

CLEAR LEADERSHIP

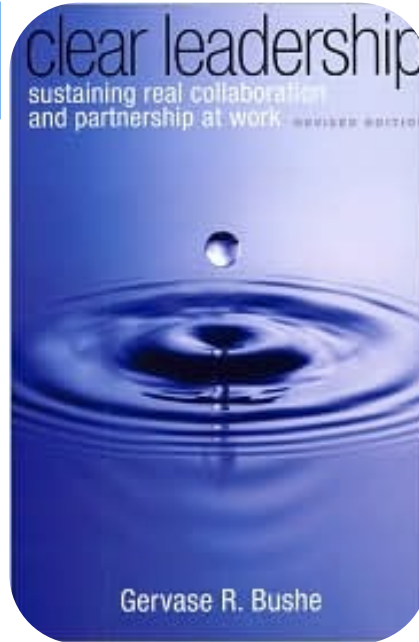
Sustaining Real Collaboration and Partnership at Work
by Gervase R. Bushe

Book Summary

This book examines the tools and techniques required to build sustaining partnerships and make collaborative organizations work. Clear leadership is about creating clarity in every interaction and every group you are a part. For clear leadership to be effective requires understanding the nature of experience and the reasons for the difficulty involved in getting people to tell the truth about their experience with one another.

Successful leaders understand that organizational success requires collaboration at all levels. Collaboration is no easy feat, however, as it hinges on clear, honest communications in the workplace. In complex organizational structures, it is easy for misinformation to spread, causing communications to become cloudy and preventing employees from forming productive, full partnerships.

In *Clear Leadership*, Gervase R. Bushe terms these cloudy communications interpersonal mush. Interpersonal mush needs to be clarified before true collaboration can take place, and the only way to accomplish this is through learning conversations – the building blocks for collaborative work systems. *Clear Leadership* provides leaders with the tools and techniques necessary to conduct learning conversations, cut through the mush, and sustain collaboration in the workplace.



Gervase R. Bushe



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"Mystification is simple, clarity is the hardest thing of all" – Julian Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot*

About the Author: Gervase R. Bushe



Dr. Gervase Bushe, Professor of Leadership and Organization Development, is an internationally recognized scholar in organizational development whose work is widely cited. His research examines organizational change, organizational learning, leadership and leadership development, teams and team building, change agents and change agency. With an extensive background in designing transformational change processes, Gervase consults to major corporations such as Business Objects, TELUS, General Motors, the Vancouver Island and Fraser Health Authorities, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and ACL Analytics. His leadership development programs are licensed for delivery around the world through Clear Learning Ltd. Gervase is on the editorial boards of the Journal of Applied Behavioral Science and The Organization Development Practitioner.

Source: <http://beedie.sfu.ca/profiles/GervaseBushe>

From Where Does Interpersonal Mush Come?

Because people are sense making beings, we are compelled to make sense of people and events that are important in our lives. We do this by making up a story about what is going on inside them and filling in the gaps of what we think we know.

Interpersonal mush describes interactions based on stories people have made up about each other and have not checked out as being true. For many people interpersonal mush is a normal way of life and interpersonal clarity is considered for many people alien territory and not a natural thing to do. Bushe argued, that people do not naturally describe what is going on in themselves because they have not been taught how to do it. In fact, most people have not even thought that it might be useful or even important to describe our experience to others.

Part of what makes a new story satisfactory is that it fits with what already we believe as the truth, that is our past acts of sense making. One

effect is that we tend to make up explanations and rationales for others' actions that fit with ones we have made up in the past. Another effect is that we tend to see and hear things that fit with our previous stories and miss things that don't fit.

It is unfortunate that the stories we tend to make up, and the stories that get made about us are often more unfavorable than the reality. Therefore, the result of interpersonal mush is that we believe about the organizations we work in, and the people we work with, is often worse than the reality. Bushe further argued the greater the interpersonal mush, the more negative the stories that are circulated.

