



## Conversations That Matter

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### Abstract

*The article is about building a bridge between abstract discussions and conversations that matter. It is about transcending silos through everyday dialogue. It is about helping companies, governments and communities operate in harmony with the way people really are, rather than the way authorities want them to be. It proposes that conversations that matter are a framework for turning cognitive dissonance into action. The object is to bring physical and relational coherence to life and work, and to offer access to integrating high performance and human mutuality. The premise is that a major problem with making a difference in the most challenging situations is abstraction itself, and that analysis, even when comprehensive, is necessarily linear and cannot produce a quantum shift in behavior, vision, strategy and action. The case is made that conversations that matter can never find their way onto a PowerPoint. Conversations that matter call for the truth about people's actual experience, with kindness and direct speaking at the same time. Timidity, fear, anger, power and position inhibit conversations that matter. From global warming to corporate, governmental and personal dysfunction, the cost of the unsaid truth is immense and ultimately deadly.*

***“The day science begins to study non-physical phenomena, it will make more progress in one decade than in all the previous centuries of existence.”***

**– Nikola Tesla**

Recently, I was with a noble man, a leader and a force for successful betterment in the organization, education, community, and in the world. For nine years there had been one cultural and pragmatic victory after another in the face of recession, social drama, deterioration, and racial, political, union and everyday conflict. Every time we met, there were conversations that led to insight and action that produced an improvement in culture and performance. Their reputation ratings moved from among the lowest to the highest ratings in the nation. It was always easy for me. All I had to do was engage, talk, share what I had recently learned, and create responsively with him about his deepest concerns in real time. The conversation was always flowing and he was open to discovering what he didn't know, and did not know he did not know.

This time was different; a bridge too far it seemed. He looked tired and used up. I had a sensation in my chest that comes with being with someone who is depressed and overwhelmed. Everything I said seemed to have no impact. I felt sad for him, and all my good ideas felt abstract and without power. People he had trusted had failed in leading crucial businesses. Political behavior and government bureaucratic requirements took away

important time. The volume of mind-numbing information had reached the point where it was harder and harder to make sense of it and find coherence. There were new members in the team and the world champion spirit he had evoked had diminished. In the face of it all, business was still good and they remained industry leaders, but he no longer felt the thrill and momentum of earlier days.

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*“The Kairos Point is the moment of change—the moment where what will never happen, happens. It is the moment where the impossible becomes possible.”*

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We talked for six hours, and by the end we had had a conversation that mattered, that brought some coherence and intention for him and the 10,000 people who work for him. But what had truly made the difference? I know it did not come from my preparation, good ideas, abstractions or checklists.

Looking back, what mattered was that he was able to share with what he really cares about, his anger at dysfunction, his commitment and love for many people, and his tiredness at the unremitting pace and unfathomable complexity of seeing no light at the end of the tunnel. What mattered came from my unqualified positive regard, my “being for” him and his well-being and future. It came from listening to and encouraging him to tell his truth exactly as it was for him, the awful reality of his experience.

There was nothing abstract in the room with us. The precept that ‘the truth will set you free’ was real, vibrational and painful for both of us. What happened was freedom to choose. Mind you, this is no ordinary human being. This is an accomplished hero and the depth of what mattered to him had become buried under history, circumstance, and people rising beyond the level of their own competencies.

I have come away from this day certain that Conversations that Matter can never find their way onto a Powerpoint. Ideas and steps are useful but a conversation that matters calls for the truth about people’s actual experience, and sometimes gets to the awful truth, with kindness and direct speaking at the same time. Timidity, fear, anger, power, and position prevent conversations that matter. From global warming to corporate, governmental and interpersonal dysfunction, the cost of the unsaid truth is immense and ultimately deadly.

***Conversations that Matter create “Integration”—the Possibility that Business, Education and Government can operate in Harmony with the Way Human Beings Really Are.***

## **1. Hypothesis I: The Kairos Point is a Portal to Conversations that Matter**

The Kairos Point is an aspect of the present moment—an awareness that, when sensed and embraced brings coherence and connection to an entire universe of possibility; meeting the right partner or job, choosing a life path in harmony with your bliss, following what you are naturally called to be or to do, saying the final “no” to a relationship or situation that never

works. Embracing the Kairos Point brings physical and relational coherence to life and work and is one access to integrating high performance and human mutuality.

