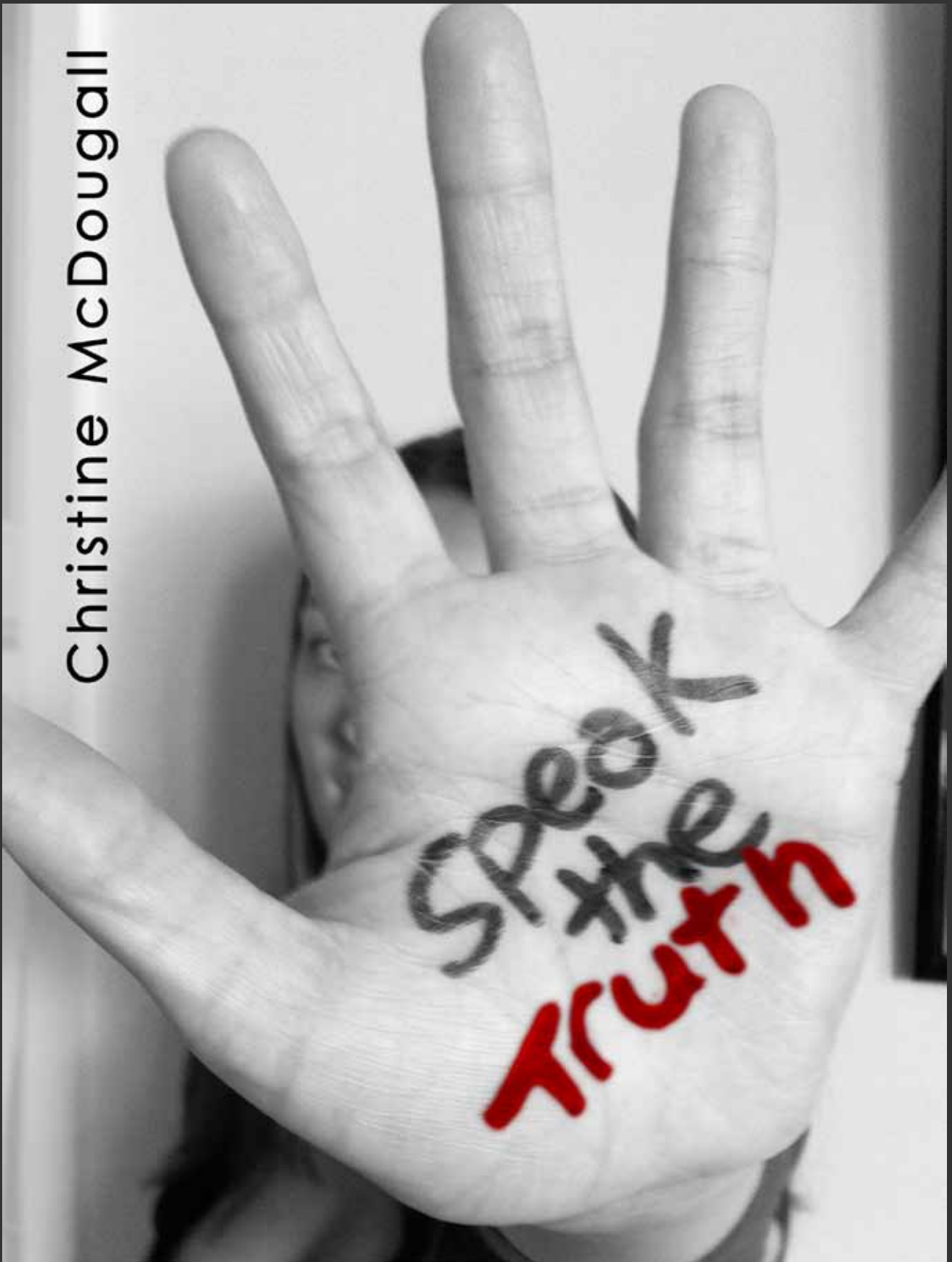


Christine McDougall



7 steps to radical truth with compassion

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**Nothing is ever achieved in life without the support of many people, both overtly and through years of long term support.**

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## Overview

The **Seven Step Process** is the foundation of a workshop called **Dare to Care**. It is an internal inquiry process that occurs prior to a conversation with another person, a group of people, or simply to uncover personal truth.