Interpersonal mush drives out our ability to see the basic humanity in one another and is replaced by a natural impulse to be cautious in the face of uncertainty. It may be a way for us to prepare for the worst-case scenario and teaches us that being negative may be more realistic than being positive.



"Under conditions of interpersonal mush, people can't learn together from their experience. People are not getting accurate information about the effect they are having on others" (p. 41).

What Interpersonal Mush Does To Organizations

1. Fragmentation increases and subcultures form
2. An environment of distrust and failed expectations develops
3. People, especially leaders, can't see the consequences of their actions
4. An active "organizational unconscious" is created
5. Plans are not implemented well if the inner dialogue of an organization does not support them.
6. People are not able to learn together from experience or collaborate effectively.
7. Problem patterns never go away.
8. Interpersonal mush makes us victims, not masters, of change
9. People get stress disorders



"The antidote to interpersonal mush is interpersonal clarity" (p. 47).

The Organizational Learning Conversation

In this chapter, Bushe provides examples of learning conversations from different work place situations to illustrate how an organizational learning conversation works. Bushe emphasizes that participating in learning conversations is an important step in creating a culture of interpersonal clarity. For a learning conversation to be successful requires the following:

1. Recognize the difference between what you know and what you are making up. Your stories are just that, stories.
2. Lead by being descriptive about your own experience and curious about other people’s experience.
3. Ask others to be descriptive about their own experience.

Sounds simple but it is not easy to achieve because it requires clear, strong personal boundaries.

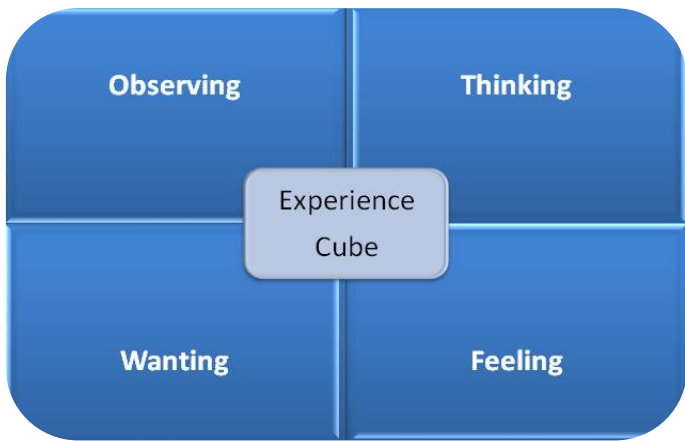


“The purpose of a learning conversation is to talk about the things that are getting in the way of our being in full partnership” (p. 50).

<i>Normal Conversation</i>	<i>Learning Conversation</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We have difficulty knowing what our experience actually is. - We think our stories we are making up are accurate or close enough and we think talking about the stories won’t help. - We don’t see our own part in the problem pattern and can only see how the other person is the problem. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We are more aware of what our own experience actually is. - We get much more accurate information about the other person’s experience. - We uncover our part in creating the problem.



The Skills and Techniques of Learning Conversations



“One reason that we don’t have learning conversations is that they require a lot of skill to do well and consistently” (p. 55).

1. Remain non-judgmental. Describe observations, feelings and wants and try to put your sense making into a context that allows the other person to describe his experience as well.
2. Do not try to respond to or try to change the other person’s experience before you fully understand it.
3. You will need strong personal boundaries, which will allow you to not feel that you have to take responsibility for the other person’s experience.
4. Be open to having learning conversations out in the open. Real partnership-based teams and organizational learning require a willingness to have these kinds of conversations out in the open where the variety of experiences can be surfaced and integrated.

Understanding the Foundations of Clear Leadership

Self-Differentiation

In this chapter, Bushe outlines the importance of self-differentiation in order to successfully operate in a partnership-based organization.