The ancient Greeks had two words for time, Chronos and Kairos. The former refers to chronological or sequential time. Kairos signifies a kind of time lapse—a right, opportune, or supreme moment of indeterminate time in which everything happens at once. While Chronos is quantitative, Kairos has a qualitative, permanent nature. (Wikipedia defines it as, “a passing instant when an opening appears which must be driven through with force if success is to be achieved.”)

Author, mathematician, musician, and teacher Alan Smithson brilliantly proposes<sup>1</sup> that reality is neither in our minds nor in the physical world, but where the two meet. At this ‘Kairos Point’ the world of science merges with the world of mind and spirit.\* The Kairos Point is the moment of change—the moment where what will never happen, happens. It is the moment where the impossible becomes possible.

The Kairos Point is an aspect of any moment, recognized or not—a window seemingly connected to everything everywhere, which offers the possibility of an immediate, intuitive insight. In the moment of embracing a Kairos Point, it has embraced you. When you chose it you then belong to the universes to which it is connected by countless invisible strings that serve as puppeteer from your future.

The Kairos Point is a moment of insight, offering Escape Velocity from the fears, norms, families, neighborhoods, religious-driven rules, and cultural practices others believed, taught, lived and died with. It is the moment when I ordain, embrace, or claim as my own an aspect of the present; a moment of knowing without thought.

The Kairos Point occurs as an “oblique shaft of Illumination.” In embracing and acting on these moments, the awareness of what’s right for an organization, an educational system, a profession, and what’s right for the people occurs in one seamless moment of hope and possibility.

## 2. Prominent Examples of the Kairos Point

- In 1955, Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of the bus in Montgomery, Alabama. It was a Kairos Point—a pivotal moment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. At that time, racial segregation laws in parts of the United States required African-Americans to give up their seats on public buses for white passengers. In her own words, “*I was determined that I let it be known that I did not want to be treated in this manner. The policemen had their squad car waiting, they gave me my purse and bag, and they opened the back door of the police car for me to enter. I didn’t have any idea just what my actions would bring about. At the time I was arrested I didn’t know how the community would react. I was glad that they did take the action that they did by staying off the buses.*”

When Rosa Parks remained sitting, Martin Luther King took the power of her stand to spark the Montgomery, Alabama Bus Boycott, and became an important driver of the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>†</sup>

\* Kinesiology offers a test for the power of this intersect in any particular instance. See Power vs. Force, David R. Hawkins, 1985.

† See <http://teacher.scholastic.com/rosa/sittingdown.htm>

- When the American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt gave his first Fireside Chat on the radio in 1933 at the height of the banking crisis in United States, the world turned. At that moment, that Kairos Point, Roosevelt ordained the collective experience of who we are, how we are, and what America should be. He was fact based, deeply concerned for the public, honest about the depth and extent of the breakdown, authoritative, dedicated to reconstruction, devoted to values, and declarative in saying that there would be regulations. He was not speaking for effect as is so often common. In Roosevelt's request for cooperation and requirement for regulations, he spoke to the hearts and minds of the country from his own heart, and was direct, vigilant, and with full intent.

Listening from that place, my faith is renewed in the possibility of transformation.\*