## The Purpose of *Speak the Truth*

- \*examine your own agenda, judgments, outcomes, emotions
- \*ensure that any covert agenda's or emotions are clarified prior to stepping into a conversation
- \*allow enough safety and care for people to be able to step into highly toxic conversations in order to resolve conflict
- \*connect to the humanity of a conversation, and why it really matters to you
- \*create a clear space to be able to re-engage a more healthy relationship

## Not Optional

You need to be aware that the **Seven Step Process** will only work if you truly want to be in the conversation to create the best possible outcome for the person with whom you are conversing. If their interests are not first and foremost in your mind and heart and this becomes obvious to them, then this conversation will stall before it gets out of the gate. If you are not able to choose this intention, if you really are more interested in getting what you want as a primary intention, then the **Seven Step Process** is not going to be appropriate. It would be better if you choose instead to (a) **make a direct request** - ask for what you want specifically, or (b) to **get some coaching** on your own issues as to why you want this to be about you.

People's entire lives have changed as a result of going through their own **Seven Step Process**. Families have been healed, relationships have shifted up a gear, conversations about the unspeakable have finally been had.

In one organisation, the Head of HR was experiencing extreme stress with the leadership team. She was going through paralysing anxiety because of her fear of not speaking up and saying what was not working for her. The very afternoon after she learnt to use the **Seven Step Process**, she had a meeting with the team, and finally, after six months of extreme inner stress, she said what she needed and wanted to say, in a way that was so well received people asked her what had changed, and why she hadn't spoken before. Her whole demeanor changed. She had removed a load of significant proportions off her back.

In another situation, a senior player within a large multinational corporation chose to work on her family situation during the **Seven Step Process**. She and her family, based in different parts of the world, had not been seeing eye to eye for many years. She was plagued with guilt, anger and frustration at the continually painful situation. When she changed the way she showed up in the conversation by going through the **Seven Step Process**, her relationships opened up to a new level of engagement. They have continued to flourish.

The **Seven Step Process** is about your ability to speak from heart, dropping all your personal agendas, attachments and expectations. This is much harder to do than it is to talk about.

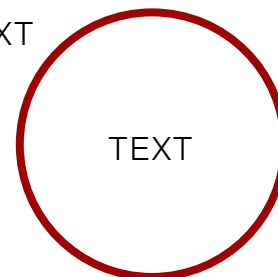
A Few Critical Distinctions

## 1. Defining Context

from com- "together" + textere "to weave"

Context is the container in which the text is held.

CONTEXT



Unless we have a container for the text, or the conversation, then the meaning of the conversation will easily be misconstrued.

For example. I could use the word "bark". Am I referring to the bark of a dog, or the bark of a tree? Or even a Barque (Middle Eastern Boat), or Johan Sebastian Bach? Unless I define the context, you and I could be in two different conversations within the same conversation.

**The right conversation in the wrong context, is the wrong conversation.** If we do not clarify the context, we are going to get the conversation wrong. If we don't take the time to get clear about the context and then to set it with clarity, inviting all parties to participate in the same context, then the conversation will not flow, people within the conversation will be confused, frustrated, angry, or simply 'check out.'

A breakdown in communication can often be traced back to people having different contexts within a single conversation. Different cultural world views, a male/female perspective, or different personality types can all contribute to a clouded context. Defining context is critical to a healthy conversation in which no one is left behind. The context may need to be defined many times during a single conversation to be sure there is mutual and not assumed understanding. Mutual understanding does not have to imply agreement. But it does ensure that there are no knowledge asymmetries.

The purpose of the **Seven Step Process** is to set the context that you are bringing to the conversation. How are you showing up for this conversation? Show up in anger, and you will get anger, show up in joy and you may get joy. Show up in judgement and you will get defense. The **Seven Step Process** will ensure that you bring the cleanest and clearest context possible to the conversation.

