

THE REFLECTION GUIDE TO

BETTER CONVERSATIONS



COACHING OURSELVES AND EACH OTHER
TO BE MORE CREDIBLE, CARING, AND CONNECTED

I | INTRODUCTION

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*The Reflection Guide to Better Conversations: Coaching Ourselves
and Each Other to Be More Credible, Caring, and Connected*

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Part 1



INTRODUCTION AND GETTING STARTED

*We are living through a
communication crisis.*

*Effective communication is an
essential skill for a fulfilled life.*

*Communication is central to
school improvement.*

INTRODUCTION



Practicing effective communication is clearly one of the first and best things we can do as professionals to improve our relationships and school culture, which in turn will make it far more likely that every student in every class will be receiving the very best instruction every day. The book, *Better Conversations: Coaching Ourselves and Each Other To Be More Credible, Caring, and Connected*, has distilled what is generally recognized and known to be the best, immediately useful, and most effective ideas of good communication to date. However, knowing about the best ideas in communication is of little help if we don't have a practical plan in place to begin to translate these ideas into daily practice. This book will help you solidify in your mind the beliefs and habits of Better Conversations and then guide you as you begin to coach yourself individually or with a team toward mastery of these Better Conversation Habits.

“We have found that the single factor common to every successful change initiative is that relationships improve. If relationships improve, things get better. If they remain the same or get worse, ground is lost. Thus leaders must be consummate relationship builders with diverse people and groups—especially with people different than themselves.”



MICHAEL FULLAN

Leading in a Culture of Change

Never before has it been so easy for us to coach ourselves on our communication skills. Anyone with a smartphone or tablet can push the red button, record a conversation (when their conversation partner is agreeable), and see how effectively they listen, build emotional connections, give positive feedback, and so forth. The little computer in our pocket helps us clearly see our current reality, set goals, and monitor our progress toward those goals. With a little effort, we can quickly, permanently, and dramatically improve our relationships with others.

We have found that we can start to have better conversations by following a three-step cycle for improvement: identify, learn, and improve. In the following pages, you'll be guided through how to use the Improvement Cycle and set goals to dramatically change your communication practice for the better.

This companion guide to Better Conversations is divided into two sections. First, you'll think about what you believe about communication and learn about the six Better Conversations Beliefs. In the second section of the book, you'll review the 10 Habits of Better Conversations and begin coaching yourself as you practice to gain mastery of these habits.

Let's begin by asking: Where are you now? Where do you want to be?

To begin the process of learning about how you communicate now and how you want to communicate, complete the Communication Profile included here to take stock of your communication skills. Consider sharing the one-column survey with your closest friends, colleagues, and family members and ask them to fill out the form anonymously. Keep these forms nearby as you work through the Better Conversations Habits. You may want to change your assessment of where you are as you move through this book.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Communication Profile



WHERE I AM RIGHT NOW

WHERE I WANT TO BE

UNTRUE VERY TRUE

○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I listen effectively.

UNTRUE VERY TRUE

○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

UNTRUE VERY TRUE

○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I build emotional connections.

UNTRUE VERY TRUE

○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

UNTRUE VERY TRUE

○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I ask questions effectively.

UNTRUE VERY TRUE

○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

UNTRUE VERY TRUE

○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

People trust me.

UNTRUE VERY TRUE

○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

UNTRUE VERY TRUE

○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I praise others effectively.

UNTRUE VERY TRUE

○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

UNTRUE VERY TRUE

○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I control my emotions effectively.

UNTRUE VERY TRUE

○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

UNTRUE VERY TRUE

○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I treat others as equals.

UNTRUE VERY TRUE

○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

UNTRUE VERY TRUE

○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

My conversations are usually good for me and my partner.

UNTRUE VERY TRUE

○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

UNTRUE VERY TRUE

○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I frequently find common ground with other people.

UNTRUE VERY TRUE

○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

UNTRUE VERY TRUE

○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I am fully present in all conversations.

UNTRUE VERY TRUE

○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

UNTRUE VERY TRUE

○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I successfully redirect destructive conversations.

UNTRUE VERY TRUE

○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

UNTRUE VERY TRUE

○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I collaborate effectively with others.

UNTRUE VERY TRUE

○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○—○

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

PEER REVIEW

Communication Profile



Please record your personal opinion of how true or untrue the following statements are with respect to the subject of this survey. Effective communication is an essential part of a successful, fulfilling life, and by giving your honest opinion, you can help the subject of this survey make important improvements.

