

How to open up to fruitful conversation

In his latest book, Santiago Álvarez de Mon encourages his readers to broach those important conversations that are still pending -- whether in a professional, personal or family realm.



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"Understanding human conversation as a meeting place with others, it changes them and it changes us." [Santiago Álvarez de Mon](#)'s 2021 book is dedicated to exploring the promise and importance of the conversations we have — and those that we should have.

"Through our words, our silences, our gestures, we leave a trace of who we are," the author explains. "The conversation is revealed as a need, a demand, a duty, a gift, a learning opportunity, a responsibility, a right, a natural environment for the human being."

Álvarez de Mon begins with a premise that accompanies him throughout the pages of the book: that a great deal depends upon "the quality of the conversations we have with others and with ourselves." For Álvarez de Mon, the quality of these conversations affects our relationships, our leadership, "our ability to influence the thoughts, feelings, behaviors of others," and, ultimately, as the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) would say, our ability "to rule over ourselves."

Public conversations may be easier to hear and follow, while private conversations remain more discreet and quieter. Each type of conversation feeds into the other. Change, a given in our lives, "takes place between conversations of varying nature and scope," the author reflects.

Five essential elements

For a conversation to be "enlightened and fruitful," Álvarez de Mon posits that it should include the following five components:

- 1. Doubt:** "the capacity for wonder, a typical state for a mind that is open, free from prejudices and ideological corsets."
- 2. Questioning,** which arises precisely from doubt. "There are no smart, enriching conversations without smart questions. Eliminate these and you weigh down a dialogue that sounded promising."
- 3. Listening,** "to know, to understand." Not only hearing what is said, but also taking in what is thought and felt, which can disprove the former. A historical example: several experienced politicians met with Hitler and concluded that he did not want to go to war. What did they miss?
- 4. Silences,** the other side of language. Keeping quiet can be an instrument of communication and knowledge of oneself. But misused, it can get in the way of a constructive debate or complex decision-making.
- 5. Attention,** the ability to concentrate and be present. It's impossible to read between the lines if you're not able to pay attention to what is said and not said.

The book's title emphasizes the conversations we *don't* have in order to encourage readers to muster up the courage and clarity needed to face, without further delay, those conversations that we owe others and ourselves. These conversations should be approached with tact,

empathy and largess. The rest -- those deemed unnecessary, awkward, unfair or trivial — should be tossed out with indifference, the author concludes.



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