Some examples of conversations taken out of context:

- The first example is a personal one. Yet it is a story that may be told a thousand times a day in different relationships around the world.

I wrote an email, and the words were read in a very different context than I had intended them. This simple and seemingly innocent action on my part created such a significant breakdown in a relationship. To untangle the confused intentions and contexts took several weeks and finally a full day of very intense dialogue. If I and the other participants in this scenario did not have the commitment to this process, a small paragraph in an email, written in innocence, would have caused a serious breakdown in a business partnership. We all learned so much from this experience. Not the least of which was to always check context, when in doubt.

The next example is a more global one, based in history. I may have chosen to use similar passages from the Bible or other religious or spiritual texts, as there are many, that taken out of context, may be used as either weapons of destruction, or tools for healing.

- Verse 3:151 of the Koran, often used by terrorists as the reason to act says:

*"We will put terror into the hearts of the unbelievers. They serve other gods for whom no sanction has been revealed. Hell shall be their home".*

Historical context.

"We will put terror into their hearts" does not apply to your non-Muslim neighbour. But the majority of Muslims reading this verse are unlikely to know the context in which it was recorded.

Ehsan Masood wrote:

According to historians, this is a verse in which God is addressing the prophet on the eve of a crucial battle during Islam's first decade. This is the battle of Uhad, when the leadership of Mecca decided that this new religion needed to be crushed. The Meccan army was large, the Muslim force small. The prophet feared defeat. The Koran reassures him and promises that the enemy will not prevail. In other words, this is a specific situation in early Islamic history.

## 2. Above and Below the Neck Conversations

In any conversation that has complexity and the human element in it, we must bring in the heart. This is a below the neck conversation. In leadership, there is often a misconceived belief that leaders must remain emotionless and in control at all times. This is of course, rubbish. Let me illustrate.

If we consider the great leaders of the last 100 years, and recall their speeches that galvanised thousands of people to action, they spoke with incredible passion, love, commitment and emotion. Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech, "I have a dream"- was a below the neck conversation. He spoke from his heart to the hearts of all the people watching him. If he had not engaged his heart, no one would ever have talked about that speech again.

John F. Kennedy-in any of his great speeches, the same. Tremendous passion, courage, commitment. "But why, some say, the moon? Why choose this as our goal? And they may well ask why climb the highest mountain? Why, 35 years ago, fly the Atlantic? Why does Rice play Texas?"

*"We choose to go to the moon. We choose to go to the moon... (interrupted by applause) we choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win, and the others, too".*

Above the neck, head based conversation is good for directions from A to B. But it will not inspire anyone to get out of their chair and take action.

Human engagement occurs heart to heart, not head to head. This has always been the way. When someone speaks from their heart, in either words or actions, people listen.

A friend of mine's family has for years lived with the tyrant father and the church mouse mother. One day, when everyone was gathered for lunch, the father was up to his usual tyrant tricks, demanding this and that from his wife. For no particular reason, on this one day, the mother decided that enough was enough. Without a word, after a particularly unreasonable demand made of her, she dropped the plate of carefully cooked hot food right into her husbands lap. The whole table sat mersmerised by this action, in shock. Finally, after all of these years, the mother had made a heartfelt, below the neck statement, without speaking a word. Everyone present heard it.

For many of us, there is a tremendous risk in speaking from the heart. It will reveal our vulnerability, our broken places, our shadow and our shame. It will show others our weakness, what we don't know, and how much we hurt.

One of my most favourite quotes is from The Course in Miracles-

*"In my vulnerability, I become invulnerable".*

Or,

*"If I have nothing to hide, I am not able to be attacked".*

Courage of course, as a word, is derived from a French word, *cor* meaning heart. To speak from our vulnerable self requires great courage, great heart.

When we speak from the neck up only, we might as well be an empty machine, devoid of soul.

The **Seven Step Process** requires a conversation that occurs from below the neck. We need to engage our own heart in the conversation.

