Corey Andrew Powell:

Hello everyone. Welcome to another enlightening episode of Motivational Mondays, presented by the NSLS now with over 2 million members nationwide. And today we are thrilled to have Dr. Alison Wood Brooks with us. Dr. Brooks is the O'Brien Associate Professor of Business Administration and a Helman faculty fellow at Harvard Business School, where she's developed a groundbreaking course called Talk. Now, as a renowned behavioral scientist and expert in the science of conversation, Alison has dedicated her research to understanding the intricacies of human interaction. Her award-winning work has been featured in prestigious academic journals and widely reported in major media outlets as well, including, uh, New York Times NPR, and with a unique distinction of having her research referenced in two of the top 10 most viewed TED Talks of all time. That's a lot of T's, <laugh> <laugh>. Well, welcome Alison to Motivational Mondays.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Thank you so much, Corey. I'm so happy to be here.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Oh, Thank you. Me too. And it's funny, um, I'm happy you're here too. And when I read intros that are that robust and wonderful, I'm like, I have been slacking clearly in my own pursuits because you've been doing a lot of great stuff, so I appreciate you taking the time.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

You're busy out here talking to people. You're doing the real work. Thank you so much.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Sure, sure. Well, thank you. And I'd like to begin, I guess now I will, full transparency, before we begin recording, you and I had a little brief talk just now, um, about how important it is, especially in a seemingly growing, growing a more growing divisive world, um, to figure a way to communicate with each other and coexist much more harmoniously. So before we really delve into that, I would love to talk about your own journey into the field of behavioral science and what inspired you, uh, to focus on this area of conversation.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Amazing. Um, I can't wait to get there and, and talk about divisiveness. Um, I, there's two answers to this question. The first is a more, sort, more professional in that my development as a behavioral scientist. I started in graduate school when I was getting my PhD. I studied feelings. I studied emotions, uh, particularly anxiety and social anxiety, and how we can all cope with very normal feelings of anxiety. Um, and my work focusing on how to reframe performance anxiety as excitement by focusing on opportunities and how things can go well rather than ruminating about how they might not go well, sort of went viral. Uh, that's what was fo uh, mentioned in those two TED talks that you mentioned in your very lovely intro. Um, there was also a scene in the new, uh, Pixar movie Inside Out too, that was based on my dissertation work, uh, where.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Wow.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

The, the main character Riley is, is having lots of anxiety. And she, there's a scene where there's all of these, um, minions and sort of cubicles doing projections about how things might go badly for her and the character Joy sneaks in and is like, no, we need to do projections about how things might go well.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Hmm.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Um, and so doing this mental reframe from anxiety to excitement is so, so powerful.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Mm-hmm <affirmative>.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Um, and from there I realized, oh, I'm not just studying feelings. I am, I am deeply interested in how people talk about their feelings. It's how we share our inner worlds and how we feel with the people around us, and how do we pull out other people's inner worlds and other people's minds from them in this way that we can be very interconnected. So it led me to this place of focusing for the last 10 years on studying everything about conversation, how we talk about our feelings, but also how we talk about everything else.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Mm-hmm <affirmative>.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Um, on a personal note, the personal answer to this question is that I am an identical twin Corey.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Wow. Okay.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

And I've spent my whole life next to my whole childhood at least, um, next to an identical copy of myself. And I got to see like a weird doppelganger version of myself interacting with the social world and giving each other sort of relentless sibling feedback about it. And it made me realize, um, not everybody gets that kind of feedback or gets that kind of forever conversation partner. And how are we all, how are we all learning to do this very important task of conversation? Um, and how can I help other people find the very tight knit, lovely shared reality that I have with my twin sister? How can I help other people achieve that in their, in their conversations?