UNTRUE ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 7 ○ 8 ○ 9 ○ 10 VERY TRUE	Listens effectively.
UNTRUE ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 7 ○ 8 ○ 9 ○ 10 VERY TRUE	Builds emotional connections.
UNTRUE ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 7 ○ 8 ○ 9 ○ 10 VERY TRUE	Asks questions effectively.
UNTRUE ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 7 ○ 8 ○ 9 ○ 10 VERY TRUE	Is trusted by people.
UNTRUE ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 7 ○ 8 ○ 9 ○ 10 VERY TRUE	Praises others effectively.
UNTRUE ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 7 ○ 8 ○ 9 ○ 10 VERY TRUE	Controls emotions effectively.
UNTRUE ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 7 ○ 8 ○ 9 ○ 10 VERY TRUE	Treats others as equals.
UNTRUE ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 7 ○ 8 ○ 9 ○ 10 VERY TRUE	Engages in conversations that are usually good for everyone involved.
UNTRUE ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 7 ○ 8 ○ 9 ○ 10 VERY TRUE	Frequently finds common ground with other people.
UNTRUE ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 7 ○ 8 ○ 9 ○ 10 VERY TRUE	Is fully present in all conversations.
UNTRUE ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 7 ○ 8 ○ 9 ○ 10 VERY TRUE	Successfully redirects destructive conversations.
UNTRUE ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 7 ○ 8 ○ 9 ○ 10 VERY TRUE	Collaborates effectively with others.

Goals

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As you begin to consider the things you want to change and start thinking about setting goals that can help you get to where you want to be, you'll need to understand more about how to set effective goals.

We have found that effective goals have five characteristics. Each of the characteristics is described below.

PEERS GOALS

- » Powerful
- » Easy
- » Emotionally Compelling
- » Reachable
- » Specific and Measurable

POWERFUL

If we are going to work hard to achieve a goal, we need to be sure the goal we're striving to hit is worth the effort. A powerful goal is one that will dramatically improve our lives, the lives of the people with whom we interact, and have a long-term positive impact.

EASY

Powerful goals that are difficult or impossible to implement are not as helpful as powerful goals that are easy to implement. Difficult-to-implement goals, no matter how powerful, often end up on the scrap heap of unrealized good intentions. In *Influencer: The Power to Change Anything* (2008), Patterson and his colleagues explain why easy and powerful goals are so important, "When it comes to altering behavior, you need to help others answer only two questions. First: Is it worth it? And second, Can they do this thing? Consequently, when trying to change behaviors, these are the only two questions that matter."

EMOTIONALLY COMPELLING

In their book *Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard* (2010), Heath and Heath suggest that effective goals need to be more than SMART; they need to compel people to action by moving them emotionally. According to the authors, effective goals "provide a destination postcard—a vivid picture from the near-term future that shows what could be possible" (p. 76).

REACHABLE

Achieving a goal builds confidence, efficacy, and hope. When I reach a goal, I'm more confident that I can reach other goals. However, not hitting a goal can have the opposite effect. Unachieved goals decrease my confidence, efficacy, and hope. Shane Lopez, a researcher at the University of Kansas and The Gallup Organization, has been described as the world's leading expert on hope. In *Making Hope Happen: Create the Future You Want for Yourself and Others* (2013), Lopez writes that hope requires three elements. First, hope requires a goal that sets out an idea of "where we want to go, what we want to accomplish, who we want to be" (p. 24). Second, to feel hope, we need agency, our "perceived ability to shape our lives day to day ... [our knowledge that] ... we can make things happen" (p. 25). Finally, hope requires pathways, "plans that carry us forward" (p. 25).

SPECIFIC AND MEASURABLE

Finally, a reachable goal also has to be one that people will know they have reached. That is, as SMART goals have shown for years, the goal has to be specific and measurable. For example, being a better listener is not an effective goal, but reducing interruptions to no more than one each 15 minutes is clear.

SHANE LOPEZ'S ELEMENTS OF HOPE: GOALS, AGENCY, PATHWAY

A goal that fosters hope is a goal that has a reasonable chance of being achieved because (a) we believe we can achieve it (agency) and (b) it includes a strategy or strategies that can help us achieve it (pathways).

Coaching Yourself to a Better Conversation

The second part of this book is where you will begin to learn and practice the Better Conversations Habits. At the end of each section, there are reflection forms to use as you watch your video and begin setting goals. You'll use the Looking Back forms to review previous conversations and clarify your current communication habits. Then, you'll use the Looking At forms to begin to gauge where you are now. Finally, you'll use the Looking Ahead forms to help you set specific goals for future conversations.

You can set a goal and begin to use the Improvement Cycle to coach yourself by video recording an important conversation (it could be a conversation at home, work, in the community, or somewhere else) and then watching the recording with the Communication Profile form nearby to focus your attention on various aspects of your interaction. Often, it is extremely easy to identify a goal after watching

only a few minutes of video; at other times the form is essential to help us clarify where we want to improve.

No communication habit is guaranteed to work as described, and often habits need to be modified or rebooted to work for particular individuals. Sometimes by watching yourself on video and implementing a habit as described in the book, you can quickly meet your goal. At other times you need to modify or change your approach until you achieve what you set out to accomplish. Once a goal has been met, you can set another goal and keep having better and better conversations.

