

Bend YP DevLabs: CONVERSATIONAL VULNERABILITY

BUILDING TRUST TO HAVE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

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4 SHIFTS TO MOVE FROM COMBAT TO CONNECTION

1. FROM I-IT to I-THOU

*"All of our humanity is dependent upon recognizing the humanity in others."
- Desmond Tutu*

KEY QUESTION: Do people feel valued in your presence?

CORE IDEA: Civility is too low a bar. How sad it would be if our goal was to simply learn to be nice and tolerate one another. Our goal is to re-humanize one another. There has been a shift in society from contempt of someone's ideas to holding contempt for the person who has those ideas. Can we learn to communicate without demeaning and demonizing? Curiosity breaks contempt. Can we shift from judgment to curiosity? Can we assume the best in others instead of the worst? Trust begins with a shared sense of humanity and knowing you are valued even though there is disagreement.

REFLECTION:

- *What behavior of others leaves me feeling de-valued and unimportant?*
- *What specific behaviors might lead others to feeling safe and feeling valued?*
- *How might my behaviors leave someone feeling unimportant?*
- *Who do I view with contempt? Why? What do I know about their stories?*

2. FROM REACTING to RESPONDING

*"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom."
- Victor Frankl*

KEY QUESTION: When and where do I overreact? How wide is the space between what someone says and how I respond? How can I widen that space?

(From *REACTING TO RESPONDING* Cont'd)

CORE IDEA: It is ok to be angry. It is never ok to be cruel. Emotional intelligence is responding from a place of wisdom and self-control instead of reacting from our fight/flight state. Listening is essential for healthy conversations. It is impossible to practice deep listening when anxious or emotionally triggered.

REFLECTION:

- *How self-aware are you of your emotional/stress state?*
- *What helps you press pause and widen the space between stimulus and response?*
- *What can you do to lower the temperature when a conversation gets heated?*

3. FROM HEADSPACE to HEARTSPACE

"Empathy – Let me hold the door for you. I may have never walked in your shoes, but I can see your soles are worn, your strength is torn under the weight of a story I have never lived before. Let me hold the door for you. After all you have walked through, it is the least I can do." - Morgan Harper Nichols

KEY QUESTION: Does the person I am in conversation with feel seen, heard and validated?

CORE IDEA: Transformation rarely happens in the headspace of opinions. Transformation happens in the heartspace of empathy where we are willing to feel another's pain. Instead of asking, "What do you think?", we might ask, "Where does it hurt?" The goal in difficult conversations isn't to necessarily agree. The goal is to foster mutual understanding, or a more accurate understanding of the disagreement. Empathy requires vulnerability where you are willing to nonjudgmentally identify with another's pain. This creates connection and trust.

REFLECTION:

- *Think of someone you feel in opposition to and find offensive. Be curious about the stories they have lived that have shaped their perspectives. Where do they hurt? Why might my perspective be so threatening?*
- *You may know the opinions of your colleagues. Do you know their stories? Do you know their fears and struggles? Do others know your story?*
- *How vulnerable are you willing to be with your colleagues? What prevents you from being more vulnerable?*

4. FROM RIGHT to RELATIONSHIP

*"I am not here to be right. I am here to get it right. Less armor. More learning."
- Brené Brown*

KEY QUESTION: Is it more important to be right or get it right?

(From RIGHT TO RELATIONSHIP Cont'd)

CORE IDEA: When is the last time you changed someone's mind or improved a relationship because you convinced them they were wrong. Exactly. Research shows that when you throw facts at people to refute what they believe, it only hardens their convictions. But if you create a relational container that can hold an ongoing dialogue, it's more likely all parties grow and change.

The poet Yehuda Amichai wrote, "From the place where we are right flowers will never grow in the Spring. The place where we are right is hard and trampled like a yard..."

Difficult conversations often start in the places we think we are right trying to prove the other wrong. What if we let go of our need to be right and placed a higher value on the relationship? This doesn't mean you are wrong. This means you are willing to create a relational container that can hold the tension of opposing ideas to keep the dialogue going. In my profession, I have the privilege of spending time with people at the end of their life. Not once have I heard someone say on their deathbed, "I knew I was right!" I often hear regrets of not valuing relationships and not forgiving more easily.

REFLECTION:

- *Do you have a need to be right? How does that impact your relationships?*

- *Having to be the "knower" or always being right is heavy armor to wear.*

This kind of defensiveness leads to distrust. How comfortable are you admitting not knowing?

- *Vulnerable conversations that create connection hold more questions than answers.*

What questions invite deeper conversation? What questions shut things down?

- *The space around us is only as open as the space within us. How much space do you have to hold the tension and uncertainty of difficult conversations without needing to fix, convince or solve?*

- *Is it more important for you to win an argument, or create a relationship?*

NOTES

*"Imagine that instead of giving people a piece of our mind,
we gave them the best of our hearts."*