Corey Andrew Powell:

Hmm. That is fascinating because we all are always, well, like, um, the world is always like enamored with the idea of having twins or triplets or, you know, the, the multiples of a person, because we've all, those of us who don't have that, we've all like watched a parent trap and like dreamed of it <laugh>. I totally, and I'm talking like the old one, like with Haley Mills, like I go back to that.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Oh, I love that one. It was one of my favorites. Of course. I love the Hailey Mills one. Yes.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Yeah. I got, I got to meet her and tell her that years later. So that's a whole story. Yeah. She was like, how old are you? I was like, don't worry about it. Um, but yeah. So I think <laugh>, I think that you, I love that you put a unique perspective on having a twin, though, where you really looked and observed of how the world interacts physically with the same face that you had.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Yeah.

Corey Andrew Powell:

And you were in this unique position to like, to watch that. I mean, I thought, I've never really heard anyone who was a twin take that approach to how they observed human interaction almost with themselves, but removed. I'm fascinated by that.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Yeah. Oh, yeah. It's almost like I've been a behavioral scientist my whole life watching. It's almost like you get to watch yourself exist in the world from an omniscient perspective. Right. From a, from an observational perspective. And it's so, you know, I would watch her have moments where she made amazing jokes and got the whole cafeteria going in a laughing fit. I also watched her stumble and, and say things she didn't mean and, and learn all through childhood. And so you learn, it's like you get double the feedback. I can do the things, the good things that I see her doing. I learned to avoid the things I didn't like seeing in her.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Mm-hmm <affirmative>.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Um, and meanwhile, we're both real people, right? Like, I actually get to have this tight, close, profound relationship with her and talk about all the things, uh, that kids go through.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Mm-hmm <affirmative>.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Um, she still, we, we've now moved. She also lives here in Boston, and she lives about a mile away. We both have three kids. And so our, our shared reality continues into adulthood, and it's really, yeah. We're a, a gift. We're very, very lucky.

Corey Andrew Powell:

That is wonderful. Well, listen, I don't know her, but I love her too already, because I love you <laugh>. No, I'm just gonna put that out there. And I love Boston. Let's just get it. Keep, keep all the love going. Boston's like one of the greatest cities in the world. It's amazing.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

I'm gonna tell her that you said that the next time I see her, Corey, and she'll tune in.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Please do. Please do. Yes. Yes. And you know, I love when we have this, the leadership conversation, because something you said there too is so relevant about, very often in life, we talk about experiences and people who have had, um, adversity in their lives or things that they wish they could go back and do over again, or just what they would consider a failure. And we are now in the process of understanding, we have to reframe the thinking to looking at that as a positive, the things you learn along the way. Yeah. So you have, you've applied that here with that example you gave where, you know, you saw the, you saw your sister, uh, prosper in some aspects and then falter.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Yeah.

Corey Andrew Powell:

But all that leads to the education of moving forward and just knowing how to be better in all aspects of our lives. I think. So whether you have a twin or not, that's like a universal lesson to just observe.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Yeah.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Take it in and process what you're seeing. Right?

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Absolutely. And nowadays, as an obser observer, as a scientist of conversation, I get to sort of eavesdrop and observe thousands of people having conversations with each other. And what I've learned from this experience is that's part of being a human, right. When you look at the transcripts of real conversations between real people, they are a train wreck, <laugh>. I mean, we don't just experience failures every once in a while. We experience many failure failures, large and small at almost every turn of every conversation.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Mm-hmm <affirmative>.

Corey Andrew Powell:

We interrupt each other, we misunderstand each other, we say things that we regret. We forget to say things that we wish we had said. And so coming to a place of acceptance about how surprisingly tricky it is to actually be a person in this so social world, I think can be a great comfort to all of us. And hopefully empowering and realizing, oh, if I can just like do a, a few more of the good things and avoid a few more of the, of the bad things, my life's gonna be so much better. And everyone around me is gonna be so much better.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Yeah. And that's also tied to the example you gave that you said was featured in the film, in which most of us in life go through like trepidation of like, oh my gosh, everything's, yeah. Here's what, here's what can go wrong if I do this.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Yeah.

