

November 2004: "Conscious Conversations"

Over the past year, selected colleagues and I (who form a Community of Practice called "Conscious Coaching"), met to discuss how we can help clients who ask for assistance with their staff coaching and mentoring skills. One area we focussed on is the importance of communicating with awareness. We bundled our experiences and knowledge to create workshop and support materials, which we affectionately title: "Conscious Conversations". Below are some tips for how you might conduct "conscious conversations".

This article has been co-authored by Helen Meader (note 1) and me.

Quotes

"Our work, our relationships, and in fact, our very lives succeed or fail gradually, then suddenly, one conversation at a time."

-- Susan Scott (Note 2)

"There is genuine conversation -- leaders listen to what people say. People at all levels are encouraged and supported to speak openly and honestly about what they think. As a result, leaders pick up signals that give clues of coming opportunities and hints about emerging threats. With the openness and mental agility of truly anticipatory leadership throughout the organization, the organisation is well positioned to survive and prosper."

-- Anne Deering, Robert Dilts, and Julian Russell (Note 3)

"This conversation opens up an ongoing dialogue that lets the leader articulate the task in ways that make sense to that person, in terms of where they want to go, or to find a stretch task for that person, to do them the favour of giving them a challenge that leads them in the direction where they want to be moving anyway. That creates immense loyalty and immense commitment to the leader and the team. Unfortunately, many managers are inept at using the coaching style. Too often, they think they're coaching when they are actually micromanaging. Good coaches ask themselves, is this about my issue or theirs?"

-- Daniel Goleman (Note 4)

10 Steps for 'Being' in Conversation

Rather than focus on the technicalities of how to communicate and converse, we want to touch on some of the more interesting ways in which conversations can be enhanced by how you focus on your 'being'.

(1) Be present

Don't be absent, distracted. Participate fully and focus on the person you are communicating with, and 'tune' into the conversation. Speak and listen as if this is the most important conversation you will ever have with this person.

(2) Be in your body

This helps you to tune in. Conversations are not just intellectual 'head' experiences, they are about connecting with the nuances of the situation, and these are often picked up at a body level e.g. sensing, feeling, knowing can be felt in the body. You will be aware of how your body communicates to you.

(3) Be centred

This is about finding your steadiness, balance, strength, and being able to be grounded. It helps you to focus on the conversation and the other person. Being centred allows you to converse yet not being drawn into the dramas or problems (if they occur). Therefore it enables you to focus on providing the coaching/mentoring support the person needs. One way to learn more about centring is to talk to people who do martial arts or yoga.

(4) Be a listener

Listening 'with presence' and with all your senses is a whole-person effort and experience. Silence and stillness allow the 'space' for the other person to speak, and be listened to. Find ways in which you speak less and listen more. When you speak, you should find that your impact is honed and targeted because you've properly heard what the other person has said. You can also listen with your intuition - being present and in your body allows your intuition to assist you when mentoring and coaching.

(5) Be intentional

This is about the mental preparation you can undertake. Think about how you want the conversation to be, for you and the other. 'Intend' for the conversation to have a positive outcome. Be aware of self limiting beliefs and your own mindsets which will get in the way of a productive conversation.

(6) Be healthy

You will be better able to do the above if you are healthy and fit. Think about those times when you've felt like *%\$# !! and recall how effective you were, or how able you were to completely focus on others.

(7) Be human

Good mentors generate trust, have empathy, integrity, sensitivity, and have respect for the person they are mentoring/coaching. Be personally interested in the other person. Think about how you would rate yourself in these areas, and how you might improve.

(8) Be patient

To coach and mentor well means being patient in the conversation. Tapping into the 'beings' above will help you to be patient. Being patient also ensures you maintain your presence.

(9) Be reflective

This entails reflecting not only on what you are hearing, and what it means, it is also about creating an environment that helps the person you are mentoring to be reflective.

(10) Be committed

Finally, be committed about the person you are mentoring, about their future, and about their transformation. Don't just appear to be so; you need to be truly committed.

Notes

Note 1: Helen Meader is one of the members of the Conscious Coaching community of practice. She can be contacted on: hmeader@bigpond.com

Note 2: Susan Scott, "Fierce Conversations" 2002

Note 3: Anne Deering, Robert Dilts, and Julian Russell, "Leadership Cults and Cultures"
<http://leadertoleader.org/leaderbooks/l2l/spring2003/deering.html>

Note 4: Daniel Goleman, "Leading Resonant Teams",
<http://leadertoleader.org/leaderbooks/l2l/summer2002/goleman.html>

About this newsletter

My aim is to provide you with information to assist you at work, with your own development, and in developing your staff. The theme for 2004 is 'Building Collaborative Workplaces'. Each month I concentrate on an area based on topics raised by my clients. Material is drawn from journals, books, articles and shared experiences.

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