

Tools, Tips, Tidbits and a Forum for continuing conversation...

If the essence of the work done by leaders and managers is conversational work, then a core competency for leaders and managers is what we might call 'conversational capability'...

Conversational Tool Feature...

Highlighting a tool from our Clinic for improving your conversations...

"We all climb a mental ladder, merrily making assumptions as we go. And we can go from the bottom to the top of this ladder faster than you can say 'Lord of the Rungs'..."

A Word from the Editor...

Welcome to this inaugural issue of **CC E-News**. The idea is to have a continuing dialogue with the 200-plus participants who've come along to our Conversational Coaching Clinics so far. In each issue we'll reinforce and expand on conversational tools, with tips and tidbits to intrigue and entertain... Experimenting with conversations isn't limited to what you learn at the Coaching Clinics. We invite you to share your contributions, conversational experiences and challenges with others through this forum... *Bill Cropper, The Change Forum, July 2003*

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The Conversational Nature of Leadership

What do managers do most of the time? 'They plan, co-ordinate, decision-make, relationship-manage, performance-monitor,' you say. But *how* do they do this? That's right - 'through conversations!' Conversations are at the core of what most managers and leaders do. The essential actions leaders and managers take happen almost entirely through conversations. They're the major forum where leaders learn, solve problems, make decisions and take action. But most never stop to think how they might become better at them!

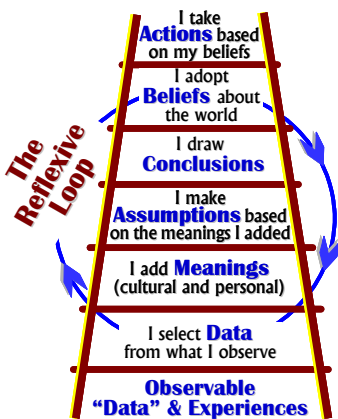
If conversations aren't effective, coordination breaks down, mistakes multiply, relationships suffer and productivity plummets. When you think of it this way, having good conversations takes on a whole new meaning! The ability to conduct more skillful and collaborative conversations becomes an indispensable leadership tool! Taking this further, you can reframe the whole definition of 'organisations' - they're not just networks of coordination and cooperation, they're *networks of conversations*. It's difficult then, to escape the conclusion that the quality of conversations leaders and managers have is one of the key elements for the effective functioning of any organisation. Take away conversations as the medium through which things get done and most things wouldn't get done at all!

There's a Ladder in my Inference...

Conversations can become cloudy when we don't make our assumptions clear to others. Many of us plonk conclusions or proposals into conversations without bothering to explain what leads us to them - and we're often offended or bewildered when others look 'blank-faced', don't understand or (worse?) decide to drop in their own counter-conclusions! 'What's wrong with them?' 'It's so obvious', we say to ourselves, suddenly feeling we're dealing with the dangerously deviant or decidedly dolish.

We're often warned: 'Assume nothing!' But assumption-making is natural. We all do it. The trouble is, once we infer something, we believe the same 'truth' is obvious to everyone. We confuse *inference* with *fact*. The *Ladder of Inference* slows down our thinking. It's a tool to test out how valid our assumptions are (or not), make them visible to others and find out how other people think - and what assumptions they're making!

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...There's a Ladder in my Inference...

Why not let some laughs into your next conversation at work?

A recent British study published in the journal of Occupational & Environmental Medicine finds bad bosses aren't just bad business - they're also bad for our health!

What's cooking got to do with conversation? When was the last time you took a good, hard look at your conversational diet? Do you need to rethink your conversational menu?

So next conversation you're in, here's a few formulas to follow from the *Ladder of Inference*:

- Don't just state assumptions and leave it at that. Explain what lead you to them. (Eg. "Here's what I propose... and this is how I arrived at it...")
- Take a little extra time to let people know what what's going on with your thinking. (Eg. "I assumed that..." or "Here's my thinking behind this...").
- Take people up the rungs of the ladder you climbed. They may not agree with your conclusions, but at least they'll have a better understanding of how you got there!
- Declare the facts. Don't deal in undeclared inferences. (Eg. "Here are the facts as I see them and here's what I make of them")
- Find out about other people's assumptions ("What leads you to conclude that?")

Laughable Conversations...