Corey Andrew Powell:

And I love the reframe thinking again of like, okay, but we can also say what will go right if I do this.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Absolutely.

Corey Andrew Powell:

And that's where I think we need to focus more on.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Absolutely. That's a great callback, Corey. We call those callbacks where you reference back to something that was talked about earlier in a conversation. Beautiful callback to the idea of reframing anxiety is excitement. Fabulous.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Thank you. Well, that's the thing, I think, um, I learned because in researching your work as well, I learned, and I've had other guests on, so I've learned this in general, but the art of conversation really is listening with intent. Going in with intent.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Yeah.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Grabbing those nuggets or just listening so that you can recall them because you are genuinely going in with an, with an interest. And so I think those are some things I got from your, uh, your work when I read more about you. So talk a little bit about sort of the, the art of conversation itself and how we approach it and what can make a difference.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

I love the word intent or intentionality. Let me, before I answer that question, can I ask you a follow up? When you think about your intentions in having these conversations, what are, what are some of your goals when you have conversations with people like me?

Corey Andrew Powell:

Hmm. Um, I love that question. Thank you. 'cause I've never been asked it, but I have a, I have a passionate response, which is I fully am invested now in providing information to help people be better.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Yeah.

Corey Andrew Powell:

And I find myself even like, I was upstate New York like maybe two years ago with my partner, and we were in some little obscure, like little local pub and like, no, you know, just trying to hang with the local, see what's up. And there's this girl at the end of the bar and she's like burying her head and her cocktail, and she's like, upset. And I, I, I'm like, Hey, are you okay? And my partner goes, oh, here we go, <laugh>. And they start calling me Cobra Wimple <laugh>, um, because I immediately start recalling episodes.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Yeah.

Corey Andrew Powell:

What famous guests, what ordinary people have said, yeah. What people have shared, like what you are sharing. And I share that with people every day from the content I get from the show. So, long answer short, it, it's to make people's lives better with the information I provide.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

That's incredible. What an amazing answer. And the fact that you have clarity about that shows that you really are going into these, uh, conversations on the podcast, but also in the world with intentionality. And so this is a big message in my book, Talk, um, that we can all enter conversations with a little bit more intentionality. What are we trying to achieve when we interact with other people? Our goals are surprisingly complex. They often, sometimes they align with our conversation partners and sometimes they conflict. Um, and just having a little bit more of an understanding, what do I want out of this? And what does my partner need? What do they want out of this? Can make every interaction go so much more smoothly. In the book, we talk about a framework to help us understand our goals and our intentions, uh, a little bit more clearly. It's called the conversational compass. And so though there's an X and a Y axis, the Y axis is about information, just like what you just said. At the high end of the spectrum. These are goals that aim for accurate information exchange. You wanna provide clear and accurate information in order to help people. That's amazing. At the low end of the informational spectrum, there are, we also have goals that are not about accurate information exchange. They might be about just filling time or having fun. Sometimes people, it's really important to them to keep a secret, keep someone secret, right? So they don't actually want to share that information with other people. On the X axis of the compasses are relational goals at the high relational end of things. This is where you're looking to help a people or to help the, um, develop the relationship at the low end of the relational access. These are goals that serve yourself. We're all human beings. We all have needs, real needs. This doesn't make you a bad person, but being aware of when you are on the selfish end of things versus thinking about the other person's needs is very, very helpful.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

And so when you described your goals, yours are high informational and high relational. You wanna share accurate information in order to help other people, um, go out in the world and live their best lives. Um, and it's important to remember that we live in all four quadrants of this conversational compass. Um, so just thinking with a little bit more intentionality about what we want out of each interaction can be very helpful.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Wow. Yeah. That's important. I, I agree. Because, um, I think very often we do end up in sort of like just social settings where maybe we not, we have not even really put ourselves there. They just sort of evolve organically. And there you are.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Yeah. <laugh>.

