

## Conversational Leadership

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Hello faculty, friends, and cohort. Lisa Tiffin here to present my leadership model – Conversational Leadership.

Gordon T. Smith (1999) in his book *Courage & Calling*, noted “[G]enerous service empowers those we serve,” and added, “true service, given in love, enables another to grow, mature, stand alone and eventually give, as we serve one another in interdependence” (p. 91). For me, the essence of leadership entails empowering others – lifting them up, encouraging them, guiding them, and seeing them fulfill their own call. And for me, all of those ideals can be accomplished through relationship that is borne out of conversation.

As a writer and speaker, words matter to me, and I can see their power in shaping strategy, vision, relationship, trust, culture, and followership and through these in shaping organizational change. That’s a tall order for conversation, but let me explain.

On the top right, you see a typewriter, which represents commitment through the written word. Often as we formalize our ideas through writing, we are forced into a process of discussion, negotiation, and decisions, resulting in a firmer commitment to our strategies.

Next to that image is one that represents vision and vision casting. Leaders need to be able to understand the strategy and the heart of an organization through careful listening, feedback, and observation and then to translate that knowledge into vision for the road ahead. The megaphone represents telling that story in a way others can understand, hear their own ideas reflected, and buy into for the journey ahead.

Another key aspect of conversational leadership is the time and effort spent in one-on-one conversations such as mentorship, coaching, and encouragement of followers. In my own journey, I have benefitted greatly from the mentorship of others and have seen the very real benefits of passing along knowledge and encouragement to mentees.

Finally, the image to the left represents the day-to-day interactions and conversations we all can have no matter our level of leadership. These are the conversations where we lift others up, help reframe an issue, or give our perspective and ideas for change. In these conversations we have the opportunity to lead up, lead down, and even lead peers through more subtle influence. As Ralph Stacey (2012) said in my favorite quote, “Change can only happen in many, many local interactions” (p. 15).

Similar to discursive leadership where there is big “D” and little “d” discourse (Fairhurst, 2011, p. 497), conversational leadership includes the larger, or big “C”, conversation that entails the happenings of our culture and organizations and the little “c” conversations that are the day-to-day ways in which we influence. As we interact conversationally and relationally as leaders, we have the opportunity to invoke and create change in ourselves, in others, in culture, and in the organizations in which we serve.

Thank you for listening.

#### References

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Stacey, R. D. (2012). *Tools and techniques of leadership and management: Meeting the challenge of complexity*. Routledge.