

## EXPERIMENT DEBRIEFING

### How to Disagree Productively and Find Common Ground? The Power of Expressing Gratitude

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Having a conversation about conflicting opinions is not easy. We've all heard about the benefits of embracing diverse opinions and perspectives: They make us better team leaders<sup>1</sup>, more creative problem solvers<sup>2</sup>, and more empathic partners<sup>3</sup>.

But disagreement can feel very uncomfortable—even stressful—despite our genuine desire to have open-minded and inclusive conversations. How can we identify the personal skills and practices that allow us to navigate the challenges of disagreement? In 2017, behavioral scientists from University of Chicago and improv experts from the Second City teamed up to explore the power of gratitude when talking about opposing views.

Inspired by the famous “Yes, And” approach—a pillar of improvisation—and fifty years of research on how expressing gratitude creates more cooperative and enjoyable relationships<sup>4,5</sup>, we designed a new exercise called “Thank You, Because”. In this exercise, people try to express appreciation for how their conversation partner’s point of view contributes to the conversation. They may thank their conversation partner for the value of their opinions, the risk their partner takes in sharing their personal point of view, or other aspects of the conversation they are grateful for. **In this exercise, people do not need to pretend to agree with each other or suppress any of their own concerns. Instead, they only need to look for aspects of each other’s comments that they genuinely value, and when recognizing something they appreciate, take a moment to let the other person know.**

Since August 2018, over a thousand people in Chicago and Los Angeles have experienced the “Thank You, Because” approach when discussing disagreement in one of our workshops. After identifying a topic of disagreement with their conversation partner, participants were instructed to take either the “Thank You, Because” approach or one of two contrasting approaches—called “No Because” and “I Hear That”. Immediately after the conversation, people filled out a comprehensive survey about their conversation experiences.

The finding is simple and striking: **Gratitude is powerful, even in moments of disagreement.**

(Continues on reverse.)



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#### ABOUT THE CENTER

The Center for Decision Research is devoted to the study of how individuals form judgments and make decisions. At the forefront of the rapidly developing field of behavioral science, the Center is part of the University of Chicago Booth School of Business and is home to researchers who examine the processes by which intuition, reasoning, and social interaction produce beliefs, judgments, and choices.

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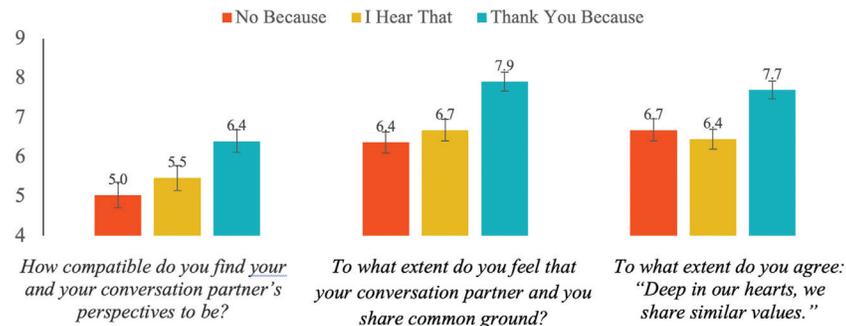
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#### “Thank You, Because” wins over “No, Because” on all fronts:

Compared to a “No, Because” approach, which people often default to when disagreeing with each other, a “Thank You, Because” approach wins on ALL measures in our comprehensive survey. In particular, people with the “Thank You, Because” approach *found their conversation tone to be more collaborative, felt closer to the conversation partner, felt more valued by their partner, valued their conversation partners more, and found the other to be more reasonable.*

#### “Thank You, Because” wins over “I Hear That” in certain domains:

In addition, the “Thank you, Because” approach showed unique advantages over the “I Hear That” approach (expressing listening without expressing gratitude) in several domains: People who used the “Thank You, Because” approach *identified more common ground, found each other to be more similar people and sharing similar values, and trusted each other more.*



### INTERESTED IN HEARING MORE?

Please sign up on our mailing list (<https://tinyurl.com/booth-secondcity>) to receive a full research report in August 2019. Contact Xuan Zhao ([xuan.zhao@chicagobooth.edu](mailto:xuan.zhao@chicagobooth.edu)) for additional questions or feedback.

### REFERENCES

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