Corey Andrew Powell:

And so, so in that regard, you do also in your work talk about the difference between, uh, between small talk and deep talk.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Yes.

Corey Andrew Powell:

And I guess, how do you distinguish between the two of them? Or, or how do you even embark upon like em, uh, applying them to the situation you're in? If it's organic?

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Listen, there are so, oh, so many people dread small talk. Everybody, most people think it's this horrible thing. You're failing at conversation. We're failing to get deep. And it's awful. I wanna give some comfort to everyone who feels that way. Uh, small talk is unavoidable. It's a very important ritual. It's the way that most conversations start, especially between strangers or people who don't know each other well. And between, um, people who haven't seen each other in a while, you just have to start somewhere. Right? How are you, how have you been? The mistake that most of us make isn't about small talk in general, but about lingering on it for too long. You have to escape small talk. And so in my course at Harvard, we talk about a topic pyramid. At the bottom of the pyramid are topics that you could talk about with anybody that's small talk. So things like the weather and how was your weekend? How are you sleeping? Um, that's small talk. And the second tier of the pyramid, this is where things get more personalized. This is medium talk or tailored talk. And so while you're in small talk, you're looking for these launching pads to move up the pyramid to make it more personalized. And there are so many ways to make a conversation more personalized. It can actually be asking questions of your partner.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

So that they reveal more about themselves to you. Or it can mean thinking ahead. Like, what is gonna be interesting to this person? What could I raise with them that they would find personally interesting? Or thinking about their expertise? What question could I ask this person that they can share their knowledge with me in a way that will be mutually rewarding?

Corey Andrew Powell:

Mm-hmm <affirmative>.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Um, so moving up that pyramid at the peak of the pyramid, the third tier is deep talk. These are those sort of magical moments in conversation where you know that you've landed on something really good and really important that maybe only the two of you could talk about. We shouldn't be expecting that all the time. But in the right circumstances, with the right people on the right topics, sometimes conversational magic can happen.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Yeah. And I think if you're open to it as well, right?

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Yes.

Corey Andrew Powell:

That's another part of it. Like you have to sort of be, be open to it. And I've experienced what you're talking about, whereas I have, um, I try to adhere to a rule now because we often say, oh, how are you? And we say it so freely.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Oh yeah, yeah. Habitually <laugh>,

Corey Andrew Powell:

Right? Yes. And, and nine times out of 10, we really aren't prepared for if the person were to give a real serious response 'cause we're all going through some stuff all the time.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Everybody's going through stuff. Yes.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Right. And so, um, I have a new model, uh, new model now, and I am literally adhering to it. And I love it because, uh, I only ask that if I'm really, I really wanna know,

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Oh, so good.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Right?

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Yeah.

Corey Andrew Powell:

And so when they say, oh, everything's fine. I'm like, I even will grab the hand. No honey, I, you really,

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

How are you really?

Corey Andrew Powell:

How are you really doing then?

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Yeah.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Well, you know, my mom's not well and my great. That's the talk I wanna have. Yes. 'cause I, I'm in a place now where I'm really, I don't want people to feel alone and isolated because I'm going through things maybe together we can work it out. So that's my approach with people.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

I love it. It's a, it's a great, um, a trick for, for anyone to use in, if you feel like you often get stuck in small talk, that's a really good way to get out of it. You start by saying, how are you? They say, good. And you, if you just pause and ask a follow up question, but how are you really.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Mm-hmm <affirmative>.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

How are you really?

