

# Conversations to help people work safely

Suzette Woodward

October 2017

# Contents

How did we get here and what are we trying to achieve?

Conversations - helping people talk to each other

Engaging staff to help them work safely

What helps and what gets in the way

What you could do differently tomorrow

## A bit about words...

- Erik Hollnagel has got us thinking about our language...
- We like his assertion that we move away from talking about 'safety' to talking about 'working safely'



# People ..

- Adapt and adjust to the conditions of work
- Identify and overcome the flaws in the system
- Change their performance to cope with actual demands
- Interpret policies and procedures to the situation they face

# Working Safely [Definition]

‘how people are able to adjust what they do to match the conditions of work, how they learn to identify and overcome the flaws in the system, how they learn to recognise the actual demands and adjust their performance accordingly and how they interpret and apply procedures to match the conditions’

Ensuring that the number of  
intended and acceptable outcomes  
*is as high as possible*

*(in other words everyday activities)*

# We have seen...

- Some things have changed over the last 20 years but...
- The issue of 'Safety' is being treated as a problem that can be fixed by a set of tasks or interventions rather than a 'way of working safely'
- People and problems are disconnected by vertical systems, vertical programmes and projects
- People are confused with the endless different 'catchy' initiatives which are generated from the top down and within organisations
- Behaviours that help us work safely are often ignored

# We believe...

- Helping people work safely and build a safety culture that can grow and flourish requires a fundamental change in mind-set
- Creating a safer system is all about people, relationships and interactions
- These are absolutely dependent upon 'good' conversations



Our ability to communicate in healthy, productive ways has been eroded by the complexity of the way in which we work and our own exhaustion

People are polarised, overwhelmed, lonely and isolated

# People pay the price of failed communication

The inability to speak up

The inability to listen

The failure to respond

Sorrel King – Mother of Josie King  
who died in Johns Hopkins Hospital  
Baltimore (US)

*“Slow down and take your eyes off the  
computer.*

*Look at the patient in the bed and listen.*

*Listen to that mother who is saying something is  
wrong”*

*“I’m scared, I’m exhausted, and I hate being a doctor.*

*Sat on the kitchen floor of our flat, tears poured  
down my face as my partner looked on, stunned and  
worried.*

*My third day on the wards was over, and I never  
wanted to go back”*

- I expected to be thrown in at the deep end,  
but I expected to be supported
- I expected a well-oiled team around me,  
keeping an eye on me, never leaving me  
feeling alone

- At the end of my shift I did a quick walk round the ward and that walk-around was probably the only reason I made it back in the following day
- Having the chance to speak to the people I was trying so hard to care for, I was able to glimpse the reasons why I'd started my training

This doctor desperately needed talk to someone about how they were feeling and for someone to listen intently to them so that they could carry on

- Where were their colleagues?
- Who was there to support?
- What got in the way?

*Avoidable or unavoidable?*

A simple question?



# The punitive approach .. Is for the most part deeply unfair and damaging

Treating patients safely, as well as  
effectively, should be regarded as an  
achievement and celebrated

# To work safely people need to...

- Work with and through other people and therefore relationships matter greatly
- Be helped to make [often difficult] decisions quickly
- Be able to talk to one another without fear of judgement
- Feel listened to and be heard

Good relationships and reliable communication across hierarchic boundaries are crucial for safety

Edgar Schein

Humble Inquiry: The gentle art of asking instead of telling

Are you really  
listening or  
are you just  
waiting your  
turn to talk?

Listening  
=  
Learning

Robert  
Montgomery

# Learn to listen

There is nothing more potent than being in the presence of someone who just wants to listen to you

open minded and open hearted, someone who does not get restless for you to find a solution or for you to take up their preferred solution

# Help to listen...

Listen with intent to understand

Listen without judging

Listen assuming you have something to learn

Don't think your way is the only way

Don't equate your experience with theirs - all experiences are individual, it is not about you

Try to be in the moment

# Things that get in the way...

- Being silenced by things like hierarchy, power and status
- A closed mind-set – ‘it doesn’t happen here’ – “everyone can talk to each other here”
- Fear of looking stupid, of getting it wrong
- Grandstanding and dominant voices pushing their own views
- Characteristics such as personality, gender and race

Try not to make comments that  
blame others ‘ its all those surgeons  
they never listen’ ‘those managers  
are always the problem’