- Albert Einstein's moment of knowing that sense experience and thinking have no necessary relationship..., that the relationship between a person's sensory experience and what they think is purely arbitrary, even though it makes perfect sense to them. In that moment, he saw in himself an amazing free play of imagination. He later said that this was the 'code breaker' in all human affairs, business, science, art, leadership and community.†
- The first meeting between President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev took place in Geneva, Switzerland in November 1985. Reagan and Gorbachev discussed all areas of US-Soviet relations. Overall, the two leaders used the meetings to feel out each other's positions. Although no significant agreements were made, the two leaders agreed to meet again. This choice was a Kairos Point. It shifted a previous impossibility and started a process that led to thawing of Cold War tensions and more effective arms control.
- The moment Angela Merkel saw that accepting Syrian immigrants into Germany was both an act of mercy and a transformation of Germany's cruel past in the eyes of the world.
- The moment in Mahatma Gandhi's life on June 7, 1893, when during a train trip to Pretoria a white man objected to his presence in the first-class railway compartment, although he had a ticket. He refused to move and was thrown off the train.
- A UK telephone company CEO said the Kairos Point was the moment he realized he was responsible for human energy rather than roles, systems and profit—human energy was released and expanded. Their hopelessly impossible target of £100,000,000 over the next year actually happened. When he spoke about some of the team thinking he was on drugs and that this was 'Mission Impossible', he said, "..., *the good news is that I am pleased to say we hit it a year earlier than expected..., fantastic news.*"
- The moment when Karl Marx saw that the capitalist economic system was itself an important cause of general misery.

\* See <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fdrfirstfiresidechat.html>

† From an unpublished letter shared by my friend, Howard Sherman, in a personal conversation in Santa Fe, New Mexico in 1999.

- US President Richard Nixon's choice to go to China in 1972 and open conversations with Mao Zedong was one of the major transformational events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with great commercial and political benefit to both countries. It was a remarkable and surprising Kairos moment. He paraphrased Mao's own words when he said (as quoted by Nixon biographer Stephen Ambrose); "*You are one who sees when an opportunity comes, and then knows that you must seize the hour and seize the day.*"\*
- The moment when US State Department officer George Kennan saw that "containment" was a better way to relate to a nuclear Soviet Union than war.
- The moment so many Americans realized that John F. Kennedy and the hope he represented for the country had been assassinated.
- The moment Mikhail Gorbachev embraced the transformational possibility of Glasnost and Perestroika.
- The moment in 1978 when Anwar Sadat chose to go on a peace mission to Jerusalem, which led to the Camp David Accords and years of peace between Egypt and Israel.
- The moments of Steve Jobs' repeated choices to create and hold forcefully to his vision of the future of Apple and its products.
- The moment when the leader of a division of one of the world's largest information technology providers chose to make 1500 disparate products manufactured in five countries accessible through a single on-line channel, and integrated enormous diversity with great harmony in the face of a corporate culture that had been divisive and segmented. With intent, facilitation, and good will, it all worked.

### **3. Hypothesis II: Conversations that Matter are a Framework for Turning Cognitive Dissonance into Action.**

A Conversation is an informal exchange between two or more people, involving sentiments, observations, opinions, ideas or media. It is an art or creation that people can play with and give life to.<sup>2</sup> A Conversation that Matters transforms the base metal of everyday reality from the experience of, "*this is just the way it is and has to be*" to the experience that, "*my own life's search for personal meaning can happen while I'm helping a company to succeed.*" In practice, these conversations are not sequential or linear, but occur repeatedly, informally, and are free-flowing, with an intent to practice and master Human Mutuality with Pragmatic Success.

The experience of Cognitive Dissonance is necessary before people will choose to go beyond what they already do. Such dissonance is the foundation for an acute experience of the unacceptable contradiction between something you really want and the seemingly inescapable truth of the way it actually is for you. We are referring to an intensity that is experienced physically, emotionally, and sometimes spiritually.

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\* I never liked Richard Nixon and saw him as a devious man. The insight in this is that the power of a Kairos moment has little to do with one's own judgments about the virtue of the person who experiences it. I sometimes devalue or fail to recognize the importance of a Kairos moment when I don't respect the author in the first place. This is a conundrum. Beyond being aware that a Kairos moment is intuitive and the power comes from ordaining its importance, there is little else to say.

Conversations that Matter create “Integration”—the bringing together of parts of an organization or a system into a whole that is experienced as greater than the sum of its parts. On one side is the order and control needed for the system to survive. On the other is peoples’ search for meaning and freedom in their own lives.

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*“The world does not consist of objects; underneath the apparent reality of objects was the underlying reality of interacting energy flows.”*

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The following steps are design principles for organizations to achieve “continuous integration” while operating in harmony with the way people really are.