It's nothing we didn't already know, but now it's official: emotions are catchy. In his most recent book *The New Leaders, Emotional Intelligence* author Daniel Goleman cites Yale University findings that 'emotions may spread like viruses' amongst working groups. Luckily for us - cheerfulness is most catchy. Buoyant moods boost business performance, '...while irritability is less contagious and depression spreads hardly at all'. Laughter, it seems, is particularly contagious. 'Hearing laughter, we automatically smile or laugh too, creating a spontaneous chain reaction that sweeps through a group.' Groups who have healthy conversations and work well together often laugh together too, while groups who distrust or dislike each other tend to have fewer laughs. If, as Goleman suggests, people take their emotional cues from the top, then 'leaders who spread bad moods are simply bad for business' says Goleman. So why not let some laughs into your next conversation at work?



Having Healthy Conversations...

On the other side of the Atlantic, health care workers wearing blood pressure monitors scored their supervisor's leadership style with readings taken every 30 minutes for 3 working days. Readings rose when they worked with 'difficult' supervisors and fell with those they saw as reasonable. Since prolonged elevated blood pressure is linked to increased risks of heart disease and stroke, your manager's style may really be killing you!



Speaking of blood pressure – did you know that feeling of well-being and connectedness you get from having a good conversation is good for your health? There's now a scientific basis for this too. The pulse rates of pairs of people having conversations run at different rhythms as the conversation begins. But 15 minutes or so into a conversation both people feel is 'good', their profiles start to look remarkably similar. So next time you walk away from a conversation with someone feeling like you've been 'in tune with them' – the physiological fact is you probably have!

Conversational Cookery

Imagine a kitchen. We're cooking up conversations. What discussional dishes will you serve up? Are they peppered with polite put-downs? Are there lashes of listening? Does it need a dash of dialogue? We're generally more fussy about our food than we are about our conversational fare. What kind of discussions do you digest?

Many conventional conversational recipes have an excess of debate in them. (I put my point of view. Someone else puts theirs. We argue until one of us wins or capitulates). Still, raw debate's rather chewy. So, we serve it up with more palatable dishes such as *Polite Discussion* - 'polite' only insofar as hard-to-handle issues are concealed. It's blended with hidden agendas, 'corridor talk' a, thinly veiled competition... The nagging conversational indigestion you've put up with for years may be one-too-many servings of polite discussion.



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Knowing when and how to use different conversational recipes is just one of concepts we help people to practise in our *Conversational Coaching Clinics*.

Have your Say...

A feature for YOU in each Issue....

Please Reply to...

The Change Forum
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In *Management Today* Director of European Business Systems, David Synan says: "Managers spend 63 - 69 percent of their time in conversation. If we could develop a foundation discipline based on conversation it might become the much sought-after sixth discipline."

Most of us in the conversational kitchen prepare 'cook-alone' not 'cook-together' recipes. The cook-alone method says: 'You bring your ideas and opinions to the table and I'll bring mine.' We turn up the conversational heat by not letting others in on our thinking that led to these ideas. Misconceptions and assumptions simmer away and eventually, frustrations boil over. But if you want to cook collaborative conversations, you'll want more healthy give-and-take recipes with a garnish of open, authentic interaction and mutual understanding.



So, come to the other end of the kitchen where we're slowly sautéing *Dialogue*, using almost the opposite of every ingredient we put into debate. Dialogue's a 'cook together' method. People here bring all the ingredients of their thinking along – but instead of serving up individual dishes, they take everyone's raw ideas and cook them together to come up with new insights.

Dialogue tastes strange at first - not like other common conversational recipes. The flavour is a free-flowing interchange of ideas in a climate of equality, mutual tolerance and respect where people reflect together to build shared meaning. And if dialogue sounds too hard a recipe to whip up right now – try *Skillful Discussion*, where people try balancing putting their own position with genuinely trying to understand others. It still has many of the same ingredients! But just like cooking, the proof of the dish is in the eating.

So, next time you're in the conversational kitchen, why not try serving up something different for a change!

Conversation Corner: Acronymics

Can you make up an acronym of **C O N V E R S A T I O N** that gives us **your 12 best rules** to follow for better conversations? Email it back to us and we'll share it with others in our next E-News issue...

- C:** (Eg. Create opportunities for others to speak)
- O:**
- N:**
- V:**
- E:**
- R:**
- S:**
- A:**
- T:**
- I:**
- O:**
- N:**

Next Issue...

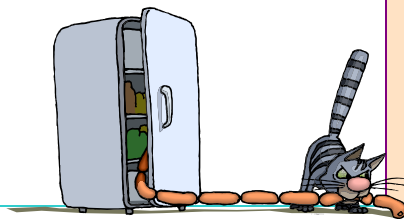
➔ Please contribute your thoughts...