*“these are not helpful”*

Don Berwick



# Things that help...

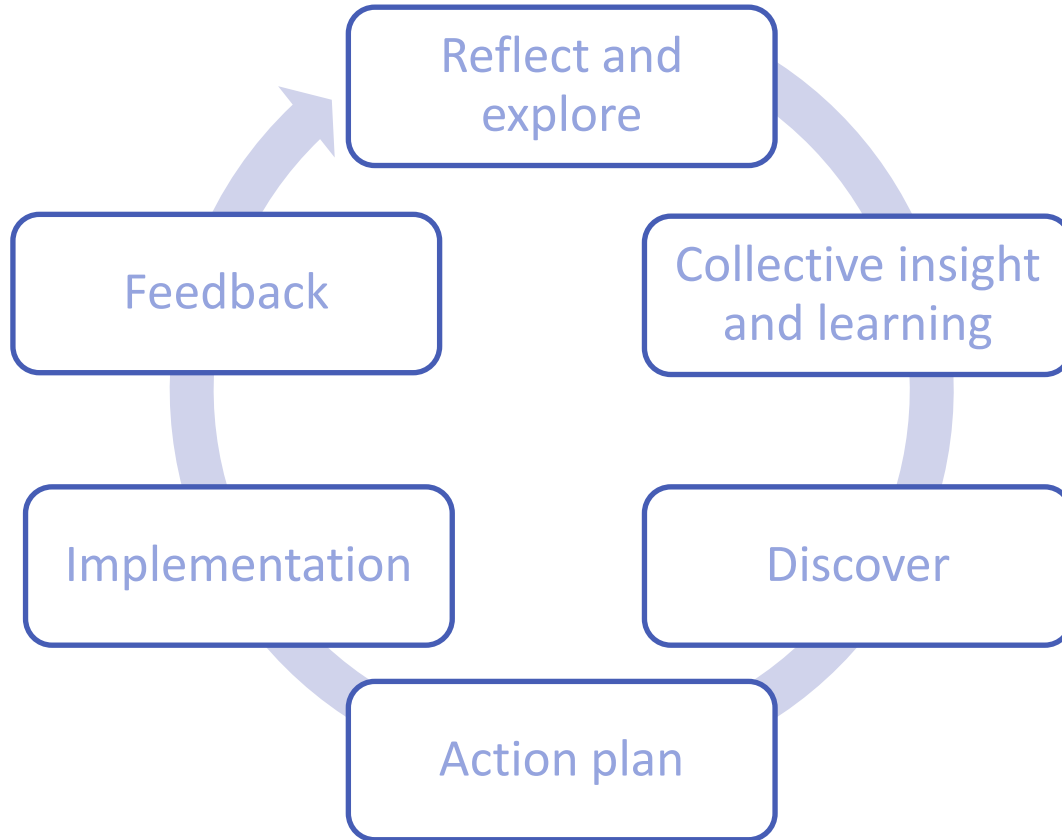
- Removal of physical barriers (tables) and classifications or stereotypes (job titles and biographies)
- Create an environment where individuals feel accepted and respected – (psychological safety)
- Kindness, respect, humility, curiosity

# And...

- Sit on your hands! (resist the urge to interrupt)
- Cherishing the fact that we each see something different because of who we are and where we sit in the system
- Call out rudeness and lack of respect – in a kind way - help people who are being bullied and those that are bullying
- Major on kindness and say thank you as often as you can

*Isn't this all just talk?*

# Conversation helps...



# But don't just take our word for it...



New  
Zealand



**Kitchen table** - a metaphor for creating a hospitable space and time for people to come together to talk

- Somewhere to gain new insights about how people are working safely in your organisation
- Somewhere to show you value what others have to say
- Somewhere to slow people down

# Three words that sparked a movement

A conversation with...  
the founders of  
#Blacklivesmatter

TED talks







Real lasting change doesn't just  
happen on its own  
(Obama)

**Sign up to Safety** is committed to  
helping people like you work safely

- Sign up to Safety is committed to helping people work safely because real, lasting change doesn't just happen on its own — it requires organising, and it requires people like you
- With people like you across the country, we are building this movement from the ground up, person to person, community by community one conversation at a time

