



A New Way of Seeing CONVERSATION

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Introduction - change through conversation

Conversation exists in the dynamic interactions between two or more people.

Each human body observes and interprets the language, moods and physiology of another. We exist in the relationship. Conversation allows us to know who we are, what we think about things and what actions are likely to be in our interests.

We use our store of words, emotional reactions and body states to explain what we are experiencing now. We are the product of our history.

Close relationships give us a shared history and a familiarity which makes conversation as important as food. We need it to live and thrive as

human beings.

That's why I am interested in the ontology of the human observer. It explains our 'way of seeing' the world.

Conversations are an opportunity for us to question the observer WE are, and seek to understand and respect the 'legitimate others' as the observers THEY are.

Changing the way we see things is the goal of a coaching relationship, which has to be founded on respect for self and others.

Conversation used to be about objectivity, an external reality, truth, expert knows best, being right, being in control, etc. I can now see

the devastating effect this mindset has on people's 'way of being'.

In a complex, paradoxical and unpredictable world it is no longer helpful to try and impose 'one right way'. Conversation today needs to be about making distinctions and connections through language. This is because reality is dependent on the choices and interpretations made by us as observers and creators of action.

It is clear that we learn and change through conversations. This newsletter explores different types of conversations designed to achieve different purposes in a coaching, managing or leadership role.

Reframing - a new way of seeing

There is no such thing as a difficult client, just coaches who decide to give up listening and questioning and just slip into 'tell and sell' mode, advising their clients on what they think they ought to do.

The presupposition of an effective coach is that the client knows themselves best and must be trusted to address issues or move towards their goals in ways that they perceive will work best for them.

The skill of the coach is to help the client cross the self-imposed boundaries of their thinking, to look for alternative interpretations or make distinctions based on new insights.

A poet sees a different moon in

the night sky to an astronomer, who sees it differently to an astrologer. For example . . .

How do you view incoming telephone calls ?

When might you view them differently ?

What might change your language, mood state or physiology ?

How might these changes shift the purpose and outcome of the conversation ?

Fundamental to these different interpretations is what is actually being observed and the distinctions being made at the time.

When a client has makes a different interpretation I ask them

what actions they could take and in what ways it might lead to a better result. If the response is positive I ask what support they might want from me to help them take the necessary steps towards a new competence, or achieving the seemingly impossible. I believe if you can see it you can do it.



"To do things differently we have to see them differently, which means being able to observe different patterns of thought and action."

Hubert Dreyfus



Building helpful emotions - a case example

Whatever someone says it is just their interpretation as an observer. Every conversation is fraught with opinions tinged with emotions (positive and negative) lurking below the sur-

been told by his manager that he needed coaching. His manager was of the traditional school and had promised to get him some help to improve his performance.

how his manager and his clients were reacting? How could that response be seen as helpful or even acceptable?

I used these questions to create a lens through which to help him review his emotional responses, and how alternatives could have benefitted him. I prompted him to choose emotions that could be levers in getting a positive rather than negative response from others.

It was clear to me that in his work as a Contracts Negotiator he needed to learn how to control his emotions. I felt that he did not respect my role and wanted to 'put me down', treat me like an adversary and even intimidate me to 'back off'.

I thought that if this was the way he treated others it was hardly surprising that he found it difficult to secure good agreements with his own clients. His emotions were getting in the way of having productive conversations. He seemed to be concerned that being coached would suggest to colleagues that he was incompetent.

Over the weeks he found merit in [appreciating and understanding what others thought, felt and did](#) - and communicated it to them.

We then worked on dealing with differences of opinion by [showing respect and looking for common links and shared values](#).

It emerged that over the past year connections with his manager were getting less and less frequent and an unhealthy distance had grown between them.

He now gives regular feedback to his manager and they exchange personal news at meetings - each [respecting the other's status and responsibilities](#).

He is now [finding his role much more fulfilling as he applies the lessons learned](#) - getting agreement with his manager and from his clients. He is now being complimented for his negotiation skills.

The first step was to get our relationship working. I was quick to reassure him that we would use his vast knowledge and experience of successful negotiations to open up a conversation between us that might be helpful to him.

