


CHRISTMAS CONVERSATIONS

It's that time of the year again where we all begin to look forward to a much deserved break after what has been a pretty challenging year. Long lists of personal and family actions are fighting their way onto our to-do lists as we all start to work on the minutia of preparation for the holiday break. Key amongst these actions usually include gifts to be bought and cards to be sent, all in the hope that we can give some pleasure and make a much needed connection to a loved one or friend.

It struck me as I was beginning to think about my own seasonal lists that the effort we put in to buy gifts and write cards is all designed to invest some credit in our 'relationship bank account'. As this is an area that we at Sensei specialise in, I was wondering why it never occurs to us to use the same tactics at Christmas as we use throughout the year. Christmas and New Year is surely the ideal time to have those critical conversations that will deepen our relationships and really make a difference to our friends and loved ones.

In this Leadership Conversation I explore some conversations that you may want to consider preparing, which will mean much more than a hastily scribbled card or well meaning gift ever will.



The Partner Conversation – Imagine Santa has shouted 'Time Out!' You stop the hustle and bustle long enough to calm down and reflect together on the highs and lows of the past year. Focus on what made you smile together and what the last year has taught you. Share how the year has 'felt' for you and make

some promises about what you can do for each other to make next year better still. Look at all the things that stop you spending more quality time together and work out ways to remove some of these hurdles so next year can be the best yet. Imagine repeating the conversation this time next year, what are you reflecting back on with pleasure; what challenges have you overcome and what are you looking forward to in 2011? Make time for this life enhancing conversation as this is the relationship you treasure the most, yet it is the one that gets sacrificed first!

The Children Conversation – No matter what their age kids require attention. It is the fuel that feeds their growth. Being 'present' for them is the best present you can give them. Ask questions that expose their enthusiasms and pique their curiosity, listen carefully and join in their games. If they are teenagers try and get past their gruff exterior and their monosyllabic conversations to the child that is still within. They will say they hate you trying, but remember they like it really, so persevere. As George Bernard Shaw famously said "*We don't stop playing because we grow old, we grow old because we stop playing.*"

The Parents and In Laws Conversation – The trick with this conversation is to remember they still care and what they really, really want is to be able to show off to all their friends what you have been up to this year. They will also be worried, as this is what parents do best, so give them some time to re-assure them that you are doing OK and share with them your hopes and aspirations for the coming year. The wise old heads may not be in tune with

current day thinking and may have a tenuous grasp on the challenges we face in this internet enabled hyper-speed age, but just remember they have made most of the mistakes we are still making, so listen up and you might just learn a thing or two.



The Siblings Conversation – A brother and / or sister is a friend provided by nature so make the most of them. Try

and set aside sibling rivalry and share your perspectives on the challenges and opportunities you face and you may well be surprised to learn how much you have in common. The bond formed between you is there for a reason; your job is to work out what this bond is for.

The Friends Conversation – Beyond the polite and festive chatter is a deeper, more meaningful space that, should you choose to enter it, can shift your perspective of yourself and enable you to build a



Sensei is an international consulting firm that helps their clients deliver business results by improving human performance and optimising the value of team and leadership interactions.

We focus on areas where companies can raise the bar on performance, productivity and profit. We ensure that any work we do has clear line of sight to specific business outcomes of value to the organisation, so that a solid return on time, energy and investment is realised.

We are experts in the process of unlocking potential and focusing this in the right ways on the right aims; and we excel at emotionally engaging leaders and teams to own the change, take accountability for it and deliver it. In short ...
'We do the really hard part of the soft stuff.'

better understanding of how you appear to the rest of the world. Your friends often see you in a unique light, one that is devoid of your long history and is much more reflective of your most recent behaviour. A really good friend will point out your unseen strengths and all too often seen weaknesses so long as you return the favour for them. I find this conversation is best to have after a few drinks, but it should be avoided after a few too many!

Finally, probably the most important conversation of all....

The Mirror Conversation – Just look at yourself; what is going on? Where are all the hopes, dreams and aspirations and how can you re-connect with your higher purpose? Remember you should not really exist! Do the maths; statistically your creation is almost a mathematical impossibility. Whether you are religious or not you exist for a reason and now is as good a time as any to start to work out what your reason for being is. You are the CEO of you. What is your long term Vision and Strategy and what are the 'Must Win Battles' and 'Courageous Actions' you need to take to progress towards your long term goals? Remember to write them down and put them somewhere that will nag away at you when the treadmill starts again in early January.

This is Christmas, so 'take a blow' as they say in my adopted home in Yorkshire. Sit back, settle down and recharge. This is the time to be merry and be thankful. Try not to squander the opportunity created by the seasonal goodwill on mind numbing TV shows and all too stressful parties and events. Use this Christmas to invest in conversations that really matter and enter 2010 with a real spring in your step.



Happy Christmas!

Malcolm Follos, December 2009