

The Art of Addressing Situations In The Moment

Donna Karlin



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The advertisement features a black header with the CMO Inspired Conference logo on the left, which consists of a green speech bubble containing the letters 'CMO'. To the right of the logo, the text 'INSPIRED CONFERENCE' is written in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. Below this, in smaller white capital letters, is the date and location: '25 OCTOBER | DE VERE BEAUMONT ESTATE | OLD WINDSOR UK'. The main body of the advertisement is a collage of three images: the top image shows a large, white, classical-style building with many windows, surrounded by green trees and a fountain in the foreground; the bottom-left image shows a woman in a black dress speaking into a microphone on a stage with a large audience; the bottom-right image shows a man in a light blue shirt presenting to a group of people. At the bottom of the advertisement, a black banner contains the text 'Join Over 100 Chief Marketing Officers & Digital Innovators' in green.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



*We're not just human beings, we're humans becoming, always changing,
shifting, adapting to new circumstances and challenges.*

– Donna Karlin

Donna Karlin, certified Executive Coach and Organizational Psychologist, has been called a thought-shifter, accelerator, dot-connector and reality-checker. She's an international speaker, lecturer, author and world-renowned leadership coach. You will see Donna coach on the run with her clients through the halls of corporate headquarters, start-ups, small businesses, government departments and agencies, and political offices in many parts of the world.

Her work has been written up in *Fast Company Magazine*, *The National Post* (Financial Post), *The Globe and Mail*, *The New York Times* Business Section, *The Boston Globe*, and *Personal Success Magazine*. She was the cover story for *Women of Distinction Magazine* and featured in the Top 10 Women of 2016 issue of *Women of Distinction Magazine*. She has authored the critically acclaimed, award-winning book, *Leaders: Their Stories, Their Words – Conversations with Human-Based Leaders*, and *The Power of Coaching: Don't Give up Your Day Job, or Should You?* eBook on Bookboon, as well as other books, articles and online publications.

For 35+ years, Donna has worked with global leaders to develop the competencies and practices that enable them to meet the challenges of the future. Principal and founder of the *No Ceiling Just Sky™ Institute*, *A Better Perspective®* Coaching and Consulting firm, and Founder of the *inCUBEatory™*, the people, idea and organizational accelerator, Donna works with C-Suite Leaders of Fortune 100 companies, Leaders in Governments, the Military, First Responders, Task Forces, Health Care, and with Entrepreneurs around the world.

Donna truly understands the power of two minutes. She has a finite amount of time available to coach clients on the fly, in the centre of complex challenges in chaotic times. Unlike most coaching sessions, Shadow and Laser Coaching® can be a matter of a few minutes, where she coaches on one thought, one moment in time that had just unfolded in such a way, that when they're coached on it, they not only get it, but "it" sticks. It's about illuminating the truth of the moment or embedding an idea in someone's mind that is so clear, so powerful, they can turn their attention on what must be addressed immediately.

Donna is a member of the TED Community, Coach and Mentor to the TED Fellows and Senior Fellows, Coach at The Uncharted, and Coach at StartingBloc. She is on the Advisory Council of the International Academy of Behavioral Medicine, Counseling and Psychotherapy (IABMCP), and a Founding Fellow of the Institute of Coaching, Harvard Medical School.

She brings a 360° perspective to human evolvment.

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Our 'brand-new' [inCUBEatory](#) – the Accelerator Lab – a 'container' where we accelerate people, ideas, frameworks and organisations. Donna brings her unique, tried-and-true approach that she uses with TED Fellows, entrepreneurs and thought leaders to businesses and corporations.

Access Donna's full spectrum of work on her LinkedIn Page: <http://linkedin.com/in/donnakarlin>

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PREFACE

Our lives are defined by opportunities, even the ones we miss.

– Eric Roth

Have you ever walked into an elevator and standing there was someone you always wanted to meet and have time with, possibly the President or CEO or someone famous, and were at a loss for words?

Did someone ever tell you something that caught you unawares where you were so taken aback you didn't respond then beat yourself up, replaying what just didn't happen, or thinking of what you should have said at the time, all the way home?

Being able to speak up in real time to whatever unfolds is one of the most important skill sets you could ever learn. What if you could respond professionally, clearly, and concisely so that your words counted?

In this fast-paced world, we must make each second – never mind minute – count. This book will take you through how to recognise and respond to opportunity even when it flies by in a blink.

I look at small, two-minute windows in time as invaluable. For the most part, we rarely take advantage of them. They emerge frequently by chance, however these tiny timeframes, filled with opportunities, pop up out of nowhere. The juicy parts of life happen when we least expect them; but when we pay attention to what's in front of us, take hold of what reveals itself in that moment and do something amazing with them, they can, in some ways, alter our lives.

As fleeting as two-minute windows of time can be, the perspectives are vast, and effects of them, enduring.

Consider multiple ways to view them:

1. How are you showing up? What is the first impression you're making on those around you?
2. Are you emulating leadership even when you're not uttering a word? Leadership presence is evident all the time, even when you're unaware of the impact you make from the moment you walk into the room.

3. Opportunities present themselves when you least expect them, but are you paying attention and using them to springboard you in a new direction?
4. You might have a small window of opportunity to nip something in the bud before it gets out of hand. Did you jump at the chance of addressing it then and there?
5. How do you shock someone into awareness, get their attention and keep it?
6. How can you share an idea that is so profound that people will never forget it?
7. What is so perfect when it clearly isn't? Looking at challenges as opportunities.

Sometimes you have a couple of minutes to jump on the bandwagon. Rather than, "Stop the world, I want to get off," I would rather get on and ramp it up. I invite you to dive into the deep end of small, two-minute windows in time, and see what it is you can do to shift your world right-side up.

I invite you to view what you read through the following lenses:

- **Attitude:** Are you open to responding in real time? That involves letting go of controlling action and outcome and dancing with whatever emerges.
- **Appearance:** How do you appear to others? If someone sees you for the first time, will you appear friendly? Professional? And,
- **Approachability:** How Approachable are you? Do people feel as if they can engage with you? Or do you radiate that "Back off" look?
- **Access:** What access do you have to people you want to interact with, either by chance, by common interests (same tennis or golf club, conference attendees etc.)?
- **Attributes:** What are your unique talents and strengths and, when you combine them, what is your Point of Distinction; something that stands out about you that is unique to you/your offerings?
- The "**Ask**": Once you have that access, what is it you're going to ask from them, specifically?
- **Action:** How are you going to act on the opportunity that presents itself?
- **Attention:** How do you catch and keep someone's attention? And lastly,
- Showing **Appreciation:** A "Thank you" packs more punch than you know. If you take someone's advice and achieve something because of it, let them know. It'll go a long way towards them supporting you again. It only takes a moment to do that.

Each of these points will be illustrated throughout the book. Once you've read it, ask yourself when, in the past, when something similar occurred in your life, how did you respond (or not, which is a response in itself)? How might you respond in a different way if it occurred now, in order to optimise any opportunity and strengthen your professional presence?

1 TWO MINUTES? WHAT CAN BE DONE IN TWO MINUTES

Alice: How long is forever? White Rabbit: Sometimes, just one second.

– Lewis Carroll

Sometimes one second can seem like forever or, in a blink, be a lifeline, a springboard or open a door.

In one of my blogs I had asked the following question: “If you had an extra 15 minutes available in your day, how would you use them?” I was virtually “yelled at” from all over the world.

“Ask me what I could do with an extra hour and perhaps I’d have an answer, but 15 minutes? That’s not enough time for anything!”, was what I heard back. People were incensed that I would insult them with a question that wasted their time rather than look at ways of approaching a gift of time. I do a lot with extra or what I consider “found time”, no matter how fleeting it might be. Imagine the comments I would have heard if I changed the question to, “What would you do with 2 minutes; all the time you would have available to approach someone, to address a situation, or to make an impression?” I wonder what the response would have been for that question! This is exactly what I’m addressing here. What if you only had 2 minutes? Would you squander them or use them wisely? This is about your attitude towards any opportunity that might appear out of nowhere; about how you engage with possibility.

A past colleague of mine, Thomas Leonard, once told me, “Opportunities don’t knock, they wait to be invited in.” In this fast-paced world, we must think on our feet. It often comes down to an opportunity that presents itself for a mere minute or two before it’s lost; two minutes to address something, to be a reality check, nip something in the bud before it gets out of hand, make an impression, ask the critical question, or embed an idea in someone’s mind that is so powerful, they will never ever forget it – or you – and want more.

Two minutes.

When you only have two minutes to address something, it’s got to count.

Two minutes sounds like a blink in time, but those two minutes can be the tipping point between a missed opportunity or a pivotal one.

