



CORPORATE RESEARCH FORUM

# Better Conversations

**Wanda T. Wallace , Ph.D.**

[Wanda.Wallace@Leadership-Forum.com](mailto:Wanda.Wallace@Leadership-Forum.com)

@AskWanda

Podcast: "Out of the Comfort Zone"

Book: *You Can't Know It All: Leading in the Age of Deep Expertise*

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# Agenda and Key Themes



- Introductions and building connections
- Information from you
- What makes for a great or a not so great conversation?
- Approaches and tactics to improve the quality of conversations
  - Understanding and adapting style
  - Defensive reactions Motivations
  - Honest signals
  - Trust
- Putting it all together



# Connections




*Pick a partner you do not know.  
2 minutes and then rotate places.*

- What constitutes a perfect day for you?
- What is one thing you have always wanted to do but have never done? Why haven't you done it?
- Describe a time someone had a conversation with you that was meaningful conversation to you. What happened? What made it meaningful to you?
- Describe a time you had a conversation with someone else that was meaningful conversation to him or her. What happened? What made it meaningful to that person?

"The 36 Questions to Fall in Love", Helen Fisher and Lucy Brown, [www.theanatomyoflove.com](http://www.theanatomyoflove.com)

See also NYTimes article

Original research by Arthur Aron, et al (1997) "Experimental Generation of Closeness"



**Why are you here  
today?  
What are you hoping to  
gain?**



# Poll Question #1



In an average week, for your most important conversation of the week how much time do you spend preparing for the conversation, after the document/PPT is finished?

1. No time
2. Less than 5 minutes
3. 5 to 15 minutes
4. 15 to 30 minutes
5. More than 30 minutes



## Poll Question #2



How often do you avoid a conversation because you think it will be “difficult”?

1. Rarely, not very often
2. Frequently, fairly often



## Poll Question #3



Which criteria are most likely to keep you from proceeding with a “difficult” conversation? *(pick 2 if possible)*

- Do not know the person well
- Do not like the person very much
- Not confident about my message
- Do not have enough facts to support my position
- Do not have support from senior stakeholders
- The person and I disagree on the desired outcomes
- We do not trust each other
- The message cannot be framed as a positive



## Poll Question #4



Which criteria typically persuades you to go ahead with a challenging conversation? *(pick 2 if possible)*

- Know the person well
- Like the person
- Feel confident about my message
- Have the facts I need to support my position
- Have support from senior stakeholders
- The person and I agree on the desired outcomes
- We trust each other
- The message can be framed as a positive





