Better Results through Better Conversations

David Lee

Excerpted from the Better Results through Better Conversations program

“Every better result you desire requires a better conversation”

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Why “Better Results through Better Conversations”? 

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Whatever better business result you desire, getting that result will require having a better conversation with the person or people required to make that result a reality.

It doesn’t matter whether your goal is to deliver better customer service, reduce product cycle times, improve employee engagement, become the Employer of Choice for talent, or simply improve efficiencies.

Achieving your goal requires you to “get results through other people” and that requires engaging them in productive conversations...conversations that will get you a different result than what you are currently getting.

That requires having a different—and better—conversation.

In my work over the years with managers and leaders, I’ve found that often the weakest link between the results they want from their people, and the results they actually get, is the conversations they have (and sometimes avoid having).

Even the brightest, most caring leaders I’ve worked with sometimes say things that result in them NOT getting the results they want. Sometimes, they avoid having important conversations they know they should have, because they don’t believe those conversations will go well.

The result?

They don’t get the quality of results they would like to.

Becoming more skilled at translating the results you want into the conversations you need to have...and then the skills needed to make those conversations work well, can be a game-changer.

The following excerpts from Better Results through Better Conversations will help get you started.
The Four Critical Moments of Truth You Must Master

Overview: Your success in any critical conversation depends upon your skill in navigating the four moments of truth described below. While each are important, the first two play the most important role in whether the other person gets defensive or...is able to hear what you say and respond maturely and constructively.

1. **Before**—How you prepare for the conversation. What you do before the conversation will make or break the conversation.

2. **Beginning**—How you start off the conversation. This is the second “make or break” moment of truth. If you do it well, the person will be willing and able to hear what you have to say. Do it poorly and they will instantly become defensive and either shut down or become combative.

3. **During**—What you do to facilitate a productive conversation. During the conversation, you must be skilled at fostering a collaborative environment where you and the other person work together to achieve a productive outcome and maintain a positive relationship. Also, to facilitate productive conversations, you must be skilled at helping others feel understood, and helping them shift from being defensive to collaborative.

4. **After**—What you do after the conversation to continue the positive trajectory. This is especially important for conversations around performance issues.
The Six Steps to a Successful “Before” Moment of Truth

Step One: Clear Vision

Step Two: Clear Head

Step Three: Open Heart

Step Four: Effective Emotional State

Step Five: Inviting Message

Step Six: Contingency Plans
Step One: The Clear Vision Protocol

1. **What’s Your “Before Picture”?**—What is currently happening with either an individual or your whole team that you would like to be different; something where you aren’t getting the results you want?

   It could be very practical and tangible, like people aren’t as productive as you want, or they are delivering less than stellar customer service. It could be related to your dealings with someone, such as a direct report who gets defensive or doesn’t make changes in response to your corrective feedback.

   This is your “Before Picture”, like those “Before and After Pictures” in fitness infomercials.

2. **What’s Your “After Picture”?**—For the above situation, what result(s) do you want, but haven’t gotten yet? This is your “After Picture”—how you would like things to change.

3. **Let’s Sharpen Your Focus, and Get Specific**—Six months from now, if I were to come in and observe your team (or individual) generating the result(s) you want, what would I see and hear them doing? What would be conspicuously absent—i.e. they are no longer doing? The more specific you are in describing what you want, the more clearly you can communicate what you want when the times come to have the conversation.

   So for instance, rather than just saying “I want my people to work better as a team,” you need to be able to describe the specific actions and responses that, to you, would mean your vision has become reality. To be even more helpful, you can describe situations where these new and improved actions and responses would take place.
4. **Let’s Add Past Examples of Your Desired Result**—Have you experienced examples of this result happening in the past? If so, what did it look and sound like? Describe what they said and did that made their actions and outcome desirable. When you include this in your conversation, it not only helps the other person understand what you are looking for, it also communicates “I know you can do this, you’ve done it before.”

