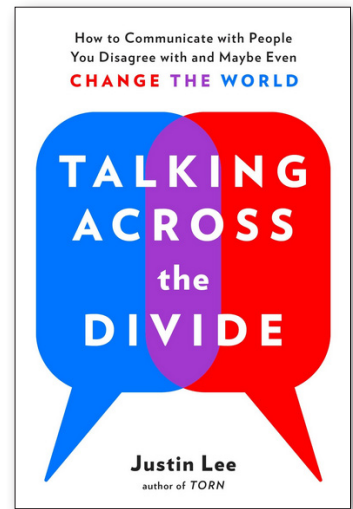


# Let's Stop Shouting at Each Other & Start Talking

How can you get through to people who think differently from you? Here are tried-and-true strategies.

By Terrence Fernsler



*Talking across the Divide: How to Communicate with People You Disagree with and Maybe Even Change the World.*

By Justin Lee.

Softcover. 259 pages.

Penguin Random House, [penguinrandomhouse.com](http://penguinrandomhouse.com).

It's become far too common to terminate communication with those who disagree with us. The result is a destructive polarization in which *anything* one "side" claims is disavowed by those identifying with the other "side." How will we ever change social problems when we refuse to even agree what the problems are?

Justin Lee, who has much experience with getting polarized people to talk with each other, offers the benefit of his experience. His solution: strategic dialogue.

He concedes that "strategic dialogue" isn't an exciting phrase. But it's a powerful tool to change minds. He emphasizes the "strategic" part of the equation. It's not enough to have a dialogue. You must have a strategy for engaging, understanding, and having an impact on the other person.

Lee explains, step by step, how to overcome barriers between people. Tactics include:

**Listen before asking them to listen to you.** "Strategic listening" is a key technique. Gather as much information

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as you can about them as they talk. Seek the answers to questions such as these: What do they want? What do they believe? What do they think *you* want? What are their sources of information? What terminology do they use (certain phrases will clue you in to their influencers). What worries them?

**Humanize the other person.** Fight your instinct to see the other side as a villain. Look instead for commonalities.

**Tell personal stories** that show why an issue is important to you. People can always dismiss an expert, but they can't argue with your story.

**Tell their story back to them.** Repeat what you've heard them say and ask if you've got it right. Tell it as if they were the hero of the story. Doing so will break down a lot of walls.

The process has worked for Lee many times: He even created a nonprofit that practices and teaches strategic dialogue.

He candidly admits that strategic dialogue doesn't always work, that we should be prepared for that possibility, and that we learn from those failures. Learning from when it didn't work for him, he offers ways to break through obstacles. Perhaps the only scenario he omits is when there is such disproportionate power between two parties that one party has no incentive to understand the other's position.

He suggests that strategic dialogue works best in one-on-one situations. And, after all, isn't one person at a time still the most effective way to change the world?

*Terrence Fernsler, MNPL, PhD, has been a nonprofit professional for over 35 years. He is currently an instructor and advisor in the James Madison University Nonprofit Studies minor program ([jmu.edu/academics/undergraduate/minors/nonprofit-studies](http://jmu.edu/academics/undergraduate/minors/nonprofit-studies)).*