# **What makes a conversation great or meaningful in your experience?**



**As the speaker ....**

**As the receiver ....**



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# **BREAK**

**15 minutes**





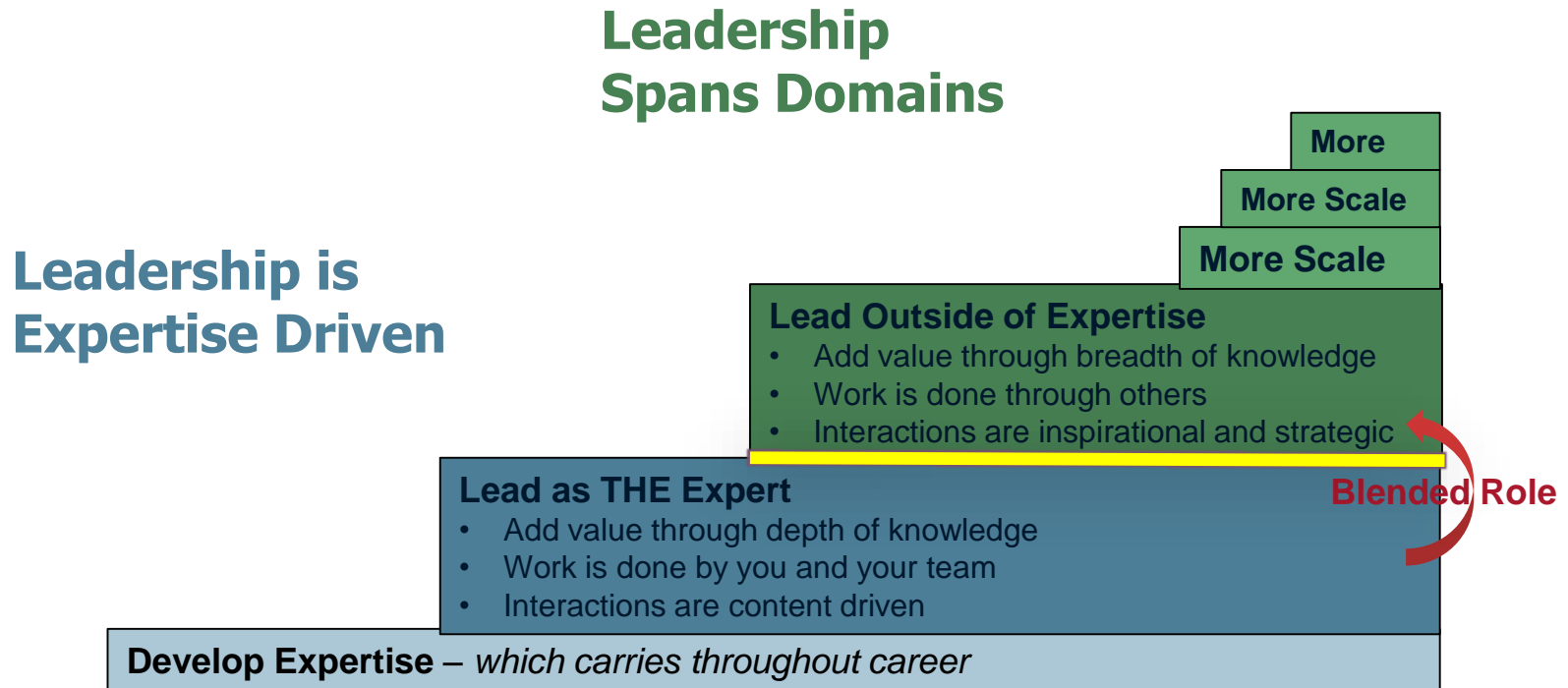
# Conversations have many purposes



- 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 behaviour of the other person
  - Usually disguised as giving feedback
- Influence and persuade
- Coach
- Create something new
  - Brainstorm, innovate, solve complex problem , collaborate
- Deepen insight and understanding about the other person
  - Motivations, intentions, perspective, experience, world view
- Understand your own thinking and emotions



# How Careers Progress





# Mental Models and Thoughts



- How the world works
- How our organization 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 they systems
- What is the simple essence 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 organization, you



# My Punchline About Great Conversations



*It's very easy to say and very difficult to do.*

- **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**

## ***Best outcome 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 how**
- **Have prepared and rehearsed**
- **Can find time and patience**



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**LUNCH**

**Back at 13:15**



**YELLOW BLUE ORANGE**  
**BLACK RED GREEN**  
**PURPLE YELLOW RED**  
**ORANGE GREEN BLACK**  
**BLUE RED PURPLE**  
**GREEN BLUE ORANGE**





## **Inclusion**

How much  
involvement

## **Control**

How much  
responsibility,  
decision power

## **Affection**

How much  
closeness,  
warmth, praise

## **Expressed**

How much you prefer  
to do or initiate

## **Wanted**

How much you want  
others to do or initiate




# Interpreting Scores



6 questions, 9 different ways

***High*** = Frequently, often, with lots of people  
7, 8, 9

***Moderate*** = Some people, some times  
3, 4, 5, 6

***Lo*** = rarely, very few occasions, very selective with whom  
0, 1, 2, 3



# Inclusion



Degree to which one includes others and associates with others

## ***Expressed***

- The extent to which you include others in your activities

## ***Wanted***

- How much you want or need others to include you



# Control



Degree of influence, decision making, being in charge

## ***Expressed***

- How often you act in ways that help you direct or influence situations
- How often you take control
- How much you want to be in charge

## ***Wanted***

- How much you want others to take charge or initiate control
- Or how much you will tolerate others taking charge, being in control



# Affection = Warmth/Openness



How close and warm you are with others and want them to be with you, degree of emotional involvement and personal disclosure

## ***Expressed***

- How often you act in ways that encourage warmth and closeness in relationships
- How much you initiate warmth, closeness
- How much praise you give

## ***Wanted***

- How much warmth and closeness you want or need from others
- How much you want or need praise and recognition



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# Break



# Your Assignment



*In groups of three:*

- Each person describes a current, “challenging” relationship – briefly please.
- Speculate whether the differences between you are primarily differences in Inclusion, Control or Affection.
- Brainstorm with your group what you could do.

Rotate positions.

Everyone has a turn.

Time: 45 minutes



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# Discussion





# Adapting To Different Styles

Detail oriented	↔	Big picture oriented
Introverted	↔	Extraverted
Inclusive	↔	Selective
Closed, reserved	↔	Warm, open
Structured	↔	Open-ended
Analytical, critical	↔	Sensitive about feelings
In control, decides	↔	Lets others decide
Rule breaker	↔	Rule follower
Candid	↔	Diplomatic



# Dealing with Others

*Particularly under stress or when being challenged, I find it useful to have some simple diagnostics about people's style and how to manage that style. Below are four of my favourite dichotomies in style along with one tip for working with each style.*