5. **Now, Describe Your Desired Result, Your “After Picture” as a Request**—Write out or speak out loud a description of what result you want from the person. Notice if it:
   a. Says what you want without belaboring what you don’t want.
   b. Communicates your perspective and request without blame or judgment.
   c. Communicates a desire to hear their point of view and have an open discussion.
   d. Contains no sarcastic, inflammatory, or emotionally charged wording.

6. **Get Feedback and Fine Tune**—Ask a trusted friend, colleague, or coach to give you feedback on your request. Say out loud your desired result---your After Picture. Ask them to tell you what they heard and compare it to what you intended.

   If what they heard wasn’t what you intended, or they say it came across too harsh, judgmental, or negative in some other way, keep refining your message. Once it’s clear that they understand your message and they like the way you delivered it, ask them to imagine they were the person in real life hearing the message and to tell you what they would do differently in the future, based on your message. See if that matches what you would like the real recipient of this message to do.

   Using their feedback, tweak if necessary.
Clear Vision Worksheet

Directions: On a separate piece of paper, write down your answers to these questions.

1. What’s Your “Before Picture”? 

2. What’s Your “After Picture”? 

3. Let’s Sharpen Your Focus, and Get Specific. Six Months from Now...

4. Let’s Add Past Examples of Your Desired Result

5. Now, Describe Your Desired Result, Your After Picture as a Request

6. Get Feedback and Fine Tune
Step Five: Creating an Inviting Message

Guiding Principle: You want to open up the conversation in a way that the other person can experience as “inviting” and “welcoming a conversation” rather than as an attack or demand. You want to communicate your message in a way that invites the other person to consider your point of view, rather than triggers defensiveness and antagonism. You want to create a message that invites the other person into a real conversation, where both parties “listen to understand” and both have a genuine desire to act honorably.

An Inviting Message...

1. Is clear, concise, and concrete—and therefore easily understood.

2. Uses the least amount of power needed to get the point across.

3. Communicates an openness to discuss; i.e. it invites the person to have a conversation rather than comes across as a monologue or pronouncement.

4. Avoids blaming, judging, scolding, criticizing, and psychoanalyzing.

5. Avoids using emotionally charged words and phrases that virtually guarantee a defensive response, such as:
   - “Should” and “Shouldn’t”
"You..." Statements

"Always" and "Never"

Inflammatory words or phrases—e.g.

- "It seems like it would be a no-brainer that..."
- "You really offended me..."
- "Why did you throw me under the bus?"
- "Duh! Hello!"

Your Inviting Message Consists of a Declaration and an Invitation

1. **Declaration** – You “declare” what the issue is, what it is that you want to talk about. Examples of “Declarations”:

   - Kyle...I’d like to talk with you about how we can improve the way our team works together. What I mean by that is _______.”

   - “I’m concerned with what’s been going on with our team and Marketing lately. We really need to improve how our departments work together, and I wanted to get your thoughts about how we can do that.”

   - “I wanted to talk with you about how we can work better together, so that ...”
2. **Invitation** – You “invite” the person into a dialogue about it. Examples of “invitations”:

- “...so I was wondering where you were coming from about that...”
  “...do you know what I mean?”

- “Is that something we can talk about?”

- “So, I was wondering what was up with that?”

- “So...I’d really like us to figure out a way to make that work...what do you think?”

- “So...what’s your take on it?”

- Others?

**Note:** Sometimes the goal of your conversation is to simply get your point across and stop the other person’s unacceptable behavior. In these situations, you still want to make your message as easy-to-hear as possible, so the person will act on it, even if the issue is not open for debate or discussion. These types of conversations should be “last resort” situations or when someone’s behavior could cause harm.
Tips for Making the Declaration/Invitation Work

1. **If it’s an ongoing problem, Name the Game.**—You don’t want to feel like Bill Murray in Groundhog Day by having “Groundhog Day” conversations about the same issue over and over.

