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Learn the Art of Dialogue and Have Open, Productive Conversations

Open and productive conversation is absolutely critical in today's high-velocity business environment. If our conversations go nowhere, failure will quickly follow.

The problem is that most of us *think* we are having conversations when we really are not. We often participate in one-way conversations—essentially **monologues**: I tell you what I want to tell you. You tell me what you want to tell me (or you tell me what you think I want to hear so I'll leave you alone). We excel at taking turns talking, but neither side is exploring and discovering and building on what is being said. When this happens, the promise of a new discovery or breakthrough is lost. So we aren't solving problems and are often creating them.

There is a difference between what typically passes for conversation and true **dialogue**. If two people are engaged in a dialogue, at least one of them can dependably benefit from the other's experiences. That is why it is important to learn the art of dialogue and practice it daily in all communications. To help promote the art of dialogue, you must be curious about another's point of view and willing to:

- State your own view and ask others for their reactions
- Be wrong
- Accept that you may be unaware of certain facts
- Remain open to new information
- Change your mind
- Interpret how others are thinking and reacting and seek to understand their underlying feelings

Dialogue lets us discover more of our own intelligence and blend it with the knowledge and wisdom of others. Clear and powerful agreements can result from dialogue, whereas little worthwhile insight is likely to come from simultaneous monologues. These types of ineffective conversations can lead to a **reactive cycle**, in which people react instead of participate. If left

unchecked, the reactive cycle can do more than kill the productivity of a conversation and even damage relationships.

A reactive cycle starts when someone says something with which you don't agree, or may even strongly dislike. In a split second, your emotions are triggered and you may feel threatened or defensive. You react by attempting to control the situation, the person or retaliating. Doing so may trigger the other person's emotions, causing that person to now attempt to gain control, which, in turn, causes you to react again. This back-and-forth emotional interplay—this reactive cycle—results in another unproductive conversation or meeting.

There are three steps that can be taken to break a reactive cycle:

1. Identify it; where one of the parties notices the reactive cycle and literally “calls it out.”
2. One or both of the parties claim their responsibility for being reactive.
3. Both parties try to understand their own—and the other's—viewpoints and emotions, and attempt to enter into a true dialogue by reframing their perspectives.

After we have named, claimed and re-framed a reactive cycle, we can engage in the type of open, honest and productive discussion needed to accomplish mutual objectives. By learning the art of dialogue we help ensure that everyone is on the same page and moving forward in the same direction.

—Adapted from "[Learn the Art of Dialogue and Have Open, Productive Conversations](#)," O'Brien Group.

Shifting Perceptions of Change From Episodic Solution to Always-on Strategy

Healthcare leaders are grappling with unprecedented disruption, resulting in a greater need for agile, change-ready cultures. A change-ready culture accepts that change is constant and understands that success will not come from point-in-time solutions, but rather from meaningful, perpetual improvement. To create a change-ready culture, leaders must shift the organization's perceptions of change management from an episodic solution to an ongoing strategy that becomes part of the organization's DNA.

As traditional approaches to change shift, leadership practices must evolve to align with the organization's aspirations. By actively modeling desired behaviors, leaders reinforce the mentality required for changes to be successful. To cultivate an organization that is able to evolve continuously, its leaders should do the following:

- See change as a transformative competency. Recognize that change is continuous, and multiple changes must occur simultaneously. This requires a culture that accepts change as the norm and becomes so good at changing that it thrives during disruption.
- Focus on your mission. This is your "why" for transformation and needs to be clearly, compellingly and continuously articulated in order to engage key stakeholders.
- Hold employees accountable. Make it clear that adapting is not optional and reinforce this mentality through validation, coaching, rewards and recognition.

If the transformation employees are asked to take on are interpreted as overwhelming and complicated, it will make it harder for the changes to be adopted and sustained. Change should not feel impossible to achieve, and it does not have to require a significant amount of effort. Here are several essential steps:

- Establish a shared vision of transformation within your organization. This will help curb change-related stress and confusion regarding the way forward.

- Leverage data to create a high-level view of the organization. Rather than focusing on a broad problem, conduct an objective assessment and diagnose the challenges at hand with quantifiable data. Share these insights broadly to promote buy-in.
- Demonstrate why. After you build your strategy, share data with stakeholders to explain why changes are critical for reaching organizational goals.
- Identify advocates. Seek out individuals who will display model behaviors and encourage others to contribute to growth and sustainable performance. They can help determine who will be affected by change and how certain team dynamics may impede or accelerate progress.

Change within healthcare is no longer an option; it's a necessity for long-term viability. Make sure leaders make the essential mind shift, then build momentum for transformational capability.

—Adapted from "[Elevating Change Management: From Point Solution to Continuous Transformation](#)," by Tonia Breckenridge, Michelle Bright and Ryan McPherson, HealthLeaders, Oct. 14, 2019.