My first task was to help him address his manager's concerns, not his emotional reaction. I encouraged him to see things from his manager's and his client's perspectives to identify some positive intentions.

I asked him . . . In what ways did he feel he was being treated unfairly? Was there any truth in

face waiting for a particular word, attitude or body state to stimulate a reaction.

Unhelpful emotions can be distracting, painful and divert attention from important issues that may need to be addressed at the time

So how can we deal with the unpredictable nature of ever-present emotions and opinions - our own and those of others ?

A strategy I use to generate positive emotions and deal with negative ones, even with the most demanding of clients, is to be appreciative.

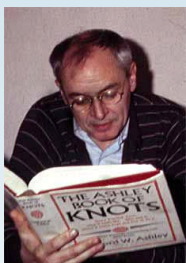
About twelve months ago a corporate client manager referred a colleague to me. I could only describe my initial conversation with him as strained and sometimes confrontational.

He appeared red faced and angry with me having



"Talk is cheap only if you treat it as cheap. If you use it well, conversation becomes your most precious asset. Conversation goes beyond simply getting information from A to point B. It's about generating action through all forms of communication from speaking and listening to painting and singing."

Kim H. Krisco



"The range of what we think and do is limited by what we fail to notice. And because we fail to notice what we fail to notice there is little we can do to change until we notice how failing to notice shapes our thoughts and deeds."

R.D Lang

Building trust through conversation

I always like to begin my coaching sessions with social conversation. I ask about hobbies, family, and what they do for fun. This helps to build trust.

I find these initial few minutes help to shift the mood to one where the client is relieved from the pressures of the day to become more optimistic and open up to new solutions.

Sometimes these 'lead-in' conversations can reveal the client's mood state and any other issues of concern. By paying close attention to body movement, breathing, intonation and their choice of words I can establish the

coaching relationship more quickly so that we can make the best use of the limited time available to us.

The initial sessions are very much about establishing and maintaining mutual trust and respect. Without securing a good rapport we will not be able to trust each other or feel confident enough to challenge what is said or inferred.

I work at creating a 'new way of seeing' that enables me to relax and be more observant. We can then both feel free to express ourselves openly and take the conversation in directions that will energise us to stay positive, find new possibilities and commit to

actions that will count towards the client's goals. This will not happen without creating a trusting relationship.

Mutual trust as [Julio Olalla](#) reminds us, is about client and coach [feeling secure](#) in the relationship, [respectful of each other's competence](#) and [keeping our promises](#) to each other.

The language must be appreciative. The words should reflect the client's sensory preferences and relay optimistic, supportive messages.

Trust holds the key to coaching success, yet it is the least understood factor. I will explore trust in a future edition of the newsletter.

Talking body and emotions - case example

Linda came to me because her new job required her to make presentations and she wanted to overcome her nerves.

In our first meeting Linda was adamant that she had "made a mistake" by being nervous talking in front of her peers. I wondered what that meant to her, if she felt she was being judged and who she thought was doing the judging. We explored who was doing the observing and making the judgement that led her to draw such a negative conclusion about herself. I explained that when you say, "I made a mistake, I apologize," this cannot undo how you feel, it simply begs respect and appreciation for your honesty.

Linda usually appeared confident, so I wondered what was causing her to accentuate the negative when presenting to a group. It seemed to be a case of self-

sabotage. She was doing the interpreting and drawing a negative conclusion. Something had to be unlearned here.

In subsequent coaching sessions we explored possible catalysts and enhanced her self-observation skills. We looked at what could be the self-limiting beliefs that were prompting her negative thoughts (see [Ladder of Inference](#)—page 6)

The relearning started after a [timeline exercise](#). It brought her to the realisation that she was creating the negative thoughts, negative language and a mood state that she experienced only when facing the judgement of peers. There was deep anxiety about not giving of her best.

I noticed how Linda's posture embodied her anxiety and fear. We started to modify her posture standing squarely on the floor, relax-

ing the shoulders, pushing them back, and flexing her neck and knees. We worked to deepen and slow her breathing and this helped to lower her pitch.

We worked on her internal dialogue, how she would make declarations of intent and deliver on promises to herself

Her presentation technique improved and so did her confidence.

