

The conversation is the work

Presented by: Hilary Bryan
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Leadership Through Conversation – An excerpt from an interview with David Whyte:

“The conversation isn’t about the work. It is the work.”

David Whyte

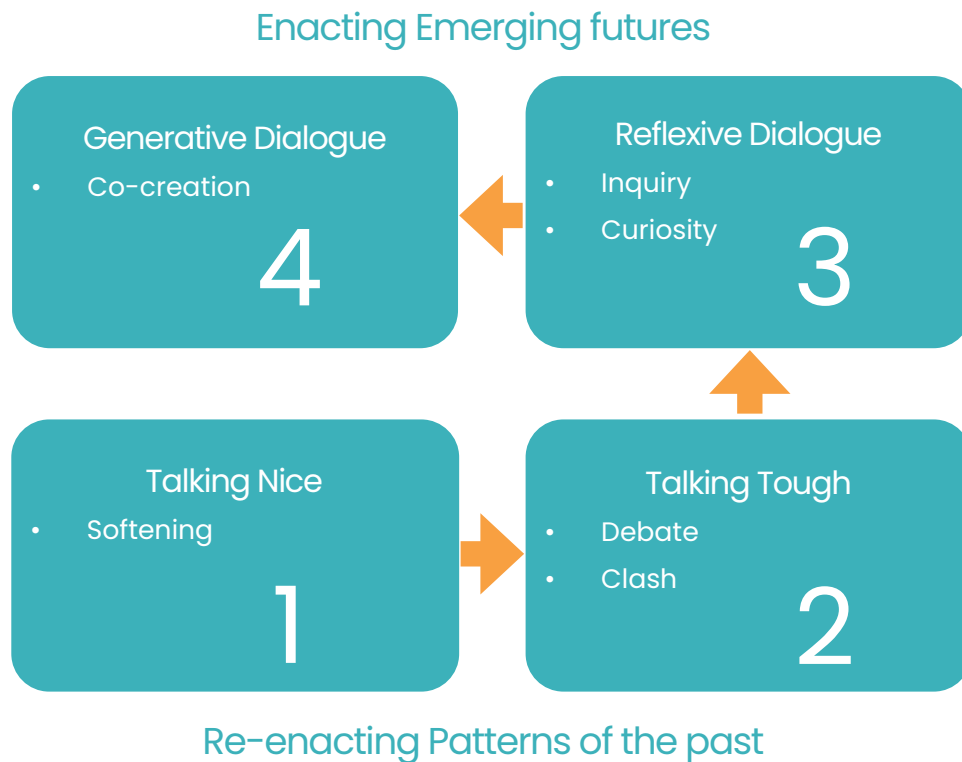
“What I see mainly is that we’re under the impression that you are supposed to have conversations in order to get to the work. This is a misapprehension that we have in most organizations now. The conversation is not about the work. It is the work. Quite often, an individual feels that they’re employed for the core competency for which they were recruited. In actual fact, they need that just as a background context, but they have actually been promoted into the field of human relationship.”

Who do you need to have conversations with?

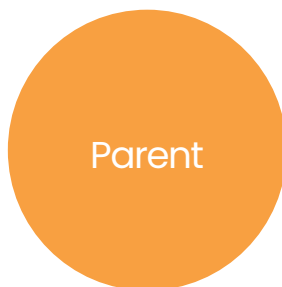
People external to your organisation
People in other areas of your organisation
Members of your own team
Friends and family members
Yourself



Two conversation approaches



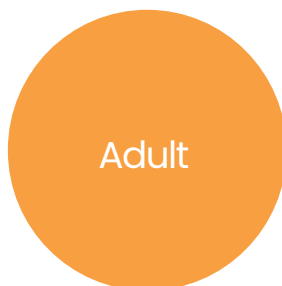
Transactional analysis



Parent

Our ingrained voice of authority. We were conditioned about what is 'right' from our parents and other authority figures. We then playback these recordings in our heads. Often words like **should, must, always, don't** are an important part of the playback.