To strip an idea down to its core, we must be masters of exclusion. We must create ideas that are both simple and profound. A one-sentence statement so profound that an individual could spend a lifetime learning it.

– Heath and Heath

You don't want people trying to figure out what you mean and why. Life is continually becoming more complex, but it doesn't mean it has to be overly complicated, nor does our response to a situation have to be. Why make things more complicated than they have to be?

I do my best work in an elevator. I have to edit myself, get rid of the verbal fluff, attract someone's attention, instigate, or clarify something. Addressing things in a couple of minutes or less is both an art and a craft. The term Elevator Speech was coined for a reason. You have a finite amount of time to get someone's attention, keep it, and make an impression. When you get to the point without beating around the bush, people will come back for more because when you're strapped for time, you have all the time in the world for someone who respects your time.

If there is one thing I can do by writing this book is to help you pack a punch and be able to dance in real time with whatever situation or opportunity unfolds, I've achieved my goal. This is something you can use at work, at home, and the "in-betweens".

Through the pages of this book, I will unpack situations, so you can use the rationales to address multiple contexts and how two minutes can change the status quo of a relationship, situation, or career. We are responsible for our actions. It's how quickly we move and take action that is the differentiator.

A case in point is a concept created in the movie *Sliding Doors* with Gwyneth Paltrow and John Hannah. The premise of the film is how her life shifts back and forth between two parallel universes; when she caught the train, her life went in one direction and, in parallel, when she missed the train, her life went in a completely different direction. It was all dependent on a split-second choice and circumstance. The concept of Sliding Door Moments is a powerful one where we take into consideration that any decision we make can alter our destiny. If we speak to someone, it might open doors beyond imagination, and if we don't, we know there won't be any possible opportunity. Sliding Door Moments can create new paradigms and beliefs as we're steered in a new direction.

Throughout our lives we choose a path that takes us either left or right, saying yes or no, diving into the unknown, or sticking to what we know which might be easier, but each choice we make offers opportunities for growth. Most of the time we stop from speaking to strangers on airplanes or in elevators because it's safer. That moment where parallel paths open up to us is gone in a blink. Two minutes is a lifetime compared to that.

It starts with your willingness to engage with people, situations, new ideas and opportunity.

2 HOW ARE YOU SHOWING UP?

With every new encounter, impressions are made and opinions are formed in only a matter of seconds. The instant imprint you make on someone can impact them, and you, for a lifetime.

– Susan C. Young

If you don't engage when chance arises, you'll never know just how impactful you can be. How do you get someone's attention? Usually by showing up in a way that sets you apart from others. I call it your Point of Distinction (P.O.D.). It can be your unique approach, your demeanour, your "look", your way of communicating or your reputation for being "different".

The way to get and keep someone's attention is to figure out what your P.O.D. is and speak from that position. How someone discerns whether there is something different about you happens quickly in a fleeting conversation, your comment on a subject and how you frame it, or how you hold yourself in the midst of others. Do you stand for what you believe in? Are you speaking with deference or authority? Many believe when they're dealing with leaders, they have to be acquiescent. I believe we must be honest – respectful, yes – but honest.

Are you approachable? Do you have a smile on your face or a scowl because of something that just occurred? Are you so lost in thought or your head buried in your mobile phone that you're oblivious to everything around you and whatever tiny window of opportunity might have been possible, closes?

Are you daring enough to talk to people you don't know at all?

No matter how short the conversation may be, it might just become the beginning of a long and rich relationship. It starts with whether or not you look approachable.

Next time you're standing in line at the bank, a check out line, the line at a buffet, or at the gate ready to board a plane, look around you at how people are engrossed in their mobile phones, often filling in time with something to do. If you're game to connect with someone close by, you just might, at the very least, meet some amazing people that way and learn a lot about people and life.

3 I GOT HIM AT “HELLO”

‘Hello!’ is more than a greeting; it’s your way of acknowledging the existence of someone else. That can make all the difference in the world in someone’s life who might, at that moment in their lives, feels invisible.

– Donna Karlin

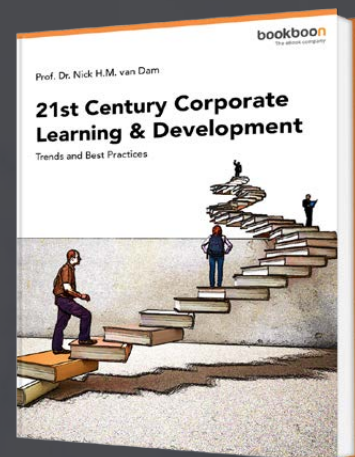
I was asked to speak at a conference for informatics specialists. I walked into the Green Room and sitting there was Steve Wozniak. He was at one of the small, round tables in the room with a group of individuals hovering, trying to get his attention. I sat down at the table next to him, put my Blackberry and notes on the table and went to get some coffee. I came back, sat down and, seeing he was eyeing my Blackberry, said, “Hello fellow speaker”.

He motioned to the Blackberry and asked, “What’s that?” I answered tongue in cheek, “It’s a Blackberry. It does all kinds of things. It places and answers calls, sends emails and texts, takes pictures and sends secure device to device pins. It’s actually quite useful.”

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He replied, “Funny. Really funny. I *know* what it does but why don’t you have an iPhone?”

In those days the iPhone wasn’t an approved device for some of the clients I worked with and told him so. I had his attention at hello, only because I knew what he was focusing on and thought I’d take advantage of it. He invited me over to sit with him at his table to continue the conversation. We talked until the conference began and they called on him to speak. I learned a great deal about the drivers behind the work he did and continues to do and he learned quite a bit about my work in Human and Organisational systems and the Fellows I worked with.

Sometimes humour can be the entrée to a deeper conversation. It certainly was in this case but to take it a step further, why did I want his attention in the first place? Why did I want to talk with him and, now that I had his attention, what was I going to do with it?

I wanted to hear his story. I didn’t want his “Apple Guy” story, I wanted his Steve story. I also wanted to find out what his current situation was and how he was continuing to change the world considering his positioning in the industry. I learned a great deal. I obviously didn’t hear all his stories as there wasn’t time, but I had just enough time to ask him what the most important story to him was.

One of the best ways to make those two minutes count is to approach someone based on what’s important to them, not you. In doing that, you will hear what’s applicable to you as well, and, in most cases, if requested, more time to continue the conversation if you give them something of value right back. In this case, it was a question to help him cement in his mind why what he was doing or wanting to be doing was important.

If you get someone at “Hello” their eyes will light up and you’ll know they’ll want to know more. If they look puzzled and try to get away, you’ve lost them. The first thing you say will be the hook. If it’s a question, make it a powerful one sharing a statistic, a little-known fact, or current event that just unfolded so they want more.

Taking this apart:

My Intentions:

- a) To get his attention before speaking a word (by putting my BlackBerry down where he could see it). I was speaking with a leader in technology from another company and platform and I knew he would notice my device.
- b) To make a connection by saying “Hello” and adding that I was also a speaker. This way I evened up the playing field a bit.
- c) To answer his question with a bit of tongue in cheek humour to really engage him.
- d) To continue the conversation in order to learn something as well as share something he might not know or consider or, in other words, give him something of value.

He is constantly inundated by people who want to meet him, but rarely do they engage in conversation that is about him. It's usually about them wanting something from him. I was curious to hear what he would share with me. When you are truly interested in someone, not just what you can get from them, that's where a connection is made. How you choose to reach out in the first minute or so will determine whether they engage.

4 WHY THEY WOULD CHOOSE YOU

Be yourself. Everyone else is already taken.

– Gilbert Perreira

If you try to be someone else, who would be you? The world needs you, your intelligence, perspectives, talents, and voice.

Do you know what your stakeholders view as success?

What do you view as success? Do they align? Next, who is the decision-maker? Who is going to say yay or nay to you if you propose something? If it's not the decision-maker, I don't want someone to be speaking for me, making promises on my behalf, or altering in any way what I believe must be done to reach that success factor. I would rather speak directly to the decision-maker, so I could answer any questions that arise or alleviate any concerns they might have.

We have become who we are as a result of the collective experiences of the thousands of personal interactions that we have each day. We recognise that these essential interactions occur in all areas of our lives which stimulates development at all levels. Therefore, we answer questions based on our depth of experience over time and can illustrate our unique response to any concern someone might have. The ultimate judge of our impact cannot be measured by one situation or circumstance. You must take into account how you are positioning yourself and what lasting relationships and synergies you're developing each moment of each day. Others measure it by how you present yourself the moment they meet you. How are you showing up? Do you have that look of authority about you; a professional presence which demands attention?

