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RAP

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Quality Conversations: Essential Skills You Can Use Right Now

Editor's note: This article is part 2 of a 2-part series. Part 1 appeared in the February 2016 issue.

Every conversation we have offers the potential for positive or negative consequences. When we examine and fine-tune the way we converse, we can become better leaders in any group situation. Residency is a good time to learn and practice conversational leadership skills.

Consider the Impact

Every conversation has an impact, writes Organizational Anthropologist Judith E. Glaser in a February 2015 blog post.¹

“You may not see it at first. It takes place inside of us at the

speed of .07 seconds. It takes place at the cellular level. Cells talk with each other, and if a conversation feels bad, our fear networks are activated instantly. Blood rushes to our primitive brain, which is designed for protection, cortisol (a fear hormone) is spray-painted everywhere, and our ability to protect ourselves from harm is turned on instantly.”

Glaser studies conversational patterns that help and hinder effective two-way communication. She is CEO of Benchmark Communications, Inc., and consults for Fortune 500 companies. Among her four best-selling business books, is “Conversational Intelligence®: How Great Leaders Build Trust and Get Extraordinary Results.”

How Innovation is Stifled

“Did you ever notice that, during a meeting or brainstorming session, one comment from a powerful

Fine-tuning your own communication techniques can make you a more effective professional and leader. You may sometimes feel as though your voice is not being heard. Or, group dynamics may get in the way. If you struggle with barriers to clear, effective communication, you're not alone. When you need some extra help resolving them, your Resident Assistance Program (RAP) is a good place to turn. A professional can help with feedback and perspective to get you past the hurdles that can impede your success. Available 24/7, RAP is your local, caring and confidential resource.

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voice can stop the innovation process?” Glaser asks.

“Simple comments such as, ‘how could you think that,’ or ‘what were you thinking?’ activate our fear network and without realizing it, colleagues can inadvertently and unintentionally turn the ‘innovation lights’ out.”

The quality of conversations does matter, Glaser asserts.



The real art of conversation is not only to say the right thing at the right place but to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment.

- Dorothy Nevill

¹ “Quality Conversations: Alchemy for cultivating a healthy, thriving organization,” Psychology Today blog post by Judith E. Glaser <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/conversational-intelligence/201502/quality-conversations> (accessed January 6, 2016)

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A Leader's Role

“Your role as a transformational conversational intelligence leader is one of the most important roles you can play in activating growth,” says Organizational Anthropologist Judith E. Glaser. “To move into position to advance and elevate your organization’s ability for quality conversations, ask yourself:

- What does your organization need to know but does not know because people are afraid to speak up?
- What are you doing to create trusting, non-toxic work environments?
- What are the unwritten codes or norms that are at play that may be inhibiting open, candid, trusting conversations?
- What can you do as a leader to create trust?

Your Resident Assistance Program

The RAP newsletter is provided as a benefit to medical residents at the USF Health Morsani College of Medicine and their dependents.

We welcome your comments on newsletter topics, however, we cannot provide RAP services by email.

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Give Conscious Thought to Quality Conversations

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“Quality conversations establish the environments and readiness to support innovation, to foster partnering, to elevate trust and to enhance relationships.”

3 Steps to Quality Conversations

Everything happens through conversations, Glaser says. So is there a pathway to successful, quality conversations? Glaser offers this roadmap and recommends internalizing and practicing it daily:

Step 1: Encourage Candor and Trust

Straight talk, candor and open conversations (without repercussions and fear of punishment) are the operating norm for innovative, transformative co-creating conversations. Employees need to trust that their ideas and feelings will be heard—and that they will get support, attention and proper vetting once the ideas are put on the table. Shaping the quality of the conversational environment enables employees to speak up, and share their innovative, and often very unique thinking.

Step 2: Eliminate Politics

Organizations have unwritten codes that signal people that: “you can’t say this,” or “you can’t do that.”

These signals tell people it’s unsafe to challenge the status quo. People are afraid to speak up. Conversations go to the lowest common denominator, and people stop innovating.

However, when shaping the quality of the conversational environment for safety and appreciation, employees trust they will get quality feedback on their ideas, and they will speak up.

Step 3: Promote Appreciation, Recognition

Too often, employees have great ideas, and no one listens. When ideas are expressed, no one validates them or acknowledges them, or even asks more about them. There is an instinctive fear in many of us that our voices will not be heard, or that our ideas will be rejected or their importance minimized.

When great ideas are celebrated as part of the conversational environment, more great ideas will naturally show up.

When employees can trust that they will get the recognition from the top for being “idea catalysts,” management will find that people have a lot to say.

Resources:

Judith E. Glaser, Benchmark Communications, Inc. www.conversationintelligence.com
Why Powerful Leaders Fail, blog post by Colin Shaw <https://beyondphilosophy.com/powerful-leaders-fail/>