Differentiated leaders realize that their primary and ultimate responsibility is taking charge of self and not changing, motivating, or shifting others. As the truism goes, "We cannot change others, only ourselves." This is far less debilitating and draining than focusing all one's energies on getting others to do things right; one focuses on oneself, rather than on everyone else in the system.

Self-differentiation is a key notion in *Clear Leadership*. It is the ability to be a "self" or an "I" in the face of pressures by others to be a part of, or blended into, the "we". Bushe refers to this notion as "fusion—demanding others manage my anxiety" (p. 66). To truly be self-differentiated is to know and act on one's own mind, especially when our position is different than the group's position.

In essence, it means to know one's opinion, stand or stance without opposing expectations or demands on to others. It is the ability to state clearly and calmly our position without suggesting (with "must",

"should" or "ought" language) that others need to have the same position.

Although leaders cannot be fused with the people they lead, they also cannot be hard-nosed leaders, or the opposite extreme – disconnected.

A disconnected leader shows little interest in an employee's experience and gives the appearance that other people's experience is irrelevant to the business at hand. These disconnected leaders show no curiosity about the impact of their ideas or actions and do not inquire into other people's thoughts, feelings or wants. Consequently, a disconnected response is as unconscious as a fused one.

Effective leadership requires balancing the extremes of fusion and disconnection through self-differentiation.

(Self Differentiation...)
What? No one to blame?

Self-differentiation

is having the capacity to claim and embrace what is so for me (my beliefs, feelings, emotions, experiences, story, etc...) in the face of pressure to conform while remaining fully engaged with your community. In other words, it's neither fight nor flight, but a third way of being yourself in community and allowing others the same freedom. Clarity of expression leads to *increased* connection, not decreased.



Self-Differentiation – Resolving the Paradox

Comparison of Fusion, Self-Differentiation, and Disconnection

Fusion	Self-Differentiation	Disconnection
- Too Connected	- Separate but connected	- Too Separate
- No boundaries	- Choiceful boundaries	- Rigid Boundaries
- Reactive to the Interaction	- Choiceful during the Interaction	- Reactive to the person
- Own experience based on other people's experience	- Wants to know what others are experiencing but stays true to self	- Doesn't think what others are experiencing

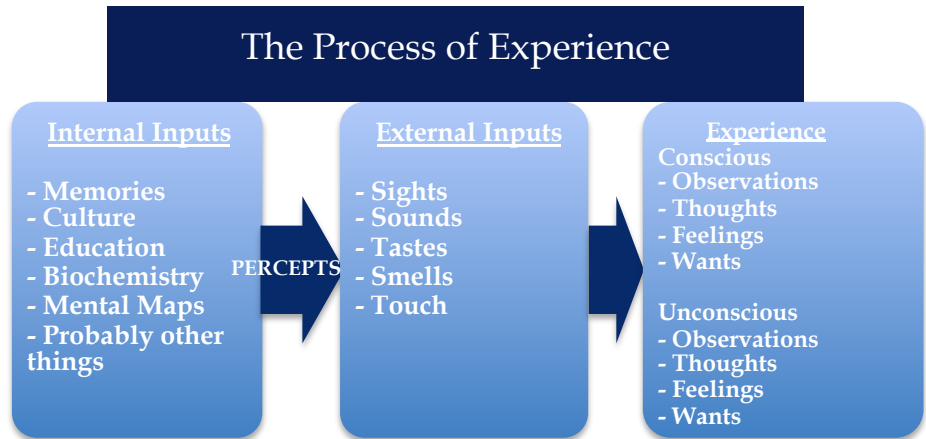
Questions to Ponder

1. When we value individuality too much we become disconnected. When we value belonging too much we become fused. Consider how you behave under stress. Which direction, disconnection or fusion, is the greater danger for you?
2. What are three actions you can take to counteract your tendency toward disconnection or fusion?