There are two different parts of the Parent ego state: controlling parent and nurturing parent.



Adult

When we're in the Adult ego state, we're oriented to current reality. We collect information rationally, test reality and treat others as equals.



Child

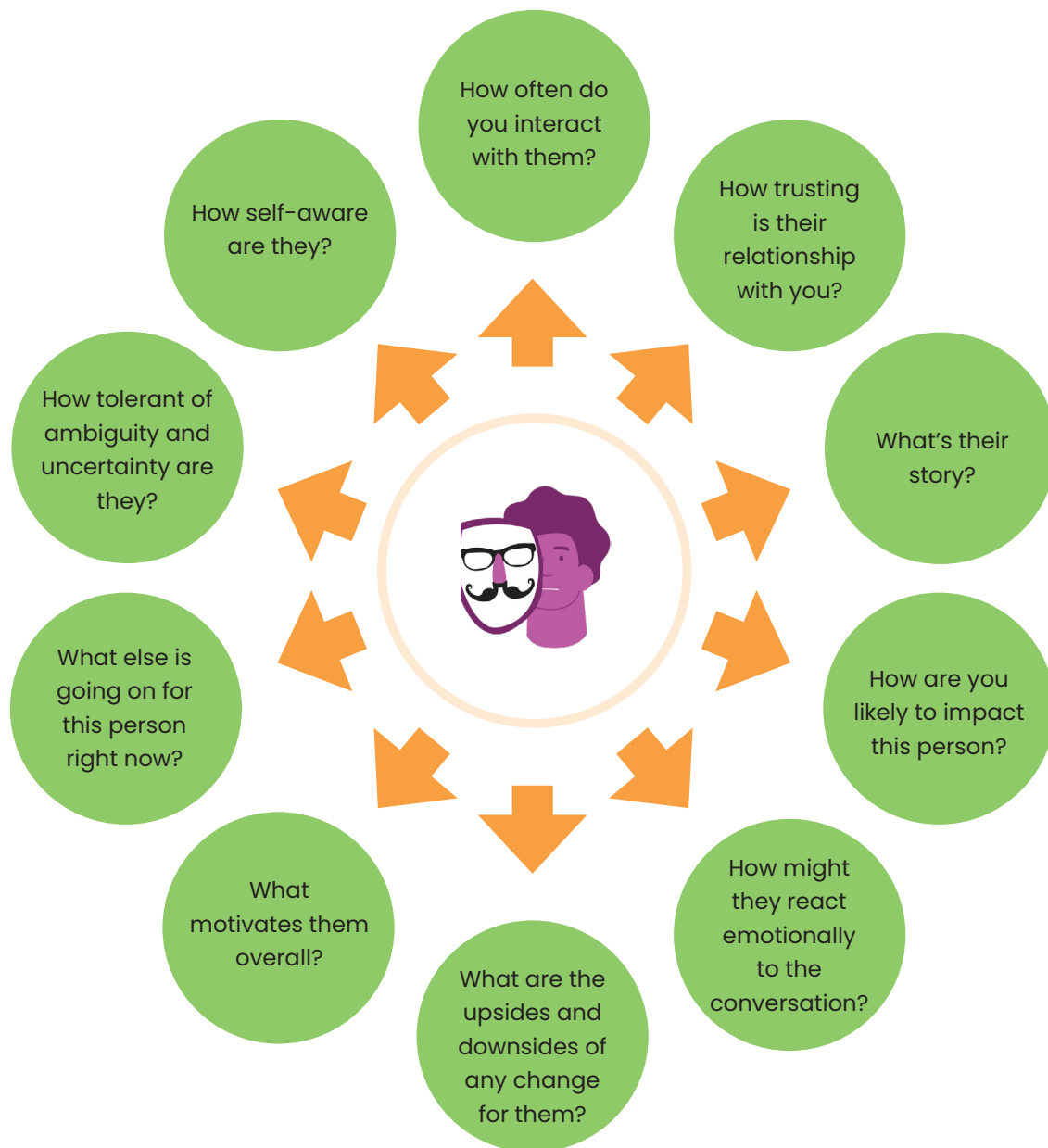
When we're in our Child ego state we replay behaviours, thoughts and feelings from our childhood.