Corey Andrew Powell:

Yeah.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

That is immediately gonna help you climb the topic pyramid and get out of that small talk so quickly. And it's sincere, right? Like, we all know that people are going through stuff. And when you really wanna know how they're doing, that's the right question to ask. It's

Corey Andrew Powell:

Awesome. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I love, it's, it's been working well. And another thing, you know, I will tell you on the flip side of that, I would love to hear your opinion on this too. One thing I was always guilty of doing when it comes to my interactions with humans and people <laugh>, um, in general, I would be angry at, um, choices people make about situations in their life. Um, I wouldn't do that. Um, it's not what I would do. Or I'd be angry that they didn't respond to me in a way I would've liked, uh, when I've done something. So, and I would be really impacted by that. And then finally one day I said, you know, I am not responsible for how people respond to things. And so I can't be angry. I, I, now I can internally go, that's not what I would've done. Yeah. But I can't really be angry at people for the choices that they've made to respond to things. And once I let that go, I sort of let go a lot of like, um, confrontational <laugh> situations.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Yeah.

Corey Andrew Powell:

I say, you know what, okay. I, I wouldn't have done it, but good for you. Right.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

You know, it's not your responsibility and you don't have control over what they choose to say and do. This is a really profound point. Corey conversation is co-constructed. Everything about the social world is co-constructed, which means you only have control over 50% of what's gonna be said and done in any interaction. You might have influence over them in other, in other ways, but you cannot control what they're gonna say and do. And so, ha, coming from a place of negative judgment or anger or frustration is really only making your inner world worse. Right. So letting go of control of how other people comport themselves in interactions, what they choose to say and do, your attitude is exactly right. It's saying, I only have control over what I, how I feel, what I say and do, and how other people respond to me. Like that's their, that's their business. It might not be what I would choose to do in the same situation, but guess what? Everybody's remarkably different.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Mm-hmm <affirmative>.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

People are, people are not you. Um, and so letting go of the frustration and anger in those situations can be a really, uh, a very effective mindset shift.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Yeah. No, I love that. Because, you know, very often it's sort of, um, you know, one of those things that kind of fouls us up and we really don't know, you know, how to, how to move forward with it. But I'm just like, well, you know, I'm gonna be less angry at other people's choices and just control what I can do. The things that I'm in control of

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

In my class, we talk about, um, shifting from a mindset of judgment or even persuasion. Like, oh, I see that you're responding differently than I would let me persuade you to do things the way I would do them. Letting go of judgment and persuasion. And instead focusing on learning in those moments when someone is reacting in a way that your alarm bells are going off saying, I would not do that. Or like, I don't agree with how you're responding right now. What can you learn from that person's perspective? Where did, where is that cut that, where is that coming from in them, from their history, from their life, from their habits, from their opinions and beliefs? Like where, why are they saying and doing that? And you have the power to ask 'em, right?

Corey Andrew Powell:

Yes.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Right then and there you have the power to say, tell me more about that. Like, where is that coming from?

Corey Andrew Powell:

Mm-hmm <affirmative>.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

And it's, that's the real beauty of conversation is like you have that you can, you can ask them right then and there.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Yes. And it's funny 'cause we did tap into the, we tapped into that a few seconds ago, but I was gonna reiterate that and say that, you know, part of your work I love as well is that point of question, asking, being a, uh, a crucial component, if you will, of effective communication. And so in those moments, you're right. It's a great thing to go. Oh. And as we, we can kind of go into the divisive part now. 'cause we were talking about, right. How we're trying to now kind of navigate a world of divisive attitudes and just a, a growingly more divisive, uh, world. So politically speaking mm-hmm <affirmative>. I am doing a little better 'cause I deleted Twitter, but that's a whole other point. Um, <laugh>.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Me too. <laugh>.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Yeah. I, I couldn't do it anyway. I said, this is gonna be a different year for me. I want all my time back and put that energy towards other things, so I really.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Good for you.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Yeah. That was, it was part of self preservation. Why, why I did it. Um, but still having said that, in the real world, I have to still navigate. Like, I can't delete like, you know, earth, I <laugh> have to still navigate through life. That's right.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

That's right.

