

Having Difficult Conversations

Tom Godwin, HOPE not hate

Notes by Owen Churchill

1 The workshop started with a conversation about how discussions about migration and refugees are often filled with implicit or explicit prejudice. How do we change the nature of these conversations? Who should we have conversations with?

2 Every movement has a spectrum of involved parties:
The Movement (e.g. advocacy for refugee rights and support)

Active supporters/allies

Passive supporters

Neutrals

Passive opponents

Active opponents

The Opposition

2.1 Who should we talk to? Some suggestions from participants:

Neutrals and passive opponents: because they occupy a large slice of the populace

Active opponents/the opposition: because their views must be challenged

Everyone!

2.3 We have a problem of getting stuck in a bubble and talking to ourselves. The majority of people can be moved on certain issues: the head of research at HNH used to be a member of the far-right when he was young.

3 What works when trying to shift someone's views?

3.1 Feedback from participants:

- Engaging and planting a seed can be just as important as persuading someone of your views — maybe they need time to digest
- Avoid conflict
- Emotions not facts — facts can be powerful but you need to be sure of them
- Making things as relatable as possible to the listener, sometimes the enormity of a problem can cause alienation/despondency
- Talk about the present, not just the past. Examples from the past often dwell on “acceptable refugees” — those who we welcome because of their positive impact on society

3.2 Tom:

- “I don't talk to the English Defence League. I talk to the people the EDL is trying to talk to.”
- The power of stories and hearing first-person accounts: a memorable medium that can communicate values and emotions
- Be wary of telling someone they are wrong — a person will not respond well to being told that they don't know as much as you

3.3 **Empathetic listening:** Giving space to the speaker to talk, building the conversation around their experiences/beliefs, using open or clarifying questions.

Agitating questions: Asking what is behind their beliefs, turning the issue around and asking if they have ever been affected/judged in a similar way.

Your story: Who are you and why are you engaging in this issue? Tell your story as if you're telling it to a friend.