



HOW TO TALK

About Immigration



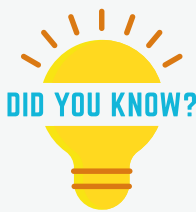
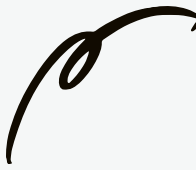
A GUIDE FOR NAVIGATING CONVERSATIONS ON A
FRAUGHT TOPIC



There has to be a better way!

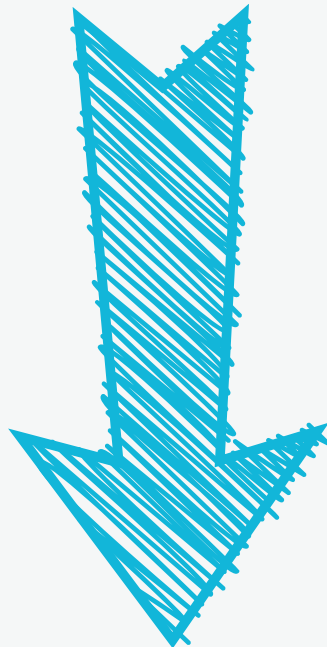


Conversations about immigration can be challenging because the issue has become so politicized. In fact, there probably isn't a more controversial topic than this one! This leads to one of three bad scenarios: people avoid talking about it altogether, they only talk about it with others who share their views, or they get into raging fights with those who don't share their views.



Thankfully, there is!

The principles in this guide are based on research by experts on attitudes toward immigration and on my own experiences speaking to audiences from all walks of life about immigration. They aren't ranked in any specific order of importance.



HOW TO HAVE A CONVERSATION

About Immigration



Identify Shared Values

Don't start by talking about immigration. Start by identifying values that you and your conversation partner share—such as fairness, safety, family, and economic opportunity. Most disagreements are about how to achieve common goals rather than on what the outcome should be.

For example, almost everyone agrees that we should aspire to live in communities that are safe, attract investment, and produce a lot of jobs for everyone.



Use these shared values as a basis to discuss immigration, emphasizing how these values align with fair and humane immigration policies.

For example, agreeing that we want a safe community makes it easier to discuss the facts in chapter 8, showing that immigrants actually reduce rather than increase crime.

Broaden the Vision and Stick to the Facts

People tend to fixate on a single aspect of immigration that really bothers them. Widen the lens by which you discuss the issue so you can both see the big picture and put the specific issue in perspective.

For example, if someone obsessively complains about the chaos at the border, validate their concern but then point out that there's a lot more to immigration than the border. We can't understand how to solve the border issue without first understanding all the ways in which immigrants contribute positively—enhancing investment, jobs, innovation, safety, etc. Once you establish that, you can go back to the border issue and have a more sane conversation about it because you have context.



The evidence showing that immigrants produce economic and social benefits is strong enough to stand on its own. You don't need to exaggerate or embellish it. Just get key facts and numbers from each chapter and tell it as it is.

For example, if someone claims that immigrants steal jobs from native workers, you can say something like: "I agree with you that it would be bad if immigrants took away jobs [shared value]. But did you know that research shows it's exactly the opposite? Immigrants create new jobs for natives, and in many cases they help increase the wages of native workers." [More statistics on that in Chapter 5]

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Focus on Sources (Kindly)

Apply the following “ladder of evidence” when evaluating a claim someone is making about immigration:

- **Highly reliable:** peer-reviewed studies, articles with independently verifiable facts (sources provided)
- **Possibly reliable:** news articles that cite highly reliable sources (beware of how the author interprets the sources), some think tanks, expert opinion (beware of who the so-called expert works for)
- **Not reliable:** political organizations, social media posts that don't cite any sources, think tanks with openly pro- or anti-immigrant agendas, articles that offer only opinions but not verifiable facts



Avoid just telling someone that their source is biased or not credible. This will only anger them. Instead, ask probing questions about the motivation and evidence provided by their source.

For example, if someone claims that we need to deport all illegal immigrants because they threaten our safety, ask where they got the information from and what the motivation of that person might be. One powerful question is “how well would that source hold up in court?”

Distinguish Between Immigration and the Immigration System

Many times people don't have the right vocabulary to express what frustrates them. They're frustrated about something in our immigration laws or system, but they attribute it to individuals or to groups of immigrants.

For example, someone might claim that “it's unfair that millions of bad actors are living here because they cut the line!” Before responding, pause and ask if they think there's something wrong with the system or with the people who cross without permission.



Once you establish whether the issue is about the system or about individuals/groups, you can better decide in what direction the conversation should go.

For example, if the person in the scenario above reveals that they're worried that the people who come illegally are not of the same caliber as those who do it legally, this is an opportunity to discuss the facts on who undocumented people are and how they contribute to our economy and society (Chapter 10). But if it turns out the person reveals they think our immigration system is a mess, it's smarter to talk about the structure of the system and how it “pushes” many people into unauthorized status (Chapter 11).

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Maintain Respect and Openness

Apply the following "ladder of evidence" when evaluating a claim someone is making about immigration:

For example, it doesn't serve anyone if you label your conversation partner at the outset (e.g. "Liberals like you..." or "You're obviously a conservative, so you believe...").



Agree to Disagree: Recognize when it may be necessary to agree to disagree, especially if the conversation reaches a stalemate, while maintaining mutual respect.

For example, if someone refuses to accept the facts you've learned from this book, don't take it upon yourself to force them to accept what you've read. Encourage them to go to the sources for themselves and express gratitude for the chance to dialogue about a hard topic.

Encourage Ongoing Learning and Dialogue

Recommend Resources: Suggest books, documentaries, and websites that provide balanced perspectives on immigration.

I can recommend a good book on immigration... 😊



Invite Further Discussion: Let others know you're open to continuing the conversation, suggesting that both sides might benefit from further reflection and learning.

For example, invite your conversation partner to read a specific article or chapter that you found enlightening and ask them if you can follow up later to get their thoughts.