There are two different parts of the Child ego state: adapted child and free child.

Preparing for challenging conversations

1. What happened?
(Your version of the truth)
2. How much do you think you're right?
3. What emotions does this trigger?
4. What do you believe the other person's intentions are?
5. Who do you hold responsible for what?
6. What contribution have you made to the situation?
7. Do you trust and respect the other person?
8. What assumptions have you made?
9. What's your history with this person and the situation?
10. What do you really want from the conversation ?

The conversation clock: the other party

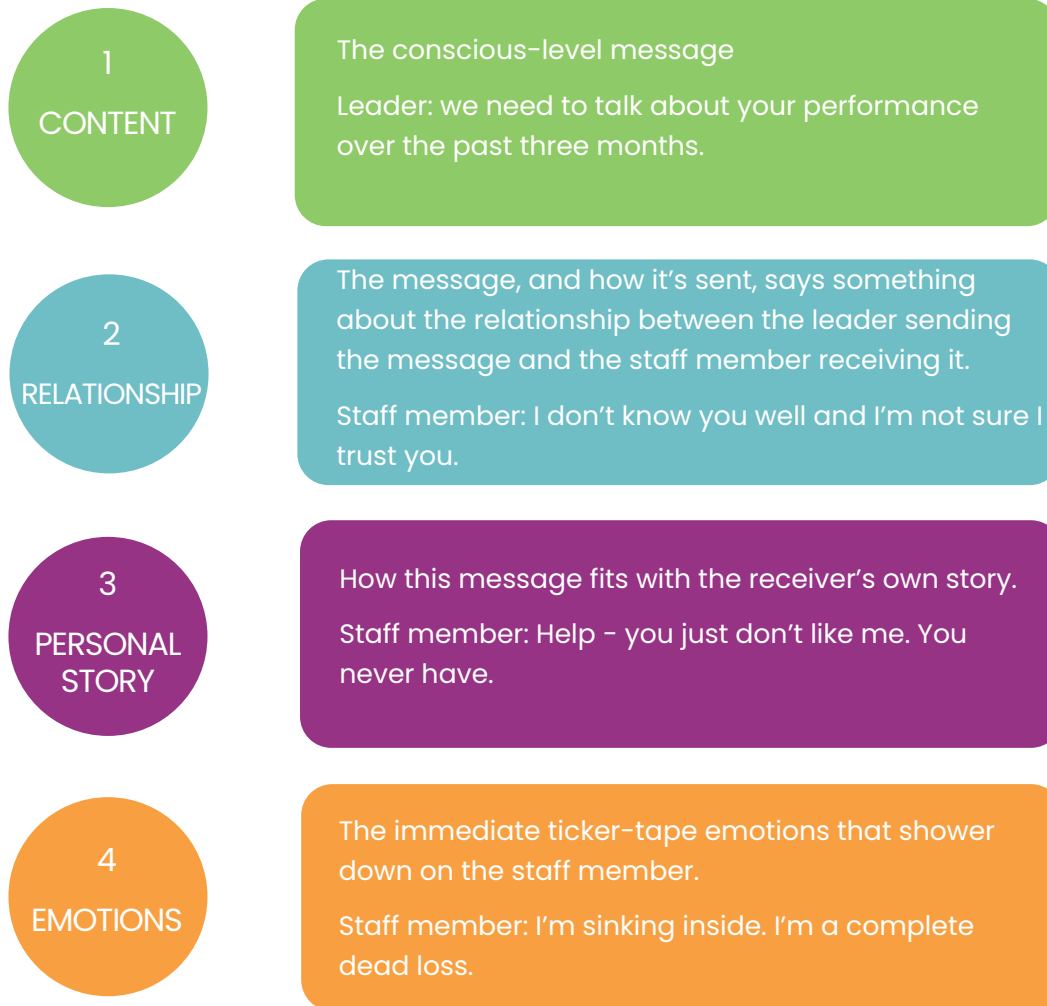


What messages people receive

What people hear when you communicate

The messages you send when you communicate are often not the ones received.

