**Courageous Conversations**

*Stepping into the heart of transformative dialogue*

**Meaning**

By Courageous Conversations (CCs) we mean holding an authentic dialogue with another that gets to the heart of what needs to be spoken about.

Courageous Conversations seek to clarify the reality of an issue for both parties, evoking learning and change as a consequence of the interaction.

Too often we avoid having the conversations that are most needed to enable creative possibilities and change to emerge. We allow our fear of consequences to keep us stuck in thin conversations that skim the surface and maintain the status quo.

In order to have a Courageous Conversation we need to be prepared to enter the ZOUD (Zone Of Uncomfortable Debate) and hold a strong centre and positive approach to what might be uncovered when getting to the heart of what needs to be spoken about.

**Purpose**

Courageous Conversations aim to challenge our perceptions of reality and create new perspectives and understanding. Difficult issues can then be addressed in such a way that enriches the relationship between the parties involved in the conversation.

**The Process of the 3Es**

The basic structure of a Courageous Conversation is to move through the 3Es:

**Explain the Gap**

Get the issue on the table. What is the gap between what you want and what currently exists?

**Explore the Gap**

Find out what the situation is for the other person. What is their reality? What do they want? Identify the real issue, the real Gap.

**Eliminate the Gap**

Agree what is needed from both of you to resolve the issue and close the Gap.

**Identifying the need for a Courageous Conversation**

It is unlikely that a Courageous Conversation will feel easy and comfortable to think about. A Courageous Conversation is needed when the courage is needed to have it (!) and when broaching the issue is essential to maintaining your integrity in the relationship.

A Courageous Conversation might be about talking to a member of your team who is not performing well. Or it might be talking to someone that is your senior and who is demonstrating unhelpful behaviours that are limiting your success. The most challenging conversations are most likely to be upwards or sideways. A Courageous Conversation may also be about discussing a sensitive issue that requires from them a high level of understanding and agreement that may be challenging to ask for.

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**Preparing for a Courageous Conversation**

* Be aware of the balance of benevolence, strictness, courage and wisdom needed in this conversation.
* Be clear about what the issue is for you – focus on the gap between what is current and what you want.
* Know why it is significant to you.
* Understand how you have contributed to creating the situation.
* Know what positive outcome you want form this conversation.
* Decide what information is relevant in the conversation – leave out that which is not.
* Know what you have done so far to (attempt to) resolve the issue.
* Seek to understand the perspective, motivations and intent of the other person.
* What do you want the other person to do in order you can achieve a positive outcome?
* What do you need to do yourself in order to achieve a positive outcome?

**Explain the Gap**

* Check you are in command of your emotions (in a positive and resourceful state), with no feelings of blame, attack, judgement or bias.
* Develop rapport with the other person – be conscious of your body positioning, and of theirs.
* Use “I” language – “I feel”; “from my perspective”.
* Be mindful of the thoughts and assumptions you have about the other person.

Follow the seven steps:

1. The issue for me is ........... *(remember, it may not be an issue for them*)
2. A specific example is ....... *(help them to understand what you mean)*
3. I feel ................................. about the situation. *(remember, your feelings are your responsibility, not theirs)*
4. What’s at stake for me is ...... (*show there are consequences of the situation not changing)*
5. I’ve contributed to this by ,...... *(own your part in creating the situation)*
6. I want to resolve this with you. *(show your desire for a positive outcome)*
7. I’d like to know what are your thoughts and feelings about the situation? (*show you are willing to listen and learn)*

**Explore the Gap**

* Ask about their views and seek to understand their perspective and intent.
* Stay in command of your thoughts and emotions and be curious about their perspective and reality.
* Acknowledge and appreciate their views – they are true for them.
* Identify the real issue that needs to be addressed – it may not be what you first thought.

**Eliminate the Gap**

* Agree what is needed from both of you to resolve the issue and close the Gap.

**Courageous Conversation Framework**

1. **The issue for me is *(remember, it may not be an issue for them*)**
2. **A specific example is *(help them to understand what you mean)***
3. **I feel**

**about the situation. *(remember, your feelings are your responsibility, not theirs)***

1. **What’s at stake for me is *(show that there are consequences of the situation not changing)***
2. **I’ve contributed to this by *(own your part in creating the situation)***
3. **I want to resolve this with you. *(show your desire for a positive outcome)***
4. **I’d like to know what are your thoughts and feelings about the situation. *(show you are willing to listen and learn)***