This approach here is based on [Kurt Lewin's Change Theory](#), the idea of unfreezing and refreezing 'mind sets' as a way of seeing things differently. I used Linda's own powers of observation to manage her own learning.

My role as Coach was to influence Linda's state of readiness for learning and change her perception through a commitment to observe herself and reflect on the impact of change.

Stephen MR Covey



"I am convinced that speaking (conversations) and our behavior (actions) have an enormous impact on how we see things and the results we can then get."

[The Speed of Trust](#) published Simon & Schuster 2006

Kurt Lewin



"There is nothing so practical as a good theory."

"If you want truly to understand something, try to change it."

"Experience alone does not create knowledge."

"Social action, just like physical action, is steered by perception."



Conversations about performance

Coaching can start when the coachee/client has an awareness of the need to improve or change themselves through learning.

In a corporate context this involves identifying a gap between current and desired levels of competence or performance. This scenario is played out in thousands of organisations where performance improvement plans enable managers to identify and support opportunities for learning by 'bridging the gap' between 'now and new'.

This involves setting [SMART Targets](#) or [Well Formed Outcomes](#). They would be effective if more managers had the coaching ability to under-

take [Motivation Interviewing](#) and adopt a 'positive attitude'.

An [Appreciative Inquiry](#) can induce positive reinforcement from even the smallest effort and can make all the difference. It helps to build confidence and relationships based on mutual respect.

It is my observation that managers undertaking [Performance Development Reviews \(PDR's\)](#) with their direct reports would benefit from following a simple format.

This format needs to be used in most work conversations, not just during formal PDR interviews.

1. Pick one performance is-

sue to focus on and stay with it until there is a commitment to take action.

2. Appreciate the person and only make statements about the behavior you have actually observed .

3. Criticise the behavior (not the person) and explain the impact it is having on results or working relationships.

4. Ask for what actions that could taken to improve their performance and what you could do to support it.

5. Agree to actions and set deadlines. If this doesn't work describe clearly what you want done and by when.

6. Hold people accountable for their promises to act.



Sir Francis Bacon



"If a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubt, but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he shall end in certainties."

'The Advancement of Learning'

Conversation from a state of not knowing

You can never know another person's experience or fully understand their perception of it.

What you can do is build your own model of their descriptions and behaviours. Our minds are thrown into chaos when what is said seems illogical to us and takes our reasoning on unfamiliar twists and turns. They may be far removed from what the client meant to communicate.

As each new piece of information emerges you revise your mental model of what you think they are trying to communicate.

This is why it can take two or three sessions to get a clearer picture of their world.

When coaching I approach such situations by asking 'clean questions'. This avoids imposing my own world view on what my client is trying to tell me.

The technique known as [Clean Language](#) was devel-

oped by [David Grove](#). It ensures that everything we say and do is intimately related to what our client is saying and doing. The question is based on the last verbal statement or description (including the speed and intonation of the delivery) so that there is minimum need for the client to try and interpret your words and so stay within their own world or model of reality.



Clean questions have their own syntax. The statements you pick up on are where you want to direct their attention.

For example, if the client

says "I would like to have more energy" you would ask "[And](#) you would like to have more energy, [that's](#) more energy [like what](#)?"

This encourages the client to search their unconscious mind and seek metaphors to explain sensory and symbolic information.

For example, the client may reply "[It's like being at the top of a mountain](#)". You would then

ask something like "[And](#) it's like being at the top of a mountain. [And when](#) at the top of the mountain, [what kind of](#) mountain [is that](#) mountain?"

James Lawley & Penny Tompkins



"Learning to use Clean Language you will develop acute listening and observation skills, an improved ability to retain and recall information and an increased capacity to think systemically and at multiple levels."

'Metaphors in Mind'

The Developing Company
2003

For more information go to <http://www.cleanlanguage.co.uk/CleanLanguage.html>

Reflective conversation

Reflective conversation promotes learning and personal transformation. It draws on how we interpret past experience and challenge the assumptions and distinctions we make to gain new perspectives.

You may have experienced this in [Action Inquiry](#) or [Learning Sets](#), but more than likely you do it everyday as you process your personal worries or problems. You talk to yourself.

