



## Why we do what we do . . .

### Conversations about changing the world

Thursday, August 24. 15:15 – 16:45

1. Introduction: Setting the context and explaining the process
2. Our guest speakers: Listening to their stories
3. Small group work: Asking meaningful questions ... and cage-rattling ones . . . to generate conversation<sup>1</sup>
4. Intentionally design questions to generate conversation



Conversation produces learning

And learning produces change



#### 5. Rules

- Keep the conversation going through questions. No yes/no questions!!
- Build on your story listening skills, not your story telling skills.

#### Quick definitions

- Discussion = advocacy for your point of view
- Conversation = inquiry. Focus on asking meaningful questions. Seek information and the views of others. Probe how the others arrived at that view. Encourage others to challenge your own perspective.

**For examples, good and bad: See the scrolling PowerPoint.**

**See handout re: conversation – and use this at work!** (Pages 2-6)

**See speaker bios on the following pages.** (Pages 7-8)

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<sup>1</sup> Conversation ... also called dialogue. Part of systems thinking and learning organization business theories.

## Conversation is a Core Business Practice

“Imagine that ‘the grapevine’ is not a poisonous plant to be cut off at the roots, but a natural source of vitality to be cultivated and nourished...

“Consider...that the most widespread and pervasive learning in your organization may not be happening in training rooms, conference rooms, or boardrooms, but in the cafeteria, hallways, and the café across the street. Imagine that through email exchanges, phone visits and bull sessions with colleagues, people at all levels of the organization are sharing critical business knowledge, exploring underlying assumptions, and creating innovative solutions to key business issues.” [Juanita Brown and David Isaacs, “Conversation as a Core Business Practice,” *The Systems Thinker Newsletter*, Volume 7, # 10, December 1996-January 1997.]

Consider the following:

1. Informal networks of learning conversations are a key business practice. Create these in your organizations.
2. Communities of practice build social capital – and social capital makes organizations work. Do you see gatherings of UPS trucks? What does that mean to you?
3. Conversation has the power to generate new insight and committed action. “An organization’s results are determined through webs of human commitment, born in webs of human conversations.” (Fernando Flores)
4. Talking catalyzes action! So encourage talking.
5. Innovation happens at the grassroots level as people share common interests, concerns and questions.
6. Promote ongoing conversation through dialogue, the process of collective thinking and generative learning.
7. Conversation is the lifeblood of the new economy. (Alan Webber)
8. Your organization must create physical environments that encourage knowledge-generating conversations.
9. Use the Intranet (but don’t eliminate the face-to-face meetings that are essential to building social capital.)

### **David Bohm, physicist: Fragmentation of human thought**

- In a rapidly shifting and troubled world, Bohm believed we desperately need a common pool of meaning in order to take coherent action together.
- We create this common pool of meaning by learning to think together in new ways. Thinking together in new ways happens through conversation and dialogue. (And dialogue is different than discussion! See the next page.)

## Conversation (also called dialogue) is different than discussion<sup>2</sup>

1. **Discussion** focuses on advocacy. (I share my position and try to convince you to sign on.)

### Advocacy

• Stating one’s views	• Disclosing how I feel	• Urging a course of action
• Describing what I think	• Expressing my judgments	• Giving an order

High quality advocacy: Provide data. Explain how you move from the data to your view.

2. **Inquiry** is different than advocacy. Inquiry focuses on asking meaningful (not rhetorical!) questions. Inquiry seeks information and does not advocate a position.

High quality inquiry: Seek the views of others and probe how the others arrived at that view. Encourage others to challenge your own perspective.

3. **Balance high quality advocacy and high quality inquiry to produce significant learning.**

4. **Dialogue/conversation** focuses on inquiry. Dialogue is defined as a particular set of conversational practices designed to help create and sustain learning and collaborative partnerships.

- a. See the “whole” of issues: systems thinking
- b. Suspend judgment in order to hear the rationale behind the thinking of others.
- c. Identify and suspend assumptions because assumptions produce judgments. And, unquestioned assumptions hamper listening and learning.
- d. Listen – without resistance – in order to learn: Listening to others. Listening for your own judgments, assumptions and questions. Listening for the collective themes emerging from the dialogue.
- e. Release the need for a specific outcome.
- f. Suspend the role and status of each individual in the conversation. And, make sure to share responsibility and leadership for the dialogue process.
- g. Respect differences.
- h. Speak to the group – to the collective intelligence. Speak when you’re moved to speak.
- i. Balance inquiry and advocacy.

