Crucial Leadership Conversations
A Chance to Practice What You Preach
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Principle Agile Coach at Vaco Agile in Raleigh, NC

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- Somewhere “north” of 30 years experience
- Wide variety of technical stacks and business domains
- Roots of a software developer
- Senior/Executive software development leadership for 20+ years
- Agile “Coach of Coaches” and Leaders
- Deep XP, Lean, Scrum, and Kanban experience since late 1990’s
- From Cary, North Carolina; husband, father, grandfather, and dog lover
Introduction

Agenda

1. Experiment Dojo
2. Peter
3. We’re NOT good communicators!
4. Conversational Models
5. Conversational Practices
6. Coaching Considerations
7. Dojo – Practice
8. Debrief
9. Close
Lets try an experiment...

- What do I do?
  - Half the groups take #1, Upward
  - Half the groups take #2, Peer-to-Peer

- Break into groups of 3 (Triads – Coaching Dojo)
  - Coachee
  - Leader - Coach
  - Observer – Facilitator/Scribe

- Have a coaching conversation, capture activity & discussion notes
- Role play, Have FUN with it!
Let me share a story…

The sad tale of Peter – Super-performer
Two-Thirds of Managers Are Uncomfortable Communicating with Employees

- Point being – Generally as leaders we suck at giving feedback
- It takes too much
  - Energy
  - Time
- Easier to avoid it or blow smoke

https://hbr.org/2016/03/two-thirds-of-managers-are-uncomfortable-communicating-with-employees
Conversation Models
In agile contexts, leadership feedback is essential
- Sprint & Release reviews
- 1:1 meetings
- Real-time opportunities

I have a view that pareto rules here in that only 20% of leaders are willing to give 80% of the feedback

And it needs to be honest...
7 Key Steps

1. 1) Start with the heart
   - Open minded, empathetic, and positive intent

2. 2) Stay in dialogue
   - Keep talking, don’t shut down, engage

3. 3) Make it safe
   - Listening, clarifying, observing body language
   - Intentions
7 Key Steps

4. 4) Don’t get hooked by emotion
   - Name it, acknowledge it, don’t allow it to dominate

5. 5) Agree on a mutual purpose
   - Goals, clarity, roles, outcomes

6. 6) Separate facts from story
   - Allow feelings, stories, perceptions; but focus on / return to facts

7. 7) Agree a clear action plan
When it comes to risky, controversial, and emotional conversations, skilled people find a way to get all relevant information out into the open.

That’s it. At the core of every successful conversation lies the free flow of relevant information. People openly and honestly express their opinions, share their feelings, and articulate their theories.

They willingly and capably share their views, even when their ideas are controversial or unpopular.

-- Crucial Conversations: Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, Switzler
Radical Candor

- Published Radical Candor in late 2016 by Kim Scott
- Central story from Google w/Sheryl Sandberg
- Intro video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4yODaILQ2IM
Radical Candor

HIP-tool

- Stay humble
- Be helpful
- Immediate
- In person
- In private (criticism), in public (praise)
- Don’t personalize

Practice giving feedback - don’t hold it in

Don’t dish it out if you can’t take it. In fact, demonstrate your ability to take radical candor

Deeply care

Regardless of what people say…folks want honesty with good stuff and not the bad.
Meet them where they are

- Try not to coach too “far away” from their current context

- Empathy for the current landscape
  - Agile transformation, culture, skills, leadership dynamics, business dynamics

- Give them the “Truth” they can “Handle”
No Baggage!

- Leave behind your own baggage
  - The more travelled, the harder it is
  - It will influence your behavior and body language

- No marginalization of the situation
- Explore instead of judge
- Stop stereotyping
- Be patient!

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Be crisp & clear with your language

- Velocity, Throughput
- Failure
- Agile
- Self-directed
- Servant Leader
- Trust, buy Verify
- That’s not “agile”
- Testing
- Developer vs. Tester vs Business Analyst
- SAFe, DAD, Less, etc.
- Scrum, XP, Kanban, etc.

- Results
- Transparency
- Engagement
- Partnership
- Pivot
- Autonomy
- Team health
- Trust
- Predictability
- Quality
- Team member
- Continuous improvement
Walk your talk…
Model the “Right” Behavior

- Agile principles
- Be transparent
- Be courageous
- Take risks
- Tell truth
- Serve your team
- Role model
- Consistency
- Show vulnerability
Maturity (and context) Matters! Shu Ha Ri

- **Shu**
  - Novice or beginner; narrowly following given practices

- **Ha**
  - Journeyman; following, but extending, perfecting, occasionally breaking the rules
  - Mentoring in specific strength areas

- **Ri**
  - Expert; perfecting to creating your own practices
  - Coaching; mentoring; ‘Sticky’ practices

More Prescriptive

Less Prescriptive
Most important thing is HOW your feedback was received

And are the outcomes/behaviors moving in the right direction?

Point being – you’re NOT DONE by just giving it…
Coaching
Try not to over-coach
- Coaching stance
- 5-why’s
- Powerful questions

Listen Deeply
Show Empathy
Emotional Intelligence

Partner more; establish “skin in the game”
### Coaching Conversations
A Simple Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opening Moves</th>
<th>Middle Game</th>
<th>End Game</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permission</td>
<td>Widening / brainstorming</td>
<td>Closure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration</td>
<td>Options</td>
<td>Next steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarification</td>
<td>Strategies</td>
<td>Action plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td>Who does what</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Actions</td>
<td>Repeat, confirmation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction</td>
<td>Narrowing / planning</td>
<td>Schedule</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Coaching Dojo Bordeaux
Le samedi 30 avril 2016 à l'Aéroport
Venez pratiquer! Chacun son style :)
Workshop Dynamics

- You’ve been given a hand-out with ~7 coaching scenarios
  - Form a Dojo
- OR
  - Simply break into a discussion group of two
- Pick 2 coaching scenarios OR create your own
- Adjust coachee roles as necessary
- Explore coaching strategy and / or conversation(s)
- Capture activity / discussion notes
- Role play, Have FUN with it!

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Workshop Dynamics

- Let’s debrief some of the scenarios…care to share?
  - Any useful strategies you used?
  - Any useful patterns you observed?
  - Any interesting outcomes or experiences?
Wrapping Up

- Bottom line: We ALL struggle with crucial/pivotal conversations
  - Self awareness of skill, strength, and patterns
  - But, it’s your job

- How do we get better?
  - Simple models
  - Courage, commitment, and persistence
  - Practice, practice, practice – sharpening your saw
  - Asking for help
Free - PDF eBooks
Agile Leadership & Coaching

https://leanpub.com/agilerefectionsforagileleaders

https://leanpub.com/scrumproductownership-ajimaturitymodel
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Podcast on all things ‘agile’ -
http://www.meta-cast.com/
References

- 9 Coaching Roles link: http://www.growingagile.co.za/2016/03/the-9-coaching-roles/
- HBR article: https://hbr.org/2016/03/two-thirds-of-managers-are-uncomfortable-communicating-with-employees