## 4. Eleven Steps

### ***4.1. Step One: Surrender to the fact that you have almost no control when it comes to explaining, rather than inquiring.***

Much of what people do in business and government is locked in place by explanations. Like alcohol, explanation need not be a problem. The problem is in having to explain. It is a widespread addiction; women explaining men, men explaining women, advocates explaining why their strategy is the right one... Explanations in the mid-east have people blowing themselves and others up explaining that they can get into heaven faster. Others say that there is no God and all we have is ourselves, with explanations for that. Investment companies and banks explain the virtues of security and greed. Everyone has clay feet, but their explanations always make them right and their opponents wrong.

I distrust the explanations of anyone who is selling or controlling something. They only tell me the part aimed at helping the sale. Advertising, public relations, politicians and nations have “Explanation Addiction” in common. These explanations give the illusion of certainty and allow us to avoid the discomfort and anxiety inherent in raising fundamental questions. Explanation prevents considering a shift that comes from stepping into the unknown.

Explanation is addictive. Friedrich Nietzsche wrote, *“To trace something unknown back to something known is alleviating, soothing, gratifying and gives moreover a feeling of power. Danger, disquiet and anxiety attend the unknown—the first instinct is to eliminate these distressing states and the first principle is that any explanation is better than none... what drives this addiction and excitement is the feeling of fear...”*

Behavioral psychologists say the process of explaining actually releases chemicals in the brain that make us feel good. We literally become addicted to the simple explanation. The fact that our explanations may be irrelevant or even wrong is not important for the chemical release.\* *“Most people, when faced with uncertainty, need the ‘fix’ of their already adopted explanation to feel secure. The imagery of a junky blindly following his ‘feel good’ could*

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\* John Mauldin, <http://www.frontlinethoughts.com>

easily be linked to the stubbornness we see in politics, among other things.” So, we eagerly look for more explanations in order to feel good.

*“Before humans learned how to make tools, how to farm or how to write, they were telling stories with a deeper purpose. The man who caught the beast wasn’t just strong. The spirit of the hunt was smiling. The rivers were plentiful because the river king was benevolent. In society after society, religious belief, in one form or another, has arisen spontaneously. Anything that cannot immediately be explained must be explained all the same, and the explanation often lies in something bigger than oneself.”*<sup>3</sup>

The practice of Inquiry enables Human Mutuality and Exceptional Performance. Inquiry interrupts unnecessary explanation. Inquiry is seeking for truth, or a request for truth, information, or knowledge. Inquiry without interruption enables new possibility and Conversations that Matter.

#### ***4.2. Step Two: Be a steward of energy—responsible for the expansion of energy and vitality in you and others, between departments, and between your organization and society, as your bottom Line.***

Observing levels of energy comes first—within individuals, groups of individuals, between departments, units, between levels. Even slight levels of energy expansion produce dramatic shifts in culture and performance.

Integration of extraordinary performance and Human Mutuality is an energetic, not a linear phenomenon. In my personal journey I moved from seeing organizations as static objects to seeing them as interactive energy fields. I ran a successful company, but over time as my energy and inspiration waned, many things began to fall apart. I began to realize that companies and people succeed when they have a lot of energy (assuming they know what they are doing), have talent, and have a good product or service to sell. And they begin to fail when people stop generating energy for themselves and for each other, as individuals, departments, entities. Before I had clearly articulated this, it was a background awareness that things were good when personal and team spirit were strong. Things did not work well when team spirit, personal and departmental energy was weak, and this was predictive of success.

About the same time, Pomo Indian medicine man Loren Smith taught me that, *“Life and work are all about maintaining, preserving, and increasing the energy you have, personally and collectively.”* In this, he was representing something I had not seen before; that it was possible to live in a world in which my relationship with my own energy and the energy of others was central. He had an ability to see what I was not trained to see. While I could sense some of this in my work with groups, I was not really construing it in a kind of energetic framework, as he did. What he was able to produce, in terms of sick people getting better, or groups going from non-directed to focused, was fast and remarkable. It was as though he was breathing life—energy—into them. His view was that that the world does not consist of objects; underneath the apparent reality of objects was the underlying reality of interacting energy flows. Having good ideas and strong intentions was important, but what is decisive is the available energy.

