

By Judith E. Glaser

What is Conversational Intelligence?

The corporate battlefields are littered with the burnt-out, rusting hulks of auspicious strategies that failed in spectacular fashion and companies that — despite having novel and promising ideas — constantly trail their peers in profits and shareholder returns. A while back the drug company Boehringer Ingelheim suspected its underperformance sprang from a lackluster sales force. New Wave Entertainment blamed conflicting egos in the executive suite, and Clairol believed inconsistent marketing efforts led to the company's poor numbers.

However, none of these assumptions turned out to be the whole truth. By digging below the surface, each company uncovered another obstacle that was holding them back. It wasn't simply that they couldn't execute, market or sell. The bigger problem was a lack of Conversational Intelligence™.

Conversational Intelligence is an organization's ability to communicate in ways that create a shared concept of reality.

Having worked with these companies and many more of the world's largest businesses over the past 30 years, I've learned that Conversational Intelligence

can be cultivated in individuals, teams and organizations.

Conversational Intelligence is the hardwired ability in all humans to connect, engage and navigate with others. It is the most important intelligence that gets better when "we" do it together. While the other types of intelligence are more "I-centric" in nature, Conversational Intelligence is a collaborative effort. We can raise the Conversational Intelligence level in personal relationships as well as the teams

and organizations we are a part of.

Conversations are not always what we think they are. We've grown up believing in a narrow view of conversations, thinking they are about expressing thoughts, observations and opinions. Many see conversations as "persuasion" or "getting others to think the way I think."

In our early research, we watched conversations under different circumstances, everything from first meetings to major negotiations. It wasn't difficult to see the patterns emerge. We found that as many of 95 percent of verbal exchanges were "telling" statements. "Asking" statements were rare, as was quality listening.

Conversational Intelligence is about closing the gaps between your reality and mine. As such, it can yield improved business results and create a framework for enhancing relationships and partnerships, releasing new energy for growth and transformation.

For many, it may be a new concept to think that what we hold in our head — as our reality — is not nec-



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Build Trust and Get Extraordinary Results."

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Five Mistakes That Lower Conversational Intelligence



Ignoring Other Perspectives

Many people err by spending most of their time describing their views of reality rather than learning how others assess a situation. But the more we focus on the “realities” that others perceive, the more we connect with them.

Fixation on “Being Right”

Neuroscientists are discovering that humans have a passion for being “right” — more than a passion — a compulsion. People “get high” on being right — and are rewarded individually for having “correct” answers. But, the more a speaker pushes his or her “reality,” the more the listeners will seek to protect their positions or points of view, which reduces their connection with others and raises the risk of conflict.



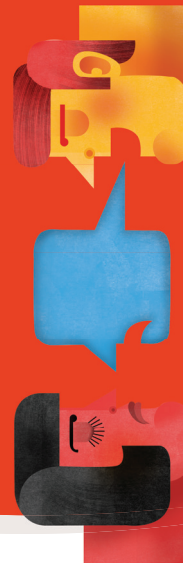
Tell-Sell-Yell

It’s a mistake to think that more talk always translates into better communication, understanding and influence. The truth is, the more we try to align others around “our” point of view, the more we create groupthink, resistance or grudging obedience driven by fear. To employees, this comes across as “my way or the highway.”



Allowing Emotions to Affect Listening

Every conversation has emotional content. Fearful listeners may misinterpret friendly advice or warnings as threats.



Disengaged Listeners

Those who nod their heads while others talk aren’t always paying attention. Leaders need to learn to practice engagement strategies with others to ensure they are truly connecting, sharing and learning.

essarily what others see. Each of us maps the world through our experiences. We create the meaning, and then we share it with others. Conversations provide the tools for talking about what we think and feel, and if the conversations are healthy and robust, we will come to see how others view the world and learn to work successfully with them.

Conversational Intelligence begins with trust. Consider the challenges Angela Ahrendts, who heads Apple’s retail businesses, faced when she stepped into her previous job as CEO of Burberry in 2006. How did she transform this tradition-rich British clothing line, founded in 1856, so that it outpaced all other brands in the luxury apparel sector? Ahrendts put it this way. “Trust is truly at the heart of it all. If trust is your core value, you hire accordingly. I interview

a lot of senior management people, and at this level competence and experience are a given. Trust is the difference-maker. When I look them in the eye, I’m asking myself: Do I trust them, and do I get the feeling that they trust me? Do they get the vision?”

Distrust leads to defensive listening; trust leads to intelligent listening. Creating a healthy, trusting environment is the first step to gaining Conversational Intelligence. When intentions are set on bridging our realities, being open and transparent, focusing on respect and relationships before tasks, listening to understand, discovering shared success and consistently working to narrow the reality gaps, we are exercising our conversational muscles. When we do that, we are much more likely to achieve organizational goals and perhaps our personal ones as well. ▮