Think of it like this.



Set the scene at the start or beforehand

Our brains like certainty. So, let the other party know what's coming either at the start of the conversation or beforehand.

Simon Sinek talks about leaning in to being uncomfortable about having challenging conversations. He argues being uncomfortable is being human.

How about:

<i>I need to have a clear and direct conversation with you about...</i>	<i>I need to put where I'm at about...on the table, so we can talk it through.</i>	<i>It's time we had an open and honest conversation about...</i>
<i>I need to let you know what I'm thinking and feeling about...</i>	<i>I've got some important things to say about... And I want to hear your perspective as well.</i>	<i>We need to get together and get to the heart of... What do you think?</i>
<i>Are you ok for us to do this?</i>	<i>Is this the best time to do this?</i>	<i>Can we have a free and frank conversation about...?</i>



Radical Candour



The effect of questions on the brain

Golden question	<i>What would it take for you to...?</i>
Pure inquiry	<i>How are things going?</i>
Diagnostic inquiry	Focus the other party's attention on specific aspects of their story: feelings, reactions, underlying motives, actions taken or planned. <i>How did you react to the changes made to your report?</i> <i>What emotions did the situation you've described trigger for you?</i>
Confrontational inquiry	This isn't about confronting the person, but their story. <i>You've mentioned the poor relations between different parts of the office. How have you contributed to this?</i> <i>You've used the word - stressed - four times. What's within your control to manage your stress better</i>



Holding challenging conversations

Set the scene

- Tell your story
- Ask for, and listen to, the other person's story
- Think about a third person story and introduce it
- Draw them out if they still hold back
- Enter into dialogue
- Try to find mutual understanding and common ground
- Outline any contribution you've made to the situation and apologise if needed
- State your wish to resolve the issue or continue with the conversation
- Discuss options
- Let the conversation flow

Listening makes pain go away

Clinical trials have found listening reduces physical pain. Yet we're poor listeners, but we think we're not. Accenture conducted an extensive listening survey and found 96% of respondents thought they were good listeners: a positive illusion.

Nichols and Stevens concluded: "If we define the good listener as one giving full attention to the listener, first-grade children are the best listeners of all." They were listening 90% of the time. Why? It seems counter-intuitive. The key to their listening success was open-mindedness.

Here are four levels of listening:

Cognitive: Hearing and remembering – Yes, I understand

Behavioural: Nodding, smiling, eye contact, etc. – I get it

Meaning and emotion: Picking up all the signals – I value you

Deep listening: No judgment



Lessons from a hostage negotiator



Chris Voss, a former FBI negotiator, has some really useful techniques for negotiations that you can use in challenging conversations.

Use your voice and face

Smile and slow it down. Use one of three voices:

- **Late-night DJ voice:** Use it to make a point. Inflect your voice downward. Be calm and slow. Use it to create a feeling of trustworthiness.
- **Positive & playful:** This is the voice of an easy-going and good-natured person. Relax and smile while talking.
- **Direct / assertive:** Use rarely. Again inflect downwards.

Label the other party's emotions

Validate their emotion by acknowledging them.

- *It seems like _____ is your priority*
- *It seems like you don't like _____.*
- *It seems like you value _____.*
- *It seems like _____ makes it easier.*
- *It seems like you're reluctant to _____.*

Pause to let the label sink in. Every fourth thing you say, according to Voss, should be a label.

Thanks for coming!

From The Training Practice team - Hilary, Kristen, James and Oli

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Our brains at work