The Four Elements of Experience

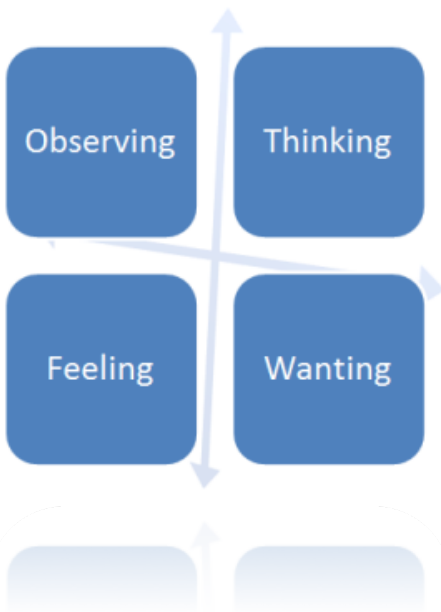
The Experience Cube

If we are going to learn from experience we first must understand clearly what experience is. Experience only happens to a person here and now. A person's experience is based on his/her percepts. The percepts (building blocks of perception) we create are the basis of our experience. It is important to understand that experience is not what happens to you but what you do with what happens to you. Experience has four elements, which can be used as a roadmap to understand experience. Our experience is made up of observations, thoughts, feelings and wants. These elements are in us all of the time whether we pay attention to them or not. It is also important to realize that some of our experiences are conscious while others are unconscious.



Observing and Thinking	Feeling	Wanting
- Observing and thinking involve all the cognitive processes.	- People generally hesitate to talk about their feelings and believe it is better to keep their feelings to themselves.	- People are often not aware of their wants and desires because they are taught it is selfish or impolite to express their wants.
- People differ in their awareness about what they think and the speed with which they access that awareness.	- Feelings strongly influence our actions and our sense making.	- It is difficult to create sustaining partnerships unless everyone is clear about what everyone else wants.
- Some thoughts are outside our awareness. (i.e. the mechanics of driving a car)	- Feelings can be further understood by paying attention to body sensations and emotions.	- As a clear leader, you have to lead in creating a culture of clarity by telling the truth about your own wants and being genuinely curious about the wants of others.
- People often confuse observations with thinking.	- By learning to listen to the body, we can learn to become aware of the unconscious aspects of our thoughts, emotions, and wants.	

The Four Elements of Experience



Awareness begins, according to Bushe, with understanding the four elements of your experience. Each person has a different level of awareness in each element. These elements are observing, thinking, wanting and feeling. We act from our experience and yet, many of us are unaware of how our experiences is driving the way we act. For example, how much of what you react to and, therefore, how you communicate, is driven by anxiety?

“The experience cube is a road map to your experience that you can use for deepening your awareness of your own experience and for focusing your curiosity into the experience of others”
(p. 93).

The Aware Self

Knowing Your Experience Moment to Moment

In this chapter Bushe argues that self-awareness is the basic skill of clear leaders. In order to be self-aware leaders must possess the ability to know what their moment-to-moment, here-and-now experience is. Bushe emphasizes that it is difficult to lead learning if you are unable to understand your own experiences and uncover other people's experiences. The four key skill areas involved in the mastery of the aware self are illustrated in the following diagram:



Fill in the Cube involves people paying attention to all four parts of the cube (observing, thinking, feeling, wanting) to become increasingly more aware of their experience

Use Clear Language in a way that it clarifies your experience. Avoid saying “you” when you are really talking about “I”. Using “you” language and “we” language misleads people into thinking that their experience is generalizable, that everyone else would have the same thoughts and feelings in a given situation. Bushe suggests, “the rule of clear language is simple – say “I” when you are talking about your own experience” (p. 120).

Talk About Right Here, Right Now to build partnership and organizational learning. It is only by paying attention to the experience I am having when I am having it, do I get around my defenses against self-awareness. Having the ability to put together the variety of experiences as they are happening in the moment leads to the aware self.