Dialogue	Discussion
• Seeing the <i>whole</i> among the parts	• Breaking issues / problems into <i>parts</i>
• Seeing <i>connections</i> between the parts	• Seeing <i>distinctions</i> between the parts
• <i>Inquiring</i> into assumptions	• <i>Justifying / defending</i> assumptions
• <i>Learning</i> through inquiry and disclosure	• <i>Persuading, selling, telling</i>
• Creating <i>shared</i> meaning among many possibilities	• Gaining agreement on <i>one</i> meaning

“Strategic questions create dissonance between current experiences and beliefs while evoking new possibilities for collective discovery. But they also serve as the glue that holds together overlapping webs of conversations in which diverse resources combine and recombine to create innovative solutions and business value.” (Juanita Brown and David Isaacs)

<sup>2</sup> From *Dialogue: Rediscover the Transforming Power of Conversation*, Linda Ellinor & Glenna Gerard

## Achieving success through strategic questioning

Your responsibility as a leader, as a strategist, is to ask the “right” (meaningful) questions and then use those questions to refresh and reform your NGO.

The question you must ask and answer for yourself: Are you willing and able to take the risk? Can you afford the risk of asking the essential questions?

And how about the CRQs that need to be asked? (CRQs = cage-rattling questions)

### **Disagreement is good.**

Design a conversation around these statements.

- “Unity, like so many good things, is good only in moderation.” [Jane Jacobs, *Dark Age Ahead*]
- “A peaceful, harmonious workplace can be the worst thing possible for a business. Research shows that the biggest predictor of poor company performance is complacency.” [“How to Pick a Good Fight,” Joni and Beyer, *Harvard Business Review*, December 2009]
- In a Board meeting at General Motors, Alfred Sloan said about an important decision: “I take it that everyone is in basic agreement about this decision?” Everyone nodded yes. Sloan responded: “Then I suggest we postpone the decision. Until we have some disagreement, we don’t understand the problem.”

### **Think about unity and collegiality. Talk about this, too.**

Don’t be too congenial. Dysfunctional politeness is bad!

Check out this article: “A Culture of Congeniality Cannot Achieve Greatness.”<sup>3</sup>

A corporate executive says: “We need more rabble-rousers. We need more people who cause a stir and make noise when we are making the wrong decisions.” But the author wonders if, deep down, such people are really welcome.

The author mentions a colleague serving on a board. The colleague notes, “Unless those at the top are willing to listen to tough questions and work on the tougher answers, it’s like spitting in the wind – with a mouthful of food.” The colleague has currently concluded that this board, like so many others with which she is acquainted, is an emperor with no clothes!

The article continues: “Unless [the colleague] stays in place, asks the tough questions, demands the even tougher-to-arrive-at-answers, there’s little hope of emperors – boards, associations, corporations or organizations – every being fully clothed or achieving greatness.

“Sometimes I wonder if the culture of congeniality is a culture that cannot ever achieve greatness. The answer... a culture of congeniality – or one of avoidance – cannot achieve greatness. A culture where tough questions are asked, tougher answers are provided honestly and the hardest truths examined closely, provided that culture is deeply embedded in a culture of civility and respect, appears to be the only way to achieve greatness.

Granted, not everyone is in the position to feel comfortable speaking freely; however, for those who are, those who can, those who should, every tough question that remains unasked creates another barrier to reaching fullest potential.”

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<sup>3</sup> *The Roanoke Times*, 2005, by Camille Wright Miller

- “Pursuit of knowledge is based on asking questions, questioning answers, and asking the right questions in the first place.” (Karla A. Williams, ACFRE and Simone P. Joyaux, ACFRE, Adv Dip)
- “Always the beautiful answer that asks the more beautiful question.” (e.e. cummings)
- “A good question is never answered. It is not a bolt to be tightened into place but a seed to be planted and to bear more seed toward the hope of greening the landscape of the idea.” (John Ciardi, from *75 Cage-Rattling Questions to Change the Way You Work*)
- “Strategic questions create dissonance between current experiences and beliefs while evoking new possibilities for collective discovery. But they also serve as the glue that holds together overlapping webs of conversations in which diverse resources combine and recombine to create innovative solutions and business value.” (Juanita Brown and David Isaacs)
- “The only interesting answers are those which destroy the questions.” (Susan Sontag)

