



#### POST **MEETING NOTES IONS**: 5 1 AND ER ł ł TO HAVE THEM

19-20 February 2020, St Albans

# **KEY TAKEAWAYS**

Until you can examine your own assumptions, you cannot improve the quality of your conversations.

LET FEAR OF DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS STYMIE THEM.

**PEOPLE RARELY SPEND ENOUGH** 

TIME PREPARING FOR IMPORTANT CONVERSATIONS, AND OFTEN

> to want to make what's natural to us 'right'; but there is no 'right', it's about adaptability.

The three major sources of defensiveness are feeling insignificant, incompetent, and/or unliked.

Intrinsic motivators (recognition, autonomy, fun, etc.) are much more effective influencers of human behaviour than extrinsic ones (such as money).

There are five bases of trust in corporate life: structure, expertise, reputation, by proxy, or through personal experience. Trust increases as you move down the list (from lower trust through structure to higher trust through personal experience). THERE IS NO 'IDEAL' CONVERSATIONAL STYLE, NOR A 'RIGHT' MIX FOR A TEAM; RATHER, IT'S ABOUT UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENT TYPES, HAVING THE CONVERSATION, AND ADAPTING AS NEEDED.

To interrupt the cycle of a defensive response, we need to pause before reacting in order to avoid making a faulty interpretation of the situation. To do this, we must think logically and slowly, and avoid making snap judgements. Coming up with three alternative interpretations of the situation is a helpful strategy.

'Honest signals' – energy, mimicry, fluidity, and influence – are the four body language signals that convey about 80% of one's message. The ability to quickly recognise them can helpfully influence how one conducts a conversation.

A GREAT CONVERSATION IS LIKE A MUSCLE – THE MORE YOU WORK AT IT, THE EASIER IT SUBSEQUENTLY BECOMES.





CRF members gathered at Sopwell House on 19-20 February 2020 to discuss why conversations matter to organisational performance, and how to have better ones. In a series of interactive sessions, attendees explored the skills and tools necessary to overcome barriers, adapt to others' style, and build better conversations.

#### **Great Conversations**

Workshop leader **Dr. Wanda Wallace** launched the event with an acknowledgement that we have conversations for many reasons, including to:

- Give information (e.g. good news, bad news, facts, updates)
- Receive information
- Build rapport and/or trust
- Negotiate an outcome
- Give feedback (performance evaluation (looking back), development (looking forward)
- Change the behaviour of the other person (usually disguised as giving feedback)
- Influence and persuade
- Coach
- Create something new (brainstorm, innovate, solve a complex problem, collaborate)
- Deepen insight and understanding about the other person (motivations, intentions, perspective, experience, world view)
- Understand our own thinking and emotions.

Having better conversations isn't about following a template for different types of conversations, but about learning the general principles that foster great conversation whatever its purpose.

Attendees then discussed some of the barriers to good-quality conversations.

• People rarely spend enough time preparing for important conversations (five minutes or less, on average).



#### **AUDIENCE Q&A**

• We often don't have time to prepare for conversations; the business runs too fast. How do we deal with that?

A Is there anything more important than finding the time, at least in those cases of the really, really important conversations, to prepare? Try preparing on Sunday night for the three most important conversations upcoming that week. What are they? How will you handle them?



- It can. One way to combat this is to plan for spontaneity, for example by planning for a pause to allow a question to let something unexpected happen.
- People too often avoid a conversation because they think it will be 'difficult'.
- What keeps people from proceeding with a 'difficult' conversation? Often, it's a lack of confidence, including the fear that you don't have the right facts (but it's critical to understand that most conversations are not about the facts, and you will never have complete information).
- What makes people go ahead, typically, with a challenging conversation? Feeling confidence about one's message.

#### **Mental Models and Thoughts**

It's important to understand all the assumptions one brings to any given conversation.

- How the world works
- How our organisation works
- What it means to be a leader here
- What I have time to do as a leader
- What you should or shouldn't be doing
- Who I am as a person, who you are as a person
- What motivates me, what motivates you
- What our interactions have been like in the past
- What I expect to happen, often without thinking about the complexity or the systems
- What is the simple essence of or reason for the problem
- What I believe to be true based on my expertise/experiences
- What I want as an outcome
- What I feel insecure about
- How much I trust people, the organisation, you.

These mental models and thoughts can cloud our assessment of who we're speaking to and what they care about. At the same time, understanding our conversation partner's mental models, thoughts, and core values can facilitate better conversations.

Until you can examine your own assumptions, you cannot improve the quality of your conversation.

