



What you are *NOT* talking about is hindering you

With the plethora of media forums, devices and communication channels that now exist, one would think we are connecting with others better than ever before. We have FaceBook, Twitter, LinkedIn, meetings, conference calls, video conferencing, blogs, instant messaging, texting, emails (exhausted yet?). The sheer quantity is unruly; but what of the *quality*?

Not only in there a greater likelihood of miscommunicating online, but there appears to be a growing tendency for people to substitute it for genuine interaction. Who hasn't sent a quick text as a method to put off a decision or as a distancing technique? We rapidly hit "send" feeling we've done our part to stay in touch or be responsive.

As we go through our day at breakneck speed, amassing unanswered emails in our inbox that deplete our energy reservoirs, one wonders if we will ever catch up on the demands of staying connected. Basic human emotional need is to feel a sense of belonging and accepted. Yet, research shows that there are increasing feelings of isolation and loneliness among many online networkers.

Now, this column is not about the pros and cons of online social networking. Instead, the heart of what I want to explore is, are we diminishing our willingness and capacity to have real, direct and meaningful conversations?

The quality of our conversations dictates the quality of our relationships.

Think about the last time you had a powerful exchange with someone. Was it electronically? On the phone? In person? Did you have a meeting of the minds? Was it genuine? Did you feel heard? If so, it was likely transformational – and no doubt increased the emotional bond and connection.

So, if feeling connected is equivalent to feeling accepted and to feeling like we belong, why do we fail to have the kind of conversations that actually produce that experience? Because meaningful and honest conversations take time, skill, courage and commitment. It also takes being fully present – an increasing luxury in our time.

I work relentlessly with business leaders on the concept of "*Have the conversation.*" By that I mean discuss what's most critical – to the issue at hand, to the relationship and to your company's overall health. Recently, a CEO I work with was exasperated by a member of his team who failed to take initiative. I asked, "*Were you clear that you wanted him to take the initiative?*"



After reviewing a string of emails, it was clear to both of us that there was never a directive that the employee was empowered and expected to take ownership of it and drive the results. The epiphany for this CEO: pick up the phone, be clear in his expectations and receive clarification through paraphrasing that the employee is in total alignment with the assignment.

Oftentimes, we attempt to have the conversation – but we tend to avoid being truly direct. We infer. Suggest. Hint. Gloss over. Avoid speaking the truth. Instead, we vaguely speak to the issue – and rarely partake in the practice of actively listening to ensure mutual understanding of the issue. Remember, conversation is a dialogue, not a monologue (no matter what your role in the company)!

Of course we have a stack of reasons we don't "have the conversation":

1. We're busy. We don't have time to discuss every single issue that comes across our desks. We need to get things done. We have emails to answer!
2. There hasn't been a good time to discuss the issue (there rarely is).
3. We don't know where to begin or how to articulate the issue (maybe we haven't even thought it through ourselves and we want to have it "figured out" before we address it)
4. We're concerned we will negatively impact the situation or hurt someone
5. It's awkward and uncomfortable

The truth is, we are resistant for a number of reasons – from procrastination to fear. Whether it's a performance issue, a missed deadline to a client, a point of friction, or what have you, we often avoid having the very conversation we really should have.

Let's speak to why you should start having the *real* conversation.

Fostering a culture where open, honest dialogue is actively practiced and encouraged creates an atmosphere of trust and respect. People have more breathing room when they trust you will voice your concerns as they arise – not days or weeks later. It's a sign of respect when you engage with an employee or colleague directly. It says you value them and you hold them able to handle the truth. Additionally, practicing having timely and straight up conversations builds transparency and accountability in an organization.

Don't wait – whatever your reason for not having the conversation, it's negatively impacting your business and your relationships. When issues are left unresolved, misconceptions, assumptions, fears and politics skyrocket and relationships suffer. Organizations are burdened with inefficiencies and you'll find an atmosphere of tolerating attitudes and behaviors that get in the way of a healthy, high functioning organization.



Follow your gut. As a business leader, if there's a conversation you think needs aired, it probably does. Start developing the practice of having the conversation and you'll set the tone for your organization in a new, more vibrant, way. You will be freed up to lead in more effective ways as you navigate relationships, decisions and setting the course for your company's growth.

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Have the conversation.

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