**The following questions are adapted from *75 Cage-Rattling Questions to Change the Way You Work* by Dick Whitney and Melissa Giovagnoli, McGraw Hill**

1. What’s happening? Who cares? What does it matter? What can be done about it? (Some things that are happening do not matter!)
2. What is most important for your nonprofit / NGO to talk about and why?
3. What change – if made in your nonprofit / NGO – would enhance the organization?
4. What skill – if you acquired it – would enhance your nonprofit / NGO?
5. What idea would get you fired? Promoted?
6. What idea seems impossible – but if executed well – would dramatically change your nonprofit / NGO?
7. What would you do if you knew you could not fail?
8. What incremental activities would produce momentum and the momentum in turn would move your nonprofit / NGO forward?
9. What can you (or your nonprofit / NGO) be the best in the world at – and what can you not be best at?
10. What is the key economic factor that best drives your economic engine?
11. What are your key people passionate about?
12. What would your nonprofit / NGO look like if it operated like a natural system does? If it ran according to the principles that guide natural systems?

**The following questions were developed by Simone P. Joyaux, ACFRE, Adv Dip and Kay Sprinkel Grace, CFRE for the 25<sup>th</sup> International Fundraising Congress 2005, The Netherlands:**

1. How can your nonprofit / NGO build it’s adaptive capacity?
2. What do we mean by culture? (e.g., national culture, ethnic culture, organizational culture, culture based on size, etc.)
3. How is the concept of philanthropy (voluntary action for the common good) articulated and practiced in different cultures?
4. How do different cultures affect the development of nonprofit / NGOs and the practice of management, governance, planning, and fund development?

5. In today's (and tomorrow's) globalized environment, how can we as leaders use the body of knowledge and best practice in business management and the NGO sector to advance our causes?
6. How do leaders balance strategy and tactics?
7. What is the nature of conversation (dialogue) as a core business practice? How can this core business practice translate across cultures and enhance nonprofit / NGO work?
8. What is the nature of politics in philanthropy? How do politics affect our nonprofits / NGOs, the sector, and philanthropy?
9. What do we mean by a civil society and civic capacity? What is the role of the nonprofit / NGO sector in creating a civil society and civic capacity? How do we as leaders create viable strategies to do this work?
10. How do leaders raise any of these issues – or any other issues – within our nonprofits / NGOs? How do we maintain a strategic focus and conversation within our NGOs rather than devolve to a tactical focus? How do we focus our nonprofit / NGO on what matters and more importantly, why it matters?

Read Theodore Zeldin's beautiful little book, *Conversation*.

Read my books, blogs and articles for lots more CRQs.  
[www.simonejoyaux.com](http://www.simonejoyaux.com)

Check out the story of the titmice and robins in England...As discovered by Arie de Geus and included in his article, "The Living Company," in *Harvard Business Review*.

"Conversation is not just about conveying information or sharing emotions, not just a way of putting ideas into people's heads.... Conversation is a meeting of minds with different memories and habits. When minds meet, they don't just exchange facts: they transform them, reshape them, draw different implications from them, engage in new trains of thoughts. Conversation doesn't just reshuffle the cards: it creates new cards."

"Having one's ideas challenged and transmuted by verbal intercourse makes one aware how much one owes to others, how much a partner can contribute to one's intellectual, moral and emotional development..."

"Without conversation, the human soul is bereft. It is almost as important as food, drink, love, exercise. It is one of the great human needs. If deprived of it, we die. People in solitary confinement...keep themselves sane by having imaginary conversations with themselves."  
 (Zeldin quoting someone else)

"Conversation as to explore new territory to become an adventure." (And that's where the meaningful and cage-rattling questions come in.)