Identify Your Mental Maps and realize that they influence your awareness. Good mental maps are valuable because they help us operate effectively and efficiently. Mental maps provide us not having to relearn everything from scratch. Mental maps also cause problems because they focus our attention so we tend to see only what is on our maps and miss what isn't. Consequently, when we mistake the map for reality and are not aware of doing it that distorts our perceptions. This can cause us to see people doing things they did not do and hear them say things they did not say as well as to not see things they did do and not hear things they did say.

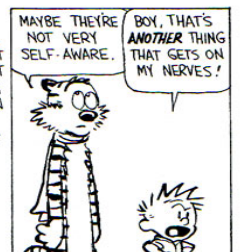
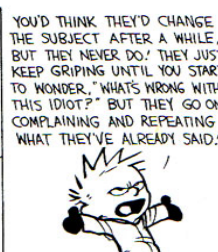
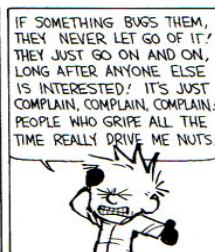
Why Develop An Aware Self?

Bushe suggests the most important reason why people would want to develop an aware self is that awareness equals choice. Becoming more aware of your experience is a pathway to being more differentiated. This is especially true if you tend to be fused with your feelings and wants. When you blur the boundary between yourself and your feelings, then they control you and other people may be afraid of your irrational actions. Differentiating yourself from your experience (being separate from it but still connected to it) helps you to be less reactive and more choiceful in your responses. Ultimately, it becomes easier for you to differentiate yourself from other people.



Calvin and Hobbes

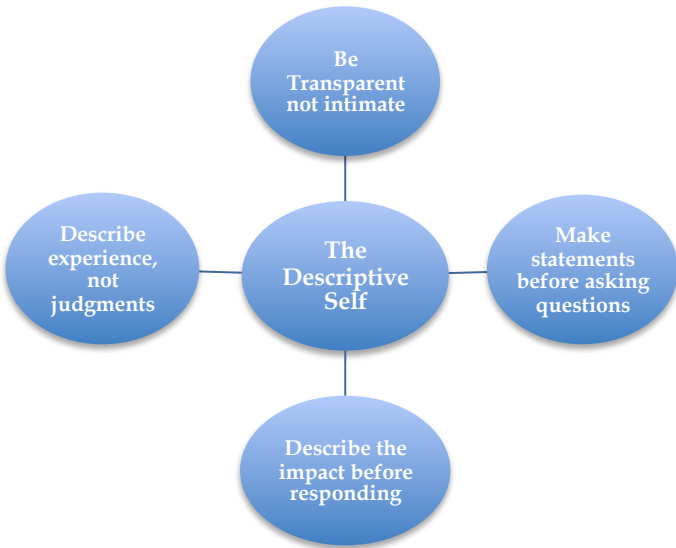
by Bill Watterson



The Descriptive Self

Reducing the Mush by Making Me Understandable to You

Bushe suggests the ultimate skill of becoming a descriptive self is noticing when others might need to make up a story about you and stopping the mush by giving them the information they need in order to have an accurate picture of what is going on in your head. This can be challenging because it is difficult telling others your experience of them especially when you have a problem pattern with them. Trying to tell others your experience in a way that builds partnership rather than make them feel defensive, hurt, or angry is also a tricky endeavour. To help to develop the skills of the Descriptive Self, Bushe created the following model and techniques:



"You're wrong and you know it, and I'm right and I know it!"

