



Using Conversations To Overcome Fear

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Learning Conversations



Using Conversations to Overcome Fear



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Overview of this session

- Purposes of conversations
- Kinds of conversations
- Downloading and debating
- Reflective conversations
- Generative conversations



Purposes of conversations

- To express ourselves
- To clarify meanings
- To share information
- To build understanding
- To bring people and ideas together
- To exchange, transform and reshape facts, draw different implications, engage in new trains of thought
- To diminish brutality and aggressiveness
- To redirect fear – to stimulate generosity rather than paralysis
- To give us courage to make a difference



Task

- Talk to someone you don't know
- What did you talk about?
- Was it safe, risky, difficult, dangerous, something else?



Kinds of conversations

- Safe talk
- Risky talk
- Difficult conversations - require negotiation of people's sense of identity, their feelings and their recollections of events
- Dangerous conversations - encroach on people's belief systems



Task

- Line up by your attitude to chocolate.
- Justify your position on this line to those near you.





Downloading

- Downloading
 - Talk politely
 - Say what we are expected to say (“How are you?” “I am fine”)
 - Repeat what we already know, not noticing anything different or new.
- It is predictable and efficient and supplies the right answer without hesitation or uncertainty
- Risk is getting stuck



Debating

- Debating
 - Say what we think
 - Speak our minds openly, even at the risk of fragmenting the system (“How are you?” “I am terrible.”).
 - Debate and make judgments, like in a courtroom.
 - We observe the outside world and other people.
- Seek out unfamiliar perspectives, from each other, from academics, and in the learning journey.



Task

- Choose one of the following topics to talk about:
 - How old do you have to be to converse?
 - What place is there in conversation for the competitive instinct?
 - Is the most worthwhile conversation one which takes the most risks?
 - What can a letter do that a conversation cannot?
 - What kind of space, or time, is best for conversations with oneself?



Reflective conversations

- Move outside of ourselves
- We stand in their shoes, see through their eyes.
- We listen self-reflectively to ourselves, and hear ourselves through the ears of others.
- We inquire into how things came to be as they are
- We envision how they might be.



Generative conversations

- We are fully present to what is emerging in the whole system.
- Each story is a hologram that contains the whole picture.
- Meaning emerges not from any one person but from the center of the circle.



Barriers to conversations

- Some things are so self-evident they are not spoken about.
- It is hard to have conversations with people who are approaching the conversation from, and using, their position of power.
- It is hard to have conversations about *ideas* when people are focused on *survival*.
- There is just not enough time, we are all so stretched getting things done, it is hard to find the time to talk and think.



Creating generative conversations

- Tell ‘wonderful stories’, stories of success
- Give ‘facts’ a personal flavour that enables others to identify with the experience
- Use words that are familiar to the listener
- Ensure there is some ‘theory’ behind the stories – to help generalisations
- Use our friends (contacts) to influence others
- Make space and time for conversations.
- ‘Break bread’ together – conversations are different over a shared meal.



Initiating and supporting conversations

- Take responsibility for our own conversational behaviours
- Think about the kinds of conversations we are having: about what, at what level, with whom, how
- Think about who we respect enough to listen to and then talk with them
- Talk with others about the importance of ‘conversing’
- Influence the environment in which conversations can happen by creating time and space for them to occur (from the dinner table to the Board room).
- Ensure we are talking about the same issues
- Support the conversation to move from downloading, to debating, to reflective dialogue to generative dialogue.



Would you like to take this further?

- Join a Learning Conversation about conversations:
 - Monday, 29th May, 7:00 – 9:30pm OR
 - Wednesday, 14th June, 9:30am – 12noon OR
 - Saturday, 24th June, 9:30 -12noon
- Put your name on the sign up sheet or contact us marie.martin@learningconversations.com.au
- Bookings required
- Cost: \$22, including GST



References

- Isaacs, W. 2002. *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together* (there is a diagram of the central ideas at <http://home.earthlink.net/~paulcaswell/ea2002/communication.html>)
- Communities of the Future Network. 2002, *Framework for 21st Century Conversations* <http://pcpli.grnp.org/cotf-plwb-05a.html>
- Kahane, A. *Changing the World By Changing How We Talk and Listen* <http://pioneersofchange.net/communities/foresight/articles/Kahane%20on%20talking%20and%20listenin%20g.pdf>
- Mackay, H. 1994. *Why Don't People Listen* (republished as *The Good Listener*).
- Stone, D., Patton, B. & Heen, S. 1999. *Difficult Conversations: How to discuss what matters most*
- Zeldin, T. 2000. *Conversation: How talk can change our lives*