## **The *Seven Step Process***

In preparation for this process, please choose a conversation that you need to have that is causing you angst, concern, or that you have been putting off. Any relationship where you notice some level of emotional or physical discomfort when you think of having this conversation will work for this exercise. It doesn't have to be major discomfort, minor discomfort will work just as effectively. If you can't think of a current situation, choose a conversation that you have had in the past that you wished would have turned out differently.

### **Step #1. What do I want *for* them?**

The question is worded in a very specific way. Changing the wording doesn't achieve the same affect, so do leave it as it is. Notice also how your mind/ego will reword the question so that it fits your personal agenda.

Take a moment now to think of the person or people you will be speaking to. Visualise them. Remind yourself that, no matter what you think of them, or what they have done to you, they are human beings too. They bleed, cry, ache, love, laugh, struggle. They want to be loved, held fondly. They have made good and bad choices, just like you. Ask yourself what do you want for them - this human being? If your answer is along the lines of the following;

I want them to stop doing...  
I want them to start doing...  
I want them to be more...  
I want them to do...

Then this answer is about what you want for you, and not for them. Notice also that in the answering you have changed the words to "I want them to" versus "What I want for them." Ask the question again. This time, connect to this person, as a person. Really connect to the soul of this person. What is it that they want, that if you would want that for them, they would get you are present for them.

Use very contextual, global words - the kind of words that if you said I want this to anyone, they would agree that they would love that for themselves. For example: Happiness, Success, Peace, Grace, Love, Fulfillment, Abundance. Each person and each situation involving that person has a special wanting. Connect to that by connecting to your own heart, and then language what you want for them in that context. This is heart based exercise. You need to feel. It will not come if you are stuck in your head, thinking.

For example:  
Bill works hard. He has just turned 50, and with his partner, have spent a considerable sum of money on a home renovation. He has a teenage daughter, who lives with her mother. He is feeling upset



because his daughter is not spending so much time with him, and he is feeling very disconnected from that relationship.

He wants to have a conversation with his daughter.

It is easy for him to connect to his daughter in this first step. He realises though, that when he first answers the question 'What do I want for her', the answer is he wants to see her more, which is really all about him and not her. On the second round, what he wants for her is for her to be happy and safe and to feel happy and safe in his company at any time. If he came into the conversation with his daughter from this space/context, she would immediately feel safer and more relaxed than if he initiated the conversation from the context of what he wants for himself. This increased level of safety occurs as a direct result of you dropping your own agenda, and being there for the other person, for their wants and needs as the first priority. Don't stress that you will never get what you want. You will get what you want more than you have in the past, because you will discover that wanting something for yourself at the detriment of the other is a shallow victory. If there is something you clearly want, then making a direct request is the best way to have this conversation. See this article on [making requests](#).

In the same example, Bill's ex-wife Mary has been responsible for the bulk of the time and money in raising their daughter. Bill is now asking to contribute less money, even though it is a very expensive time in the life of a final school year teenager. Mary is feeling very upset by the request, feeling an added burden, less support, and quite isolated in the process.

As she considers this first question, her immediate wanting goes to her own agenda. She wants Bill to take more responsibility and stop being so tight with his money. On the second round of the question as Mary steps into a more heart centred place,

"What do I want for Bill? I want for Bill to be at peace and to feel he is a valued part of his daughter's life."

From these two examples it becomes apparent that simply working on this question - changing the way we show up for the conversation - changing our context, will create a radically different space for the conversation to occur in. If we stay in this space of wanting for them during the entire conversation, the outcome will be vastly different and much more healthy for all parties.

### **Exploring a workplace situation:**

Paul is a manager of a team of five. They work in a highly pressured environment, with deadlines and more work than they can handle. The team desperately requires an extra person. Paul and his boss have never really seen eye to eye. They seem to speak a different language. Paul doesn't feel valued by his boss at all. His boss is very resistant to the idea of extra staff at this time, as the business has had some losses and they are trying to keep costs down. Paul doesn't know what else he can do, so decides to give it one more go, and have another conversation with his boss, this time using the **Seven Step Process**.