   When you’ve already talked about an issue and it hasn’t changed, now the conversation needs to be about the fact you’ve talked about the issue and it hasn’t changed, not about the particulars about Version 9.0 that just happened.

   e.g. “Jim...we need to talk about your missing your deadlines. As you know, we’ve talked about this before and it’s still happening, which can’t continue...do you understand why?”

2. **Share your “Inner World”—your thoughts, feelings, and intentions.**—This helps break down barriers and makes it easier to relate to you person-to-person rather than as someone in a particular role like “boss” or as an adversary.

   For instance, to a fellow manager whose team has been giving really bad internal customer service to your team, you might say: “Karen, this is really awkward to bring up but I wanted to let you know that we’ve been having some issues with customer service from your team, and I wanted to talk with you about it...”

3. **State what you’re NOT saying or intending.**—This reduces the potential of defensiveness because it gets out in the open possible misinterpretations they might have.

   e.g. “Bethany, I want to ask you some questions about the Olympus project, not because there was anything wrong with how it was handled, but to learn more about the methodology your team used, so we can learn what works and what could be improved on...”
Related Resources By David Lee

Articles

How to Address Negativity in a Positive Way
Managing Up: How to Bring Up a Difficult Issue With Your Boss
Let’s Talk for a Change
3 Engagement-Enhancing Conversations Every Manager Should Have
What Happens When Leaders Show Humility and Openness to Feedback?
What to Do When Employee Feedback Goes Wrong

Audio Recording

Let’s Talk for a Change – This recording is of a keynote presentation on how to bring up and discuss difficult issues in a way that fosters honest, unguarded dialogue.

For a Complimentary 30 Minute Strategy Session or to Learn More About How David Lee Can Help you Achieve Better Results Through Better Conversations:

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About David Lee

David Lee, the founder of HumanNature@Work, works with employers who want to improve employee engagement, customer service, and morale. He has worked with organizations and presented at conferences both domestically and abroad.

An internationally recognized thought leader in the field of employee engagement and performance, he is the author of nearly one hundred articles and book chapters that have been published in trade journals and books in the US, Europe, India, Australia, and China. The just published second edition of the business classic, *The Talent Management Handbook*, features a chapter of his on the topic of Onboarding.

In addition to his research and work with both struggling and “best in class” organizations, David Lee’s work draws from a wide range of scientific disciplines including cognitive neuroscience, anthropology, psychoneuroimmunology, trauma and resilience research, and paleopsychology.

Taking this research which typically doesn’t find its way into the business world, David translates these principles of human nature into practical leadership and managerial strategies that optimize employee performance.

Using the popular TV show *The Dog Whisperer* as an analogy for the difference understanding human nature makes, David’s work helps leaders and managers become “Employee Whisperers.”

In his work with managers and leaders at all levels and his interviews with employees, he has found that “every better result you desire requires having a better conversation.”

For information on his coaching, consulting, and training, call 207-571-9898.
Comments from Clients

“The value David provided our organization went far beyond the actual classroom experience. In addition to the wealth of information he provided during class, David provided a broad support system to further the development of our senior management team.

Specific elements included working with the team to articulate a behavioral vision, one-on-one coaching, individualized professional development plans, and a variety of other support services that enabled us to build a culture of teamwork, accountability, and excellent customer service. While everyone says they will help you be more productive and get better results from your people, David is the only one I’ve worked with who really helps you get there.”

Eric Henry, CEO and CIO at Hershey Trust Company

“Weeks after David Lee spoke to our college, people are still talking about the message he sent. One employee thanked our President and said it was a “gift to employees to hear David speak”. David took the time to get to know US before he stepped foot on campus. We didn’t expect the level of service that he provided. He interviewed people, sent out surveys and dug deep to find out exactly what our college needed to go from good to great. He then customized a program that fit what we needed and has been great with follow-up and feedback. It’s clear he truly cares. David does more than give a great speech a leave, he transforms the culture.”