# Taking you with us...

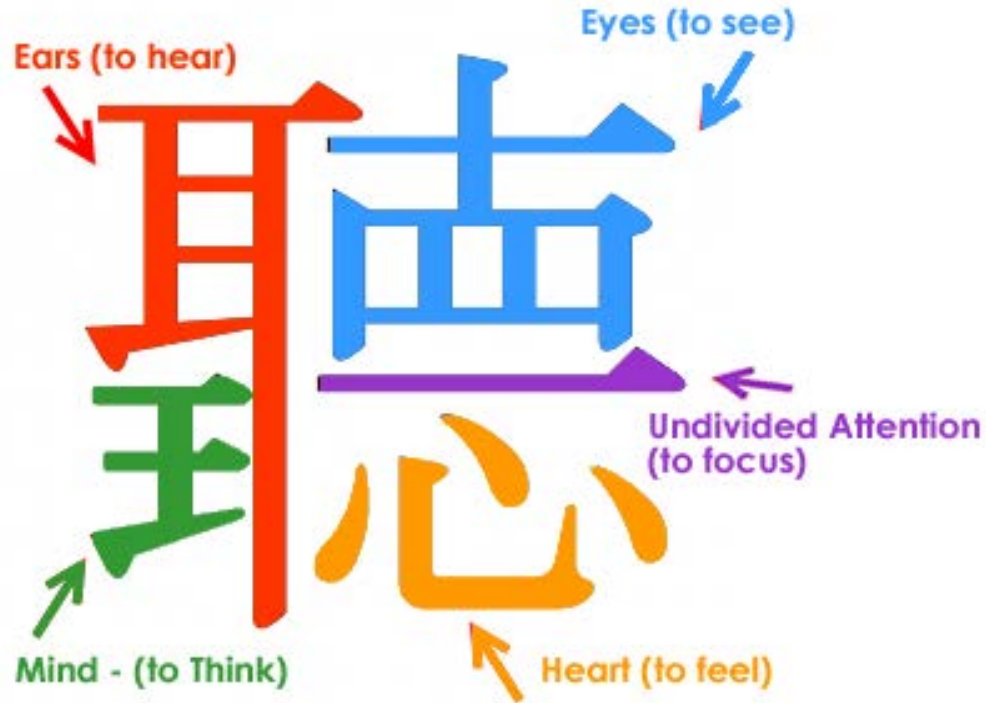
- First phase why is this important?
- Second phase what's the evidence base?
- Third phase providing opportunities
- Fourth phase passing the baton

we are building this movement from  
the ground up, person to person,  
community by community

**one** conversation at a time

# To listen...

Sign up to  
**SAFETY**



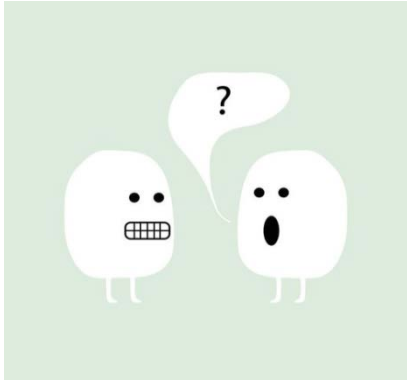
# If you do one thing

Celeste Headlee

10 ways to have a better conversation



# Playlists you can watch...



## **TED talks playlist**

### **How to connect with others**

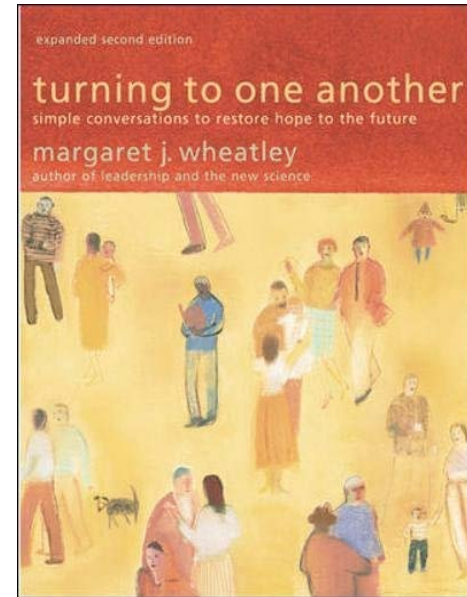
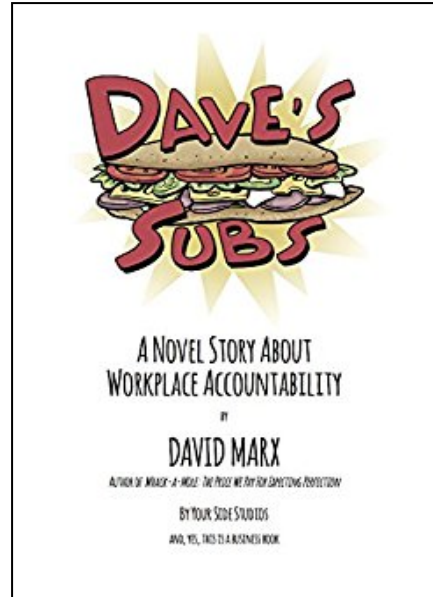
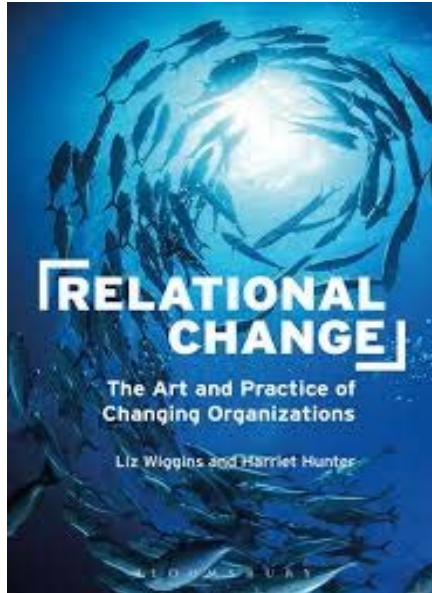
These talks offer new insights into how to connect ... and celebrate the ways we are more alike than you think

