

FIVE CONVERSATIONAL BLIND SPOTS

**How do we become more conversationally intelligent?
One way to improve is by recognizing and overcoming the five most
common conversational blind spots.**

Blind Spot #1: Assuming everyone thinks like me.

An assumption that others see what we see, feel what we feel, and think what we think. **Backstory:** When we are engrossed and attached to our point of view, we are unable to connect with others' perspectives. If we did, we would realize how differently they see the world. Yet our bodies pick up the lack of connectivity and switch on a stronger need to persuade others we are right. Human beings actually have a high addiction to being right. When we persuade others we are right, our dopamine level goes up. It's like a natural high—dopamine is part of the brain's reward center. *Winning a point makes us feel good—it makes others feel bad, but we often don't realize that.*

Why
aren't you
seeing it?

Because
I'm right!

Well,
whatever he
says, I'm not
listening...

Blind Spot #2: Feelings change our reality.

The failure to realize that fear, trust, and distrust changes how we see and interpret reality, and therefore how we talk about it. **Backstory:** When in a state of fear, we release cortisol and catecholamines, which closes down the prefrontal cortex. We feel threatened, move into protective behaviors, and often don't even realize we are doing it.

Blind Spot #3: I am too fearful to empathize.

An inability to stand in each other's shoes when we are fearful or upset characterizes Blind Spot #3. **Backstory:** Researchers in Parma, Italy, led by Giacomo Rizzolatti discovered, through their 1999 research on monkeys (and later humans), that our brain has unique neurons called mirror neurons. These neurons give us a view into what others feel, think, and intend. When we listen deeply, turn off our judgment mechanisms, and allow ourselves to connect with others, we are activating the mirror neuron system, now thought of as 'having empathy for others.' Yet when we are fearful, that power to connect becomes disconnected, and our sensitivity to others' perspectives recedes.

You
need
to start
doing
your
job!

Oh... You
think you can
do my job?

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Blind Spot #4: I remember, therefore I know.

The assumption that we remember what others say, when we actually remember what we think about what others say. **Backstory:** Researchers have concluded two things. One is that we drop out of conversations every twelve to eighteen seconds to process what people are saying; two, we often remember what we think about what another person is saying because that is a stronger internal process and chemical signal. In other words, *our internal listening and dialogue trumps the other person's speech.*



Blind Spot #5: I am listening so I actually know what you really mean.

The assumption that meaning resides in the speaker, when in fact it resides in the listener, characterizes Blind Spot #5. **Backstory:** For me to make meaning I need to draw out what I think you are saying from my vault of experiences, specifically from the hippocampus, where memory is stored in the limbic system, or emotional brain; or I may draw from the neocortex, where I store memories of what to do and how to do it. My brain will pull the meaning from my experiences and I then bring them into the conversation to make sense of what I hear. That's why "in my mind's eye" I can see a totally different picture of what you are saying than what your mind sees. Meaning resides in the listener until the speaker takes the time to validate and link back to make sure both have the same picture and shared meaning.



*All human beings have blind spots. We can't focus on everything at the same time – if we did we would lose our minds. Too much data to process, too much confusion, no logical threads to guide us forward. So blind spots are in many ways a natural part of our human system to prevent us from 'going crazy.' What we do need to know about blind spots are how they work and what happens when we are so incredibly driven by our I-centric impulses to protect ourselves. In these cases our blind spots take us down a path of conversational ignorance. We stop listening deeply to others, we think they know what we mean when they don't, we lose our ability to stand in each other's shoes and empathize. Understanding our **5 Conversational Blind Spots** and learning to step through them into insight and awareness of others – strengthens our ability to create healthy environments for trust to emerge.*