These periods of stillness and reflection are vital in enabling us to learn from our experiences. See [Theories of Learning](#).

We all know the power of positive self-talk, but a reflective conversation with a coach helps challenge our assumptions and choose alternative ways of seeing things. It also stimulates what [Chris Argyris](#) calls 'Double Loop Learning' (go to: <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/argyris.htm>)

The factors that govern learning, such as values and assumptions, need to be addressed. We then know how to activate our learning and what will motivate us to change our thoughts and actions.

[Reflective conversations](#) can go even further and tease out why we associate with particular values and beliefs, and when they do or do not work in our best interests.

Conversation needs dialogue not discussion

Dialogue requires what [Belenky](#) in her book 'Women's Ways of Knowing' described as 'connected knowing'. It emerges from conversations where people feel connected to a point where they build on each others ideas to find the best solution. This is what a coaching conversation seeks to achieve.

Discussion on the other hand is about 'separated knowing' where many different ideas are generated and compete with each other to win people over—what [David Bohm](#) called [didactic discussion](#).

Dialogue seeks common ground which requires people to really listen to each other

to find something in what they are sensing or saying that they can connect with and add to. This only happens when two or more people are in a 'helping relationship'. They are wanting to share a stance or belief so they can reason with and not against each other.

For this to work, the parties must see themselves as equal in status so they can value each other's experience and insights. They appreciate each others contribution and this encourages curiosity and creative thinking.

This kind of [constructed knowing](#) gets the commitment needed to find a solu-

tion that is valued by everyone in the conversation.

Learning the art of dialogue requires empathy, listening without judgement—and that requires an attitude of trust. We need to be whole human beings, willing to try and understand others by appreciating difference.

This is why so many managers find dialogue difficult. They feel safer retaining their status as 'expert knower' and judge. To validate an opposing view could undermine their authority.



David Bohm

Internal Dialogue

Internal reflective dialogue requires a stimulus, what [David Clutterbuck](#) calls 'the right coaching climate'.

Sometimes our conscious state of mind leaves us with constant chatter that makes it difficult for us to see the possibilities or draw on our lived experience.

Finding some stillness or 'quiet time' can be an invaluable

way of tapping into our unconscious mind—the place where all our memories and thought connections are stored.

This is the place where we wrestle with our dilemmas, find strategies that have worked in the past, or find the confidence and willpower to take action.

But as [Habermas](#) (see *Vol*

ume (1) newsletters) reminds us, there is a danger of self-deception, limited by our own world view. We need to learn the skill of detachment and become powerful observers of our own thoughts, feelings and actions.

Reflective conversation with a coach can make the internal dialogue and learning much more effective in helping the coachee to make a change.

Reg Revans

"Action learning does not pretend to supply the subject with much fresh cognitive knowledge; it is sufficient to help him use more effectively what he already has, and to reinterpret the experiences of yesterday in the light of tomorrow."

David Bohm

"Dialogue emphasises analysis, the breaking up ideas into many points of view. They compete with each other for dominance. Its value is limited. Dialogue seeks to connect ideas and create new meaning that when shared offers us new ways of seeing that arise from the relationship"

'On Dialogue' 1996

Carlos Castaneda

"We talk to ourselves incessantly about our world. In fact we maintain our world with our internal talk. And whenever we finish talking to ourselves about ourselves and our world, the world is always as it should be. We renew it, we rekindle it with life, we uphold it with our internal talk. Not only that, but we also choose our paths as we talk to ourselves. Thus we repeat the same internal talk over and over until the day we die."

'Tales of Power' 1981

Conversation and learning

The goal of [Ontological Change](#) is that people will view themselves and their reality (world) differently.

Positive change is infectious that assumptions, beliefs and values often change. Some even say the experienced touches their souls'.

Some organisations still seem to ignore the simple fact that people have to change themselves for the organisation to change.

The [Learning Organisation](#) movement have long recognized the importance of personal generative learning.

fore the vehicle through which organizations can transform themselves.

[Ontological Coaching](#) adopts the view that we need 'new ways of seeing' to reveal new paths to effective learning and change. The primary process for achieving ontological change is through conversations that foster quality relationships. That's what get's results in terms of personal performance and quality of life.