The Descriptive Self	
Be Transparent, Not Intimate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describe to others what is going on in your head so that they have more accurate information for their sense making. - Describe specifically the thoughts, feelings, observations and wants going on inside you that help others clearly understand your experience. - Describe the emotion without expressing it - Be transparent by talking about you're here and now experience.
Make Statements Before Asking Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describe yourself using declarative statements. - Avoid asking a question without first making a statement about the context and the reason for the question or it may lead to interpersonal mush. - Model clarity of communication by simply stating your belief before asking the other person for their opinion. - Model and practice making statements about what is going on inside you before asking others what is going on inside them.
Describe the Impact Before Responding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - During a learning conversation, describe the experience you are having as you talk, before responding to what the other person said. - Describe impacts by disclosing your here and now observations, thoughts, feelings, and wants in a clear, dispassionate way.
Describe Experience, Not Judgments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describe your experience by relaying the stories and information you are using in your sense making. - Avoid making judgments and acting as if your subjective truth is a kind of objective truth - Your attitude needs to convey that the stories and information you are using is simply your own truth that may or may not be true and can be corrected by other person during the learning conversation

"By speaking as Descriptive Selves, we replace interpersonal mush with interpersonal clarity, but only if we are listening to each other" (p. 169).

The Curious Self

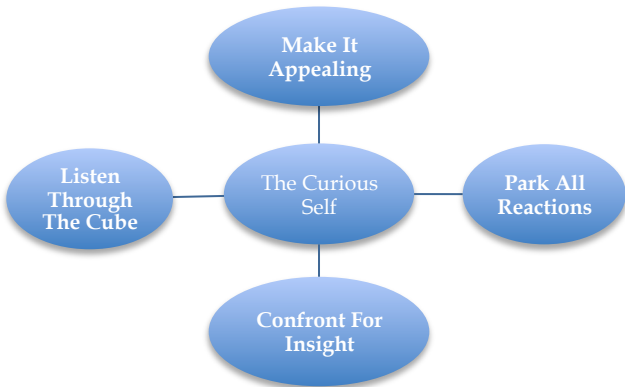
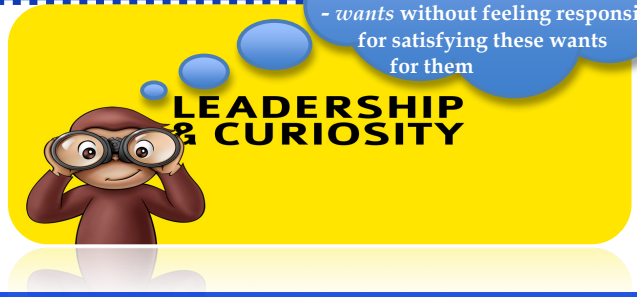
Uncovering Other People's Experiences

Leaders...

- Listen to others':
- thoughts without having to change their minds
- feelings without trying to make them feel better
- wants without feeling responsible for satisfying these wants for them

Bushe suggests, "being curious is both openness to hearing what goes on in other people's heads and the ability to find out" (p. 171). To be an effective leader requires a balancing act between being descriptive about you and curious about others. Basically, the mastery of the curious self requires the ability to help others become aware of and tell you about their experience. An effective leader, therefore, uses the skills and techniques of the Curious Self to help other people become more aware of their experience even as they are talking about it.

In order to increase one's curiosity skills, Bushe created the following model and techniques:



The Curious Self	
Make It Appealing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Invite others to be descriptive selves. - Treat others with respect and dignity so that they are willing to tell the truth of their experience. - Others should sense a real openness to hearing their real experience in a way that won't diminish them. - Listen to their thoughts without changing their minds.
Park All Reactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Try to stop yourself from reacting so that you can fully understand the other person. - Hear the other person out fully before describing what you see differently.
Confront For Insight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bring to awareness a discrepancy you have noticed (in yourself or the other person) and ask if he/she has noticed the same thing. - A successful confrontation results in increased awareness while maintaining or enhancing the quality of the relationship.
Listen Through The Cube	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Helps you to fully understand another person's experience. - Involves three levels of listening: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Active Listening b) Listening to the Other Person's Experience c) Listening to the Self

Sources of Reactivity

Competence Compulsion
The compulsion most people have to make sense of anything that happens to them at work in a way that ensures that they see themselves as competent and that others see them as competent (p. 177).

Personification and Defensive Projection
Through personification we pick others – real, fictional, mythical- to personify different parts of ourselves to ourselves. Defensive Projection is a process that helps people keep the parts of themselves that they don't want to acknowledge out of their awareness (p. 180).