It's very easy to say we'll have a great conversation, but it's very difficult to do so.

- Rapport is required
- The more trust, the better
- Clarity about your goal for each conversation helps
- Keeping defensiveness as low as possible for all parties matters.

The best outcomes of conversations come when and if you...

• Understand the perspective of the other person (listening to seek understanding, curiosity)

- Suspend your own judgment (not right or wrong, not trying to change the other person)
- Understand of your own intentions, emotions, mental models
- Are willing to adapt on the 'how'
- Have prepared and rehearsed
- Can find time and patience.

Great conversations are like a muscle – the more you work at it, the easier it subsequently becomes.

#### WHAT MAKES A CONVERSATION GREAT OR MEANINGFUL IN YOUR EXPERIENCE?

CRF members say...

#### As the speaker...

- Active listening
- Presence (audience is paying attention; body language signals they want to be present)
- Setting aside a proper amount of time for the conversation.

#### As the receiver...

- Honesty and clarity about the speaker's motivations (not skirting the issue; everyone knows why they're there)
- Authenticity from the speaker.

#### **AUDIENCE Q&A**

- When is it ok to leave people where they are, in a conversation? Do we always have to be influencing and changing minds?
- Everybody should be an adult, and as such, it's ok to leave someone the choice to accept or reject something. As a manager, you become 'the police' if you don't leave that choice to the person. The caution is to make sure you aren't avoiding challenging the person, while still ultimately leaving them a choice.

# • How can you get a foot in the door when someone isn't open to conversation?

A There is no magic bullet; you can't get people to be what you want them to be. Instead, play to their strengths, which of course requires understanding what those are.

#### Ability to Adapt to Others' Style

In the afternoon session on the first day, attendees completed the Firo-B (Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation) assessment, which helps people understand their own and others' behaviour and conversational style.

The Firo-B measures an individual's style with regard to:

- Inclusion The degree to which one includes and associates with others
- Control The degree of influence, decisionmaking, and being in charge
- Affection Warmth/openness; how close and warm you are with others and want them to be with you, the degree of emotional involvement and personal disclosure

It's valuable to understand one's own style so you can clearly communicate your preferences to others in conversation; likewise, knowing others' style allows one to adapt accordingly.

Wanda shared some common dichotomies of style and how to manage them.

There is no 'ideal' style, nor a 'right' mix for a team; rather, it's about understanding the different types, having a willingness to have a conversation, and then to adapt as needed.

#### **AUDIENCE Q&A**



A Ideally, yes. But in real life, either the manager or the employee can change the dynamics of the conversation, with or without the other's cooperation. So if the manager isn't adaptable, it can be empowering for the employee to take the lead by being the adaptable one.

# • Why is the quality of group conversations, particularly the Board, so often low?

 Boards have periodic interaction and no real contact in between, so they are among the most challenging of conversations to have at a high-quality level.

#### **EXTRAVERTS**

#### want to talk about what they are thinking.

Allow them to think out loud. Show enthusiasm, energy. Say what you are thinking.

#### **INTROVERTS**

#### want to have the space and silence to think before they speak.

Give an agenda in advance. Allow silence. Do not fill the gaps with too much energy. Ask what they are thinking, do not assume.

See Susan Cain, *Quiet* or her TED Talk.

#### DETAIL ORIENTED B PEOPLE C want to work from P

#### want to work from the detail to the big picture.

Give them the details, prepare to answer their questions and allow them to reach a conclusion inductively.

#### BIG-PICTURE ORIENTED PEOPLE

#### do not want detail until they ask for it.

Give them the concept, show a picture, present a 'mind map'.

Start with the idea and let them ask for the detail they want to know.

#### CHALLENGERS/ ORIGINATORS

#### love new ideas and they love radical change.

Present the change as a totally new way of achieving the goal. Talk about what is radically different. Allow them to imagine a new world.

#### HIGH INCLUDERS

#### want to know you have talked to a lot of people already.

Talk to a number of people, not just the usual group.

#### HI SECURITY/ CONSERVERS

#### appreciate incremental, well thought out change.

Present what is good about what has been done in the past. Note what isn't going to change, for now at least. Smaller steps are better.

#### SMALL INNER CIRCLE PEOPLE want to talk to one

**or two** *key* **people.** Work with the inner

circle.

#### Defensiveness

Defensiveness is the quality of being anxious to challenge or avoid criticism. It can be triggered by an event, an action, a decision, or a person. Whatever the factor, it triggers one's hot buttons. A person has an intense emotional response, that kicks off a (usually faulty) interpretation of the situation.