What do I want for him? When Paul first asks this question, he immediately answers to himself that he wants his boss to disappear off the face of the earth. (He uses different language to describe this!) Realising that that won't do it, Paul asks the question again. This time the answer is that he wants his boss to just give him the extra staff. Paul is still speaking from his own agenda. This is not what he wants for his boss, but what he wants for himself. He starts to recognise the depth of his anger. It has been brewing away in the dark chambers of his mind, very close to exploding.

He asks his coach for help, not sure he is able to get past this on his own. His coach asks him to think about his boss. First of all, to identify him by his name. We immediately establish a closer connection to people when they are in the first person. If I speak about my ~boss~ as a nameless, faceless identity, it is easier for me to remain separate and disparaging, because I have no connection to him. The Board, the Suits, the Government-the people in the third world- it is very hard to connect to them as living breathing human beings when we speak in third person. The moment I speak of someone as a first person with a name and identity, my connection with them goes up, and likewise my responsibility to them. They are no longer objectified.

The coach then asks Paul to think of his boss John, as a person. Does he have children, how long has he been in the job, what are his hobbies? If Paul were John, what would he be afraid of? What are his motivations? If Paul is unable to humanise John in any way, the issue is primarily a Paul issue, and John is just the receiving party of Paul's own frustration and self deception.

If Paul can humanise John, he can then move towards answering the question.

What do I want for John? I want for John to feel he is doing a great job in a tight market. Paul can stand in complete authenticity around this as a result of the question and the process to reach this point.

Already we have a breakthrough. Paul has made a shift. Without John even being present, Paul has made a connection with John as another person doing the best he can. This does not mean that Paul agrees with John, or even likes John. It does mean that Paul has moved past his own judgments, agenda and projections, to create a space for John and Paul to explore all options and scenarios. If Paul manages to hold his wanting for John clearly as his intent throughout the conversation, then John's response will be much less reactionary and potentially move towards more openness than they have previously experienced.

This first question in the **Seven Step Process** asks of us to step out of ourselves and our own desires and intentions, and to be willing to participate for the achievement of the desires and intentions of another.

In order to be able to do this, you need to be able to see the world from the eyes of the other.

We learned this lesson the hard way.

We were delivering to a team of people in a multicultural environment. One of people on the team, who by all accounts was contributing the most overtly to the team breakdown, came from a deeply ethnic group. She spoke from an egocentric, ethnocentric place. "Don't tell me what to do (egocentric),

and if you say anything against my tribe (not her team, but her national tribe), then I won't listen, and I will storm out (ethnocentric)". She was literally holding the team to ransom, and because of the deep cultural sensitivities, if anyone did speak out they were immediately labeled racist (pluralistic worldview). She refused point blank to consider that she was a part of the problem. She affirmed that she simply didn't care the effect she had on other people. If she upset them, too bad. Not her problem. (I actually believe that she did care, but that she had built up a story around herself that meant if she said she cared she would need to be in a different story, and that would be humiliating or confusing.) However, the rest of the team also contributed to the situation by not holding clear boundaries around how she treated them, and doing so with compassion.

What we realised, (too late) was that she was not able to, or willing to change in that moment. We did not have her trust, which was our mistake. She was not open to coaching, she didn't have the developmental maturity to consider her contribution to the situation. Accepting that this was the way she is, without making her wrong for her stage of development, would have allowed us to go to plan B.

What we really needed to do (Plan B) was either/both of the following options (1) not have her be present for the workshop (she said she didn't want to be there anyway), and spend the time with the rest of the team training and supporting them on how to make and keep boundaries, not be bullied, and during all of this, not to lose their centre and blame her. They needed to want for her to feel accepted and safe in the team - part of the team/tribe-a language she knew well. At the same time, they needed to learn the skills in how to create the environment that would support her to move to a higher stage of development, and to simply say no, without emotion or ego, to her bullying behaviour. (2) Create a safe place for her to connect with her own heart, prior to the workshop. Allow her to feel valued and cared for before she stepped into the room.