As the following short case example below shows, we cannot ignore the power

of our internal dialogue, emotions and physiology if we want to make our conversations more effective.

If in all our conversations we could find a way to helping each other learn how to improve, then the quality of our life and work would be greatly enhanced.

If all managers knew how to coach their direct reports to be more powerful observers of themselves and others, performance would improve and human souls would be nourished.

Peter Senge



"Real learning gets at the heart of what it means to be human. Through learning we recreate ourselves."

The Fifth Discipline

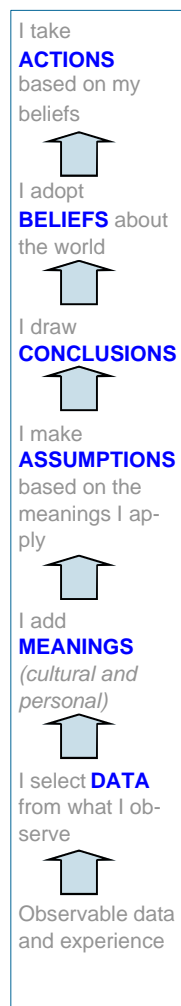
Conversation and reasoning

How can coaches hold conversations that they know will have the desired effect in changing the mindsets of coachees ?

One way is to encourage coachees to try a new behaviour and then observe how a 'new way of seeing' might work better for them in achieving their goal.

Whilst there is a strong emotional dimension there is what [Chris Argyris](#) called a [Reflexive Loop](#) where a change in mindset changes the data that is selected from an observation simply because we see it differently. Our actions follow our beliefs or the way we think about things.

The reasoning process is summarised in **The Ladder of Inference** shown opposite, where beliefs influence the data we select. As a result, asking reflexive questions can shift people's perspectives and move things in a more positive direction.



Personally, the idea of the reflexive loop has helped increase my powers of observation and shape the way I stimulate [generative learning](#). This is how people actively construct their own interpretations of information and draw conclusions from them.

Using the **Ladder of Inference** could help you become more aware of your own thinking and reasoning and makes the reasoning of others more visible to you.

It certainly aids purposeful questioning to check out their thinking and get at the data behind their conclusions, assumptions and the meaning they gave to it.

This way of seeing helps a coach to understand the beliefs that are behind the choices and actions being taken by their coaches/clients, and how through conversation, they can check out what they originally thought and how it can be given different meanings and result in new actions.

Chris Argyris



"Most people define learning too narrowly as mere "problem-solving", so they focus on identifying and correcting errors in the external environment. Solving problems is important. But if learning is to persist, managers and employees must also look inward. The need to reflect critically on their own behaviour, by identifying the ways they contribute to their problems, through the way they see the problem."

The conversational nature of leadership

Leaders and managers are required to behave in ways that will get others to take action. This is achieved mainly through conversations.

Indeed, all of us rely on conversation to influence the actions of others. Coaches are no exception.

Leaders are under pressure to minimize the chance of communication breaking down as they issue declarations, exchange information and share meaningful ideas.

Conversation is the tool leaders use to direct people's energy to the tasks and behaviours that will deliver collaborative action towards achieving a shared

vision.

In an article about the nature of conversation [Alan Sieler identifies the elements of conversation proficiency](#). He explains how we can use conversations to build relationships.

Alan observes *"When conversations are lacking relationships suffer . . . and if relationships are not positive limited conversation occurs."*

It would appear that language underpins everything we do. We use it to create and interpret reality, to explain our emotions, make distinctions and form relationships . . . to name but a few. It would appear that we 'live in language'.

As leaders and coaches we need to learn how to:

- build trust
- get commitment
- be willing to learn
- build relationships

To do this, we must learn how to listen empathetically, ask purposeful questions, manage our moods and emotions and use our body's to communicate confidence.

It is obvious that the work of a leader, manager and coach is to establish and develop learning conversations and learning relationships. To this list I would add learning communities as they too reflects the quality of conversation.

Walter Truett Anderson



"Organisations are linguistic structures built out of words and maintained by conversations. Even problems that aren't strictly communications - failures of mechanical systems for example - can be explored in terms of things said and not said, questions asked and not asked, conversations never begun or left uncompleted, alternate explanations not discussed."