How can we intervene in the cycle of defensiveness? We need to learn to understand the triggers, recognise our responses and develop strategies to cool them. We then need to stop before reacting, avoiding that moment of faulty interpretation. To do this, thinking logically and slowly, and avoiding judgements is key. Trying to come up with three alternative interpretations of the situation is a helpful strategy.

There are three major sources of defensiveness.

- Feeling insignificant (fear being ignored or abandoned)
- Feeling incompetent (fear being humiliated or embarrassed)
- Feeling unliked (fear being disliked or rejected).

How can we effectively manage our defensiveness?

- 1. Notice and drop judgmental language.
- 2. Tune in to your own emotion and the trigger for that emotion.
- 3. Acknowledge what's right in what the other person has said/done.
- 4. Optional: Acknowledge the emotion.
- 5. Ask a genuinely curious question without edge.
- 6. LISTEN and do not challenge or debate.
- 7. Synthesize.
- 8. Ask if the other person would like to hear your perspective.
- 9. Find one action you can take to move a step forward.
- 10. Later, review your own triggers and the reasons. Adopt a practice to check yourself when it happens again.

#### **10 TYPES OF DEFENSIVENESS**

Denying all responsibility	"This is your fault, you know."
Making excuses	"I couldn't help being late. If you were better at scheduling meetings I wouldn't have gotten overbooked and would have been there on time."
Mind- reading with negative affect (or assuming a negative motive)	Person #1: "Your report left out the statistics I gave you yesterday." Person #2: "I think you threw those numbers at me when I was almost finished just to overwhelm me with information."
Cross- complaining	Person #1: "You didn't leave enough time for my presentation." Person #2: "Your last presentation was too long."
Bounce it back	Person #1: "You don't listen to me." Person #2: "Neither do you."
"Yes, but"	"We could try your idea, but it won't work."
Repeating yourself syndrome	When one or both people keeps repeating the same response instead of trying to move the conversation forward.
Whining	The tone of voice sends the implicit message "I'm the victim here – not you. Why are you picking on me?"
Body language or facial expressions	Rolling the eyes, crossing the arms, turning your back to your colleague, walking out of the room in the middle of a tense conversation.
Outright hostility	Explicitly harsh or cruel verbal responses. Obscenities. Contempt. Name-calling.

#### **Understanding Motivation**

Motivation refers to the reason(s) we act in a particular way. Extrinsic motivators (such as money) have quite limited power. Intrinsic motivators are much more effective; thus we should be thinking about how to stimulate these in organisations.

Wanda identified several primary intrinsic motivators for human behaviour.

#### **PRIMARY MOTIVATORS**

Recognition or Mastery	Be known, have chance to develop skills in-depth, be visible, be acknowledged for skill and knowledge
Execution or Power	Make things happen, orchestrate getting things done, completion, outperform competition
Autonomy	Have the opportunity to determine some part of how to do things on your own
Fun	Pursue fun and pleasure, work with people who are fun to work with, blend work and private
Affiliation or Affinity	Belong to a group, help others, work with people you like, focus on the group or team rather than yourself as a solo agent
Predictability or Security	Work hard, follow procedures, avoid risk, have predictability and structure
Altruism	Helping others, coaching, developing talent, mentoring

In an interactive session, attendees practiced having conversations in language that plays to these different motivators.

#### **PRIMARY MOTIVATORS LANGUAGE**

Recognition or Mastery	Be acknowledged, Show your leadership, Be visible Be seen as the expert
Execution or Power	Take the reins and make things happen Be in the driver seat, Call the shots
Autonomy	Determine how you want to achieve an outcome Decide for yourself what to do or how to do it
Fun	Have fun at work Work hard and play hard Not be so serious all the time
Affiliation or Affinity	Be part of a great team Meet people who are similar to you, people you will enjoy Fit in
Predictability or Security	Make sure the risks are mitigated as much as possible Have a predictable outcome, Have stability
Altruism	Help others, Be of service to others Mentor or coach

#### **AUDIENCE Q&A**

- How much courage does it take to have a better conversation?
- A Many conversations take courage, because they feel scary. Why do they feel scary? There's a fear of what the outcome will be, so there is risk. One might want to live with the relationship as it is rather than risk making it worse. One way to mitigate this is to contingency plan for poor outcomes before you start the conversation.

#### **Honest Signals**

Wanda discussed MIT computer scientist Sandy Pentland's research on 'honest signals' – these are the four body language signals that convey about 80% of one's message. According to Pentland, these signals are automatic and uncontrollable. The ability to quickly recognise them can helpfully influence how one conducts a conversation.