Corey Andrew Powell:

And, and talk to people. So I'm trying to be at a point now where even if we're on polar opposite spectrums of political divides, I'm trying to get to a point now where I say, well, why do you feel that way? Yeah. What is it that makes you feel that way? And so I'm, you know, I'm fine that that's at least alleviating what would've been probably an, an argument. At least there's a conversation. We still probably go back to our sides <laugh>. Yeah.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

You don't need to agree. Right, right. But what you really don't want to happen is for it to end in hostility and blow up and anger and hatred, really. Um, so the goal and what I teach in my class and in this book is what are the skills we need to continue to engage with each other so that we even have the opportunity to learn from each other. Whether we go on to ag ultimately agree, disagree, um, uh, reconcile our differences or not. Nobody wants to end in anger and a blow up and hatred.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Like, that is not productive. It's also goes against our spirit of like, love and kindness that I think most people are looking for in the world.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Yeah. Yeah.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Um, the greatest barrier to conflict resolution overall is our failure as humans, uh, to understand the perspectives of other people. It's perspective taking.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

And the, and the more, no matter how hard you try to take, put yourself in other people's shoes and like, guess why they feel a certain way or why they have come to believe a certain thing. We're really bad at guessing, we're really bad at, at sort of intuiting the perspectives of other people. But what we are better at, just like you're saying, is asking them directly, instead of me guessing why you feel a certain way about a certain topic, I can ask you. And when you were asking this question, Corey, I, you, you gave two examples. You said, why do you feel that way? And what about your life led you to feel this way? So I just wanna give a very concrete piece of advice, framing questions, open-ended questions with the word what is much more inviting than starting questions with the word why they're both open-ended questions technically, because the other, your partner's gonna answer and give you information, but why questions can feel very accusatory.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Hmm.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Like, why don't you do this? Or why do you do this? It's sort of like, I'm trying to get to, uh, your motives and, and it can feel a little bit, um, accusatory or attacking interative.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Right, right.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Whereas what questions, like what, what in your life led you to be, to feel a certain way about this topic? Or when you, or when you think about, um, this topic, what do you think about, or what do you, what do you feel energized by? What do you feel confused about? What do you feel strongly about? What excites you about this? What questions are the perfect way to actually come to learn the most information you can about another person? And also not make them feel threatened by your, by your line of questioning? A lot of people don't, just as a basic thing, they're not asking enough questions.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Mm-hmm <affirmative>.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

So even why questions would be better than nothing.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Yeah.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

But once you get to, if you're really honing your question, asking skills, uh, what questions are very, very powerful.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Very often what happens when people are shocked. When I have interviews, for example, when I do have a moment where I say something back to them, and I've heard guests on the show say, you know, I haven't heard too many podcasts, guests do that because in our line of work, for example, it's so fast moving that people kind of get like top 10 questions and they don't really read the book and they don't really read the.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Yeah.

Corey Andrew Powell:

And which is fine, I'm not knocking them. But for me, I choose to do it a different way. Like, I really need to kind of wrap my head around what we're going to discuss beforehand. I get into it. And so when I hear questions or hear things state stated, I really am genuinely, like, I wanna know more. So I ask the follow ups.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Yep.

Corey Andrew Powell:

And go comp. I might not even get to the other 10 questions. Like, right now I'm gonna have to have you come back <laugh> I

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

<laugh>

Corey Andrew Powell:

Because there's like a whole scroll. Because, you know, once you get into one topic, it's wonderful to keep peeling back those layers.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Yes, yes. In terms, if there's, if there's more there, there, it's so fun to discover it together.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Mm-hmm <affirmative>.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

And you just said something, that's another great strategy that can help with listening, Corey, which is, um, a little bit counterintuitive. It's all the work you put in before the conversation even starts.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

So you've read my book, you've thought about it, you prepared questions, um, and, and you, it's not just a job for podcast hosts. We can all prep topics before we see people. It doesn't have to be rocket science, it doesn't take reading a whole book, but just 30 seconds of thinking ahead, Hey, I'm gonna see my friend Dora. I know that Dora's kid was signing up for the hockey team. I should ask her about how that's gone. Like, did he make the team? How's he doing? Um, or what did we talk about the last time we were together? I should follow up about that. So what we find in our research is that just 30 seconds of forethought, maybe jotting down one or two little bullet points of ideas will free up your mental space to be a much better listener during the conversation. So in those panicky moments when you don't know where to go next, you're like, oh, yeah, but I know I need to ask her at some point about her kid on the hockey team.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