Someone I had taught way back when, called me out of the blue to come in and help with a situation in her company. She felt that my approach would be the best way to handle a sticky situation. The last time I had seen her was 3 or 4 years before, but obviously, I made a strong enough impression for her to think of me when this specific situation arose. Evidently when she spoke to the senior leader who was trying to deal with the issue and she recommended calling me in, his answer was one of surprise as he didn't see the need to call in someone from another country never mind city. That theme seemed to have worked its way through many of my conversations leading up to accepting the contract with them.

To give you a bit of background...

Both the new CEO of the company and the Chairman of the Board were having difficulty with two senior executives and wanted to let them go. Their immediate boss, David, didn't want that to happen as they were invaluable to his team and the organisation and were really doing an excellent job. I won't go into the specifics as they aren't relevant to this book. What I need to share is my approach and why it would even occur to a Fortune 100 company to bring me on board when they could have their pick of consultants.

This call was unexpected, so I had to think on my feet. I insisted on a call with David to find out more information and to share what I could bring to the table. I wanted to connect directly with the decision maker. That happened immediately, as she was calling from his office. Again, there was no time to create a potential plan of action. I wanted to know a few things including what had actually occurred to get to this point. He had no idea, so I knew I had to find out what took place that created the issue in the first place. The CEO had told David that he and the Chairman of the Board were both disgruntled with them and wanted them replaced. I needed to find out if the CEO and Chairman knew David was trying to salvage his two staffer's jobs and keep them from being let go. That could have implications and put him in hot water with the CEO and Chairman if they thought he was going behind their backs and not doing their bidding. His answer was no to that as well.

What I had insisted on for everyone's benefit was for David to let the CEO and Chairman know he wanted to bring someone in to try to remedy the situation, and for arrangements to be made for me to speak with each of them separately before agreeing to take on the assignment. He agreed to both.

I had no preference as to who I would meet with first. They were in two different cities, Washington D.C., and Houston, so I needed to book two separate trips which had to fit into their schedules as well as mine.

I knew they were extremely busy. I would have a matter of a few minutes to get their full attention and keep it, so I kept my questions and answers short, sweet and to the point, not to mention a bit edgy.

First, they needed to know who I was without me sharing my resume and boring them to death. I wasn't sure what my potential clients' boss told them so had to be prepared to answer any questions they asked in a way that would keep their attention and engage them to support what I offered to do. As I told David, if I didn't have their buy-in, I wouldn't waste my time or their money on trying to solve this issue if they were hell bent on having them fired anyway.

As chance would have it, the first meeting was with the Chairman in Washington. The second would take place 4 days later with the CEO in Houston.

The Chairman greeted me and asked me if I was from Houston. I said, “No”. Then he said, “Well you’re not from Washington”, to which I again answered, “No”. He went on, “Well, where *are* you from?” and I answered, “Ottawa”. He was taken off guard with that one and asked, “Ottawa? As in *Canada*? We don’t have people who do this normal kind of consulting here?”

This was my chance to capture his attention. I took a chance by answering with, “There’s absolutely nothing normal about me or the work I do. You should know that early on.” He smiled and said, “I don’t think I’m ever going to be able to guess what you’re going to say next and I rarely say that!”

I had his full attention.

Next, he asked if I had met with the CEO. I told him no. He asked why I didn’t meet with him first and I answered honestly; it was about availability and I booked the person who was available first which was him. He nodded. Now it was time for my “Ask”.

I asked him for specifics on what had happened to get to the point of no return, or the desire to fire these two senior executives, then just listened; listened to hear context of the situation, but as important, listened to the words he used to describe the situation and whether there was an emotional component to how he was sharing it. I also needed to hear if some assumptions were being made and to be able to challenge them. I asked for his support in helping me be successful.

He gave it.

I could have given him options as to how I would have approached working with these two people but that wasn’t important to the conversation. What was important was letting him know I would get to the bottom of it, do everything within my power to create a shift that was workable, and touch base with him now and then to find out if he saw any changes (positive ones). I truly believe I caught and held his attention because I approached him in the same manner I would approach anyone; with respect and candour. I didn’t couch my words for them to be soft and sweet. This was a corporate, fast-paced environment. I was there to do a job, not play “nice”. I had to assure him that was exactly how seriously I would treat this situation. My demeanour had to reflect that.

The second meeting was with the CEO. I was on more of a hot seat with him. First, he wanted to know if I had met with the Chairman. I said yes. He asked what the Chairman had said, and I told him I wouldn’t share it just yet as I wanted to hear what he had to say based on his own experience. Before he would answer my questions, and as an engineer,

he wanted to know what I knew about his field and what the company did. I told him, “More than you think”, as I had other clients in the same industry, but rather than list my experiences in his realm, I answered, “It’s important that you know what you’re doing and it’s important that I know my field. I’ll support yours by doing what I do best, and not getting tangled in an area that is not my expertise. Deal?”

I had his attention and from there we created a plan of action. I had buy in from both organisational leaders and was not only given the green light to move forward, but their support and the assurance that if I needed anything to make this intervention successful, they would make themselves available.

The critical points of each of these conversations was to keep them short, direct, and get them slightly off balance so they would listen to what I was saying. If they thought it was a waste of their time, the outcome could have been very different.

Ultimately, I solved the issue for them, strengthened each of the executive’s positions in the company and have continued to do targeted work for them in most of their geographic locations. If those initial two-minute introductions hadn’t captured their attention, there would have been a distinct possibility these valuable executives would have been fired and replaced, and I wouldn’t have the contracts I continue to have to this day.

Taking this apart:

My Intentions:

- a) To be explicit as to my approach.
- b) To be specific regarding what I was asking of them to support my work and the desired outcome.
- c) Be clear as to why my model was unique and how it engendered sustainable results.
- d) How I would hold them accountable for noticing the changes and supporting the hard work the executives would do to shift the status quo. There was no point in my working with these two executives if their hard work wouldn’t be noticed.

You know when you have ‘buy in’ or feel you need to convince someone of your worth and that feeling occurs within the first couple of minutes of a conversation. If you have to convince someone, you’re chasing them, not intriguing them.

5 “I’M THE ENFORCER”

*You have to leave the city of your comfort and go into the wilderness of your intuition.
What you’ll discover will be wonderful. What you’ll discover will be yourself.*

– Alan Alda

One of the programs I run is *Finding your Point of Distinction. How to get and Keep Someone’s Attention*. It’s a program I bring to organisations for emerging leaders to step into their unique contribution and discover and adopt their Point of Distinction. This particular group was about 100 participants. I divided them up into pre-determined smaller groups and then asked everyone in the room to give a two-minute intro about themselves and who they were, what they believed their Point of Distinction might be, and any other relevant information they wanted us to know. It had to be in the neighbourhood of 2 minutes and no more.

I went around the room pointing to each person, one by one, inviting them to speak. A young woman stood up, head bowed and, so quietly you had to lean in to hear her, shared her name. Almost in a whisper we had to strain to hear, “My name is May” and added, “I’m a severe introvert.” I asked, “Is that what you want people to remember about you?” Then I continued, “The first thing that comes out of your mouth is what everything else will be filtered through. Do you want people to wonder what they need to do to interact with a ‘severe introvert’ or really know what you bring to the table that is unique to you?”

She was shocked because no one had ever called her on it. She thought she needed to let people know she was uncomfortable in larger groups and especially around people she didn’t know.

I was intrigued. I was trying to figure out what would draw her to this kind of workshop. I asked as much, and she told me her boss knew me from the work I did in the organisation and thought it would benefit her.

She had her work cut out for her, but I knew this could be an extraordinary opportunity for her.

I divided people into tables of 6. They paired up for some of the work and worked as small teams for the rest. I tasked her to share everything she did, how she approached her work and what she wanted to be known for.

When I work with people to help them discover what they can say to catch people’s attention, it’s with the instruction that you only have a moment or two when people decide whether or not they want to give you the time of day, so when you speak, it has to pack a punch in a unique way not an aggressive way.

She had no problem telling her table what she did for work but had a tough time putting herself in the story. She gave them a laundry list, a task list of sorts, but didn’t say what role she played within it.

She spoke quietly, head bowed, and her body language was closed and still. You could feel her introversion. But we couldn’t feel her presence. She was doing everything in her power to become invisible. If I accomplished one thing of value that day, I wanted it to be to help her find her voice, her power. The 100 or so people in the room were all pulling for her.

When I heard what her job was, I was dumbstruck. It wasn’t something I expected a high introvert to deal with day after day. She worked in Regulations. If people didn’t abide by State and Federal regulations, there would be a huge penalty to pay. Her job was to make sure they did what was needed and within their deadlines.