Conversation as a coaching tool - a case example

I strongly believe that if you can change the way you talk to people, you become a more effective coach - almost overnight.

In a recent conversation with Jim, to whom I am a mentor (Coaching Supervisor), I asked him "How might you go about engaging your client in a deeper dialogue about that issue?"

As I spoke I noticed a physical reaction to my use of the word 'deeper'. So I added "So they speak from the heart for example".

He said that he would listen for what the person was feeling and seemed to be committed to, and not just

listening to the words that were used.

I was thinking, that would be good, but wondered if Jim had thought about how he might check-in to notice and observe his own reactions to what he was sensing in his client

So I asked him "Would you share your own beliefs and understanding of what you were sensing?"

Jim went on to explain that he wouldn't do it in an attempt to judge his client or convince them of the rightness of his assessment, just as a vehicle for offering a different perspective.

I was thinking that it is often

helpful to introduce new ideas and ways of thinking by sharing a personal experience without being patronising or trying to moralise in any way.

So I asked "How could you deepen the conversation without appearing to moralise or putting your ideas into your client's head?"

Jim was emphatic. "I would look for a way-in by asking 'clean questions', such as - Given . . . blah, blah, what would you want to have happen?"

I congratulated Jim for realising that his job was to learn from and take his lead from the client.

Peter Thorneycroft



"To be humble is to recognise you are in the presence of something or someone you can learn from—and that includes everything and everyone."

Language patterns in conversation

There are language patterns identified by [Richard Bandler](#) and [John Grinder](#), the co-founders of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), that are based on conversations between [Virginia Satir](#) and her clients.



These language patterns are used to get a better understanding of people's mental maps by using questions to get at another person's deeper thoughts.

For example, the phrase "I am always right" is very general and begs the question.

Do you mean you have never ever make a mistake in your whole life? Statements such as "I did that badly" begs the question: Compared with whom?

When someone says "You are not good enough, you naturally want to ask: Says who and by what criteria I wonder?"

When there are highly exaggerated statements made by someone you are in rapport

with you can amplify it more so that it sounds vaguely ridiculous.

For example, when someone says "You always do that?" you may want to reply with "You're right I do like to feel that people can depend on me."

If someone should say "I couldn't possibly tell you" you would naturally ask: Why, what are you afraid of? or What's stopping you? Or "Just suppose that you could, what would that be like? [Here we are searching for possibilities.](#)

The comment "I must try and do better" is a lead in to questions such as: What would happen if you didn't? or What is forcing you to do better? Or Suppose you didn't, what would happen then? [Here we are clarifying what is absolutely necessary.](#)

We must be careful not to imply that there is a problem in being afraid or being in denial.

Then there are mind-reading comments like "He doesn't think I can do it." or "He should be obvious how I feel." I would want to ask "What has happened to make

you believe that?" [Here we are looking for sensory-specific observations.](#)

Look for comments where clients a jumping to conclusions. Question the connections made between an effect and its assumed cause, or why one statement is justified by another.

Key lessons for coaching conversations are:

1. Be clear about what you want to do, do something, notice what happened and then change it until you get the outcome your client wants .
2. Don't be afraid to make mistakes, just remember to learn from them.



3. Spot the language patterns used and practice your questions so that rapport is maintained and confidence increases.

4. Write down the problem you are seeking to resolve in simple language as a platform for your questions.

Richard Bandler



"Brains aren't designed to get results; they go in all directions. If you know how the brain works you can set your own direction. If you don't, then someone else will."

'Using Your Brain' 1985



Ontological simplicity in conversation

Ontological simplicity (parsimony) is a principle that says we should not multiply entities beyond necessity. This principle is attributed to [William of Occum \(Ockham\)](#) who in the 14th century criticised people who created complex explanations for simple phenomena.

He actually said "*For nothing ought to be posited without a reason given, unless it is self-evident (literally, known through itself) or known by experience.*" This phrase, called **Occam's Razor**, helped people "cut" through complexity. It challenges the

argument of [reductionist philosophy](#) by synthesising rather than analysing, seen today as a heuristic (rule of thumb) thinking that advises simplicity of thinking and action in a complex world.