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\* Jonathan Lewis Smith, private conversation

In facilitating Conversations that Matter, the practice is to be a steward of energy and vitality. A Steward's sacred responsibility is to take care of something.

### **4.3. Step Three: Embrace the Paradox of Humility and Strength.**

A paradox is a seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition that, when investigated or explained may prove to be well-founded or true. In the words of Vaclav Havel, former President of Czechoslovakia,\*

*“At the beginning of everything is the word. It is a miracle to which we owe the fact that we are human. But at the same time it is a pitfall and a test, a snare and a trial. More so, perhaps, than it might appear to you who have enormous freedom of speech, and might therefore assume that words are not so important. They are. They are important everywhere. The same word can be humble at one moment and arrogant the next.*

*It is not hard to demonstrate that all the main threats confronting the world today, from atomic war and ecological disaster to a catastrophic collapse of society and civilization, have hidden deep within them a single root cause: the imperceptible transformation of what was originally a humble message into an arrogant one.*

*Having learned from all this, we should all fight together against arrogant words and keep a weather eye out for any insidious germs of arrogance in words that are seemingly humble. Obviously this is not just a linguistic task. Responsibility for and toward words is a taste which is intrinsically ethical.”*

In parallel, come to a Conversation that Matters “as you would go to war; wide-awake, with fear, with respect, and with absolute assurance. Going to knowledge or going to war in any other manner is a mistake, and whoever makes it might never live to regret it.”†

The Practice is to facilitate a Conversation that Matters with Humility and Strength—a practice that enables “Integration” because people respond to the way you are being more than to what you are saying.

### **4.4. Step Four: Tell the Truth about your Experience**

***“The truth is what you experience. The truth believed is a lie.”***

**– Werner Erhard**

Comedian Flip Wilson said he believed in the church of “What’s Happening Now”—a religion of paying attention to what’s actually present, and a way of recovering, moment-to-moment from changing circumstances, things going wrong, upset relationships, boredom, loss of support and countless surprises that always happen and can keep you from fulfilling your mission and getting what you really want in business and life. Practice noticing what you are aware of about others, yourself, and the situation:

- Keep noticing the difference between what you are aware of in the present moment, and what you are thinking.

\* Peace Prize acceptance speech, German Book Seller’s Association, Frankfurt book fair, 1989.

† Adapted from Carlos Castaneda, *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*

- Ask what is knocking you or others off the block, taking you away from purpose; what you want, what you notice, if you are bored, distracted, scared of looking foolish, experiencing too much complexity, spending too much time on your favorite activities instead of what's needed, keeping the game small, not wanting to deal with all the problems you know you'll have with people, feeling greedy and not wanting to share, overwhelmed, fearful of being dominated, lacking political support or formal power, anxious that nobody else cares, etc.
- Notice the degree to which individual and group energy is in focus. Do people have the ability to direct usable power in service of mission, strategy, and immediate requirements to recover from circumstances and breakdowns? Or is there a condition of passivity, of not being fully engaged, inactivity, reacting to external agencies, lacking in energy and wellness, and tending not to take an active or dominant role?
- Notice the degree to which you or others are "on mission", with adherence to essential purpose, ultimate goal, singular outcome, strategic intent and responsibility that one has been especially called upon to undertake. Or are you "off mission", off purpose, distracted by circumstances, having primary responsibilities elsewhere, or unclear on purpose?
- Notice the degree to which strategy is in action. Is there a plan being fulfilled, a blueprint being built, a design being accomplished, a game plan being executed? Or is strategy not in action? Is a plan, blueprint, design, game plan not formulated, or conceived but not in satisfactory action, not embraced by others, or being executed inconsistently?
- Notice the degree to which a person or group has the attitude of a hunter. Are you pursuing your intentions with intent to capture, determined to win, in steadfast pursuit? Or are you behaving like prey, feeling acted upon and adversely affected by a force or agent, injured or sacrificed by conditions, subjected to oppression, hardship or mistreatment, helpless or unable to resist?
- Notice the degree to which you and others are open to your environment. Do you, or the group have confidence in your immediate judgment, no hesitation, accessible to input and other participants, and free from limitations boundaries or restrictions? Or are you trapped by your own ways of being cautious, not playing to win, playing small, fearful of looking bad, resistive and avoiding the domination of others?
- Notice the degree to which you are connected. Are you, or the group, in direct personal connection by speaking, listening, moving and looking? Are you in a condition of immediate proximity and exciting connection, with the effect of being "in relationship" and "in communication"? Or are you deflecting contact, blocking personal connection by avoiding or suppressing speaking, listening, moving, and looking? Are you blocking the directness of connection by turning aside, diverting and digression?
- Notice the degree to which poor decision making may be based upon emotional responses to peer and hierarchical pressure, family or friends rather than an objective evaluation of a situation.
- Notice the degree to which your or others' existing mindsets keep you from recognizing and coping with changes.