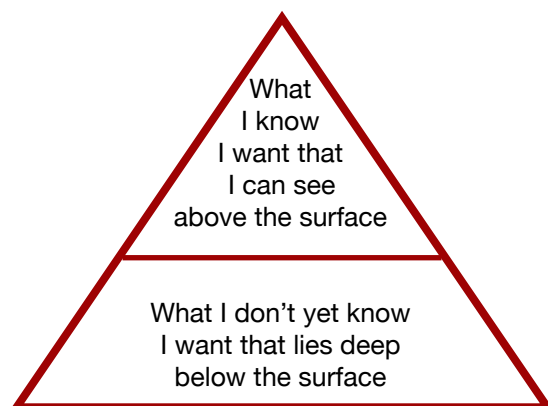
"What do I want for you?" is a very powerful question. It is the first question to ask on the path to being of service to others.

## Step #2. What do I want for me?

After step #1 it may seem strange to go back to this question, to go from focus on the other to focus on self.

The main reason we go back to this question is to determine the truth about what we really want, and standing in this truth, ask just how relevant it is to the overall conversation.

In most cases, what people want on the surface is not what they want at the deepest level.



What we want below the surface needs to be revealed in asking "What do I want?" until we have reached the very end - gone right to the very bottom of the iceberg. It is only when we have full awareness about our intentions that are we able to choose if we will enact them with full consciousness. Most people go into a conversation with their own surface agenda, and then a range of hidden agenda's that they do not even have conscious awareness of. The other party in the conversation will sense a private agenda right off the bat. (Think about a conversation you have been in when you knew there was an agenda that wasn't being revealed. We don't hear much of the preliminary dialogue because we are listening for the hidden agenda, wondering exactly what it is, and how it will be presented. We are also often aware that there is a deeper agenda, without knowing exactly what it is. This subconscious agenda will leek through the entire conversation, preventing clarity and resolution for both parties.)

Let's go back to the previous examples from Step #1.

### To refresh:

Bill works hard. He has just turned 50, and with his partner, have spent a considerable sum of money on a home renovation. He has a teenage daughter, who lives with her mother. He is feeling upset because his daughter is not spending so much time with him, and he is feeling very disconnected from that relationship.

He wants to have a conversation with his daughter. What he wants for his daughter is for her to be

happy and safe and to feel happy and safe in his company at any time.

What does he want for himself? When Bill first asks this question, what he wants for himself is for his daughter's mother to not be so controlling, he wants his daughter to want to see him more, he wants her to call him more. When we ask Bill the question again, "What do you want for you?", Bill says he wants his daughter to be there for him. He doesn't want to have to keep feeling like he is pushing for her company. "What else do you want, Bill?"

I want her to be my daughter? And what does that look like? I want her to call me, hang out with me, want to be with me, be close to me, be more a part of my family. She doesn't seem to care about my family. And if she did that, what would you have? I would feel that she loved me.

In the same example, Bill's ex-wife Mary has been responsible for the bulk of the time and money in raising their daughter. Bill is now asking to contribute less money, even though it is a very expensive time in the life of a final year of school teenager. Mary is feeling very upset by the request, feeling an added burden, less support, and quite isolated in the process.

"What do I want for Bill? I want for Bill to be at peace and to feel he is a valued part of his daughter's life."

When Mary asks the question, What does she want for herself, the surface answer is more support.

What else?

Bill to stop being so mean and miserly?

What else?

To understand how hard it is to raise a child pretty much singlehandedly.

What else?

To appreciate how much I have done already.

What else?

To be there for your daughter.

What else?

To be there for me sometimes.

Anything else? (Long Pause - allow Mary to reflect)

To be grateful for what I have done as a mother.

Anything else?

No...

### **In the situation with Paul and John, to refresh:**

Paul is a manager of a team of five. They work in a highly pressured environment, with deadlines and more work than they can handle. The team desperately requires an extra person. Paul and his boss have never really seen eye to eye. They seem to speak a different language. Paul doesn't feel valued by his boss at all. His boss is very resistant to the idea of extra staff at this time, as the business has had some losses and they are trying to keep costs down. Paul doesn't know what else he can do, so decides to give it one more go, and have another conversation with his boss, this time using the **Seven Step Process**.

Paul wants for John to feel he is doing a great job in a tight market.

When we ask Paul what he wants for himself?

