

G L E N S H A R K E Y



NAVIGATING

A ROADMAP FOR EFFECTIVELY

COURAGEOUS

ADDRESSING TOUGH TOPICS

CONVERSATIONS

(AND PEOPLE!)

NAVIGATING COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS

*A Roadmap for Effectively
Addressing Tough Topics
(and People!)*

By Glen Sharkey

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Addressing Tough Topics (and People!)/Glen Sharkey**

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1. Self Help/ Personal Growth/ Success

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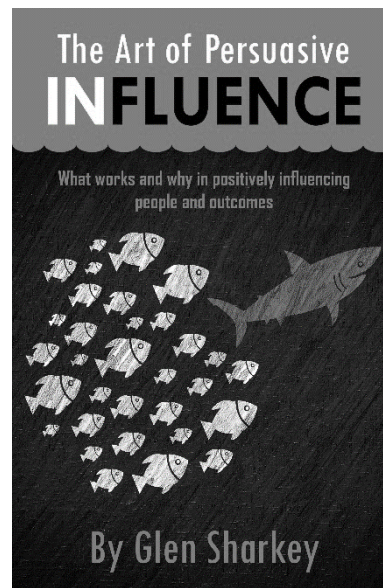
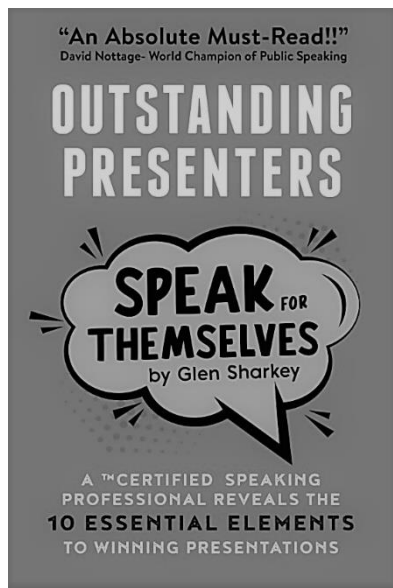
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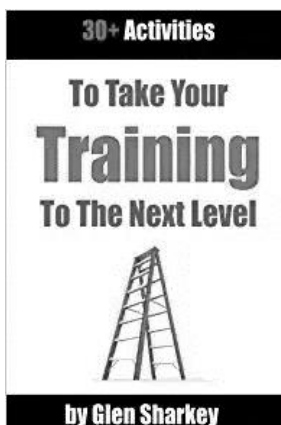
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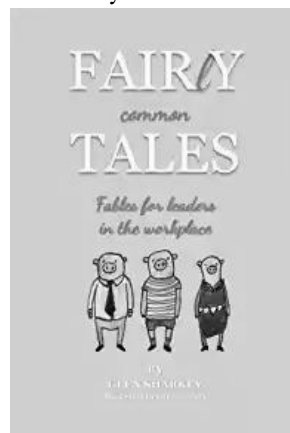
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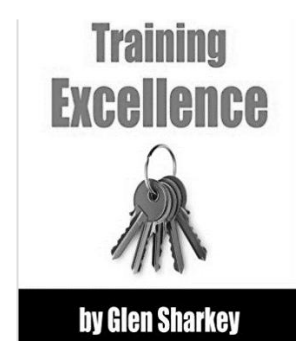
30+ Activities to



Fairly Common



Discover the Keys
to Training
Excellence



The Tale with Sandra Continues...

“That ‘Y’ Conversations Model will be really useful in my next conversation with Daniel,” said Sandra as she sat down with the Coach at the cafe just around the corner from her work. “I’ve always thought that I need to keep the conversation very level regardless of Daniel’s response and the Y model gives me a very clear rationale for shifting my tone, something that I’ve felt a bit guilty for in the past, but I know now that I was quite possibly responding appropriately when I didn’t realise!”

“I must admit though”, Sandra continued, “that Daniel seems so practised with his responses that he always seems to have the upper hand in these conversations, and although you’ve been very clear in explaining the tone of these conversations with the Warm Heart to Hard-Nosed model, and the specific tone in a conversation with the Y model, I still feel a little bit lost in terms of the actual route that I need to take in beginning the conversation with him through to its conclusion. He so easily derails the logical sequence of these conversations and so it would be really helpful for me if I had some clear signposts to follow so that regardless of the detours that we take along the way I’ll be able to pull it back to make sure that it’s on track”.

“I think you need a biscuit!” Said the Coach.

“I’m fine thanks” replied Sandra, “I’ve not long eaten”.

“Actually, I wasn’t offering you something to eat,” the Coach said with a slight sense of amusement. “It’s actually the ‘BISCuit Model’. This model offers a clear four-point roadmap to navigating these conversations from start to finish. I think you’ll find it a lot more palatable for your situation than a sweet piece of baking...!!”