Shame
Shame is the part in each of us that feels unworthy, small, and inadequate. Shame based behaviours create disconnection. Recognizing the shame that underlies another person's behaviour helps me be less reactive and more compassionate (p. 186).



I found this on CupofZup.com

The Appreciative Self

Creating Spirals of Positive Partnership

In order to create a culture of clarity that promotes positive partnerships, a leader must possess the ability to see beyond differences and difficult people to the positive intents and potentials in people and situations. Bushe emphasizes, "people are much more willing to 'get real' with each other when their partners see and amplify the best in them" (p. 201). The Appreciative Self does not focus on a person's annoying way of stating his wants but instead focuses on the intent that person has to be clear and create a partnership in which all those involved get what they want.

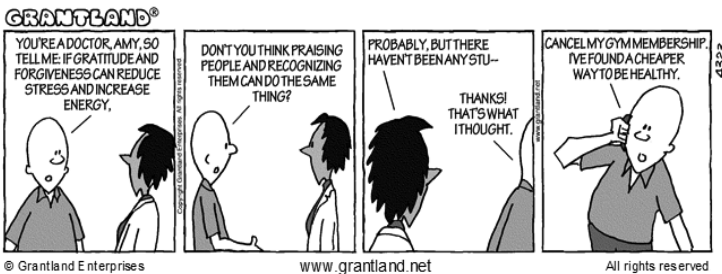
To help people master the Appreciative Self, Bushe provides the following model and techniques:



Appreciation

The Appreciative Self

Cultivate an Appreciative Mind-Set	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Important to see our organizations primarily as people and human relationships with limitless capacity and potential. - Instead of focusing on what is annoying, difficult or bad, in those you want to be in partnership with, focus on what you do want and begin with the assumption that it is already there, just waiting to be actualized. - Assume the best in people even if you don't have much evidence for it.
Align With Their Positive Intent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When asking people for interpersonal clarity, it is easier if they believe you see their positive intentions. - If you look for and see the positive intent behind actions that appear negative, you have a greater ability to create clarity and partnership.
Find With Tracking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tracking is the ability to see what you want more of as already being there. - Sometimes it takes a leap of faith to amplify the small quantities of what you want more of that already exists. - In essence, tracking is awareness with a purpose.
Increase With Fanning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fanning is the ability to look for ways to increase what you want more of. - If you focus on what you like, appreciate and want more of, others are much more likely to be interested in partnering with you. - Describing your experience allows you to identify what you like and want more of without judgment.



"Appreciation is used to amplify things, to create intersubjective reality by increasing the amount or frequency of something you want more of" (p. 209)

"Appreciation can make a day, even change a life. Your willingness to put it into words is all that is necessary."
Margaret Cousins

The Learning Conversation in Depth

Steps in an Organizational Learning Conversation

Step	Initiator	Other Person
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Check if you are willing to learn about yourself in this conversation. - Check that the other person is willing to explore this issue with you. - Ask the person to have a learning conversation with you. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tell the truth about your readiness to learn about yourself, the initiator and your relationship. - Set another time if needed.
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use the experience cube to describe your experience of the problem pattern. - Talk about what you want now. - Check to ensure the other person understands you. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Actively listen and seek clarity about the other person's experience. - Use the experience cube to guide your listening and deepen your understanding of the initiator's experience. - Check to see if the initiator is finished and summarize back his/her experience until he/she feels fully heard.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Actively listen and seek clarity about the other's experience - Use the experience cube to guide your listening and deepen your understanding of the other person's experience. - Check to see if the other person is finished and summarize back his/her experience until he/she feels fully heard. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describe you're here and now experience. - Use the experience cube to describe your experience of the problem pattern and respond to what you just heard. - Own what is true about the initiator's experience of you. - Check to ensure the initiator understands you.
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describe you're here and now experience. - Use the experience cube to describe your experience of the problem pattern and respond to what you just heard. - Own what is true about the other person's experience of you. - Check to ensure the other person understands you. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Actively listen and seek clarity about the initiator's experience - Use the experience cube to guide your listening and deepen your understanding of the initiator's experience. - Check to see if the initiator is finished and summarize back his/her experience until he/she feels fully heard.
5	- Continue this conversation until you are each clear about the other person's thoughts, feelings and wants.	
6	- State what you have learned about your part in the problem pattern.	
7	- Describe what you are willing to do differently in the future.	