## Our storytellers

### **Ivana Bacik**

Senator Ivana Bacik, LLB, LLM (Lond), BL, FTCD, is Reid Professor of Criminal Law, Criminology and Penology at Trinity College Dublin, a Senior Lecturer and Fellow of Trinity College Dublin, and a barrister. She is a Labour Party Senator for Dublin University (elected 2007, and re-elected 2011 and again in 2016), and was Deputy Leader of Seanad Eireann 2011-16. Ivana has written and published extensively on criminal law, criminology, human rights, constitutional law and related matters, and has a long track record of campaigning on civil liberties, penal reform and feminist issues. She was Editor of the *Irish Criminal Law Journal* from 1997-2003 and co-authored a major report on gender discrimination in the legal professions in Ireland (*Gender InJustice*, 2003). Her other publications include *Kicking and Screaming: Dragging Ireland into the Twenty-First Century* (O'Brien Press, 2004); and she is co-editor (with Mary Rogan) of *Legal Cases that Changed Ireland* (Clarus Press, 2016).

### **Sean Farrell**

Seán Farrell has over 20 years experience working in development and humanitarian settings. He has been with Trócaire since 1999 and has worked in a number of roles across the organisation, most recently spending 8 years in Africa managing the Trócaire country programmes in both Uganda and Zimbabwe. He has also managed Trócaire's Education and Campaigning work as well as the Trócaire Lenten Campaign.

Prior to joining Trócaire, Seán spent 7 years as a volunteer development worker in both Romania and the Philippines and describes his time in both countries as 'life changing' and 'life shaping'.

He is deeply committed to the work of justice, having witnessed first-hand for many years, the devastating impact of poverty and the denial of human rights on people's lives. He describes working for Trócaire as a 'privilege' in having the opportunity every day to make a difference in the lives of people living with poverty and oppression.

He was recently appointed Director of the International Division for Trócaire with responsibility for Trócaire's development and humanitarian work overseas.

Seán is originally from Dromard in Co. Longford and has a Masters in Equality Studies from U.C.D.

### **Karen Ingala Smith**

Karen Ingala Smith is Chief Executive of [nia](#), an East London based charity providing services for women, girls and children who have experienced sexual and domestic violence. Under Karen's leadership, [nia](#) has maintained an undaunted feminist commitment to ending male violence. During an unfavourable economic climate, Karen has built upon [nia's](#) reputation for innovative and creative ways of responding to the needs of the women and children it serves and become a highly regarded organisation championing an integrated approach to addressing all forms of male violence.

Karen is co-creator of **The Femicide Census** with Women's Aid (England), supported by Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer LLP and Deloitte LLP. The census is a ground breaking project enabling the monitoring and analysis of men's fatal male violence against women, providing valuable data with the aim of contributing to the reduction of the number of women killed by men. She has also been recording and commemorating UK women killed by men since January 2012 in a campaign called [Counting Dead Women](#).

With over 26 years' experience in the women's sector which encompasses frontline delivery, and operational and strategic management, she is a leader in feminist-informed service provision. Karen is a doctoral candidate on men's fatal violence against women. She blogs (less frequently since starting her PhD) at [kareningalasmith.com](http://kareningalasmith.com).

Karen can be found on twitter at [@K\\_IngalaSmith](#) and [@CountDeadWomen](#)

### **Abi Wilkinson**

Abi is a freelance journalist writing on politics and social issues for the Guardian, Independent, Telegraph and various other outlets.

## **Host: Simone Joyaux**

**Simone P. Joyaux, ACFRE, Adv Dip is described as “one of the most thoughtful, inspirational, and provocative leaders in the philanthropic sector.”** A consultant specializing in fund development, strategic planning, and board development, Simone guides organizations and professionals through consulting and coaching, teaching and writing.

Simone speaks worldwide, enjoying the opportunity to work with colleagues in places like Mexico City, London, Paris, Italy, Belgium, Australia, New Zealand, The Netherlands, Slovakia... She also teaches in the philanthropy graduate program at Saint Mary's University, Minnesota, USA.

Her books *Keep Your Donors* and *Strategic Fund Development* (now in its 3<sup>rd</sup> edition) are standards in the field. Her newest, *Firing Lousy Board Members*, also receives rave reviews. She's contributed to several other books, writes for the *Nonprofit Quarterly*, and blogs as Simone Uncensored.

Joyaux has founded two organizations, and serves regularly on boards. She's a former chair of CFRE International.

Currently Simone serves as chair of the Board of Directors of Planned Parenthood of Southern New England. She also chairs the Advisory Board for the Centre for Sustainable Philanthropy at Plymouth University, in the U.K. She and her partner have bequeathed their entire estate to charity.