

THE RIGHT CONVERSATIONS FOR THE RIGHT RESULTS

Talking is not in short supply in most organisations. However, the ratio of 'transmissions' to 'discussions' is a real cause for concern. In fact I have coined a new law and called it '*the first law of flip charts*'. It states that if the word 'Issues or Challenges' is written at the top of a flipchart, the word '*Communication*' automatically appears somewhere on the page!

We live in the communication age but like many things in life, many leaders seem to have gone for quantity over quality. Authentic and meaningful conversations have the power to form and hold together teams and build communities: these are the enabling force from which relationships are formed. Remarkably, for some leaders at least, they do not require PowerPoint for this to occur.

Beware Fake Conversations



If you were to audit the conversations that buzz around most workplaces, you would find that many things are audible by their silence. What do I

mean? Sometimes the din of what is **not said** is frankly deafening. Many leaders, particularly in large organisations, tend to have strategic conversations in exclusive groups locked away from the inconvenient reality of day to day business. Then, when they come down from the mountain top into the valleys to deliver decisively on this strategy, that's when the transmissions really begin.

Walk into a typical senior leadership meeting ... Someone is presenting; two people are fixated on their laptops and /or iphones / blackberries as if the secrets of the universe were flitting urgently across their

screens; two others are whispering and, when noticed, straighten up with a strained smirk on their face, others are randomly doodling; and a minority are nit-picking the presentation. Digressions abound, with little settled. Anything that needs action is very often brokered through private deals in the hallways.

Is this a caricature? Maybe, but essential elements of the above are rife in many large organisations. In successful organisations you rarely hear conversations that consider the next legitimate breakthrough or how to continue to raise the bar in areas that will really make a difference. When the organisation is less successful, these conversations do take place but usually in an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear for the future.

Five Conversations for Sustainable Success

We encourage and help our clients to have **Five Conversations that we believe hold the key for sustainable success**. These conversations will, over time, create results-focused, collaboration-fostering and accountability-rich relationships.

#1 The Strategic Conversation. We design this first conversation to craft a compelling future vision for your organisation, one that talks to the head and to the heart of all your key stakeholders. This requires real authenticity and a degree of courage as well as the capacity to 'imagineer' a bright future - never easy in the depths of a recession! This conversation is the toughest to have as it usually involves your senior leaders having to confront really difficult questions, whose answers - by definition - bring real risks and significant challenges sharply into focus. It is however a necessary conversation to have if your organisation is to be future proof.

#2 The Customer Conversation. There is a simple truth to be recognised in most commercial organisations: The customers have the money and it is your job to get it off them. To do this you need to understand what they think of you, your products and the services you provide. To get these insights you need to set up listening posts in all areas to amplify this customer conversation loudly throughout your organisation. A candid interview to camera from a real and important customer delivers more impact and can release more passion than 100 PowerPoint slides from your Sales and Marketing function or PR agency, no matter how fancy their graphs are.

#3 The Execution Conversation. This conversation creates a clear line of sight from your day to day tasks to the results you've agreed you're going to deliver in your strategic plan. You need everyone engaged with your higher purpose: the key strategic goals you have set for your organisation and your 'Must Win Battle' plans. Without this engagement and alignment, precious energy and productivity is being squandered



Sensei is an international consulting firm that helps their clients deliver business results by improving human performance and optimising the value of team and leadership interactions.

We focus on areas where companies can raise the bar on performance, productivity and profit. We ensure that any work we do has clear line of sight to specific business outcomes of value to the organisation, so that a solid return on time, energy and investment is realised.

We are experts in the process of unlocking potential and focusing this in the right ways on the right aims; and we excel at emotionally engaging leaders and teams to own the change, take accountability for it and deliver it. In short ...
'We do the really hard part of the soft stuff.'

as people choose to allocate their discretionary effort to improving things that may not count!

#4 The Cultural Conversation. This is potentially the most 'fluffy' of the conversations, so to ensure successful outcomes we use practical tools and techniques to help our clients get real value from their discussions in this space. We focus on behaviours and habits and through this lens we expose the prevailing paradigm and mindset of the organisation. This elusive, yet powerful force, can be the biggest limiter to success in any organisation as it defines the art of the possible. To shed light in this area we engage teams across geographic, hierarchical and functional boundaries to share with each other their perspective of the reality they experience in day to day interactions. We do this in a fun yet thoughtful way that challenges participants to correct habitual behaviours that they all know are counterproductive and disengaging.



#5 The Effectiveness Conversation. This conversation is the one you will find taking place in most organisations, most days, especially during recent times. Listen carefully and see if you can spot how many people confuse 'efficiency' with 'effectiveness'. In many organisations the corporate mantra seems to be 'we can squeeze and cut our way out of this recession if only everyone will just work a little bit harder!' It is akin to the leaders wandering the corridors shouting 'the beatings will continue until morale improves!' Effectiveness is very different from efficiency; sure, they both deliver benefits but one requires inspiration, the other simply requires perspiration.

Get Talking – If any of these thoughts resonate with you, and you would like Sensei to help you create an environment where these conversations can flourish in your organisation, then please get in touch.

Malcolm Follos, October 2009