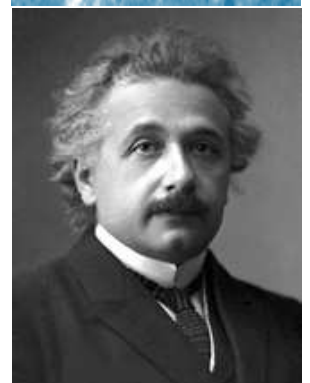
The proponents of Ontological Change and Ontological Coaching, seek to clarify the fundamental principles of what it means to be human.

The result is a laser like focus on language, emotions and [somatics](#) (body) and how they impact on each other.

Effective conversation involves these three domains working together to create a 'way of seeing' that releases a human being's potential for independent and interdependent action.

What do you and others bring to relationships? Are you attending to the quality of your conversations with people? Can you afford not to if conversation is the main vehicle used to generate learning and change during times of increasing complexity.

Albert Einstein



"Make everything as simple as possible - but not simpler".

Understanding the 'adaptation reflex'

Sometimes conversations can get out of control. They can move into areas that are unfamiliar. As a result, those who fear change will adopt conventional responses. It then becomes the job of the Coach to find [a safe place for dangerous truths](#) to be explored. It means holding on to [fuzzy possibilities](#).

Unless 'strange' chaotic thoughts can be reconciled with conventional [linear reasoning](#) then the conversation often stops.

It stops because the mind is naturally [autopoietic](#) and rejects any new thoughts that might be infectious or threaten its identity. This results in denial, withdrawal or diversion.

The role of Coach is then to use the expectation of betterment to stimulate the imagination and explore alternative viewpoints.

To support the process of realignment to a new dynamic balance, I use my own

[Dynamic Balance Model](#) to reframe perceptions and choose those actions that will result in the highest probability of success.

This approach is the [Adaptation Reflex](#) which involves moving someone from one state of dynamic balance to another. This may involve a breakthrough or the gradual evolution of an idea.

You can find out more in Daryl Connor's book [Leading at the Edge of Chaos](#).

Daryl Connor

"Think of dynamic balance as a kind of restless composure. Stability is an illusion. It is the byproduct of highly mobile forces interaction with each other that they create a steady state. Knowing the meaning and implication of these forces enables us to get control over our destiny."

[Daryl Connor's Change Model](#)

Balancing action and reflection

The main purpose of work conversation is to influence another person's actions.

As work processes become more complex, relationships become more interdependent. If the people involved are unable to self-manage and things get messy, external controls reassert themselves and the capacity for self-realisation and collaboration remain undeveloped.

When working as a Corporate Coach I find that when the awareness of my clients is raised, and they observe the language used in their interactions with others, they get insights into what the dominant culture expects and values.

The power comes from observing how the language changes in different contexts and moods.

Awareness of the mood within a conversation is achieved by actively listening to the other person, assessing their motivations (revealed through the body language they use), understanding our own intentions which influences the meaning and the conclusions we draw.

These observations make it possible to manage the mood of the conversation, create a more positive and open climate for learning and explore new possibilities for action.

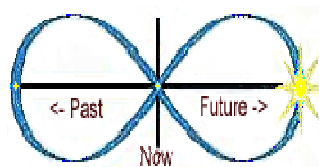
This is how individuals shape the culture which then influences the tone and nature of future conver-

sations.

This is why [coaching is a co-active process](#). The quality of the relationship creates a space where values become shared and there is a mutual interest in achieving the client's goals.

As a consultant I would look at the network of communication channels. As a coach I look for new distinctions and possibilities to help the client see current practices from a new perspective.

They can emerge from conversations that link past, present and future together in a loop. The assumption here is that there is no one simple cause and effect relationship that will deliver a 'future perfect' state.



One of the methods I might use in this context is the [miracle question](#) - "Suppose the problem vanished overnight. How would you know?" Getting the client to use their imagination, enables them to see a better future and what is happening then that is not happening now.

I might give the client a worksheet to complete to help them capture ideas for action—things they could do that would count

towards creating 'future perfect' visualizations and actions.

It would ask them to identify simple things they could start and stop doing, even do more of and less of to make it happen.