I wandered from table to table, going to May’s last because I wanted to see how far they had gotten without me intervening. Finally, I walked over to their table, pulled up a chair and listened to what they had come up with for each of them. Some got the knack of articulating what their unique Point of Distinction was. I helped them fine tune their Points of Distinction so they could adopt them and use them. For her, it was much more difficult. I percolated with her on some ideas, tasked her table to help her figure it out without giving her the answer, and told them we would be reporting out to everyone in the room in 10 minutes, so they had that amount of time to come up with something.

Time was up! We went around the room listening to how people came up with their unique brand or P.O.D., that would become their moniker. When it was her turn, I asked if she was ready to share it with the others in the room. This tiny, painfully shy woman looked up, grinned at me, actually stood up on her chair, put her hands on her hips and belted out, “I am the Enforcer!” The whole room cracked up. No one expected that! She found her P.O.D. as well as her voice and was revelling in it. What had to happen was for her to use it, adopt it and become the person she showed up as in that workshop.

Fast forward to the next day...I received a call from her boss asking, “What did you do with May? She’s come out of her shell and has been grinning all day!” I asked her boss what May learned about herself in the workshop and she told me, “May said, ‘I’m the Enforcer

and nothing will get by me that doesn’t meet the standards!’ How in the world did you do that in one day? She is having a ball telling everyone who she is!”

Now think about this for a moment, if you met her at an elevator or in a meeting before this workshop, asked her a question, and she would whisper an answer to you, head bowed, body folded in on itself and said the bare minimum, do you think you would pay attention to what she said? But now, if someone met her and asked, “What do you do here?” and she answered with passion and a grin, “I’m the Enforcer!” don’t you think they would want to know more? She went from timid to being a force of nature. That is a shift everyone paid attention to, especially May. She learned what she was made of and revelled in it.

You have moments in time to make an impression. Figure out what you want that impression to be. She certainly did.

Taking this apart:

My Intentions: (These applied to everyone, not just May)

- a) To invite her to see how her introduction pushed people away.
- b) To help her view herself through her unique contributions.
- c) To teach her how to engage with others when it was almost painful for her, as a high introvert, to do so.
- d) To frame who she is more than what she does in how she presented herself.
- e) To help her revel in the response she got and to build on it in her day to day work.
- f) To help her be so comfortable in sharing her new ‘title’ that she wouldn’t hesitate to state it, and with energy.
- g) To help her see how her new approach to people got their attention and kept it.
- h) Lastly, to help her realise that when you really have a sense of who you are and what you bring to the table, you don’t have to be an extravert to get someone’s attention.

6 OPPORTUNITIES DON'T TALK, THEY WHISPER

The right time and right place is only right when we take advantage of it. Otherwise it's yet another opportunity we didn't seize when it presented itself. Sometimes the smallest things point us in the right direction.

– Donna Karlin

A colleague of mine used to say, “Opportunities don’t knock, they whisper, so shut up and listen.” Access brings opportunity. Sometimes you’ll find yourself in a place or situation where you’ll meet someone and will most probably never have that opportunity again.



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Case in point:

I was in Australia to do the opening keynote at a conference on Critical Incidence Management. When I walked in, there was a Firefighter with her therapy dog in the room. I gravitated over to her to talk, of course see the dog, as I'm a dog lover, and to find out more about what she was doing. Jennifer told me that she was trying to have a medic therapy dog program formalised but couldn't get into the Chief's office to have the necessary conversation and make the presentation. As he was supposed to be at the conference, she thought she'd bring her dog and seize the day so to speak and connect with him.

I asked her, "What is your 'Ask'?" She didn't quite know how to respond to that.

I continued, "It's one thing to have access but what do you do with that access? How do you get someone's attention and keep it? They are inundated with people asking for something of them. What will you give him in return that will make it a no brainer for him to listen?"

She had to think about that.

There was another layer to this. She had access to me. As I was the opening keynote, I, in turn, had access to everyone at the conference. If I had been working with her, I would have asked her to figure out her "Ask" to me as well, but I let her off the hook with that one. Just being there and trying to find a moment of the Chief's time wasn't enough.

I had two minutes if that long, to get his attention on her behalf. He was interested in speaking with me about my talk as it had relevance to the day-to-day work he did. I could have gone over to introduce the two of them but without her knowing what her specific ask was for him, that two-minute window would have been wasted.

We discussed what I shared in my talk and how it was applicable to him. I then asked him one question I was interested in that related to some of the work I did at home. At the same time, it would be a way to introduce the medic therapy dog program to him. To get his attention, I made it personal to him.

I asked, "How many people are you responsible for regarding their physical and emotional well-being?" Without pause he answered, "70,000 people". That blew me away. I couldn't conceive of someone being responsible for that many people, but he was.

I took a double take and replied, "Run that by me again? Did you say 70,000 people?" I paused and then added, "And you don't have a medic therapy dog program in place?"

I had his attention. It only took one question.

He paused and then asked, “What would a therapy dog program do for us?”, to which I answered, “I can tell you from experience back home just how powerful it is, but as there’s someone here with her therapy dog who can answer that better than I, I would prefer if she would tell you. Let me introduce you to Jennifer.”

The day before when Jennifer told me she wanted to implement a program locally, I told her about the one I knew of back home and offered to connect her to the First Responder, running the program. When I went back to my hotel room that night, I reached out to Trisha back home to ask what pointers she had about her program that I could share in Australia. She not only told me what I should pass along but sent her business model to me to give to Jennifer.

The next day, when I introduced her to the Chief, it was evident that Jennifer took to heart the conversation about access we had the day before; she had the wherewithal to introduce herself and her dog, stated what she wanted to create in that part of Australia, and, informed him that she already had a business model sent to her by someone who had a successful program up and running, so she wouldn’t have to reinvent the wheel.

Unpacking this:

What was the purpose of my telling you this story? My intentions:

- a) To illustrate how you need to figure out who you want and need to connect with to make your dream happen.
- b) To show the process around figuring out what your “Ask” is and why it would be in your audience’s best interest to engage in the conversation.
- c) Illustrate how, by asking the Chief a question that was intensely personal – he was accountable for the wellbeing (physical, mental, and emotional) of 70,000 people which was a huge responsibility and weighed heavily on him – and had an aid for that, I would get and keep his attention. When you’re dealing with that level of responsibility and someone has an idea that can go a long way at helping them do a better job and at little cost, you will get their attention.

- d) By introducing the Chief to Jennifer and her dog, he could see the program in action. There were many people dealing with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in the room who came to hear current research, words of wisdom, and to hang out with people dealing with their own personal hells. One by one, as if drawn by a magnet, they walked over to the gentle Golden Lab, and stroked her coat while they talked. You could sense the calm that came over them. The Chief experienced the powerful impact of a trained medic therapy dog because he witnessed it for himself.
- e) To illustrate the power of immediate action. Jennifer seized on the moment and had her funding before the end of the conference.

You're not expected to have all the answers, just enough questions and impactful statements to get and hold their attention. The rest works itself out.

7 THE “ASK”

From what I've seen, it isn't so much the act of asking that paralyzes us – it's what lies beneath: the fear of being vulnerable, the fear of rejection, the fear of looking needy or weak.

– Amanda Palmer

In the previous chapter, *Opportunities Don't Knock, They Whisper*, I touched upon the “Ask”. If you find yourself in the position to be in close proximity to someone you've always wanted to have access to, you need to know what your “Ask” is going to be. People are busy – busier than ever – and that's not going to change any time soon, so you have to make it count. What will your “Ask” be? It must be so specific it can be addressed in the moment.

Prior to the TED Women conference in San Francisco, I posted on Social Media what I would be taking part in, and asked clients and students out there what they would like me to bring to the table regarding the topic of that year's conference. I wanted to know ahead of time what I would tweet and post on LinkedIn during the conference that would be on point.

One young woman who was just starting out in her career was following me on Twitter. Once she heard I would be in her neck of the woods, she reached out and asked if we could meet for dinner while I was in San Francisco. She knew my availability would be very limited and knew I had to eat, so used that as a starting point. She offered to come to my hotel before the conference started and asked if she could get my guidance as to a way to expand her business, so she could give up her day job. I had no idea who she was, but she impressed me by her gumption to reach out and make the request.

Her “Ask” was specific around her business model or lack of. She told me she wouldn't take more than the time it would take to have dinner and it was on her.

I was really impressed with her daring to reach out to someone who didn't know her. She did it in a way that showed she had taken to heart what I had posted on Social Media and had acted on it. It wasn't a generic, “I love what you're doing, and want to meet you” kind of comment. It was, “When you spoke about Point of Distinction in your post and said, ‘Don't be the best, be the only,’ I changed my marketing material and articles to reflect who I am and why I am the only one to consider in my field.”

She was paying attention.

Her email was short, sweet and to the point. She asked for what she wanted without beating around the bush, promised not to take too much of my time and, in only 4 sentences, illustrated she really was learning from me even from afar.