The signals are:

- Energy or activity in the body (excitement, not nervousness). This signals authenticity.
- Mimicry or mirroring (the other's body language). This signals agreement.
- Fluidity or consistency (pace, rhythm, emphasis). This signals expertise.
- Influence over others' speech (interruptions, rapid fire, etc.). This signals a desire for control.

#### Trust

Trust in one's personal life is much different than trust at work. At work, there is not the same depth of honesty, looking out for one another, and so on. The rules of trust that apply in one's personal life, therefore, are not the same as those that apply at work.

Wanda shared five different reasons one might trust a colleague in corporate life. (Levels of trust increase as one moves down the list).

- Structure Role or the organisational structure, systems and processes for the individual's role
- Expertise Knowledge and experience
- Reputation Based on experience, integrity, breadth of network
- By proxy Someone I trust deeply trusts this person
- Personal experience Know the person, have seen under fire, strong relationship with the person

Trust is a judgement, and so we look for indicators that we can trust another person.

Indicators vary in importance from person to person. Understanding which indicators your conversation partner is looking for can vastly Wanda shared Charles Green's work on the Trust Equation. For an in-depth exploration of the Trust Equation, please see the <u>Post-Meeting Notes</u> of CRF's 2019 residential programme Trusted Advisor.

improve the quality of your conversation.

#### **15 INDICATORS OF TRUST**

TruthfulIs honest, shows integrityVulnerableWilling to share personal mistakes, doubts, fearsLoyalCommitment to organisation and/or to individual peopleInclusiveIncludes others, seeks inputSociableFriendly, easily connects with othersAppreciativeWilling to acknowledge/praise other's contributionsConciseCommunicates clearly and straightforwardlyConfidentConveys conviction and assuranceOpen- mindedExplores new ideas, perspectives and experiencesNetworkedOthers know and trust – has high quality of relationshipsFairTreats everyone fairly and equitably and is transparentConsistentIs predictable, does what says will doTrusts MeTrusts my opinion, let's me work my way		
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5 1 7	Commonality	Has common goals and values
	Trusts Me	5

Wanda closed the two days with advice about how to increase trust in a corporate setting.

- What can you do to leave the person feeling more secure?
  - Better balance of power? Improved political standing?
  - Less perceived risk?
  - More significant, competent, liked?
  - Greater ability to alter the outcome?
  - More informed?
- How do you build commonality so that there is more intimacy between the two of you?
  - More in common? Similar interests or background?
  - Better aligned interests? Shared values or goals? Interest in the outcome?
- How can you adapt to their style?
- How do you do more of what indicates trustworthiness to the other person?
- How can you show understanding of motivation yours and theirs?
- What signals are you sending?

#### **AUDIENCE Q&A**

#### • What do you do when you reach an impasse, and you're having a conversation in an escalation situation?

Escalation is necessary sometimes; usually in cases where the problem rests at a higher organisational level, not between the two people. In these cases, keep it factual, list the things you've tried, and seek advice from your manager. This can help you determine whether the problem needs to be resolved or can sit, and the best strategy for resolving it if needed.

# • What advice do you have for conversations conducted remotely?

Video technology is a big help. People still seem to be reluctant to use it, but it makes a huge difference. It's also useful to overstructure remote conversations, keeping in mind that you lack certain signals remotely, such as body language.

#### **INSIGHTS: ENGAGE**



#### Measuring the Impact of Conversations Throughout the Employee Lifecycle

At an event breakfast, <u>ENGAGE explored how to</u> <u>measure the impact of conversations throughout</u> <u>the employee lifecycle</u>. They highlighted the way in which many organisations continue to approach the employee lifecycle as a broad and linear model, and the need to adjust our thinking to understand that employees go on a journey with critical touchpoints along the way.

They likened the way we need to <u>measure and act</u> <u>upon employee engagement</u> to the way in which organisations now approach their customers: understanding that there are key 'moments of truth' where loyalty and engagement can be created or destroyed.

These moments of truth are essentially conversations – ones that we can measure in terms of impact to understand how they drive engagement and performance in both the short- and long-term.

ENGAGE's experience and research in the area of engagement showed three key highlights:

- **1. The employee lifecycle is complex:** it's not suitable for a once-a-year project
- 2. Moments of truth in the employee lifecycle are delivered via conversations: while we can't measure every conversation, we can measure the impact of them.
- **3. Engagement starts even before employment... and continues beyond it:** conversations need to happen beyond tenure to understand long-term engagement.