<b>EXTRAVERTS – want to talk about what they are thinking.</b> Allow them to think out loud. Show enthusiasm, energy. Say what you are thinking.	<b>INTROVERTS – want to have the space and silence to think before they speak.</b> 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, <i>Quiet</i> or her TED Talk.
<b>DETAIL ORIENTED PEOPLE – want to work from the detail to the big picture.</b> Give them the details, prepare to answer their questions and allow them to reach a conclusion inductively.	<b>BIG-PICTURE ORIENTED PEOPLE – do not want detail until they ask for it.</b> 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.
<b>CHALLENGERS/ORIGINATORS – love new ideas and they love radical change.</b> 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.	<b>HI SECURITY/CONSERVERS – appreciate incremental, well thought out change.</b> 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.
<b>HIGH INCLUDERS – want to know you have talked to a lot of people already.</b> Talk to a number of people not just the usual group.	<b>SMALL INNER CIRCLE PEOPLE – want to talk to one or two key people</b> Work with the inner circle.



# Techniques



- Dialogue Technique
- Mini Causal Loop Analysis
- Feedback Processes
- Team Life-Line
- Brainstorming Process
- Leadership Forum Workout Process



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# Better Conversations Day 2



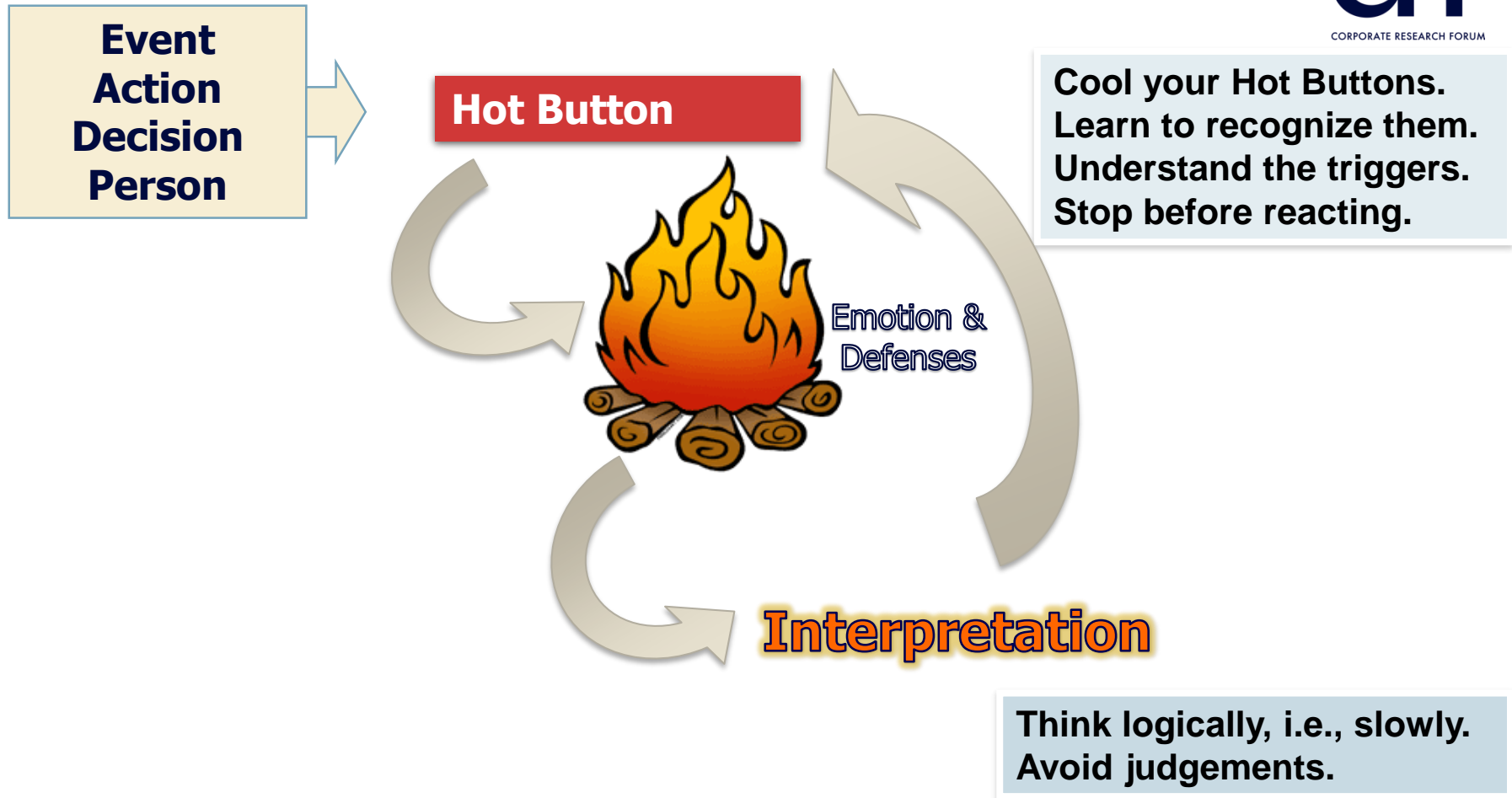
# Agenda Topics for Today



- **Defensiveness** – what it is, how it works and what to do
- **Motivation** – how to understand your own and others, language
- **Body language and impact** – Honest Signals
- **Trust** – better understanding the dynamics, taking action
- **Taking Action for Yourself**



