



## Live Your Strengths

Welcome to the January edition of *Live Your Strengths*, the monthly e-newsletter from In Search of Excellence.

In this Edition:

- Make 2008 the Year of Dialogue
- The Leadership Challenge Workshop
- Live Your Strengths Monthly Challenge

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### ***Make 2008 the Year of Dialogue***

*"It was hard to get a conversation going because everyone was talking so much." ~ Yogi Berra*

The very heart of relationships, whether personal or professional, is the ability to communicate. Many of the conflicts that exist in our workplaces, community groups and families can be traced back to ineffective ways of communicating with each other. For many of us, the New Year's resolution that would have the most profound and widely reaching effects would be to examine our own communication styles and patterns and find ways to continuously improve in this area.

In *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge provides a fascinating distinction between the concept of dialogue and discussion. He explains that 'dialogue' has its roots in the Greek Dia-logos, which means "thinking together". Whereas 'discussion' has its roots in the words 'percussion' and 'concussion' – literally a "heaving of ideas back and forth in a winner-takes-all competition."

My hunch is that the vast majority of conversations exist within the realm of discussion and not true dialogue. So, what are some of the signs that you are engaging in a competitive conversation?

- You find yourself ready to jump in to make your next point before the other person is finished speaking
- You are unwilling to listen to, or try to understand, the other person's point of view because you are trying to convince him/her that your perspective is the 'correct' one
- The flow of the conversation is disjointed, with people trying to break into the conversation and talk over one another, rather than a smooth flow of ideas (this can be especially noticeable in group discussions)
- You realize that you are not really curious or interested in what the other person truly thinks or feels and are just going through the motions of the conversation

These symptoms are not confined to conversations in which there are obvious conflicts – they are common issues in most of our daily communication and occur even when people are in agreement about the topic they are discussing. The problem is however, that if we spend all of our conversations in this shallow area of communication, we lose the depth that can occur in a genuine dialogue.

Think of the last time you felt someone was really listening to you. They may have shown this by giving you enough space to completely think through the idea you wanted to express without jumping in to provide their thoughts right away. Or perhaps they demonstrated this deep listening by asking a question about something you just said, which allowed you to develop a new insight. But most importantly, you felt that you were understood.

These genuine conversations don't necessarily take more time than our usual discussions and small talk, but they can result in dramatically improved relationships, interactions with clients, and quality team work. All it takes is a little effort and the willingness to dialogue and 'think together'.

Are you ready to improve the quality of communication in your life and work? Join me in this month's *Live Your Strengths Monthly Challenge*.

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### ***The Leadership Challenge Workshop***

Last chance to register for January's Leadership Challenge Workshop in Guelph, ON: There are only a few seats left for this

incredible learning opportunity. But don't delay... the deadline for registration is January 11, 2008!

More details and registration information at <http://www.insearchofexcellence.ca/Home/EventsMedia/tabid/59/Default.aspx>

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### ***Live Your Strengths Monthly Challenge***

*"When people talk, listen completely. Most people never listen." ~ Ernest Hemingway*

Some quick ideas to brush up on your skills to create genuine dialogue:

- **Look for role models.** There are people who just naturally 'dialogue' with others – they are often the people who are sought out for advice because they are such master communicators. Study the techniques they use in their conversations and decide which ones you are willing to put into practice.
- **Listen deeply.** Really listen to the person who is speaking with you. Make that person the centre of your attention and avoid multitasking or other distractions when you are in conversation.
- **Become fascinated.** Find something intriguing about the person you are speaking with, even if just making small talk in a line at the coffee shop. The masters of dialogue have a gift of making the people they speak with feel extremely interesting. That level of interest is hard to fake – it usually comes through a genuine curiosity in others and the world around them.
- **Breathe.** To ensure the person is completely finished speaking, take a breath before responding. You may find he/she actually had more to say. By jumping in too soon, you may miss some fascinating insights.
- **Seek a deeper understanding.** In group discussions or team meetings, watch the interactions of those around you. If you feel there is a lot of discussion and difficulty in reaching a decision, try asking a question that can move the conversation to a deeper level. Demonstrate that you have heard what people are saying and want to better understand their perspectives. You may be surprised to see how quickly conflicts can be solved when people feel they are truly being 'heard'.

Could you use some guidance with this challenge? Call Denise for a free 30-minute coaching session. Start living *your* strengths!

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Do you know someone who would be interested in receiving the *Live Your Strengths* newsletter? Please feel free to pass it on to those in your network.

Cheers,

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