I want this person to go away.

What else?

I want to hire new staff?

What else?

That's pretty much it. I want to be able to do what I think is right, what I know we need, and to not have to cause all of my other staff to stretch themselves to the limit trying to keep up, while our business struggles, when we should be booming. Just because the company screwed up in another area doesn't mean we should have to pay for it. I know extra staff would add more value to the business, that the costs would be mitigated. I know I am right on this one. I just want this jerk to see it.

In asking this question we do step back into all of the murky, below the surface opinions we hold about the situation, and that is just the point. Unless we are very very clear about what is really going on below our own surface, we may bring that unconscious garbage into the conversation where it will be present despite our best overt intentions, leaking out through our pores as we speak, tinging our sentences with low grade bitterness. The listener may not be aware of this in their own consciousness, however, some part of them will be slightly uncomfortable, depending on the degree of their own awareness.

**Clean communication** is when there is no taint at all. Not even a wiff or molecule of toxicity.

This is what we are aiming for in the **Seven Step Process**. Clean and clear communication. Which is precisely why it is not easy because once we know about this process, we are now responsible for how we show up in the conversation. If we show up clean, and stay that way, the communication will have a higher chance of success. We can create that outcome, no matter how conscious/unconscious, clean or unclean the person we are speaking to is.

When you have determined what you want for you, bring that awareness to the forefront and consider how holding onto all or parts of what you want is relevant, necessary, and will create the **win win win** outcome you are holding.

In Paul's case, he realises just how angry he is, and that if he brings that anger into the conversation it will be hard for him and John to make any forward movement.

This is a perfect realisation, because it leads right into the next step.

### **Step #3. What are my opinions, judgments and concerns about this situation?**

Again, the purpose of this question is similar to Step #2. It is important to presence the true feelings, opinions, judgments and concerns you have about the person or situation. If you are really mad, upset, frustrated, sad, etc, then presence that in full. Go right to the bottom of the iceberg, deep below the

surface. Once you have really become conscious of the truth behind your emotions, energy, and anger, two things happen. First, simply by looking the devil in the eye, the devil begins to lose its power over you, because it is now present and you have started to objectify it, instead of having it have control over you. Two, as the emotions and energy begin to lose power over you, you also get your clear sight back and can consider if this upset, anger etc is really going to contribute to the conversation.

Of course, I am speaking in the negative here, about situations that have negative energy and emotion attached.

Sometimes the **Seven Step Process** involves situations which do not evoke negative energy. Sometimes the person you are speaking to will perceive you with great love and respect. Do still ask the question, and presence your opinions. Being present to the positive regard we hold for another is a blessed gift, one we do not do often enough. This question can fill us with love, joy, gratitude and peace.

In looking at your judgments and concerns, you may begin to realise that they may not be true. You are likely to start observing that there is a lot of your own issues caught up in the drama of the situation. You will also begin to awaken to the depth of your feelings, and how this matter has taken hold of you.

Paul asks himself of John, "What are my opinions judgments and concerns about John?"

'John is a small thinking little man who doesn't have the courage to make tough decisions. He is weak. He doesn't listen. He is only interested in his own success. He is a control freak.'

Paul realises that he has such powerfully negative feelings towards John that any conversation with John he would have, carrying these thoughts, would be doomed to failure. He has to go back to Step #1 and really connect with what he wants for John.

Bill asks himself this question in regards to his daughter and the situation.

What are my opinions, judgments, and concerns about this?

My daughter is selfish, she only ever thinks about herself, she is disorganised and never considers to call me. Her mother is supporting her to not want to be with me. Her mother has never considered my feelings. She has always been about herself.

Anything else?

I am scared I am loosing my daughter. I am scared that she is not really going to want to spend time with me and that my little girl is gone.

Mary asks the question, "What are my opinions, judgments and concerns about this situation?"

I think Bill is an irresponsible parent. He wants to do the parenting gig only when it suits his schedule and plans. He is never happy with anything I do. He has absolutely no concept of how much time, money and energy it takes to raise a child. And if I ever ask him to help, it is always with reluctance, as if I have screwed up his life. Like pulling teeth.