- Notice the experience of “Got to Get There—it is” impairing judgment by a fixation on the original goal, combined with disregard for any alternative course of action.
- Notice the degree to which strategy and action are always characteristic, always the same.
- Notice the presence of subtle, non-verbal clues.

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*“If you want to change the future, change what you are doing, what you are paying attention to, right now, consistent with the future you want.”*

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#### ***4.5. Step Five: Honor both Performance Checklists and Noble Purpose.***

Story Musgrave is a 30-year astronaut, team leader of the amazingly successful effort to repair the Hubble Telescope, a medical doctor, and a military pilot. The privilege of working with him briefly challenged me with a gift—the possibility of integrating transcendence and extraordinary performance in systematic and measured ways.

So many people with noble purpose seem too soft and flaky. Others with pragmatic and measured purpose seem overly crass and lacking nobility of purpose. In his way of being and operating, Story had accepted or integrated the paradox of noble and transcendent purpose, exhaustive checklists, and the committed speaking that took us to the moon and assures an effective, global airplane safety record around the world.

The Practice in service of Exceptional Performance and Human Mutuality is to declare to yourself and the Universe that these can happen at the same time.

#### ***4.6. Step Six: Apologize and make Amends where you have been responsible for suppressing human energy and vitality.***

If energy expansion is the bottom line for extraordinary performance and human mutuality, it becomes important to take personal responsibility for suppressing the energy, vitality, and team spirit in others. Paying attention to the importance of one’s own and others’ energy level is novel and takes practice. This is different from what’s conventionally considered as right and wrong, and can easily be confused with having to be nice, which can devolve into soft, stifling cultures.\*

In the Alcoholics Anonymous addiction treatment program, members are asked to make direct amends to people they have injured wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others. If a healthy business or government depends in great part on the energy and vitality of people and functions, then regularly or systemically suppressing that energy injures both the organization and the people involved.

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\* In *Outliers*, (Little, Brown & Co, 2011), Malcolm Gladwell used Microsoft’s Bill Gates and the Beatles’ musical success as examples that it takes roughly ten thousand hours of practice to achieve mastery in a field.

The practice is to notice when your attitude, mood, way of speaking, lack of listening, or failure to be responsible for the impact of your position or authority is having a suppressive effect on the energy expansion of individuals and the environment. In such cases, the practice is to acknowledge it, apologize, and make amends as best as you can.

#### ***4.7. Step Seven: Embrace the Merlin Factor\*—The Present-Future Singularity.***

The Merlin Factor is the ability to imagine the future, stand there, and plan backwards to the present moment. It asserts that the best predictor of the future in a person's life or a company's future is what they are doing now.<sup>4</sup>

“We propose that the Present and the Future are a Singularity. At any moment, there is only one thing going on—the “Present-Future”.<sup>†</sup> The present moment is the point where the lines of past-present-future meet. The Present-Future Singularity is a point in space-time in which gravitational forces cause matter to have absolute density. Looked at from the outside, a present-future singularity is like a kaleidoscope. There are times when the future seems not influenced by the past and largely determined by new possibilities. The present moment then appears differently than if the future was determined by the past.