Deb Carlson, PhD, Director of Institutional Research and Communication, Nebraska Methodist College: The Josie Harper Campus, NE

“I have utilized David’s services several times over the years. He treats each company as a unique entity and creates specific training plans based on each company’s needs. I like that he does not deliver a canned program, but makes the time to meet with HR, managers and CEO’s to understand the company culture. He partners with HR to create training plans for success. The Appraisal Process is all about Coaching and Feedback.

David customized a program for us that focused on our list of specific goals, worked with our management staff as a team and on a one-on-one basis, and created tools to ensure success. What is most impressive is that David followed up post appraisal process with an employee survey asking how the manager training impacted the new appraisal process. The survey results overwhelmingly verified that the training made a positive impact on our management team and their delivery of the new process to our employees. And, as a result of the survey process, we now know what areas to focus on for our future training needs. We look forward to working with David again as we continue to refine our appraisal and coaching efforts.”

Barbara Bartlett, Director of Human Resources, Infinity Federal Credit Union, ME

“We chose David Lee to provide us with customer service training over a well-known national franchise in part because of his customized approach. Rather than trying to convince us that a one-size-fits-all, off the shelf “solution” was just what we needed, he took the time to learn about our business and unique needs, and tailor a program to address them.

The fact that his program was addressing the real life issues our customer service and tech support people faced every day, combined with his engaging and informative training style, had
a huge impact on our staff’s interest in, and commitment to, his ongoing program. It’s exciting to hear everyone using the concepts from his training in conversation – his concepts have become our vernacular.

One of the other things makes David such an effective trainer is the fact that he is clearly a voracious learner who is always on the lookout for new research or best practice to share with clients. Whether it’s how stress affects the brain and its implications for engaging people in constructive conversations, or a million other applications of “human nature at work”, David shares ideas and information you won’t get in “standard” business programs delivered by the average consultant. I know I have used his examples with staff, customers and friends. If you want an effective and customized training program that will enhance your external and internal communication, David Lee is the best choice!”

_Nancy Hellman, Loftware, NH_

“Finally, a moment to reflect on the weekend. David, you lit them on fire!!!! I cannot tell you what a difference you made with this very unique group—you helped us to turn the tide and it was an incredibly productive weekend—and it has shaped our attitude and focus for the next few years.

You helped us collectively grab our minds and put them together in such a way that we were able to miraculously define our immediate VISION without so much as an hour of brainstorming. It just happened. It would have taken 2 or 3 board meetings to do what you helped us do.

I am still in disbelief, and am really impressed with your attitude David. You have such a special gift, and you just drove it home with everyone. I will never ever forget your time with us.”

_Josh Libby, President of the National Cued Speech Association, Washington, DC_

"Thank you for doing such an outstanding job keynoting our conference. As you could tell by the response, participants loved both the content and the delivery of your presentation.”

_Dr. Ian Gawler, Director, The Gawler Foundation, Victoria, Australia_

“I’ve now worked with over 150 presenters since you last were a part of MEBSR's Spring Conference, and still you stand out as the best person we’ve ever had come and present on how we best work with one another, increase productivity and thrive.”

_Sanna McKim, Executive Director, Maine Businesses for Social Responsibility, Maine_

“I just want to thank you for such a great presentation! I got feedback that this was the best conference that we ever had. (Management at the venue) e-mailed me asking for your contact information. Apparently the staff that was working that day loved your message and they want to hear more. So - don't be surprised if you hear from them!”

_Anne Charles, Maine Municipal Association, Maine_

“When our Human Resources Affiliate was charged with the responsibility to recommend a keynote speaker on a topic related to change management for the New Hampshire Association of Counties Annual Conference David Lee’s name came immediately to mind.
The thought of developing a keynote presentation as well as useful breakout sessions that appealed to elected officials, departmental managers, supervisors and employees from diverse departments presented a formidable task. However, David did not disappoint. In fact, he developed and delivered an inspiring, can do, engaging presentation that was interactive, provided useful tips and flowed easily throughout the day.”

