



Having Powerful Conversations (Part I.)

1.) Quick Quote To Consider

“CEOs can be more powerful role models when they learn rather than when they teach.”
Rosabeth Moss Kanter

2. Having Powerful Conversations: Part 1

Have you ever talked with someone, thought you'd gotten agreement on an issue and then the person did something totally different? When you ask them about it, you discover their understanding was totally different than yours. Why do conversations go astray?

Many times it's because we haven't prepared for the conversation. Although not all conversations require this, important ones do. If you want someone's commitment for a particular outcome, designing a conversation can make you more successful at achieving your goals or expectations.

What Type of Conversation Is It?

Not all conversations are the same, so you need to be clear about the type of conversation you're planning.

1. Assertions or Declaration

Are you simply informing someone? Sometimes you may only want to provide information to a person or express your personal viewpoint. You are not asking or expecting the other person to take action.

Example 1: Just wanted to let you know that our department was successful in reaching it's goal of increasing revenue by 10% this quarter.

Example 2: It's my opinion that we were successful in reaching our goal because we worked together as a team.

2. Request

Are you asking for a commitment by the other person for a particular outcome to be brought about by his or her actions? Then you are making a request. You need to be clear about what future action you're expecting, the conditions for satisfaction, when you expect it to be completed and what the consequences are for not achieving it.

Example: You need to improve your timeliness in getting the operation reports to me. They need to be in the format I've provided you and to me no later than 5:00 p.m. Friday of each week. If this doesn't happen, I'm going to have to put you on probation.

Designing a Conversation

Step 1: Identifying the Purpose of the Conversation

Start by being clear about the purpose of the conversation. Are you simply informing another person about something he doesn't know or sharing your viewpoint about an issue with no expectation of the person taking action or agreeing? Or are you requesting that someone make a change either in a situation or behavior?

Many conversations turn out frustrating, because you weren't clear about the reason for it. One executive I was working with was very frustrated about how another manager handled an issue outside of her department. It wasn't the first time she'd had this experience, and she was getting angrier every time it happened. She decided she needed to talk with him, so I suggested she design a conversation using the model I'm sharing with you. When I next talked with her, she had decided not to have the conversation because she realized her purpose was simply to vent her frustration, which wasn't going to change anything. Not even make her feel better! A disastrous conversation was avoided because the executive first clarified her reason for having the conversation.

Step 2: What concerns may the person have?

You want the person to be attentive throughout the conversation, so identify in advance potential concerns the person may have about the topic and how you're going to address them. If you're making policy or compensation changes, what concerns might your listener have about these changes? How can you address her concern early in the conversation?

Step 3: What mood do you want to create?

Words are not the only tools for sending a message. Where you have the conversation (behind your desk or outside of), your body language, the tone of your voice, where you sit (behind your desk or in a chair next to the person) are all elements of your conversation. Researchers claim that tone of voice and body language account for 70% of what is "heard." What do you want the other person to hear?

Step 4: What specific outcome do you plan for the conversation?

It's hard to get the outcome you want, if you're not clear about it yourself. What comments do you want to hear? What new ideas? What information do you want to uncover? What action do you want to be taken?

Step 5: Identify Potential Breakdowns

Are your request or shared information and opinions going to create possible problems for the person? How are you going to address these concerns? What resources can you provide to help? How do you intend to be supportive?

This 5-step process for preparing for a conversation can be a powerful tool for avoiding misunderstandings, frustration, and disappointment. By following it, you can reach your objectives faster and be more successful at involving and motivating the other person.



In the next issue, we'll cover having the conversation, getting closure and following up after it. If you can't wait until November and you have an important conversation coming up, call Karen at 301.990.6331 for some quick on the spot coaching about having successful conversations.

3.) International Coaching Federation Recognizes Karen Depew

Karen Depew received designation as an Associate Certified Coach by the International Coaching Federation (ICF). In addition to displaying her coaching abilities by completing an oral exam, several of her colleagues in the coaching community heartily recommended her for certification. One colleague who she has coached commented, "I found Karen to be insightful, straightforward and respectful, creating space for creative and powerful coaching to be accomplished." Another colleague observed, "She created a safe atmosphere and asked probing questions that enabled me to identify other alternatives."

Her ICF designation as an Associate Certified Coach complements her 1999 accreditation as a coach by New Ventures West. If you are currently challenged by a situation or issue and think coaching may support you in discovering a solution, call Karen at 301.990.6331 for a 45-minute free coaching session.