

“A good conversation is an act of joint exploration. Somebody floats a half-formed idea. Somebody else seizes on the nub of the idea, plays with it, offers her own perspective based on her own memories, and floats it back to the other person so the other person can respond. A good conversation sparked you to have thoughts you never had before. A good conversation starts in one place and ends up in another. “ —David Brooks, How To Know A Person

He continues:

Big questions interrupt the daily routines that people fall into and prompt them to step back and see their life from a distance. Here are some of my favorite questions that do that:

What crossroads are you at? (At any moment, most of us are in the middle of some transition. The question helps people focus on their.)

What would you do if you weren't afraid? (Most people...haven't defined how fear is holding them back?)

If you died tonight, what would you regret not doing?

If we meet a year from now, what will we be celebrating?

If the next five years is a chapter in your life, what is the chapter about?

Can you be yourself where you are and still fit in?

We too often think deep conversation have to be painful or vulnerable...I try to compensate for that by asking questions about the positive sides of life:

Tell me about a time you adapted to change.

What is working really well in your life?

What are you most self-confident about?

Which of you five senses is the strongest?

Have you ever been solitary without feeling lonely?

What has become clearer to you as you have aged?

I have found that if you respectfully ask people about themselves, they will answer with a candor that takes your breath away.

And from Studs Terkel:

“Listen, listen, listen, listen, and if you do, people will talk. Why? Because no one has every listened to them before in all their lives. Perhaps they've not ever even listened to themselves.”