We had dinner. She came prepared and has since acted on the advice I gave her, not unilaterally, but doing it in her way that would work for her business. She also keeps in touch to let me know the movement and growth her business is enjoying.

I don't want someone to wax poetic with me in their “Ask”. I want to know why they want my time and attention, and what they will do with it. Time is everything. It's not renewable, it's not re-capturable. It's gone when it's gone. Make sure you honour yourself in relation to time. If you don't, you're squandering your most valuable resource. Why in the world would you allow someone else to waste it for you?

Taking this apart:

My Intention:

- a) To give her enough information in a short period of time that would pivot her and her business in a way that would be more successful than it currently was.
- b) To honour my boundaries and not give away more time than I could afford nor give the impression this would be ongoing. If it was, it would be a business arrangement.
- c) My “Ask” was for her to let me know what she incorporated from our conversation and what the results were. I wanted to see how it was helpful and why. This would help me gather data as to approach and level of success it brought which would impact me in my work.

If you're going to mentor someone, coach someone, or be an advisor, it's important that you get data on how helpful your input was for you to grow and shift in your work. It doesn't matter whether you're a coach or manager. Understanding how helpful you were will support your ongoing growth and for the others you're working with.

8 BRAIN DATES

Our brain doesn't remember what we hear. It remembers only what we see or imagine while we listen.

– Andrii Sedniev

The following day, after dinner with the budding entrepreneur, at the TED Women Conference, I was asked to take part in “Brain Dates”. The name itself intrigued me, so I wanted to know more about what their intention was in offering them. This was an interesting idea where people could book small chunks of time with some of us to pick our brains, hear our words of wisdom, and get some direction. This was where the two-minute concept really struck home with me. It wasn't the sessions as much as the matching process that illustrated how beneficial two minutes could be.

As a SupportED coach, I was inundated with requests for brain dates so really had to do triage to determine which ones I would accept and which I'd decline. There was only so much free time at my disposal around the edges of the conference and I needed time to attend the sessions, see the TEDsters I was working with, and just relax and replenish. I didn't consciously think of how I would make my choices but when I analysed it after the fact, it was clear why I chose some women to work with and declined others.

If I found their work fascinating, they had me at “Hello” and if it wasn't something I was interested in, I tended to put their request aside and go to the next one. If, however, they had a unique way of asking for my time, I would consider them. If I still had slots available once I did the triage, I would rethink the maybes.

Secondly, if they told me their life story in their request, and went on and on and on, I would tend to delete those and move on to the next. If the “Ask” was short, sweet and to the point and be something I could provide value for, then it was a no-brainer; I accepted. I had more requests than availability, but isn't that usually the case?

The first woman I met with shared everything about her life and career that she didn't like. I struggled to listen because nowhere in there was her “Ask”. It was, “Here's everything about my life. I'm not happy about most of it and if I do a dump of information, you're going to be able to wave a magic wand, fix it so I have to do little myself, and go on my merry way.” She lost me. She had about 20 minutes of my time and nowhere in there was she partnering with me to help me help her. After our session ended, I analysed why I chose her to begin with and, in doing that analysis, was able to give feedback to the organisation

as to possibly adding a clarification layer to the matching technology and ask questions if necessary to enable making better decisions.

The second woman I met with was the total opposite. She had me at “Hello” once she told me her name, where she worked and what she would like my help with.

To backtrack for a moment, when I arrived at the event, as we were waiting to register and receive our gift bags, one of the volunteers came over to me and voluntold me to help one of the conference partners, The Giving Keys. They gave me a necklace with the phrase, “Let Go”, and asked me to pass it along to a person who I believed would benefit from that reminder. The second woman I met with was the perfect person to give this to.

She was going for her Master’s Degree, mentoring young girls in grade school, and her day job was being a test pilot for the Navy. She loved all of what she was doing but the intensity of all three together was depleting her. She couldn’t keep up with all the demands on her time, so my focus was on helping her let go of something without feeling she was letting anyone down, herself included.

I asked her, “What do you have to let go of?” She hadn’t even considered that. She was looking at managing her time and commitments, not having to make choices. I passed on the necklace, which caused an emotional reaction. That conversation took a matter of minutes. The effect was pivotal and was exactly where I had to leave her; to live in the question and remember it for making decisions in the future. You can’t do everything you want to do. The best thing you could ever learn is making the choice of what to do and what to park either for later, or to pass on to someone else.

One question. Our conversation really didn’t need more time than that. Just because you have time allotted for a meeting, doesn’t mean you have to use it all. Often the most powerful conversations happen in the first few sentences. That extra time could then be used for contemplation, decision-making and action.

Unpacking this:

I believe that brief conversations can have the biggest impact. When I teach, I challenge those in the class to get rid of the fluff and, in a sentence or two, shine a light on what must be addressed. When I’m working with the TEDsters or those wanting to learn how to craft a talk that packs a punch, we start off with them telling me their story, which is often about an hour long. Then we chop it down to 30 minutes, then 15, then 5 and lastly 3 minutes. When they start with their story and share every minute detail, it’s because the

embellishments are important to them, not to the talk or the audience. Once they prune out the fluff that's when the through-line can be followed by anyone in the audience. We keep chopping it down to its essence and then build it back up. The other bonus in doing that is that the talk can embed itself in the audience's minds because they follow how the story was crafted as much as the story itself and it's harder to forget it at that point.

The same goes for a brain date, a request for mentoring or any occasion where you want to pick someone's brain or get advice. What are you really asking for? How have you got their attention, so they want to engage? Think of the last time you were approached by someone when all you wanted was either for them to get to the point or for you to be able to make a quick escape.

Whether or not you know it, every time you consult someone, ask for input, perspective or approval, you are, in effect, on a brain date.

My intentions:

- a) Understand how I make choices about how I spend my time and effort.
- b) To model a method of dialogue that can set a direction or open a door to possible and varied outcomes.
- c) Ask a question about something that isn't evident.
- d) To look at the broader picture, connect the dots and then take things apart to find solutions.
- e) She loved everything she did but was trying to do it all at once. Helping her see that, at least for now, she had to let go of something to create breathing space in her life, was the only option. In this case, she wasn't giving up her day job and, if she had to choose one of the other two commitments to let go of, the mentoring one was really the only option. Letting go of her mentoring commitment would immediately free up a lot of time and allow her to focus on completing her Master's Degree and have time to "play".

The key point of this wasn't the choice she made, rather it was making a choice at all as she was taking on too much. Sometimes it's because we don't know how to say "No". In this case, it was because she wanted to help young women craft a future they love. We discussed how she could continue to do that once she completed her Master's. She could also do the odd speaking engagement to that young audience and continue to set an example, just not on a regularly scheduled basis.

9 IT'S YOUR FAULT!

You never get a second chance to make a great first impression. Within a few seconds, with just a glance, people have judged your social and economic level, your level of education, and even your level of success. Within minutes, they've also decided your levels of intelligence, trustworthiness, competence, friendliness and confidence. Although these evaluations happen in an instant, they can last for years: first impressions are often indelible.

– Olivia Fox Cabane

I know, this is another elevator story, but it's an important one when it comes to opportunity. In this case I didn't know what the opportunity would be and just went with the conversation. Sometimes unintended consequences are in our favour.

I was in Chicago to work with some clients. First thing in the morning, when I arrived at work, I walked towards the elevator to go up to my client's office. It was a frigid, nasty, day with high winds and blowing snow. It was a day where we all wanted to just be home and not budge, but that wasn't to be. I walked towards the bank of elevators just as one door opened. There were two people in front of me who turned out to be the CEO's Executive Assistant and another tall man. I knew the CEO's EA but not the man who was bundled up against the cold.

She turned to me and exclaimed, "It's all your fault!" to which I responded, "My fault for...? What did I do now?" She answered, "You brought this horrible weather!" My response was, "People sometimes tell me I have a great deal of influence in their lives, but I've never been held responsible for the weather before." The man in the elevator then asked, "Why would she think you control the weather?"

Before I could answer, she said, "Because Donna is from Canada and she brings the cold with her." I smiled and said, "I hate to tell you, but the weather comes from here and goes east and for the record, I don't want to go home to this, so don't send it over!"

He looked puzzled, not realising we have this conversation every time I'm in town when the weather is nasty. We chatted all the way up to the 50th floor, I wished them a wonderful day with instructions to keep warm, got off the elevator and they continued up.

About an hour into the day, my client Robert, the CIO, told me we were going upstairs to the Executive Floor to meet the new Chief Risk Officer. As I observe my clients in all kinds of situations, this was nothing unusual, and up we went.