Participants in the discussion were keen to share their own evolving approaches to engagement and measurement, and discussed five key questions raised by the ENGAGE team:

- How well has your organisation mapped your employee journey(s)?
- How well does your organisation understand the moments of truth in the employee journey?
- Which moments of truth are related to conversations?
- Which of these conversations can your organisation control which can it influence?
- How well are these controllable / influenceable conversations measured and managed?

The results delivered great insight into the <u>varying</u> <u>nature of current and planned approaches to</u> <u>engagement measurement</u> – something that ENGAGE will continue to research and share insight about over the coming months.

# **SPEAKER** Better conversations: Why they matter and how to have them



## DR. WANDA WALLACE

Dr. Wanda Wallace is Managing Partner of Leadership Forum (LF). LF helps organisations to improve the quality of their conversations in every aspect from strategic insight, to talent, teams and individual capability. Better conversations result in better relationships and better performance. Dr. Wallace coaches leaders, conducts seminars, speaks and works with teams, emphasising the challenges of both building and sustaining productive relationships at all levels in the global corporate context. In the last several years, Dr. Wallace has focused on helping women advance their careers as well as assisting corporations in engaging managers in the diversity agenda. Her latest book, <u>You Can't Know It All – Leading in the Age of Deep Expertise</u>, was published in 2019.



# **RESOURCES** Better conversations: Why they matter and how to have them

# SPEAKER RECOMMENDATIONS

A comprehensive list of **Dr. Wanda Wallace's Recommended Readings** can be found here: <u>https://www.crforum.co.uk/research-and-resources/</u> <u>recommended-readings/</u>

# **SPEAKER SLIDES**

Dr. Wanda Wallace. <u>https://www.crforum.co.uk/</u> research-and-resources/better-conversations-whythey-matter-and-how-to-have-them-2/

# WEB

Corporate Research Forum. **Trusted Advisor: HR Business Partnering, Relationship Building & Influencing.** (Post Meeting Notes). <u>https://www.</u> <u>crforum.co.uk/research-and-resources/post-meeting-</u> <u>review-notes-trusted-advisor-hr-business-partnering-</u> relationship-building-influencing/

Corporate Research Forum. **Trust.** (Research Report). <u>https://www.crforum.co.uk/research-and-resources/</u> <u>trust-2/</u>

ENGAGE. Engaging Employees, Increasing Business Success. <u>https://www.engagegroup.co.uk/employee-engagement/</u>

ENGAGE. Engagement isn't working, so what can we do about it?. <u>https://www.engagegroup.co.uk/</u>engagementisntworking/

# NEXT CRF EVENTS

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# LONDON

WARE

#### **TUESDAY 31 MARCH**

BRINGING DOWN THE WALLS: LESSONS IN SOCIAL MOBILITY

Sea Containers House, 18 Upper Ground, London SE1 9RQ

FIND OUT MORE AND REGISTER



# crflearning

#### WEDNESDAY 15 – THURSDAY 16 APRIL

CREATING BUSINESS IMPACT THROUGH PEOPLE ANALYTICS

Fanhams Hall, Fanhams Hall Road, Ware SG12 7PZ

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# FEEDBACK Better conversations: why they matter and how to have them

Thank you for attending CRF's event *Better Conversations: Why They Matter And How To Have Them.* We hope that you enjoyed the event and found it to be useful.

We would very much appreciate any feedback you can give us regarding the organisation, running and content of the event.

This survey should take no longer than 5 minutes to complete. We really appreciate your time and will actively use your suggestions to improve future sessions.

Thank you, and we look forward to welcoming you to the next CRF event.

#### The Corporate Research Forum Team

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is poor and 10 is excellent, how would you rate the following:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Overall event	0	0	$\bigcirc$	$\bigcirc$	0	0	0	$\bigcirc$	$\bigcirc$	0
Venue	0	$\bigcirc$								
Pre-event communication	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Delivery of content	0	$\bigcirc$								
Quality of content	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Relevance and quality of materials	0	$\bigcirc$								
Opportunity for networking	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Opportunity for discussion	0	$\bigcirc$	$\bigcirc$	$\bigcirc$	0	$\bigcirc$	$\bigcirc$	$\bigcirc$	$\bigcirc$	0
Applicability to my organisation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

2. Was the content of the session helpful for you and your organisation? And what did you get out of the day?

For you:	
For your organisation:	

3. Please leave us any additional comments on the event in the comments box below, as well as any suggestions on how we can improve future events.

4. Can we contact you in the future or use the information provided here for marketing purposes?

🖌 Yes 🗌 No

Thank you. **SEND TO CRF** 





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