



Performance Matters

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Newsletter

Transforming Conversations

How much time and money does your organization lose because people are not able to have the tough conversations?

The important conversations that can have the most impact are the ones that people avoid. They may know the conversation needs to happen but hope that somebody else will initiate it or feel it's not my job, or want to wait until the time is right. They make an attempt to have the conversation but sidestep the important issues. The question is; how much talking is happening in your organization? The talking that creates synergy builds relationships and inspires results. These conversations that never happen become the elephant in the room that everyone is trying to avoid. That elephant gets more powerful with every communication that doesn't happen or with every failed conversation. With every open and honest conversation the elephant gets smaller, putting the power not in the middle of the room but in the people. Personal power is built one conversation at a time.

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Robin has facilitated presentations with groups of 150 or more, and has been a guest speaker for several well-known organizations, including the New York State Conference of Mayors, The Governor's Office of Employee Relations, and the New York State Society of Medical Assistants Annual Convention.

She co-authored the book *Maximize Your Mind; Peak Your Potential* available on her web site.

Her article "Ethics in Sales" was published in the HRDQ Press.

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Understand your listening style and how it impacts your communication. Receive 20% off here: www.PerformanceLeadershipTools.com

What blocks the real conversations from occurring?

What people often are not aware of is that all conversations occur within themselves first. Another words, you may think you are seeing people as they are but in truth you are seeing people as you are. It means that powerful conversations cannot occur until we challenge the perceptions we hold about ourselves and other people. Perceptions are the lens or filters that we see the world through and every person has a different set of lens that they operate out of. Real powerful conversations cannot occur until a person has some degree of awareness of who they are, their strengths, weaknesses, values and beliefs because that is what shapes their perceptions. We often assume that people think the same way we do or see things the same way but that is never the case, every person is different and until we challenge our assumptions important conversations cannot fully occur.

When people are afraid to tell the truth because of a potential negative reaction or not wanting to hurt someone's feelings they are stopping the important conversation from occurring. When we don't tell the truth people often know it. They feel the incompleteness and they see the same elephant in the room but don't know how to confront it. Important conversations require preparation, they should not be done on the fly or without self-reflection, only then can we look the elephant square in the eye and know how to approach it. Here are some things to keep in mind as you prepare for your next important conversation:

- Why does the conversation need to happen?
- What would happen if we didn't have the conversation?
- What's the cost of not having the conversation?
- What do I want for the other person?
- What do I want for me?
- What are my feelings, opinions, and concerns about this particular issue?
- What are my feelings about this conversation?

Answering these questions gives us perspective and allows us to view the issue and the elephant from a different vantage point and have a conversation from the heart.

Continued in the next column ...

What Creates Powerful Conversations?

A powerful conversation involves a give and take not a one-way dialogue or lecture. The word conveys flow and equal exchange. Powerful conversations can only occur when people are exchanging equally. Real listening is what can create a powerful conversation, listening not just for the words that are being used but what's not being said, awareness of body language and expressions. When we are able to fully listen we are able to understand and see things through a different set of lenses. Listening to understand builds bridges and values the other person.

Powerful conversations can occur in all situations. A supervisor giving a subordinate feedback on their behavior is a wonderful opportunity for a powerful conversation. Providing an opportunity to share their perception with no blame or faultfinding. Powerful conversations involve speaking the truth from the heart; they are direct and caring. When we are indirect in our communication we are not having a powerful conversation we are finding ways to skirt the issues and giving the elephant in the room more power. The only way around an issue is to face it directly with compassion and understanding.

Elements of a Powerful Conversation

- Speak the truth with understanding.
- Challenge your perceptions and the perceptions of those around you.
- Demonstrate personal responsibility and create openness for mutual responsibility.
- Speak with feeling, be vulnerable, *and* maintain your personal power and center
- Know what you want from the conversation and from the relationship.
- Ask questions.
- Change butts to ands.

What's Important

RReal conversations are a process they are not an event, Issues are not left hanging they are completed. That completion will often mean several conversations with mutual commitment from each person. Real communication cannot fully occur with only one dialogue,

Powerful conversations require commitment, commitment to the relationship as well as oneself. Building the skills necessary for a powerful conversation don't happen over-night and must continually be nurtured. It can be easy to ignore the important issues or find reasons to procrastinate on having the important conversations but the big issues will never go away by themselves. When we decide to give power to the elephant in the room things don't get better, it is only when we claim our own power and have the conversations that change happens. Change sometimes isn't easy and human nature will pull us back to the easy and safe way. The safe way involves staying where we are and avoiding the real important issues. We must be guardians of that and take charge, reclaim our power from the elephant in the room and have those important conversations. Whether they be with a boss, subordinate, co-worker, spouse or child let us all step up to the plate and make a difference.

5 Powerful Questions

1. What's the most important conversation to have today?
2. What conversation are you avoiding right now?
3. What's a dialogue that you hope won't come up?
4. What relationships are most important to nurture right now?
5. What are you not speaking the truth about?

Realities of Communication

- You cannot not communicate
- Whenever contact is made, communication occurs
- Meanings are in people, not in words
- Meanings cannot be transferred from one mind to another...only words can be transferred
- All communications are received...but 70% to 90% are screened out or changed by the receiver.

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Favorite Quotes

"Most conversations are just alternating monologues – the question is, is there any real listening going on?"

Dr. Leo Buscagli

"The future belongs to people who see possibilities before they become obvious."

Ted Levitt

"Ninety-nine percent of failure comes from people who have the habit of making excuses."

George Washington Carver

"Excellence is the gradual result of always striving to do better."

Pat Riley

The 5 Keys to Transforming Conversations

Key #1 - Challenge the way you see Reality

People change, circumstances change and we don't tell one another – colleagues, customers, spouses, friends. Everyone and everything is changing all the time. Are we seeing things as they were or as they are now? What is the present reality? Is there evidence to support reality or is it based on an assumption?

Key #2 - Be yourself, Speak the truth openly with warmth and understanding

Not speaking the truth in conversation is expensive for the individual and for the organization. No one has to change, but everyone has to speak the truth as they see it. When the conversation is open and honest, change can occur before the conversation is over.

Key #3 – Be fully present in the conversations

We can transform relationships, our work and our lives through our daily conversations. For that transformation to occur we have to be fully present; not thinking about the report we have to get out or things that happened in the past. The only thing happening in that moment is the conversation, speak and listen as if this conversation is the most important thing at that time, because it is.

Key #4 – Take Responsibility

It is easy to blame another person or say something with out awareness of how it may impact the receiver. There is no trivial comment. Something you may not even remember saying may have had a devastating impact on someone who looks to you for guidance and approval. Deliver your message responsibly without the emotional baggage.

Key #5 – The Magic of Silence

Learn the magic of silence. Talking can simply be a lot of words with no real meaning. Know when to be silent and listen. With silence we can listen to not only the words but also what's behind the words. With silence we can gain wisdom. Don't be compelled just to talk for the sake of talking and let the magic of silence be the space between the words to transform the conversation.

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