As Richard Bach wrote in his grand metaphor for mastering life and work, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, “Perfect speed is being there.” If you want to change the future, change what you are doing, what you are paying attention to, right now, consistent with the future you want.

When having Conversations that Matter, be aware that the content, tone, attitude and background commitment in the present conversation are predictive of the future, and the future you imagine is predictive of what's happening now. Present and future are occurring at once.

#### ***4.8. Step Eight: Act from the belief that intelligence is largely collective.***

***“Collective intelligence has existed at least as long as humans have, because families, armies, countries, and companies have all—at least sometimes—acted collectively in ways that seem intelligent.”***

**– M.I.T 2012 Conference on Collective Intelligence**

Homo sapiens (us) seem to have outlived Neanderthals because of our higher ability to cooperate in more complex circumstances, and be somewhat less rigid in our existing beliefs. Possibly our human beliefs were more like guidelines than Neanderthal strict principles and rules. Looking at today's personalities, politics, bureaucracy, and relationship dysfunction, I suspect but have not yet proven, that lingering and excessive Neanderthal DNA has now put us, in more complex circumstances, on our own road to non-collaborative extinction.<sup>‡</sup>

I recently asked a pharmaceutical company group where they thought the intelligence in the company was actually located. Without hesitation everyone said at once that the

\* Charles E Smith, Kairos Productions, 1995.

† Marc Cooper & Charles E. Smith, “Future-Present Singularity,” Library of Professional Coaching November 26, 2014 Issue of Transformation Magazine: A Road Map.

‡ See Charles E. Smith, “Collective Intelligence”, *Library of Professional Coaching* April 17, 2013 Issue of Transformation Magazine: A Road Map.

intelligence was collective and everywhere. Then I asked how the company operated with respect to where it was assumed that intelligence was located, and the answer came back just as quickly, that Intelligence was assumed to be in the hierarchy and that legitimate thinking, strategy, and practice flowed from there.

When asked why they didn't push back, the consistent response was "fear." Consider that Economic Fascism is a system of governance, whether political, bureaucratic, or corporate, in which authorities suppress opposition and criticism, and regiment economic infrastructures and resources.

In a Conversation that Matters, a turning point is to act as if intelligence is in fact collective and is distributed broadly or normally within a given system, independent of people's power and position.

#### ***4.9. Step Nine: Bring the overview effect down to earth.***

***The Overview Effect creates the experience of transcendence and the possibility of a world that works for everybody.***

Upon breaking free of Earth's gravity and going to space, some astronauts experienced a surprising change in their perspective of life on Earth. Author Frank White named this phenomenon *The Overview Effect*.<sup>\*</sup> In the same way that astronauts must achieve escape velocity to reach space and see the Earth anew, so is it possible for many on Earth to generate an equivalent escape velocity to break free of the gravity of the cultures and circumstances that keep us from going for our dreams with courage and conviction. I am taken with the transformative, emotional impact of the Overview Effect because the experience is a riveting contrast to the fragmented experience of the world so many of us have.<sup>†</sup>

Having Conversations that Matter is a practice that comes from your personal choice to be 100% responsible—cause in the matter of bringing the experience of *The Overview Effect* to your work, relationships and systems that engage with one another. This is listening without boundaries and recognizing the strange and magnetic force that listening is. The "integrative insight" is that beyond visible structure, the whole that is greater than the sum of the parts is your creation. This is the possibility of business, government and societies succeeding at operating in harmony with the way people actually are.

#### ***4.10. Step Ten: Practice having everything wonderful be a surprise.***

I have spent a good part of my life making lists, setting goals, making plans and calling people up. Mostly, it is been a waste of time. Some years ago, I sold my consulting company and in leaving, went through years of records, lists, plans, goals and phone calls. Nothing had come of almost all of them. Still, we had thrived, survived, and gone about our business more or less successfully. I began to wonder what was really going on.

If most of my planning had made no difference, what did? Was good fortune a matter of leaving the window open, and spreading a few crumbs so that blue birds might fly in? Was

<sup>\*</sup> *The Overview Effect: Space Exploration and Human Evolution*, Second Edition, January 1998.