Norm O’Neil, New Hampshire Association of Counties, NH

“I learned more in this seminar than in four others I took from (a well known national seminar company).”

Jennifer Sgroi, Stonyfield Farm Yogurt, New Hampshire

“Without you realizing, David woos you into learning by appealing to what you naturally know to be true by your own experience. He's incredibly down to earth and balances stories, humor, statistics and research to engage his audience in a time defying way. His programs will benefit anyone looking to gain awareness, passion and spirit in the workplace (and beyond). I was so riveted and inspired that when David said he was wrapping up his program, I was dumbfounded by how much time had passed. I was convinced my watch was mistakenly an hour ahead. Thank you, David, for following your passion & curiosity from which we greatly benefit.”

Krista Irmischer, Human Resources Manager, Jøtul North America, Maine

“David’s presentation style is unparalleled! The substantive and timely content of his subject materials is immediately adaptable to the workplace making his seminars an invaluable aid to an employer seeking to be an “Employer of Choice.”

Lynn M. Lombard, VP, MMG Insurance Company, Maine

“I want to say a big thank you for the wonderful job you did in your presentations during our Quality Leadership Conference. You are a talented individual; thank you for sharing your gifts with Fairview.”

Tom Hanson, Fairview Healthcare System, Minnesota

“David has an uncanny ability to not only capture the attention of his audience, but also maintain a consistent level of interest in his students... Although I recognized and easily understood most of the concepts that David presented in his class, his perspective (which I value immensely due to his knowledge and intellect) and innovative style of teaching sparked my curiosity and interest, and more importantly, triggered my brain to ask more questions, deeper questions... David also has that rare ability to teach effectively to individuals that are at different levels of comprehension and understanding, and exhibit different styles of learning. ... Lastly, I would like to add a very important detail regarding David’s style of teaching and his personality. His wit and great sense of humor were very appreciated in the class by all. He has what I like to call ‘intelligent’ humor which is a gift.”

Aditi N. Thakur, Accenture, Colorado

“Your seminar Constructive Conversations was fabulous! I got so much out of it.”

Jayne Allison, GPC Biotech, Waltham, Massachusetts

“David is dynamic and entertaining... and effective at making a strong connection with his audience. He uses personal examples which allows him to make even the most sophisticated concepts understandable.”

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Excerpted from the “Better Results Through Better Conversations” program
Gail Pickard, Director, Midlyn Communications, Vancouver, BC

"David Lee knows what makes employees tick! His presentation was filled with practical ideas in giving employees a true sense of meaning and belonging in the workplace. If you want a highly motivated workforce, put David's ideas into place."

Del Gilbert, Chief Learning Officer, St. Joseph Hospital, New Hampshire

“I enjoyed your Courageous Conversations workshop so much that I came back again for your Resiliency workshop! You are an enthusiastic, caring and knowledgeable teacher. I especially liked the way you really listened to the participants and were happy to answer all of our questions. I felt like you were talking directly to me.”

Glenda Christiaens, Assistant Professor, Brigham Young University College of Nursing, Provo, Utah

“It was great to have you address our top team at Norwich...Your enthusiasm is commendable and the address was certainly entertaining, thought provoking and inspirational.”

Peter Johnson, Group Managing Director, Norwich Union Financial Services, Ltd, Melbourne, Australia

David Lee’s seminar, Constructive Conversations: How to Foster Honest, Open, Non-Defensive Dialogue About Difficult Issues, was one of the most worthwhile training experiences that I have had in a long time. Geared towards more experienced practitioners, it presented a whole new way to look at challenging discussions we have with employees and really changed my approach and perspective. I am looking forward to returning to work and implementing the many ideas that came out of the course, and look forward to attending future seminars from HumanNature@Work.

Cindy Joyce, Director of Human Resources, FundQuest, Boston, MA