy when you're a father or mother and you just kind of bark orders. It's efficient, right? If you just tell people what to do and tell them what to think and how to feel, it's very efficient (except that they don't get it). So I think the thing for me is just valuing relationships, particularly in my home.

If I can't value and respect the people in my home, the people who are closest to me, how in the world can I do it with my teammates, my customers, and my clients? So it's like we say in the book *Living Forward*. Self-leadership precedes team leadership, and I think that becoming a good conversationalist at home with the people you love the most will really help you in every other aspect of your life, whether it's business, your social life, or whatever.

So I think that in one sense, God has kind of given us all a lab. If we have a family, it gives us an opportunity to practice this stuff, and we can practice it every day. We really can get better, and if we want more meaningful, more significant relationships, we must become better conversationalists. That's the access point for these relationships we so deeply desire.

Michele: So well said, Michael. That conversation is the access point for deeper and more meaningful relationships. Well, if you've enjoyed today's episode, you can get the show notes and a full transcript at michaelhyatt.com. In addition, if you'd prefer to watch, we also have the video of this entire episode recorded, so you can see us in all of our glory (or not). Can you do us a favor before you go?

Please take a few minutes (actually, it would take only seconds) to head over to iTunes and rate this podcast. It's very important in the world of iTunes that you take the time to rate the program. Let us know the episodes you particularly enjoy, and offer a review, perhaps. This is a great way for us to get the content into the hands of more people. Do you have any final thoughts today, Michael?

Michael: Just to say it's worth it. It's worth learning to be a good conversationalist. It's not that hard, but it does take practice.

Michele: It does take practice, without a doubt. Well, thank you for joining us today. Until next time, remember: Your life, your one and only life, is a gift. Now go make it count.