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“To get to the next level of greatness depends on the quality of the culture, which depends on the quality of the relationships, which depends on the quality of the conversations.”

“Everything happens through conversations!” Judith Glaser

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**CONNECTED
CONVERSATIONS**



CONVERSATIONS MATTER

By: Michael J. Stabile



The founder of a successful manufacturing company was in the process of succession planning and was grooming his son to take over the business. One day, as he walked through the factory, he saw his son angrily berating an employee in front of the person's coworkers. A lot of yelling, put-downs, and shouting—apparently it was an awful sight.

The father returned to his office and called his son to come and see him. When his son arrived, he said the following: “David,” he began, “I wear two hats around here. I am the boss, and I am your father. Right now, I am going to put my boss hat on. You’re fired! You are done here. I will not have that kind of behavior in my company and will not tolerate employees treated that way, I have warned you about this kind of thing before, and you are still doing it. So, I have to let you go.”

Then he said, “Now I am going to put on my father hat.” After a moment’s pause, he continued. “Son, I heard you just lost your job. How can I help you?”

There are so many great lessons in this story. Here is at least one. **What was it about the son’s behavior to cause his own father to fire him?** The answer is: **the consequences of a leader making people feel crummy.**

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The example of publicly scolding an employee is somewhat obvious and a bit extreme. You would probably never do that, but there might be a lot of little things you're doing, none of them outrageous or dramatic, that still might be having negative effect on your people. I'm talking about your tone, the way something is said, apart from content. If leaders speak in aggressive, angry, or put-down tones, if they use harsh words and overly critical ways, it triggers a stress response in the other person. When that happens the brain switches gears. As leaders, **conversations matter, tone matters, body language matters, and most of all attitude matters.**

BEING TRULY PRESENT IN A CONVERSATION

Susan Scott



Being truly present in a conversation is, sadly, a rare experience often because we are multi-tasking, eyeing our emails or thinking about something other than the conversation that is right in front of us, the one that wants and needs to take place. But it is only when we genuinely “see” the people who are important to us, that we can hope to succeed as agents for positive change. Having ignored, misheard and misread many individuals throughout our lifetime, however, we

often find that discovering someone else’s authentic self can be complicated by our increasing cynicism.

Yet we must learn to rebuild the links that connect people and that provide an effective antidote to cynicism and disaffection. We must transform the way we speak, the way we ask, the way we listen. How do we get to know another person? How do we get past “How are you? I’m fine!” By really asking and really listening. By being with someone, even if only for a brief moment, prepared to be nowhere else.

For both personal and professional relationships to move forward



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or upward, you must **have fierce affection for the other person**. You must have genuine curiosity about what is going on with that person at any given time. You must have an insatiable appetite for learning more every day about who he or she is. Occasionally set aside all of the topics ping-ponging inside your own head and simply be with this other person, here and now.

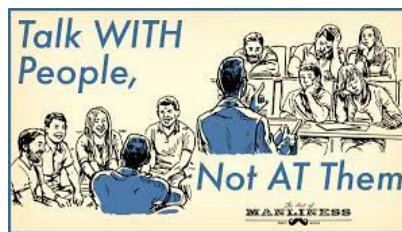
All this being present stuff does not involve listening endlessly to someone telling you more than you ever wanted to know about a series of boring topics. **The conversation is the relationship**. One conversation at a time, you are building, destroying or flat-lining your relationships. It is possible, however, to create high-intimacy, low-maintenance relationships —one relatively brief conversation at a time.

One of the basics of being present is eye contact. Being here, prepared to be nowhere else, does not require maniacal eye contact during your conversations. Many people want to back away from an avid individual whose eyes seem to drill through us and out the other side. Better to have “soft eyes.” Instead of trying to focus on any one thing, if we soften our eyes and allow the world to come to us, we will see a great deal more. We will catch subtle motion. Our peripheral vision will become acute.

The same thing happens with our listening. We may succeed in hearing every word yet miss the message altogether. There is so much more to listen to than words. Listen to the whole person. When we listen beyond words for intent, for the scaffolding on which a story hangs, clarity and character emerge. We need to listen this way to ourselves, not just to others.

TALKING WITH PEOPLE, NOT AT THEM

By: Susan Scott



Many people attempt to forge relationships exclusively through words. Lots of words. However, **the best leaders talk with people, not at them**. Talking at people is a common affliction. Did you know that **eight out of 10** sales proposals fail? And **50 percent of those eight** fail

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because we spend too much time talking about ourselves or the features and benefits of our product, and not enough time listening to the customer before we explained how wonderful doing business with us would be.