In the next issue we'll talk about:

How to deal with difficult moments in conversations

If you have any 'difficult moments' you'd like to case study, email or fax your situation in 100 words or less...

Fax: 07-4068 7555
 Email: team.tech@bigpond.com



Conversations: the Missing 6th Discipline?

Those up-to-speed with the 5 *Learning Disciplines* popularised by Peter Senge (ie. *Shared Vision, Mental Models, Personal Mastery, Team Learning* and *Systems Thinking*) may be excited by the idea of a missing 6th Discipline.

Indeed, if the 5 Learning Disciplines form the core practice behind team learning and leadership, then *Collaborative Conversation* can be seen as the glue holding the others together!

For those who didn't know there was a discipline missing, it probably won't have as much of an immediate impact on your life as a leaky fridge seal or a cat that insists on munching mice in your bed at 2 am! On the other hand, for movie-watchers, the 6th Discipline sounds spookily familiar. Is it a new Bruce Willis release to complete a trilogy with *The 5th Element* and *The 6th Sense*? If so, maybe Demi Moore (she did *The 7th Sign*) can double up with Bruce. (As numerically disadvantaged as I am, if we were doing casting by numbers, looks like this would add up!)

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...Learning Centred Leadership...

Upcoming Clinics:

- Wide Bay Nov 13-14
- Cairns Nov 20-21
- Mackay Nov 27-28
- Townsville Dec 2-3
- Brisbane Dec 9-10
- Gold Coast Dec 11-12

“Conversations will never be the same again!” Leisa Grills Wide Bay Water

“I’d recommend Conversational Coaching to anyone. My confidence has increased as a result...”
Helen Goldsack Dept of Families

Extend your conversational competency with personalised or small group coaching in the workplace - powerful learning support that’s also very cost-effective!

More Information?

To register or find out more about how Conversational Coaching can help you contact...

If you’d like to find out more about the **5 Learning Disciplines**, Bill runs a 1-2 day *Learning-Centred Leadership Clinic*, looking at ways leaders can productively integrate the tools of the 5 Disciplines into their approaches.

➔ For an outline of Modules in the **Learning Centred Leadership series** - contact Bill Cropper on Tel: 07-4068 7591 Email: team.tech@bigpond.com.

Conversational Coaching Clinics catch on...



People from all sorts of backgrounds - teachers, local government, social and community workers, psychologists, health professionals, regional development and public sector managers – are using Conversational Coaching to hone their discussion skills. The clinics Bill and Chris have held so far in Mackay, Hervey Bay, Townsville, Cairns and Brisbane have met with enthusiastic responses.

‘Very enjoyable, very practical and very interactive’ said Diann Elliott, Nurse Practice Co-ordinator with Queensland Health. ‘The clinic challenged my thinking and behaviour and also explained new tools I can apply both at work and personally.’ Sarah Nicoll from Disability Services picked up on a similar theme: ‘If you tune into challenging yourself you will learn about improving your conversations and connections from this clinic. I made an attitude shift as a result...’

Part of the appeal of Conversational Coaching is that people in organisations seldom get a safe environment to practise in. In work conversations, they’re under pressure ‘playing the game’ – there’s no time to reflect, it’s too risky to try out a new tool or approach and they rarely give each other feedback about their conversational behaviour. So the tendency is to stick to what you know and keep doing it – even in cases where what you’re doing in conversations isn’t getting you what you want. Conversational Coaching offers managers, team leaders and other professionals a rich field for finding out more about their levels of personal mastery, self-awareness, mental agility and relationship-building capacities.

Conversational Coaching offers an exceptional opportunity to improve the quality of your conversational skills and widen the range of discussion tools you can apply in all sorts of settings: from one-on-one interactions, group meetings and problem-solving sessions through to larger public forums.



Conversational Coaching can come to you

As well as conducting our Conversational Coaching Clinic in-house for your workgroup or management team, we can also provide personalised by-the-hour coaching programs for individuals or teams in your organisation. A great way to fast-track your conversational capabilities. A typical coaching program consists of:

- 5 x 3-hour structured coaching sessions (usually every 3 weeks or so)
- A blend if you want between individual and small-group coaching
- Online email and phone support over the coaching period (free of charge)
- Development of a personalised conversational coaching improvement plan
- Personalised attention, feedback and competency development practices

➔ Contact Bill Cropper to talk over personalised coaching options for you or others in your organisation...

The Change Forum

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