The approach depends on whether I sense that my client wants to observe their actions and reflect on them, or be thrown into the action and reflect on the whole experience afterwards.

Obviously observation is not an end in itself, learning requires both action and reflection.

The value of using observation and imagination is that it takes clients into the domain of ideas, possibilities from which a 'new way of seeing' can emerge and be owned as authentic.

I have coached goal-driven control freaks and laid-back reflectors. Both need to find their dynamic balance. This often starts with what they want to achieve that isn't happening now and learning what language mood and body posture is most likely to help them get what they want. It gives purpose to the conversations.

On most occasions this purpose is to get action or promises to act that will improve performance. This involves defining the criteria for performance and the thinking and behaviours that are needed to deliver them.

Raul Espejo

"When observing we do not have direct access to the experiences of other people, yet we can share common domains of experience. This enables us to give meaning to our observations sufficiently for us to talk about them and share the meaning with others."

'Organisational Transformation and Learning'
Wiley 1997



"If you keep to one corner and forget the myriad aspects of the totality, if you take one thing and discard the rest, then what you attain will be little and what you master will be shallow."

Lao Tzu, Understanding the Mysteries. 600 BC



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Ontological Coaching A NEW WAY OF SEEING

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We learn to converse from an early age and get lots of practice at it, so why then, even as educated adults, do we sometimes get it so wrong ?

Even after many years as a coach, I sometimes feel as if I don't know what I'm doing. My own mentor reassures me that

it's the quality of the relationship that's most important in conversations. Yes, it's often the key factor in getting results, rather than technical expertise. However, I still think knowing what you are doing and why stands you in good stead. Admittedly I have spent over fifteen years in training and consultancy and still have to remind myself sometimes that it is the client who is the expert here - not me. I have grown to have more respect for the power of dialogue.

The Change Zone website contains tools, techniques, articles, websites, publications, infobases and the views of leading thinkers on personal and organisational change. Search the site for "conversation" and see what emerges. Feel free to browse and take away what makes sense to you. Be patient as it is always 'under construction'. I strive to arrive, but never do. Does that make sense to you ?

Steve Trivett



Conclusion - the art of conversation



Steve Trivett
The Change Zone

"Conversations enable us to reflect and inquire into the link between what we see and how we interpret it. Learning the art and practice of conversation helps us become vehicles for building aspirations, sharing understanding and making things happen. It influences how we see our own world and the worlds that turn up for others."

Conversation is the main way in which we understand ourselves and influence others. It is a vehicle for learning and change.

Through dialogue we create reality by sharing with each other the context for our experience and the thoughts and feelings we create as a result.

An Ontological Coach not only pays attention to the words, but also observes 'felt senses' (*inside-out*) and body language (*outside-in*) as well as the nature of the coaching relationship, in order to interpret the spaces in between the words.

Through conversation it is possible to check out assumptions and how words are received and understood.

The reason why I am so interested in process (as well as outcomes of course) is that when I can do consciously and intentionally what I have

hitherto done intuitively, my coaching ability becomes more accessible to me. It brings more power and care into the coaching relationship. This actually allows me to act more decisively.

I believe I can change even in the most difficult circumstances if I know how to speak and listen to myself and others. Indeed, I feel I can create the circumstances I need to be successful. Reality is created through the thoughts we choose to act on depending on course on the meaning I give to them.

The most useful distinctions that can be made in conversations are called speech acts, such as declarations, promises, requests, offers, assessments and assertions - words that describe the commitments we make simply by speaking.

Listed below are eight principles for quality conversations that are loosely based on

those identified by Kim Krisco in his book **Leadership and the Art of Conversation** published by Prima in 1997.

1. Pay close attention to how you speak and listen.
2. Don't dwell on rapport, get a connection and then take the lead.
3. Be future focused and aware of how others see things.
4. Lead the conversation first from the past, to the future and then into the present to focus on possible action.
5. Substitute proactive listening for reactive listening to make the other party feel they are important.
6. Distinguish between things that exist in substance and those that exist only in language—and react accordingly.
7. Shape your image and speaking style to be someone people want to listen to
8. Look for a breakthrough and have the confidence to go with what emerges.