

POWERFUL CONVERSATIONS GENERATE POWERFUL RESULTS

By Suzi Pomerantz, MT., MCC.

Do you know how to consciously create conversations that are powerful? Having powerful conversations is a key to producing extraordinary results. Your ability to have a powerful conversation demonstrates that you are committed to having a powerful relationship. Extraordinary results are a function of extraordinary relationships.

Extraordinary results occur when you expand your ability to listen beyond what is merely being spoken and are able to communicate such that people are left inspired to take action.

Powerful conversations lead to:

- Building Trust
- Engaging in healthy conflict
- Expressing your commitment
- Being accountable and holding others accountable
- Attention to results
- Focus on impact
- Generating powerful results

Most of the time at work and in our personal lives we both consciously and unconsciously avoid having the conversations that will get us the results we want. Why do we avoid having conversations with each other? We avoid having conversations because we are paying more attention to our concerns or feelings rather than to the commitment we have for the relationship. When we are interested more in our own experience than that of the other person, we become self-conscious, self-focused, and ineffective. When we are working to get the words right, to sound sincere, to sound knowledgeable, to come across in a particular way, then we are focused more on being interesting than being interested. The secret to success in powerful conversations as well as powerful relationships lies in our ability to be more interested in the experience of the other person than in ourselves.

When you are paying attention to yourself, your experience, your output, your impact, we call that ***being interesting*** versus ***being interested*** (or paying attention to the other person).

Access to powerful and effective conversations comes from understanding of and mastery in dialogue.

What is dialogue?

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Real dialogue occurs when two or more people engage in a conversation where mutual sharing of ideas occur. The opposite of dialogue is monologue.

Monologue is that little voice in your head, self-talk, often referred to as noise or the gremlin. Often people communicate the monologue out loud (you know the type) and this type of communication rarely includes the mutual sharing of ideas. It does however include opinion, assessments and judgments, evaluations and concerns. The monologue-deliverer believes that his thoughts are true, and that everyone else needs to benefit from his truth.

Rarely are we able to communicate our concerns, particularly when they are hidden concerns. Hidden concerns are a function of our assessing that something is unsafe, or a fear that something is going to happen that will cause an upset or create suffering in ourselves or the other person. Sometimes we just opt out of the dialogue in order to avoid confronting our own hidden concerns.

So how do you stay in dialogue?

Communicate your concern. Talk about what you **think will happen** if you actually communicate what you are about to say.

By communicating your concern first, you **create context** for what you want to really communicate.

The key here is to ask yourself: “Is there a conversation I need to have before I have the conversation I really want to have?”...and then communicate that.

Some common pre-conversations include:

- A conversation to create the opportunity to have a conversation (scheduling it)
- A conversation to express concerns or doubts or fears about raising that topic
- A conversation about how you'd like the other person to listen to you or to hear what you are about to say
- A conversation about what you need from the other person in order to feel safe to have the conversation
- A conversation about what is important to you and why it is important to you to have the conversation you are about to have
- A conversation to determine if you and the other person are ready, open, prepared to have the conversation you want to have

If you do not distinguish and articulate that it is unsafe for you by communicating your concern you will do one of the following:

- Withdraw from the conversation
- Avoid the conversation
- Mask the conversation

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All of which lead to silence.

Or, you will do one of these things:

- Control the conversation
- Label someone or something in the conversation
- Attack someone or something during the conversation

This leads to some form of VIOLENCE.

Chances are you've experienced some of this already. Does it sound familiar? What is your particular pattern?

In order to stay in dialogue, remember to be interested verses being interesting. Get interested in what the other person has to say. You can authentically get interested in discovering why the person is communicating what they are communicating. Get genuinely interested in discovering why they are upset or how to resolve an issue they have with you. Do what it takes to get interested in creating a powerful relationship by generating a powerful conversation through authentic dialogue. You will know if you are having a powerful conversation if the other person is sharing openly and honestly their concerns, feedback, upset, issues, challenges, ideas, etc. and you are truly interested in what they have to say.

Generally speaking, we tend to be mostly aware of our own intentions and the impact the other person is having on us. We are not usually aware of the other person's intentions or our own impact on that other person. Shifting our awareness and asking questions that allow us to glimpse insights into the things we are typically unaware of in a conversation will allow us greater reach towards powerful conversations.

Conversational Intentions and Impact

| Aware Of | Unaware Of |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| My intentions | Other person's intentions |
| Other person's impact on me | My impact on other person |

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Some examples of intentions that move you away from dialogue:

- When I feel hurt or worried I will turn to silence or give cheap shots
- When I don't trust people I will control the conversation to go my way
- My boss thinks I am too emotional (little voice in head) so I will keep to myself and work harder to prove him wrong
- They are so demanding. I'll show them whose boss.

Some examples of intentions that move you towards dialogue

- I will tell them when I feel hurt or worried and find out how they feel also
- I will tell Joe that I do not trust him to complete that project and find out how I can support him so he can complete the project. I will also tell him that I am committed to having a trusting relationship.
- I will tell my boss that I am afraid to speak my mind around him because I think it will jeopardize my job.

Think about:

Can you think of a pressing issue that you know needs to be addressed but you have been avoiding speaking about it?

What concerns do you have around bringing up this issue? (Example: Every time I try to talk about it, it doesn't come out right so I end up saying nothing).

What conversation would you like to have (or know someone else should have) but you are avoiding having that conversation with one of your team members or someone else at work?

See if you can distinguish your concerns. (Example: I have a concern that I will be too controlling and will end up looking bad in front of my peers)

*"Anything that you are unwilling to communicate creates waste in an organization."
-Sandor Kovacs*

The conversations that you choose to avoid never go away and often show up in the results that you produce/ don't produce.

Unwillingness to communicate the issues that you feel are important will eventually create distrust and resignation in a team and it will show by your results.

Avoiding conflict leads to distrust.

Powerful Conversations: The Shift Required

The table below details a few of the shifts in thinking and understanding required to create powerful conversations. Which are most relevant to you?

| From | Shift | To |
|---|-------|--|
| Certainty (I know and Understand) | → | Curiosity (Help me Understand. What do they know that I do not know?) |
| I know the Truth | → | We all have different stories and interpretations |
| Assuming bad intentions | → | Assuming good intentions or sharing your interpretation of bad intentions |
| They are to blame (it's their fault) | → | What's my role in this? (What did we both contribute to create this situation?) |
| What's wrong with you? | → | What is going on for you, what's your experience? |
| Persuading to get your way | → | Looking to understand their point of view |
| I'm right, you're wrong | → | Honor each other's interpretation |
| Listening to yourself (For what you are going to say next) | → | Listening to them (For mutual understanding) |
| Questioning to prove something | → | Questioning to illuminate new options |

Your ability to generate dialogue from a powerful place, stay in that dialogue, and focus on the other person will guide you in creating powerful results from powerful conversations.

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Suzi Pomerantz, MT., MCC. is an award-winning master executive coach, facilitator, and author with over 15 years of experience working with leaders and teams in over 125 organizations internationally, including seven companies on the Fortune 100 list. Suzi authored 20 publications about coaching, ethics, and business development, including her book *Seal the Deal: The Essential Mindsets for Growing Your Professional Services Business* (HRD Press, 2006). (www.sealthedealbook.com). Suzi is the CEO of Innovative Leadership International LLC (www.innovativeleader.com), Vice President of the Board of Directors of the International Consortium for Coaching in Organizations and a founding member of the Editorial Board of the International Journal of Coaching in Organizations. Suzi's strength lies in helping leaders and organizations find clarity within chaos.