# Emotional Cycles





# 10 TYPES OF DEFENSIVENESS

TYPE	EXAMPLE
<b>Denying all responsibility</b>	"This is your fault, you know."
<b>Making excuses</b>	"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."
<b>Mind-reading with negative affect (or assuming a negative motive)</b>	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."
<b>Cross-complaining</b>	Person #1: "You didn't leave enough time for my presentation." Person #2: "Your last presentation was too long."
<b>Bounce it back</b>	Person #1: "You don't listen to me." Person #2: "Neither do you."
<b>"Yes, but . . ."</b>	"We could try your idea, but it won't work."
<b>Repeating yourself syndrome</b>	When one or both people keeps repeating the same response instead of trying to move the conversation forward.
<b>Whining</b>	The tone of voice sends the implicit message <i>"I'm the victim here—not you. Why are you picking on me?"</i>
<b>Body language or facial expressions</b>	Rolling the eyes, crossing the arms, turning your back to your colleague, walking out of the room in the middle of a tense conversation.
<b>Outright hostility</b>	Explicitly harsh or cruel verbal responses. Obscenities. Contempt. Name-calling.



# WHICH OF THESE DO YOU DO?

**Imagine you have just been told about something that you do not like very much and do not agree with.**

1. Challenge the facts and details
2. Feel helpless or hopeless
3. Have the last word
4. Explain yourself
5. Deny the feedback
6. Yes, but...
7. Withdraw
8. Become sarcastic or cynical
9. Try to be extra nice
10. Deeply criticize yourself
11. Trivialize the feedback
12. Attack the giver
13. Obsess about the feedback
14. Feel personally attacked
15. Minimize the importance
16. Over eat, drink, shop, ...
17. Have to be right, at all costs
18. Feel inadequate or incompetent
19. Make fun of others
20. Give up





# Defenses come from three major sources



**Feeling  
Insignificant**

*Fear being*  
**Ignored or  
Abandoned**

**Inclusion**

**Feeling  
Incompetent**

*Fear being*  
**Humiliated or  
Embarrassed**

**Control**

**Feeling  
Unliked**

*Fear being*  
**Disliked or  
Rejected**

**Affection**



# Advice



- 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 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.



# Table Discussion: Gentle Interview



- What is your main trigger? Insignificant, Incompetence, Unliked
- How does that feel in your body before you are even aware of the thoughts?
- Describe a time this was triggered.
- What or who is most likely to set off this reaction?
- What could you do?



# Table Brainstorming



- List as many ways as you can to leave people who work with you feeling more:
  - **Significant**
  - **Competent**
  - **Liked**
- Count the number for each of the above
- Kudos to the table with the longest list!



# Primary Motivators

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



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# **BREAK**





# Primary Motivators Language

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



# Honest Signals



- **Energy** or activity
- **Mimicry** or mirroring
- **Fluidity** or consistency - pace, rhythm, emphasis
- **Influence** over others' speech – interruptions, rapid fire, etc.


Alex (Sandy) Pentland, *Honest Signals*





# Different Sources of Trust



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

*Level of trust  
increases*



# 15 Indicators of Trust

Indicator	Definition
<b><i>Truthful</i></b>	<i>Is honest, shows integrity</i>
<b>Vulnerable</b>	Willing to share personal mistakes, doubts, fears
<b>Loyal</b>	Commitment to organization and/or to individual people
<b>Inclusive</b>	Includes others, seeks input
<b>Sociable</b>	Friendly, easily connects with others
<b>Appreciative</b>	Willing to acknowledge/praise other's contributions
<b>Concise</b>	Communicates clearly and straight forwardly
<b>Confident</b>	Conveys conviction and assurance
<b>Open-minded</b>	Explores new ideas, perspectives and experiences
<b>Networked</b>	Others know and trust – has high quality of relationships
<b>Credible</b>	Has expertise, credibility and experience
<b>Fair</b>	Treats everyone fairly and equitably and is transparent
<b>Consistent</b>	Is predictable, does what says will do
<b>Commonality</b>	Has common goals and values
<b>Trusts Me</b>	Trusts my opinion, let's me work my way



# Trustworthiness



**Credibility + Reliability + Intimacy**

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**Self-Interest**

Charles Green, *Trusted Advisor*



# How can you increase trust?



- **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?**