**TED talks to help you be a better listener – playlist** on the importance of listening, and how to do it much better



# Three things you can read...

Sign up to  
**SAFETY**





# What you can do from today...

- Make relationship building your top priority
- Go and talk to people
- Practice asking open, clarifying and probing questions
- Change the way people meet and change events – stop talking ‘at’ people and start talking ‘with’ them

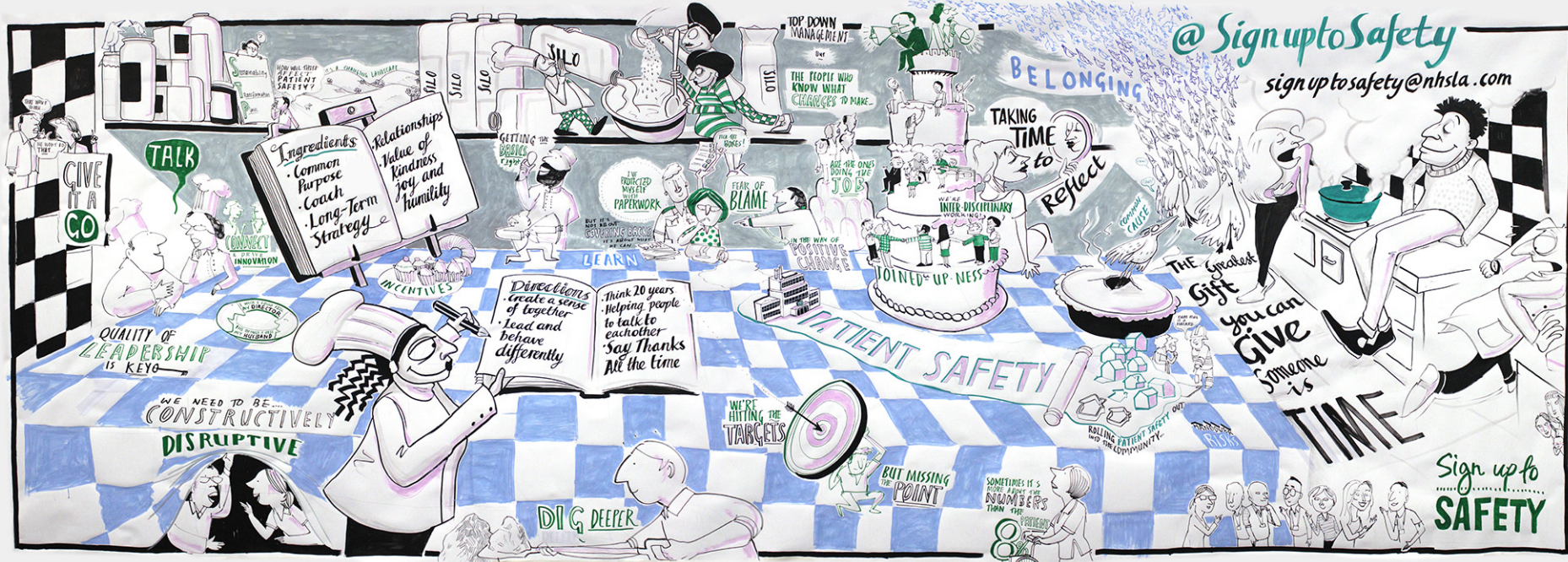
# One thing you can do **right now**

The next person you talk to...

Think about how you are listening

Think about the questions you are asking

Thinking about how you are responding



Conversations to help people work safely