“DANIEL SEEMS SO PRACTISED WITH HIS RESPONSES THAT HE ALWAYS SEEMS TO HAVE THE UPPER HAND IN THESE CONVERSATIONS...”

CHAPTER NINE

ARE WE THERE YET?

The BISCUit Model©

My BISCUit Model is a framework to help give people a clear route when approaching courageous conversations, and acts like a roadmap along a difficult stretch of highway where it would be very easy to slip off the edge and careen down the bank. The BISCUit Model encourages people to plan for these kinds of conversations using the acronym BISC (the first four letters of the word biscuit). BISC stands for: Behaviour, Impact, Shift, and only if necessary, potential Consequences.

Behaviour

In the kinds of conversations where we are bringing up an issue with someone else and we need to influence them to act or perform in a more desirable fashion than they currently are, it is important to clearly spell out the behaviour that is inappropriate or is failing to meet our expectations. For some people this opening part of the

**THE RECIPIENT MAY BE
COMPLETELY
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UNDESIRABLE**

conversation will come as a surprise—they may be completely unaware that their behaviour is undesirable. In this case you may need to re-examine, if appropriate, how clearly you articulated your expectations of them in the first place. It is best to think this through prior to the conversation happening, but you should at least be prepared to consider it during the interaction.

If the person is genuinely surprised, and even somewhat disappointed that they have failed to meet expectations, then there is every chance that they are unclear of those expectations in the first place. In cases such as these, some consideration needs to be given to your role in the unmet expectations.

WHEN YOU ARE ADDRESSING AN UNSUITABLE ATTITUDE IT'S PRUDENT FOR YOU TO GIVE EXAMPLES OF HOW THAT ATTITUDE MANIFESTS ITSELF AS A BEHAVIOUR

When the courageous conversation centres around an undesirable attitude more than an undesirable behaviour, we need to keep the nebulous nature of attitude in mind. Attitude is intangible and unseen whereas behaviour is much more visible and invariably is the tangible outworking of attitude. So, when you are addressing someone about an undesirable attitude it is prudent for you to give concrete examples of how that attitude manifests itself as a behaviour. Give them examples of the behaviours that need to cease or diminish, and on the other hand, give examples of the kind of behaviours that need to be seen more. For instance, if you are dealing with a staff member who has a negative attitude then talk to them about the kind of behaviours they are displaying that are evidence of this attitude, such as; scoffing at new ideas in meetings or making random comments to upset the momentum of constructive conversations.

It is much harder to identify and see attitude change than it is to target tangible behavioural change. It is also clearer for both parties to see progress being made with behaviour shift as compared to attitude shift. The clearer we can define the change that needs to happen behaviourally, the more likely it is to be changed.

Impact

Often people who are behaving poorly fail to see the broader impacts of their actions. If they are already aware that their behaviour is less than adequate, then they may not be so easily influenced to change simply by being told of the offending behaviour. If they haven't changed when they already have an awareness and clarity about their poor behaviour, then you need to take a step up from simple awareness of the issue in resolving it with them.

In this case, it may be helpful for them to understand the negative impacts that their behaviour is having. If they do not respond positively, and in an engaged fashion, when the behaviour is challenged, then they may be unaware of the wider implications of their behaviour with relevant stakeholders. A dialogue around the broader impact of their negative behaviour can be enlightening and helpful to their process of taking influence from you regarding altering their conduct.

Some people describe this process as giving people a 'reason big enough' to motivate change. Detrimental impacts in a workplace setting that people may be unaware of include: the effect the behaviour is having on other team members, on other colleagues and peers, on clients and customers, on suppliers and other stakeholders, on the broader company and its reputation, and also on the person's own reputation. It may also be appropriate to talk about the negative impact that the person's behaviour is having on you as their leader.

If undesirable behaviour is left to continue unchecked, it sends an inadvertent message to the rest of the team that the behaviour is acceptable and therefore lowers the standards of the team. Therefore, it is necessary for

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ACCEPTABLE**

everyone's sake that undesirable behaviour and its impacts are addressed as early as possible in these kinds of conversations.

I worked with one site manager who supervised forestry workers. When he reached a point of impasse with a resistant staff member, he would say to them; "We are not getting anywhere with this, so we will meet again tomorrow morning first thing. In the meantime, go to your locker, grab your gear, go home now, and when your partner asks you why you are home so early you can explain to them why you are risking your future with this company." That strategy almost always returned positive results, often with people immediately turning their attitude around on the spot! When we think through the broader impact of our behaviour on others (including our family), it can be revelatory!

Shift

Having talked about the behaviour that is inappropriate and having covered sufficient elements of the impact of this behaviour, it then becomes necessary to talk about the shift required. As important as the clarity of expectations is in the process of initially setting the bar for attitude and behaviour, the same level of clarity is required in terms of the shift that is needed to resolve unacceptable behaviour or performance.