And so when you're talking about something else, like she tells you she had this big presentation at work, you're able to actively engage in that until it feels like there aren't more layers to peel back. And then you're like, oh yeah, by the way, I've been dying to hear about your kid on that hockey team. How did it go? How did did he make the team? Hmm. And you're just ready with it. It alleviates that mental burden of, of having to manage everything actively during the conversation.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Excellent. Excellent. You know, we are just about at time. Um,

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Time flies. Time flies, Corey.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Time flies. It does. It does. Um, but I think this is a nice closing question actually, because it sort of wraps it up with this one other thing that we all struggle with as humans apologizing.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Mm.

Corey Andrew Powell:

The apology. So, you know, when all else has failed and you've maybe said something wrong or done something wrong and communication has failed, and you need to kind of repair that.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Yes.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Through an apology, um, it can be difficult. So, but yet as you say, it's essential for maintaining relationships. So what makes an effective apology in your opinion?

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Great question. People have deeply held beliefs and feelings about apologies. And a lot of people, it, it be, and understandably so, it's very hard to apologize. It requires sometimes an admission of blame worthiness and taking responsibility for some sort of failing or mistake or problem or harm that was done to someone that you care about. Um, and taking ownership of that. So it's two pieces. It's sort of like showing that you understand another person's perspective and their harm and that they were hurt and taking responsibility or ownership for it. So what we find in our research is a very, very, uh, clear piece of advice about how to apologize. Well, you say you're sorry, of course, um, but also come up with a, a, a concrete plan to change in the future. Um, a promise that you are not gonna, um, make this mistake again. Uh, the promise to change is so compelling. It pulls your focus from the hurt in the past and focus on the future. What, how's it gonna be better in the future? Um, so you make this promise to change. Here's how I'm gonna change, here are the concrete steps. And then ideally you go and do those steps, uh, over time. And what we find is that people in close relationships, those who apologize frequently to each other and effectively have much stronger relationships than, than people who don't.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Hmm. That's wonderful. I kind of think that's a little bit, which we'll have to, you know, take for another day. But I think forgiveness is one of those.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Oh, yes.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Right. It's sort of tied to that too. And, uh,

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Well, that's the receiving end of the apology. When you're apologizing, it's actually important. If you say, please forgive me, it's sort of making it about you, the apologizer, rather than about your partner. It's up to them to decide whether they forgive you. So don't ask for their forgiveness. But when you're on the receiving end of an apology, it's a sort of philosophical profound question of like, do you have the strength also to forgive this person?

Corey Andrew Powell:

Mm. Wow.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Um, and that's something we all have, we all confront.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Hmm. That's amazing. Thank you so much for all these great nuggets of wisdom today. And I wanna just clarify too, just one thing. So your book talk, is it based on the actual course, the, the program that you had

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

As well? It's okay. It is, yes. It follows the content and trajectory of my course at Harvard called Talk, uh, and the book is called Talk The Science of Conversation and the Art of Being Ourselves.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Mm. So good. Yeah. We're gonna make sure that there's a link to that to everyone when the podcast airs, which will be, uh, after the first of the year or so.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Great.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Um, but we'll make sure that everyone out there listening knows how to, uh, get the book and I guess even reach out, follow you directly if they have more questions about your amazing work. And thank you so much for being here today with us, Dr. Allison Wood Brooks. It's been an absolute pleasure. One of my favorite conversations thus far on the show.

Dr. Alison Wood Brooks:

Oh Corey, thank you so much, and thank you for sharing all of this beautiful information to help people in the world. You're, you're a real delight. It's been a treat.

Corey Andrew Powell:

Thank you.