We walked into his office. His back was to us and when he turned around, I realised he was the man I was talking to in the elevator. This was his first day at the company. To Robert's surprise, he turned to me and asked, "So what trouble are you causing now?" This was an apt and interesting question for a Chief Risk Officer to ask and made Robert worry for a moment. I went with the joke and said, "All sorts of things but now that I know you're the CRO, I'm not answering and plead the 5th."

Robert, puzzled, listened to our banter and exclaimed, "He's been here for all of an hour. How in the world do you know each other? I know you talk to everyone, but this takes the cake!"

That was over 4 years ago and every time I meet the CRO, he reminds me of that first conversation. I was the first person he spoke to in the new position, other than who would be his new boss and the hiring panel, and it was such a bizarre conversation he would never forget it. We refer to it in all sorts of ways in our interactions but it's about connection more than anything else.

You never know who you will travel with in an elevator, walk by in a hallway, or bump into in the lobby of a building. That person could become a connection that will set you apart

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from everyone else. It takes a moment to decide whether to speak or stay silent. Staying silent will definitely not attract possibility but speaking might. Make it count even if it's a twist on talking about the weather.

Unpacking this for a moment:

I have met more people in an elevator, airplane, airport gate area or waiting room than I can count. I can also assume that you are in close proximity to people you don't know on a regular basis as well. How often do you take advantage of that to meet and engage with new people? How often don't you?

My intention:

- a) To find out more about people and what makes them tick so I understand humanity better.
- b) To see where my work can be of benefit, whether or not it leads to new work.
- c) To use our inside joke as a continuous starting point to ongoing conversation.
- d) To take advantage of a situation that won't recur. Opportunity or learning won't necessarily be an outcome of every interaction, but if I don't take advantage of them, they won't be.
- e) To be totally present to everything and everyone around me and see how I can engage.

10 NIPPED IN THE BUD

Every word has consequences. Every silence too.

– Jean-Paul Sartre

Occasionally we might find ourselves in a position where we are the ones to overhear something troubling. I had travelled by train to a meeting out of town, checked into my hotel and went to the restaurant for a quick bite before heading out to my meeting. I ordered, and then did what I often do, observed the others in the restaurant, the people walking down the street past the window, and just relaxed until my food came.

There was a couple sitting on the other side of the aisle deep in conversation. They had that look about them – this is our first meeting, so I want to impress – look. The man was also talking loud enough for me to hear his conversation. He was definitely trying to impress her. He was telling her all about the importance of his work, and how his input was very influential in international relations. She was lapping up everything he said. The problem with what he was sharing was that it wasn't for public consumption. It was a stance the Department of Justice held regarding Middle East relations.

How did I know that was what he was sharing and, from there, deduced where he worked? They were my clients at the time and the information he was sharing had not been released.

As chance would have it, his date excused herself to go to the washroom. I looked at him and asked, "First date?" to which he answered with a smile, "Yes. Can you tell?" I continued, "You work at the DOJ?" He looked at me as the smile was erased from his face. "How did you know?" he asked. I continued, "Because I work with the Minister and know exactly what you were referring to. I also know it's not in the public domain so now I believe you are in what is called a pickle. Your choice is to let the Minister's office know that there was a breach which you were responsible for by the time I call in later today."

The conversation ended as his date returned to her seat. I didn't know his name, nor did I ask for it. I could describe him if need be, but I had his assurance that he would address this right after lunch and held him to his word. He didn't violate confidentiality for the wrong reasons but did for personal gain which still wasn't acceptable. Secret information is secret, no ifs ands or buts. My integrity would have been compromised if I did nothing with this. They might have never known what I heard and might have had to deal with a sticky situation if it got out before it was ready to be shared, but I would have known.

Being on the receiving end of gossip or wrongful sharing of confidential information happens all the time. Whether listening to gossip in the break room, the elevator or in this case, a restaurant, and doing nothing to challenge it when you know you can, can ultimately implicate your reputation. My conversation with him was a little over a minute. I called him on what he was doing indirectly by asking him questions to validate where he was from and what he was doing there. I also invited him to fix something he created in a way that asked him to step up and do what was right. I also told him it was my duty and responsibility to deal with it if he didn't. I did what I could at the moment and yes; I checked in with the Minister's office and asked if they were informed regarding an information breach. He honoured his promise and there was nothing more for me to do.

In another case, I overheard something that could have dramatically impacted one of my clients. He was chosen to be an Ambassador overseas. How that worked was an individual was chosen by the Prime Minister to be an Ambassador. That person would be presented to the leader of the country they would be posted in. If that leader agreed to the Prime Minister's choice, then that individual would be confirmed and announced. In the meantime, the individual would undergo training to prepare him for the post. It was against policy to make an announcement before it was finalised and to tell anyone other than their immediate family that the possibility of the posting was even on the table.

There were, of course, employees of the organisation who would be involved in the machinations of the process and would be in the know. In this case, as I was helping him prepare for the role, I knew David was in the middle of the process. Walking by a staffer's office on the way to another client, I overheard a conversation she had on the phone where she was telling whoever it was on the other end of the line how her boss was being posted overseas. It was more of a gossiping stance of, "My boss is going to be an Ambassador and I will be supporting him in the field, so I'm going to be even more important" kind of framing. Her door was opened and obviously talking loud enough that others could hear who might be walking past her office. Luckily it was me and not someone else who might spread the story.

I called my other client and told him I'd be about 10 minutes late as I had to deal with a critical situation and walked straight to David's office. Thankfully, he was there and asked, "What's up?" I told him about the conversation I had overheard and who was having it and thought he would want to know so he could nip it in the bud before possibly losing his chance at the Ambassadorship. He motioned for me to close the door and sit down and immediately got on the phone. She must have answered as I heard him ask how she was and about a project she was leading and then, almost in passing said, "So you know I'm working on preparing for my role overseas." she responded, then he continued, "And you also know that if this gets out into the public, I will lose that opportunity." She must

have paused at that point. He went on, “And as you are talking about it to others, losing the Ambassadorship could be a distinct possibility, so how are you going to nip this in the bud and make sure whoever you mentioned this to will not spread the word? And, I want to know who you mentioned this to, so I add my voice to that message. If for any reason that opportunity is withdrawn, it’s on you! Understood?”

Obviously, as he was posted overseas, it was nipped in the bud, but even harmless gossip has huge consequences. I happened to be in the right place at the right time, however if I had hesitated to let him know, it could have spread beyond the point of fixing it.

Nipping situations like this in the bud is about stopping things as soon as you can for them not to blow up in your face or potentially have broader implications. What might stop you from speaking out? Rather than looking at whether or not to speak out, consider how you can speak to the issue in a way that can bring increased self-awareness to an individual, and enable you to speak from a position of professional integrity. The only time rumours thrive is when they’re fed or not challenged. Once a rumour is released and repeated, it’s almost impossible to know if there is any truth to it. It takes a couple of minutes to start a rumour or gossip and the same to quash it.

Unpacking this for a moment

My intentions:

- a) To speak up to issues I witness.
- b) Illustrate to someone that they have no idea how their words and actions might impact others, even on a global scale as in this case, and to do that in a matter of minutes.
- c) To not avoid the sticky conversations.
- d) To support my clients in every way possible.
- e) To protect the trail of communication as to not reveal confidential information.
- f) To eliminate delay in all its forms and be willing and ready to engage if and when necessary.
- g) In the second case, it wasn’t up to me to speak with her and let her know what she was doing could have negative consequences. If I did that, I would in effect be sharing that I knew about the posting and revealing a confidence. My role was to support him, not act on behalf of him. By David calling her and not letting on how he knew who revealed the information to him, he was calling her out.

11 DON'T SNOOP

If you leave assumptions lying around unchallenged and uncorrected, it isn't long before they morph into facts.

– Kiran Manral

Sometimes we find ourselves in a situation where something occurs that was totally unexpected, and, because of it, the learning is profound and unforgettable. On a particularly busy day, I found myself running with clients from meeting to meeting and had little if no time to check my emails. I would never open a client email in a crowded environment to protect confidentiality, but some emails from website inquiries or colleagues I can review. This day, just after lunch, I was in a packed elevator scanning whatever emails I could, when an interesting situation presented itself.

I happened to open an email from someone I worked with from Austin, Texas who happened to have the same name as our current Prime Minister. Someone from one of my client's team was in the elevator next to me, looked over at what I was reading and, at the top of his lungs, stated, "You have an email from the Prime Minister!"

I didn't correct him, but answered, "John, don't read my BlackBerry."

At this point everyone in the elevator was fixated on this conversation. I was well known in the department as I had worked with most of the Executive Team individually and collectively so got to know many of the employees there. I also noticed that no one was getting off the elevator on their chosen floors. I knew this could get out of hand so had to deal with his misconception immediately.