So Many Words, So Little Substance

Fierce conversations require silence. In fact, the more emotionally loaded the subject, the more silence is required. And, of course, this carries over into our homes, into our personal relationships. Often we are simply trying to intuit something about ourselves, our companions or the topics themselves. Sometimes we need silence in which to make a decision about the closeness we feel for our companions or the distance we feel from them. Once in a precious while, silence is merely abstinence from self-assertion. For many work teams and couples, however, it is easy to fall into a conversational pattern that contains so many words, so much white noise, that it leaves all parties deaf to any comments of substance that could have been interjected into the conversation. ***Our habitual ways of talking with (or at) each other prevent us from allowing silence to help us get in touch with what we really want to say.***

Slow Down

Sometimes a dramatic intervention is required to ***stop the words in order to start a conversation.*** There are issues that our colleagues and customers will ignore every time they come up. If we are not alert, we will walk with others right past the issue. We may sense that something is there, but the conversation is moving too fast. Or, because we are so invested in playing the role of “expert,” we fill the air with words, missing the real issue entirely. Silence is the greatest tool to slow down a conversation. As we talk with people, as we sit with them in silence, what is in the way — anger, numbness, impatience, manipulation, rigidity, blame, ego, cruelty, ambition, insensitivity, intimidation, pride — may fall away. It is in silence that such attributes, emotions and behaviors reveal themselves as unnecessary.

The Space Between Thoughts

Deepak Chopra refers to the ***space between thoughts as the place where insight can occur.*** The trouble is, for most of us, there is no space between thoughts. While the occasional stream of consciousness can be illustrative, important conversations require moments of silence during which we may reflect on what someone has said and consider our responses, before opening our mouths. Otherwise, our knee-jerk responses may not reflect our highest and best thoughts. How could they? We haven’t had a

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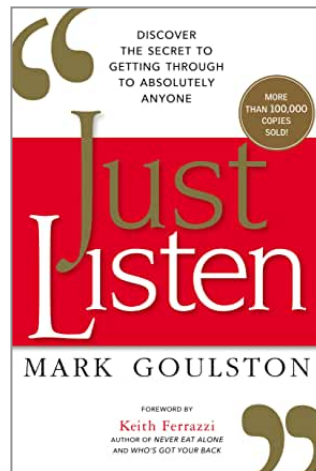
moment to consider what they might be.

How do we let silence do the heavy lifting?

Provide it. Allow silence to fill in the greater meaning that needs to be there. Perhaps if I close my mouth, you'll open yours. During company meetings, the best responses, the most brilliant solutions, often come from the person who has sat silently listening for a very long time while the rest of us filled the air with debate. Even when called upon, such an individual often appears reluctant to speak, sitting in reflective silence for agonizing moments while others click ballpoint pens and glance at their watches. Then he or she speaks, and everyone else in the room is compelled to shift to a broader, wiser perspective, with the result that elegant, complete answers begin to emerge.

THE SECRET TO REACH ANYONE

Mark Goulston



You probably don't find yourself in the types of situation that hostage negotiators handle. But on any given day, who are you trying to persuade to do something?

The answer is: nearly everybody. Almost all communication is an effort to get through to people and cause them to do something different than they were doing before. Maybe you're trying to sell them something. Maybe you're trying to talk sense into them. Or maybe you need to impress them that you're the right person for a job, a promotion or a

relationship.

People have their own needs, desires and agendas.

They have secrets they're hiding from you. And they're stressed, busy, and often feeling like they're in over their heads. To cope with their stress and insecurity, they throw up mental barricades that make it difficult to reach them even if they share your goals, and nearly impossible if they're hostile. Approach these people armed solely with reason and facts, or resort to arguing, encouraging or pleading, and you'll expect to get through — but often you won't. Instead, you'll get smacked down and you'll never have a clue why.

The good news is that you can get through simply by changing your



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approach. All persuasion moves through the steps of the **Persuasion Cycle**. To take people from the beginning to the end of this cycle, you need to speak with them in a manner that moves them:

- **From resisting to listening**
- **From listening to considering**
- **From considering to willing to do**
- **From willing to do to doing**
- **From doing to glad they did and continuing to do.**

The secret of getting through to absolutely anyone is that you get through to people by having them “buy-in.” Buy-in occurs when people move from resisting to listening to considering what you’re saying. The key to gaining buy-in and then moving people through the rest of the cycle is **not what you tell them, but what you get them to tell you** — and what happens in their minds in the pro