<sup>†</sup> Harvard University Video for astronauts discussing *The Overview Effect*: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0X\\_fhLIPyDE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0X_fhLIPyDE)

most of the world's strategy and planning really bunk—no more than a way of suppressing anxiety about the future? Without my lists I felt shaky..., maybe that's all they were good for. Maybe a key to often having Conversations that Matter is to consider that Everything Wonderful is a Surprise!

'Wonderful' happens in the moment. Miracles happened consistently in life and work, when people "let life flow through" them.<sup>5</sup>

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*"The greatest sin of all is to turn something concrete into something abstract." – Jean Paul Sartre*

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#### **4.11. Step Eleven: Notice which conversations are missing right now.**

We each have our favorite types of conversations, while there are other types which we avoid or engage with insufficiently. These 'missing' conversations are invisible to us and are sometimes they are the ones most needed to have something actually happen.

Dr. Thomas Zweifel illustrates the essence of necessary conversations that are often missing, not obvious, in his Global Leadership Pyramid.\* Organized into five levels, this is a framework that brings particular energies into focus. Each of these conversations produces a specific effect, and in their entirety bring necessary coherence, action and desired outcomes to a situation. The absence of any of these conversations ultimately creates a deep hole in effectiveness and satisfaction.

Mastery of Conversations that Matter requires remaining aware of which categories of conversation dominate and which are missing, and to be personally responsible for all of them.

### **5. A Stand Sparks Conversations That Matter**

Recently, I served as Executive Coach to a national division of a global organization. In our first meeting, the President said she needed a great leap forward in her own leadership, and in having the organization operate far beyond business as usual. She had recently been transferred from a country where her performance was rated as ordinary. She now intended to create a place that excelled in growth, profit, and performance while at the same time had people genuinely wanting to come to work because the culture was caring, humane and collaborative. She wanted people to breathe 'trust' in the air.

Over the next two years, they came to have the third highest engagement scores in the global organization. Growth was consistent and peoples' energy, good humor and passion for working together increased in pleasing ways. More and more people from outside the division independently asked to go to work there because of what they had heard. Business was good, products were popular, extensive coaching, training and imaginative leadership made a visible difference. But none of this can explain the surprising integration of organization needs and human character that occurred.

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\* See <https://www.linkedin.com/in/thomaszweifel>

What really seemed to spark all of this was a belief in what Shlomo Yishai calls a “Human Mutuality System”:

***“The meaning of Human Mutuality is that the person lives in a Superimposed Reality in which each person is at one and the same time both an individual and part of a collective. It is a durable, existential infrastructure that allows humanity to create diverse solutions that provide a significant, stable and empowered existence.”\****

This leader’s deep-seated belief in the possibility of Human Mutuality is what ignited, inspired and drove this success and her efforts to generate a business and economic system based on that belief. From this belief she was willing to “stand” for it as inevitable challenges and conflicts took place. To stand for something means to hold firmly to a particular opinion or belief..., to give it your wholehearted support.

A stand is the engine that takes a good idea and makes it real. Consider that in this life for the most part, you get what you stand for. We propose that an individual’s “stand” creates widespread permission for Conversations that Matter.

## Afterword

Jean Paul Sartre said that, “The greatest sin of all is to turn something concrete into something abstract.” In 47 years of looking for simpler ways to make things better in companies and personal lives, the bridge between human mutuality and extraordinary performance has been in helping people be connected and contributing to one another.

It’s as simple as that.

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## Notes

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2. Milton Wright, *The Art of Conversation and how to apply its technique* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1936).
3. Maria Konnikova, “Born to Be Conned,” *New York Times* Dec. 6, 2015.
4. Charlie Smith, “The Merlin Factor: Leadership and Strategic Intent,” *London Business Strategy Review* 5, no. 1 (1994): 67-84.
5. Peter M. Senge et al., *Presence: Exploring Profound Change in People, Organizations and Society* (New York : Doubleday, 2005).

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\* See “Human Mutuality”, *Library of Professional Coaching*, Dec 3, 2016 Issue of *Transformation Magazine: A Road Map*.