He replied, "Why would he be writing you?" It really was none of his business, but I thought I'd run with this for a moment to see what assumptions he was making, and answered, "He's writing about a blog we co-author."

He thought he had me on that one and asked, "You're trying to tell me that you write a blog with the Prime Minister?!?"

I looked at him intently and answered, "No, John. I never said he was the Prime Minister. He happens to be a colleague who lives in Texas with the same name and **don't read my BlackBerry!**"

I told him that if he started a rumour saying I was working with the Prime Minister, I would be labelled as having allegiance to one party and not a-political as I have to be in my work. Secondly, the press isn't always kind to politicians and it could have meant a whole lot of grief for our Prime Minister. The interesting thing was, everyone in the elevator was now a part of the conversation. I had a captive audience. They all wanted to know if someone important was in their midst, and I wanted them to understand that there are consequences to jumping to conclusions. If they had left the elevator with the story that "Donna coaches the Prime Minister" it would have started something that could have spread like wild-fire. I had their attention and kept it until I let them collectively off the hook by telling them the truth. When I told John that he might have started something that many would have been accountable for, he turned green.

Unpacking this:

This entire exchange unfolded in a couple of minutes, but what really happened was an unforgettable learning experience. Most of us don't have the time to process situations the way I'm unpacking it, but the more we look at why and how things unfold, the easier it is in future to act immediately.

Every situation carries potential consequences and outcomes.

In this case, I (obviously) knew he was snooping, but what about cases such as in the previous chapter, where you don't know you're being overheard? You have people's attention even when it's not intentional. What you do with it is key and you have moments to address it. Situations like this can't be recalled nor can the stories that are seeded through this kind of interaction be stopped or changed.

The best response isn't a statement to prove yourself right or wrong. It's a question that creates doubt in someone else's mind. Only when one second guesses themselves do they attempt to put the brakes on.

12 SHOCKING INTO AWARENESS

The future is not a result of choices among alternative paths offered by the present, but a place that is created – created first in the mind and will, created next in activity. The future is not something we are going to, but one we are creating. The paths are not to be found, but made, and the activity of making them, changes both the maker and the destination.

– John Schaar

Have you ever worked on an elevator speech, a two minute or less blurb about what you do, how you do it and why you're so amazing at it? (AKA your sales pitch). Picture having that same amount of time to do an entire session with a client or have the attention of a decision-maker. I'm not kidding. Oftentimes that's about all the time I have with a client in a secure elevator or waiting for a car to whisk us away. Sometimes we're lucky enough to be in the car without other staff and can actually expand a session to 10 minutes! But even then, we're usually focused on the meeting that will happen, so all conversation is around that, not the client. I, on the other hand, have to absorb everything from time lines, dynamics, conversations, energy levels, engagement, level of responsibility, global or financial implications, mandate, hierarchy, volume of memos, reading material, emails and correspondence, processing time, and staff support to name a few areas of focus. This is my clients' worlds. It defines the term intensely complex.

Picture the TV show *West Wing* in all its wonderful chaos. Press releases are flying, TV's are going in every office, communications specialists, political advisors, high-level government officials, world leaders, and corporate leaders are running in and out of offices and meetings, and mobile phones are buzzing constantly. That is the norm on a good day when all isn't going to hell in a handbasket. Add a crisis like a war, quake, bombing, plunge in the value of the dollar, a recall, or a hostile takeover bid, and then it really gets busy. Truthfully, that's become the norm. I can't remember a day in the not so recent past when there wasn't a natural disaster, threat of a terrorist activity, war-related or even bottom-line challenge. To some people, a fluctuation in the value of the dollar can be as devastating in their world and that of their shareholders as an earthquake is to others. Ramifications are different, but a client's world is their reality, and it's not for me to rate crises on a scale of 1 to 10. I need to help them get to wherever they want to and have to get to by their definitions.

Turning it around for a moment, the luxury of having hours to come to a decision has gone by the wayside and the best thing I can teach the people I work with is to maximise every minute. I have to get to a key dynamic of a situation in seconds, articulate what I

need to get across in as clear a manner as possible, so my clients get it instantly; they can brainstorm quickly, and integrate whatever changes are necessary now, not later. Later for most of my clients isn't an option.

Some of the people I work with have their own elevators. They're secure, soundproof, guarded, and very private. One day, when I was in a government department where I work with all senior leadership, I couldn't seem to get out of the elevator. Every time I got in to go to another floor to see a client, another client would get in and say "OH! Great! You're here! I need a few minutes to share something with you." I tried to get off, and another client got on telling me much the same thing. I went into the boss's office a bit later and said, "I need to borrow your elevator." He looked at me and laughed. I told him I wouldn't work with my clients unless it's private and confidential and I could have spent an hour in the elevator because so many wanted me for "a minute". I continued, "As I don't have my own office, the least you could do is give me your elevator." He laughed and told me I was very welcome to use it when he was away, but for the time being, he would give me a private office to work in.

When I was asked to speak at a conference about my laser work, I illustrated to the audience what my intentions were for my feedback sessions and invited them to test it for themselves. I didn't let the participants know how much time they'd have. After two minutes I had the runners call "time". There was a collective uproar with people complaining that they hadn't even got started. My response? "Welcome to my world where sessions can often be only two minutes. If I don't cut to the chase in as short, sweet, to the point manner in moments, it's lost, and a lot of time will go by before I can bring it up again. Without immediacy, a great deal of the effectiveness of the interaction would be lost."

Also consider that the key question I might ask might seem to have no relevance to my client at that moment. It's not unusual for me to bring up something that had happened days before that show trends. By asking them a question that might shock them into awareness, I can bring to the fore there might be a pattern or trend of behaviour at play that might not be serving them. Shocking them into awareness is not asking a question that judges, rather it's asking a question that is so truthful and so illustrative, it shocks them into the realisation they are behaving in a certain way that might get them into trouble. It's an 'aha!' moment and one that usually creates breakthrough. This happens in seconds not hours, depending on how and when that question is posed.

This is a way of intervening that lives in the instant, not even the moment. Nuances and subtleties are what makes this style of interaction so powerful that people get it and fast. There is no time to craft the perfect question or response. You might only have time for one question or comment relevant to that moment in time. And even in these time constraints,

use of silence can be just as powerful as that perfect statement. It's giving the recipient the space to process, think and share, even within a two-minute window. For you, it can be the most powerful tool there is with which to move them. Open space, open thought, a moment to let the world in, can be the biggest gift you can give yourself as it creates movement in a blink, even within tight time constraints.

The people I work with know the most important skill they must know is how to learn and be open to what they haven't considered or didn't know. I look for is how quickly they integrate their learning into the context of their worlds.

Shocking people into awareness can be as simple as asking a question such as, "Is that an assumption or fact?" and asking them to validate a stance. Shocking people into awareness can shine a light on something that hid in the shadows before, however after it's brought into the light was an important point or idea to consider. I need to tell my clients something unexpected, so they engage. If you're anyone who needs to stand out, the two-minute rule is absolute.



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13 PERFECT WHEN IT CLEARLY ISN'T

People tell me they want to create the future or complete the past, both of which are fulltime jobs. I suggest engaging in the present which replaces the past and is the future.

– Thomas Leonard

I was working with a client who was a Director in a global organisation. We had just started working together about 2 weeks prior to that day. Kevin's boss was travelling for an international meeting and it was quiet in the office. We were thrilled that we'd have time and space to take a deep dive into our work together when a request came through from the office of the new President for an update on a hot issue. Kevin only had a small amount of information on this file as his boss hadn't shared the latest updates before she left town.

He panicked. "What am I going to tell the new President? I haven't even met him yet! This is not the best way for me to meet him! What should I do?"

I don't give advice to clients, but I do help them figure it out for themselves. In this case I had to (what I call) shock him into awareness and help him stop the overriding fear that was taking over. I asked, "What is so perfect about this when it clearly isn't?"

He looked at me in shock and asked, "Are you out of your mind? What do you mean what is perfect about this? **Nothing** is perfect about this!"

I waited a few seconds before replying to help him calm down a bit, and then replied, "I know you don't see it as perfect right now. Your reaction is telling me that, but think for a moment, what is perfect about this, even though it clearly isn't? Take a moment and look at all facets of what's occurring."

He paused and quietly said, "Well, I get to meet the President and that is one thing as, at my level, it's not a regular occurrence." I nodded and encouraged him to keep on going. "I could tell him what I *do* know, what my opinions are, and, for the rest, tell him I would get back to him as soon as I could. That would give me two face-to-face meetings with him."

He was on a roll.

I then prompted him to come up with a few other points of view but what I was really looking for was a change in his demeanour. It was evident. He had calmed down, had stopped screaming at me and was looking for opportunities where he only saw challenges

before. Even more important was posing a question that created a paradigm shift for him, one he would most probably never forget.