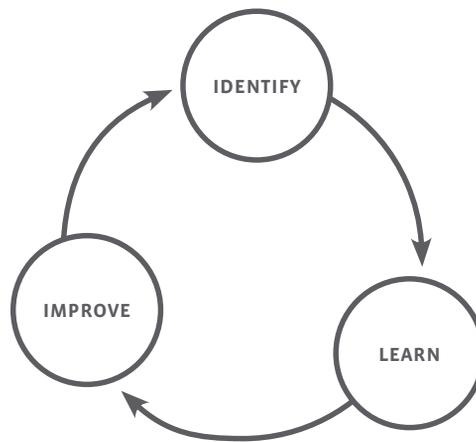
“Before you begin a thing, remind yourself that difficulties and delays quite impossible to foresee are ahead. If you could see them clearly, naturally you would do a great deal to get rid of them but you can’t. You can only see one thing clearly and that is your goal. Form a mental vision of that and cling to it through thick and thin.”

//////////

KATHLEEN NORRIS

Coaching

THE IMPROVEMENT CYCLE



IDENTIFY (A)

Use a smartphone or tablet to record a conversation.

If you are going to try to get better you need to understand your current reality. Put another way, if you are going somewhere, you need to know where you are starting. The easiest way to get a clear picture of reality when it comes to understanding how you communicate is by recording yourself talking.

Start by video recording yourself communicating because if you are like most other people, you have a very poor understanding of what it looks like when you interact with others. In fact, just seeing yourself in conversation can be a huge catalyst for change. If we don't use video to see what we are doing when we interact, there is a real danger we will waste our time by not focusing on the most important area for improvement.

IDENTIFY (B)

Analyze the video using a reflection form.

After video recording a conversation, you need to analyze it. You might want to look carefully at how you listen, ask questions, build connections, or some other habit. To improve in any particular area, look at your current reality with focused attention.

To assist with your analysis of your video, reflection forms are included at the end of each of the 10 Habits chapters. The forms are tools you can use to look at your video with focused attention to see what you otherwise might not have seen.

IDENTIFY (C)

Identify a goal.

To bring focus to your coaching, you need to identify a goal. Goals focus attention, they provide a destination to strive for, and they help us identify when have we arrived at our destination.

LEARN

Learn the applicable Better Conversations Habit.

After you've decided on a goal, you'll need to consider which of the 10 Better Conversations Habits to learn in order to help you achieve your goal and then set about learning that habit inside out. If you determine that you would like to be a better listener, study the chapter on Habit 2, Listen. You'll learn effective strategies that will help you to listen well. You might create your own checklists to review and commit to memory to help you as you move forward.

IMPROVE

Monitor progress toward your goal.

The Improve part of the Improvement Cycle is where you tweak a goal, reconsider the goal, possibly create an entirely new goal, and begin the cycle of monitoring your progress toward your goal all over again until you gain mastery. For example, an instructional coach who wants to have better conversations might video record herself during coaching sessions and determine that she needs to be more dialogical. She might set the goal that her collaborating teachers will do at least 50% of the thinking during coaching conversations, and then use the dialogue strategies to do less telling and more collaborative reflection. Then, she can continue to video record her coaching conversations and use the reflection forms to identify what she is doing well and where she needs to improve as she strive to become more dialogical.

After you've set a goal, and you're gathering data by video recording and analyzing your conversations with the help of the reflection forms, you may realize your first attempts won't always hit the target. This is where you make adjustments as you learn from your video. Perhaps you realize you need to change your goal because you discover a more foundational challenge than you had first

anticipated. For example, you may think you don't listen well, but you realize you aren't listening well because you've not mastered a more foundational habit such as building emotional connections or being nonjudgmental.

There are as many variations here as there are people. This will be unique to you, and it may not look exactly the same twice.

How Should I Use This Book?

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“We have never wanted to be alone. But today, we are alone. We are more fragmented and isolated from one another than ever before. Archbishop Desmond Tutu describes it as ‘a radical brokenness in all of existence.’”

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MARGARET WHEATLEY

Turning to One Another

As you work through *The Reflection Guide to Better Conversations*, you may use it in different ways. If you find yourself in a Better Conversations Workshop, this book will stand in the place of slides. Perhaps you are reading *Better Conversations: Coaching Ourselves and Each Other to Be More Credible, Caring, and Connected*, and you wish to work through the content and practice it on a deeper level by beginning to coach yourself. You might be in a book study group comprised of peers and friends and use this book to guide you as you practice coaching one another. Similarly, teams of professionals may use it to coach themselves as they implement the ideas found in *Better Conversations*. And, of course, instructional coaches may work through the book and use the tools to assist them as they come alongside instructors and guide them through the coaching process.