It is the task of the person wanting to influence the behaviour to make sure that the offending party understands the required shift. It is not enough for problematic behaviour to be addressed; it also needs to change. What needs to be eliminated? What needs to be added? What needs adjustment? It is necessary for both parties to be very clear on the nature of the change required, and on how both will know when that change has occurred. If expectations were lacking in the first instance, then it needs to be made sure that these are crystal clear going forward. You don't want to have to go around that mountain again!

If you are dealing with a staff member, it will probably help to write the expectations down and date and sign them together if there is any concern of lack of compliance going forward. Some businesses call this a 'Letter of Expectation' that occurs prior to the instigation of a disciplinary or performance management process.

Several decades ago, while still at school I found myself with some degree of regularity in the headmaster's office for disciplinary action. This would most likely mean five to ten minutes where

the headmaster talked ‘at’ me, and then in conclusion, would ask me some kind of closed question like; “So are we clear?” or, “Do you understand?” Presumably this was to ascertain whether I understood the error of my ways and what the desired rehabilitated behaviour was to be. I often use this in communication training as an example of a poor question choice to establish whether the person has understood the main substance of the conversation, because it does little to clarify that understanding has actually occurred and that we are ‘on the same page’.

**BEWARE- THE
PERSON WHO
DOES THE
MAJORITY OF
THE TALKING
ALSO DOES THE
MAJORITY OF
THE WORK!**

In courageous, performance-based conversations it pays to remember that the person who does the majority of the talking also does the majority of the work. When my headmaster spent most of his time speaking ‘at’ me, I was doing very little thinking about my actual behaviour and the impact that it had on others. In fact, if he was able to see what I was thinking about at the time he would have most likely seen images of a football field or West Coast waves. I was present in body only! The headmaster would have achieved a much more effective result if he had asked me, “So what do you think you need to change?”, and not been satisfied with, “I dunno”, which would have been my immediate response, not because I didn’t know,

or couldn’t generate an answer, but because I could be confident that that kind of answer would get him talking again, and I could go back to ‘zoning out’.

In terms of having a genuine influence in these kinds of conversations where the recipient is resistant to change, it is a simple but effective strategy to have them talk more, and you less. This is much more likely to happen with persistent questioning, and especially using the open-ended question starters of “what, how, and why?” By having them feed back to you about their behaviour, their reasons, and rationales for such behaviour, what they know or consider to be the impact on others, and what they believe is the desired shift required, you engage them in the process.

Consequences

The first three stages of the BISC Model—explaining the undesirable behaviour, the wider impact of the behaviour, and the need to shift that behaviour—may be sufficient in terms of getting a positive outcome. If, however, at this point in the process there is still no clear sense of buy-in from the other party, then you will need to be prepared to discuss the potential consequences of the failure to demonstrate the required shift. What will happen if they don't comply? In what time frame? With what warnings? This is the stick rather than the carrot in terms of getting the donkey to move forward.

**OPEN-ENDED
QUESTION
STARTERS - WHAT,
HOW, AND WHY -
WILL HELP THE
RECIPIENT TO
ENGAGE IN THE
PROCESS**

If the person with the undesirable behaviour is unable to shift simply by being made aware of the untenable situation and its impacts on other people or other factors, then it may be necessary to use the extrinsic motivation of potential negative consequences in the event of failure to deliver. Once again, it is most profitable to have the recipient do a lot of the talking, even in this 'potential consequences' stage. The key to getting people talking is asking them questions. I've had people in these kinds of conversations still resistant after working through the first three stages, so I'll ask them; "What do you think will happen if the desired shift doesn't happen?" Often, they answer, "I guess we'll

have another chat then." However, I don't want to simply have another chat —and another one after that with no change, so I ask them to have another think about what the consequences might be if they fail to shift because we're having the chat now! At this point they may jump straight to the conclusion of, "I might get sacked!" That's come from their own mouth, and though in most cases it is a little extreme, it is important for the unwilling recipient to think about the 'what if's' in the event of things not changing.



Behaviour (Past)

- Facts (preferably not hearsay)



Impact (Present)

*- On the team, leader, business and customer
- Results of the behaviour*



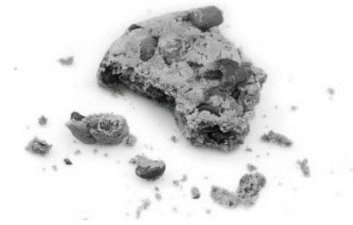
Shift required (Future)

- Desired change



Consequences

*- Discuss potential consequences if unconvinced
that the person has accepted ownership*