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"This is the nicest conversation we've had in weeks.
Let's not spoil it by talking."

Managing Learning Conversations

- Enter with the Right Attitude
- Fully Explore Each Person's Experience
- Describe Each Person's Here and Now Experience Before Every Transition

When you talk, you are only repeating what you already know. But if you listen, you may learn something new.

Conclusion

Learning to Sustain Collaborative Organizations

The fundamental premise in *Clear Leadership* is that interpersonal mush causes many failures of people who want to be in partnership. Real partnership means giving everyone an equal voice – and that means everyone needs to have access to the same information and be part of the same choices. What is required is an ability to get things out in the open. Bushe emphasizes the necessity to “clear the air, to build real commitment to decisions, to develop synergistic teams, and to be able to openly discuss failures and successes and learn from everyone’s experience” (p. 261). Clear leadership is also about creating inquiry when our performance or relationships are not what we want them to be and, ultimately, it’s about leading learning in the midst of performing. A learning conversation is an inquiry and using the three skill sets of the Aware Self, the Curious Self, and the Appreciative Self, which are forms of inquiry, help people create real partnerships. Bushe also suggests the Descriptive Self is about expression, and inquiry needs to be balanced with expression if it is to be of practical value. With these four skill sets, through a balance of inquiry and expression, leaders can facilitate conversations that create new insights into people’s experience and lead to lasting partnerships. Whether people will be motivated to try to create learning conversations will depend on the culture of clarity that leaders create in their organizations.

Critical Evaluation

Although *Clear Leadership* seems to be written for a business audience, as I read the book, I found myself drawing comparisons between the business world and the education world with which I am involved. Interpersonal mush is alive and well in education. Skills to clear out interpersonal mush and to become more effective communicators are valuable skills to possess. There is great power in Bushe’s idea that we construct the world and we can create real partnerships when we can effectively clear out the interpersonal mush. This book makes leadership accessible to all and provides the pathway to become more successful communicators. Rich with practical wisdom and real life examples, Bushe provides us with a common sense approach for cutting through the mush and for creating organizations where learning and collaboration is more than just another slogan. Leaders from all disciplines should read this book to understand exactly what their role is in shaping interpersonal dynamics in their organizations and what they can do to create a climate of clarity that the 21st Century work environment demands. Applying the principles outlined in *Clear Leadership* has already made a difference in the way I communicate as a vice principal in my school. After sharing an overview of this book with my staff, we have begun our journey in delving into and practicing the art of learning conversations. I am amazed that after only a few weeks of practicing clear dialogue, a spirit of cooperation and understanding is developing. People seem to be working and talking together better and a palpable sense of team and camaraderie is becoming solidified in our school’s culture. *Clear Leadership* is a must read for anyone who wants to learn practical ways to start making a difference in their organizations. In fact, after reading the book, it may leave you impatient to go out and make things happen in your organization.



Questions to Ponder

1. *Bushe gives a lot of ideas on how to reach a level of Clear Leadership. Focus your attention on your personal situation. How would you apply the ideas presented to your own personal life? How would you apply the ideas presented to your work life?*
2. *Imagine yourself as the leader of your organization having a conversation with the author, Gervase Bushe. What would your conversation be like? What ideas would you question?*

Bushe, G. R. (2009). *Clear Leadership: Sustaining Real Collaboration and Partnership at Work*. Mountain View, CA: Davies-Black Publishing.