And he didn't forget that day. As a matter of fact, he turned the tables on his new boss a couple of months later.

We were coming from a meeting and getting off the elevator. When the doors opened, his new boss was standing there waiting to get on. I was working with her as well, so knew where she was going, but Kevin didn't. He asked her how her day was going, and her answer was, "I'm going upstairs to meet my new boss. I hear he's a bit difficult, so this should be interesting."

Kevin looked at her and asked, "What is so perfect about that when it clearly isn't?" Her response was priceless; almost the same as his was a couple of months earlier. He continued, "Think about it for a moment. What opportunity does this present?" She looked at him, then me, grinned and said, "This must be a Donna thing." Then she listed off three benefits/opportunities that she hadn't thought of before he asked that question. I had a lot to discuss with her later but my intention here was to let them have that conversation between them.

Think about this for a moment. It took one sentence to shift their thinking and view of something that originally made them panic; less than a minute, but how powerful can that kind of intervention be?

The questions you ask yourself every day will be the best teacher you will ever have. What are the questions you need to ask yourself? Figure that out and ask them often.

14 WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST “MINKHOLE”?

People don't have time to do things right, but they do have time to do them over.

– Donna Karlin

Before I give you an example of a Minkhole, let me paint a picture for you of what a Minkhole really is. Picture a rathole. It's nasty, dark, scary and could be dangerous. They're easy to ignore or recognise because of how horrible they are. If you do get stuck in one, you know you'll do everything you can to get out of it. You don't want to be there under any circumstances.

On the other hand, Minkholes are deliciously soft and enticing when you first feel enveloped in the fur. It's the same rathole but disguised in mink. It's just as dangerous – even more so – because they're so seductive. They're hard to identify when we first encounter them and, because they're so enticing, we burrow ourselves in even deeper before we try to get out. You finally recognise you are in big trouble however, and it won't be so easy to dig yourself out. When I use the term Minkhole with my clients, they know I'm asking them to reflect on when and where they dug themselves in deep and how they're going to dig themselves out. It only takes a minute to burrow into a Minkhole, another to realise what happened, and a lot longer to figure your way out.

“I don't have to deal with this”, can be one of our biggest Minkholes. Not taking a moment to address something, can make it blow up in our faces. If we rationalise what we did or did not do, that can be a Minkhole in itself. Using the term Minkhole can be a way of addressing a situation as well.

A couple of cases in point:

I was working in an international organisation with the President, his Chief of Staff and many of his Vice Presidents, but not all of them. There was one Vice President Dan, who habitually chewed staff out, screamed and yelled at people and was the epitome of a bully. The current President was getting ready to retire so didn't deal with his VP's behaviour as quickly or thoroughly as he should have. It was towards the end of the day and I was in the Chief of Staff's office, just next to the President's. His Corporate Secretary was in there

and we were discussing something that had happened that afternoon. We watched the VP approaching, wondering what he would be unhappy about that time. He was marching towards Susan’s office with what looked like steam coming out of his ears. Sure enough, he barged right in, not caring we were deep in discussion and started yelling. He then looked at me and asked, “And just what are you looking at?” I answered, “Not much. I was thinking of what your biggest Minkhole was.” Two things happened just then. That one question stopped him in his tracks because he had no idea what a Minkhole was. And secondly, I knew the President had overheard our conversation because I heard muffled laughter coming from his office. The other two women just watched what unfolded instead of answering his screaming demands.

Dan looked at me and demanded to know what a Minkhole was. I answered, “It’s a fur-lined rathole. It might feel really good when you burrow in, but you just keep digging yourself in deeper. Do you know what your biggest Minkhole is?” and I turned and walked away.

The President called me into his office and asked, “Did I really hear you tell Dan about Minkholes?” Anyone I worked with knew about the concept. The President just couldn’t contain himself because he couldn’t believe I was brave enough to bring that up with Dan.

At that point, I got ready to leave for the day, picked up my briefcase, put on my coat and headed to the elevator. Just before the doors closed, Dan walked in and started giving me a hard time on another subject. He was bellowing. I punched the number of the next floor on the way down; the elevator opened, and I started to walk off. He wasn’t finished with me, held the door open, and exclaimed, “You can’t do that! You can’t just get off the elevator!” I turned back and answered, “Of course I can. It works like this. You push a button and the elevator door opens and you can leave. Simple.”

He yelled, “I am not finished!” to which I answered, “As far as I’m concerned it’s a non-starter. I won’t subject myself to this kind of behaviour. I don’t work with you. I don’t work for you. And even if I did, I would still get off the elevator.” I turned and walked away, waited for the doors to close and pressed the button for the next elevator car.

The following day when I walked onto the floor and heard yelling, he saw me and said, “Yes, I know. You’re going to ask me what my biggest Minkhole is.” I turned it around and asked him what it was, and he said, “You’re going to say my communication style,” to which I answered, I asked you what you thought it was, not what you believed I thought. The question is, how are you going to dig yourself out without digging in even deeper?” and walked away. I gave him food for thought.

This was a vehicle for me to tell him I wasn't going to buy into his behaviour in any way, nor would anyone else who worked with him. This was drawing the line in the sand.

It wasn't a long, drawn-out conversation. It was short, sweet and very to the point. It was also the starting point for him to look at his behaviour and do something about it. Which, actually, he did!

CONCLUSION

My dear, here we must run as fast as we can, just to stay in place. And if you wish to go anywhere, you must run twice as fast as that.

– Lewis Carroll

Stop the world, I want to get on. If it's spinning out of control, you're playing catch-up rather than setting a course forward. These snippets in time – the two-minute window – is a way to slow things down to the speed of conscious thought or choice. In running, we're missing so much, but if we stop even for a moment to see something, say something, observe something, or integrate something, it can create a paradigm shift that is so powerful we can discover a new path or door that opens to incredible possibility.

Dancing in real time with the current pace the world seems to be going, enables us to interact with it rather than always play catch-up or put something off for one day. Life takes place in the present. Opportunities happen when we least expect them to appear. Believe enough in yourself to embrace those opportunities and go with them.

To evolve, the place to start is to increase your awareness; not just your level of alertness or perceptiveness, but rather your awareness. Awareness occurs as a result of an increased ability to feel, acknowledge how you respond intellectually, recognise your emotions and emotional reactions, and a broad perspective of you, life and where you fit within it.

When you are aware, more things make sense because you have a higher perspective of life and can see people, events and problems from all angles, not just from the "me" angle. You will notice things as they occur, not afterwards when you can't do anything with them. You'll react less and respond more. You'll waste less time on things that don't matter because you'll have a clearer picture of where you've been and have developed a greater sense of what's possible. This perspective lets you choose where you want to go next.

The beautiful part of dancing in real time with whatever unfolds is how you will ultimately be able to handle paradoxes that would discombobulate and upset most people and instead, do something powerful with them.

Don't look for leaders, be aware of them when they present themselves. They might not be corporate or political leaders. They might be the wise old man or woman on the corner who, for whatever reason of their own, decides we're worthy enough to be the recipients of their stories, words of wisdom and insights, hoping we'll pay attention – or not. Perhaps

they see in us what we don't yet see and seek to inspire us through a narrative or anecdote from their past that we can relate to and draw a parallel to. Whatever reason, leaders are everywhere, in some realm of life. Are you paying attention?

To make the best use of that two-minute window, consider the following:

- If you do one thing every day, take a couple of minutes to figure out what you have to let go of to free up space for opportunities. Too many opportunities are missed because they're put on the back burner for when you have time. Too many opportunities are missed because you're so bogged down you didn't see them in the first place. Honour yourself in relation to time.
- Get out of your immediate realm. See what other people are doing and living. Yes, hone your skills by being a continuous learner but check in with those you impact by the work you do. That's the best way to know what shifts you need to make to serve them better and, in turn, you'll be better for it. That's the road to mastery.
- Speak to someone you've never spoken to before – then reflect on the experience and learning.
- Say "Hello". Say, "Thank you".
- Do what really matters. Don't do what doesn't. In other words, don't just do something because it's in front of you. Take a moment to make sure you need to engage with it at all.
- Simplify. Just because life might be complex, it doesn't mean it has to be overly complicated. Complicated takes more time. If you feel something is complicated, take it apart and look at all its components. You might not be able to address them all in one fell swoop, but you'll certainly be able to deal with something, even in two minutes.
- Give the gift of presence. If you're with someone, be with them even if it's a brief encounter. You don't have to spend a lot of time with someone to make an impression.
- Take risks. Seize the moment. Playing it safe isn't playing at all. And lastly,
- Eliminate delay in all its forms because delay makes opportunities disappear.

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