



Purposeful Wanderings

A Monthly Newsletter for Clients and Friends of **The Road Not Taken**

©2017 Bradford L. Glass • www.RoadNotTaken.com

Vol. 16, No. 11 -- November 2017

Powerful Conversations

“A bird sitting in a tree is never afraid of the branch breaking, because its trust is not on the branch but on its own wings.” – Unknown

How do “difficult conversations” go for you? You know, the ones with conflict, emotion, high stakes, people you’re afraid of or people you don’t like. Unconsciously, it’s easy to jump to blame – either the circumstances, other people, your skill, or yourself ... deciding you’ll never be a good communicator. However ... looking more carefully at what’s going on underneath the surface commonly offers new perspective, and therefore, new choices.

In a program I offer called Constructive Conversations (to emerge one day as a book), I suggest this: none of the things you *believe* cause communication problems are culprits (situations, people, skill, emotion). The same thing that causes conversations to fail causes conversations to succeed – your personal presence, *how you see and think*. Conversations *become* difficult because how you think about a conversation actually changes the conversation.

The key to effective communication is self-trust. When you truly know who *you* are, circumstances lose their power to derail you. Or ... as *you* matter more, circumstances matter less. One pathway to self-trust is to re-learn how to *begin* a difficult conversation. A powerful opening can change the course of an entire conversation, by softening tensions and dramatically expanding the potential for resolution. You can do that by (1) transparently declaring your own truth, and (2) creating a big, safe space for a conversation to unfold. Here are seven great beginnings for a tough conversation.

- The simplest conversation we rarely have: “**Thank you.**” Immediately brings two people closer together.
- The most powerful conversation we rarely have: “**I love you.**” Often a reminder, but a way to set a large context.
- The highest potential conversation we rarely have: “**I need your help.**” This invites others into your world.
- The most courageous conversation we rarely have: “**I’m afraid.**” This opens you, and others, to what’s true for all.
- A non-judgmental opening to any emotionally charged conversation: “**Things just aren’t working for me.**” This can work for anything from a tough performance review at work, to a personal disagreement, or even to a divorce.
- A positive opening to any emotion- or conflict-laden conversation: “**Help me understand.**” Again, it invites the other person into your context. This builds shared space for learning and resolution (vs. fighting or winning).
- The most freeing conversation we rarely have: “**No, thank you.**” This is (1) an act of true *wisdom* for unresolvable conflict and for times when the other person simply won’t play, and (2) a way to eliminate the plethora of useless conversations that rob our time and spirit (which is most of them!). “Never waste your time trying to explain who you are to people committed to misunderstanding you.” Just leave.

You are a natural communicator; you just need to *unlearn* the *unnatural* fears that block your thinking and presence. As you become aware of those pesky little voices that tell you how impossible things are, your natural self-trust returns.

Exercise: (1) *Before* starting any conversation you have this month, easy or difficult, reflect on *your own inner energy*. Are you confident or afraid? Do you intend to win, to be right, to learn, to resolve? Look deeply; your truth may lurk below a more obvious surface. (If you’re in it to win, you’ve got to be prepared to lose. Even the Red Sox know this. If you’re in it to be right, you’ve got to be willing to be proven wrong. That’s part of the territory when judgment lives in either side of a conversation.) (2) Plan ahead ... how one or more of these beginnings may be appropriate for a difficult conversation. To think about these things ahead of time focuses your energy on learning and self-trust, releasing fear.

Life lessons from nature: When hurricanes rearrange shorelines, uproot vegetation, and flood the land, nature begins rebuilding immediately. Oh wait! Nature never *stopped* building; hers is a continuous process of creation – a trait that nurtures wholeness and ensures sustainability. Self-trust. Unlike FEMA, no approvals, politics or fear. *It just is.*

Book of the month: *The Five Keys to Mindful Communication*, by Susan Chapman. A practical look at issues and fears that block effective communication, with practices for openness and awareness ... finding your true self in the midst of it all. And if you’re on Cape Cod, you’ll find this book at the Market Street Bookshop in Mashpee Commons; 508-539-6985.