As I mentioned earlier, my headmaster had little influence on my behaviour as a result of our ‘chats’ (the cane was somewhat more persuasive). When the principle would say to me, “So do you understand?” do you think my response was, “I thought you started out well. I think that your emotions probably got the better of you somewhat in the middle, and then quite frankly I think you could have done a better job in summarizing what you’d talked about because you did lose me towards the end”? I might have wanted to say that but obviously I never did. My response was always a simple, “Yes sir”, not because I had understood, or even cared to understand, but because I

was suffering from the disease of “Getoutoftheprincipalsofficeitis”! A simple response seemed to work—no doubt because the principal was just as keen to see the back of me as I was of him. But each time he let me leave his office without making me really think about my inappropriate behaviour, and process its impacts, or the desired shift in my behaviour that he required, he missed an opportunity to influence my behaviour. It would not have been too difficult to read my body language and see that I was not ‘onboard’. Had he made me genuinely think about the potential consequences of my continued poor behaviour he might have caused me to wake up to the dangerous track I was heading down.

The BISCuit model aims to give leaders a road map for structuring courageous conversations. This is vital because so often in these circumstances the recipients have developed life-long strategies for deflecting and derailing such conversations. As the old military adage goes “To be forewarned is to be forearmed.” The better prepared we are for these conversations, the greater the likelihood of success for all parties concerned. So be prepared to:

- clarify behaviour,
- elaborate on the impact of behaviour,
- outline the shift required, and
- determine the potential consequences if the desired shift doesn’t happen.

The aim is to make shift happen!

The following chapter deals with the final model of “Predictable Outcomes” and aims to give you that last little boost of confidence to have these conversations in the light of every outcome being viewed as beneficial.

**BELOW THE LINE
RECIPIENTS HAVE
DEVELOPED LIFE-
LONG STRATEGIES
FOR DEFLECTING
AND DERAILING
DIFFICULT
CONVERSATIONS**

Chapter Nine- In a Sentence

It's Hard to Know
You're Off Track in
a Courageous
Conversation if You
Have No Clear
Road Map to Follow

The Tale of Sandra Continues...

“Why haven’t I heard this before!?” exclaimed Sandra. “Just the BISC model alone could potentially have sorted out this issue with Daniel months and months ago!”

“That’s exactly why I created it” replied the Coach. “I was amazed at how ill-equipped so many managers and supervisors are in the workplace to deal with the issue of courageous conversations”.

“And for so many people in team leadership roles that I’ve talked to,” continued Sandra “this challenge of having to have courageous conversations with team members seems to be their biggest pain point. And what I really like about the model is that the navigation and the routes that you would take through the four steps depend on an understanding of how Daniel responds in either an above or below the line fashion. I can see now why you taught me the above the line model first and I now realise that every conversation I have with Daniel about his attitude needs to be filtered through the lens of whether or not he’s accepting responsibility. But here’s a question for you Coach - what happens when Daniel is sitting on the fence and I can’t work out whether he is above the line or below the line?”

“It’s actually quite simple,” said the Coach in reply. “If you’re in doubt then you give Daniel the benefit of the doubt. If you’re unsure whether he is above or below the line then you treat him as if he is above the line - you only alter your tone or the direction of the conversation if it is obvious that Daniel is below the line. That being said, your job is to clearly offer him the opportunity to indicate that he is accepting ownership or responsibility for the issue. If you make that clear, and yet his tone and manner suggest that he isn’t picking up on that ownership, then you are safe to assume that he is stuck below the line”.

“Okay, I feel like I’m armed to do the very best that I can to have a constructive conversation with Daniel. But to be honest I’m still really concerned about making matters worse. I’m nervous that he may respond in an agreeable fashion in the meeting, but I may not realise until further down the track that he actually hasn’t been on board with accepting responsibility. I’ve seen it before where I have thought I’ve had agreement from Daniel and then two weeks later I realise that he has been going

**“IF YOU’RE IN
ANY DOUBT
ABOUT DANIEL
BEING ABOVE
THE LINE,
THEN YOU
HAVE TO GIVE
HIM THE
BENEFIT OF
THE DOUBT”**

behind my back and undermining my leadership and creating division in the team - I just don't think that I could cope with that kind of result again even though I conduct the conversation effectively from my side".

"I can guarantee you that you're going to have a positive outcome" claimed the Coach, much to Sandra's scepticism.

"You can't do that!" exclaimed Sandra. "How on earth can you guarantee a positive outcome!?! You certainly can't guarantee Daniel's attitude being positive, so if he goes below the line which I'm concerned he will, then how on earth can you suggest that that in any way is a positive outcome?"

**"HOW ON EARTH
CAN YOU
GUARANTEE A
POSITIVE
OUTCOME TO
ALMOST ANY
COURAGEOUS
CONVERSATION?!?"**

"There are really only three possible outcomes" answered the Coach, "and all three can be seen to be beneficial over the long-term. Let me explain the 'Three Predictable Outcomes Model' which gives anyone embarking on a courageous conversation the confidence that a constructive final result is always possible..."