Anything else?

No, thats about it.

Mary is beginning to observe that her feelings are deep and angry. She has been carrying them with her for a long time. They have been chewing up small parts of her energy for many years. They do not support her in anyway, even if they are true. They contribute nothing of value.

## Step #4. How am I feeling about having this conversation?

By this stage we are getting to the bottom of the barrel of truthfulness with ourselves. The introspection, while it may have been uncomfortable, is getting a little easier through application.

Why do we ask this question?

Have you ever attended a speech and the speaker was nervous? How were you feeling in this situation? Nervous?

The state of feeling that we show up in a conversation will be a felt experience by most of the people in the room, especially the more conscious/present ones. If you are feeling nervous, then it will create a nervous environment.

We need to ask this question to determine exactly what our feelings are around having this conversation so we can presence our feelings at the outset, or discard them completely.

Common feelings you may have about this potential conversation:

- Nervous
- Anxious
- Afraid that what you say will be misinterpreted
- Excitement
- Neutrality
- Apprehension
- Confusion
- Curiosity
- Interested
- Relieved
- Sad
- Wanting to get it right

Bill is apprehensive because he wants to get this conversation right. He wants to say what needs to be said and bring his relationship with his daughter closer, not further apart.

Mary is interested to understand just what is going on with Bill? Is there something she doesn't know? She is also relieved to be finally having this conversation and a little nervous that it will work out well.



Paul is nervous about this conversation. He is worried he won't be able to keep his feelings in check, and keep his cool.

### **Step #5. What are they (the other party) thinking, feeling and seeing about this situation/potential conversation?**

This question has a lot more depth to it than to simply step into the other persons shoes. This question asks us to consider the world as viewed by their eyes. We need to consider their worldview, their cultural context, their experience to date, at minimum.

Are we able to do this with accuracy? Not really. However, the honest intention to do so is a great place to start. That demonstrates that we are now willing to consider their point of view, and be attentive to what is going on for them. This is a big advance from the starting place in many situations, where all we could see was our own stuff/emotion, story etc.

Bill needs to be really willing to see the world from a teenage girls eyes. What is she interested in? What occupies her mind most of all? Who is in her life? What causes her upset? What is she afraid of? Why does she do the things she does? What motivates her? How does she feel about parents, family? Does he even know what really matters to her now?

He realises, when he considers these questions, that he doesn't really know his daughter at all, That he has not really been listening to her, nor engaged her in a dialogue around many of these topics. Their conversations have existed at the superficial level only. Places she visits, things she needs to do, her school results.

He considers what he was interested in as a teenager. Easy. Girls. Partying. Having fun. Did he want to hang out with his parents? No way. He was finding his own feet, exploring his independence.

He reflects that he doesn't really know much about her friends, and he has little idea about what really excites her.

She may be feeling uncomfortable, even guilty about her relationship with him, having some suspicion that he wants to spend more time with her. She would not been feeling thrilled to have the type of conversation he usually has with her.

Mary asks this question, and it raises many more. What does Bill really feel about the whole situation? Why is he behaving in such a way? What is his view of the world and his cultural background.

She knows that he is used to women providing for him - his mother did that so very well. She understands that because his mother was his major reference point, she can hardly blame him for this behaviour. She senses that Bill is embarrassed that he can't provide the kind of money she has. Also that he still holds anger towards her for breaking off their marriage and they have raised a child as separated parents, which was never in his plan. That Bill's model of the world is for the most part very traditional. That the women takes care of the children while the men are out working. That this really has nothing to do with money, in his mind, it simply is the role people agree to play traditionally.

She cannot blame Bill for this, because it is the only world view he has experienced. That he is upset, and angry at her because she has never really included him in the whole child raising conversation, that she has gone about it in her own way with little dialogue between the two. He did want to be included more - to feel that his opinion mattered.

Paul has trouble with this question. He is still trying to leave behind his own personal feelings. So he breaks it down.

What motivates John? Why does he do what he does?

Paul suspects John is very motivated by authority. He likes to please his superiors, and will do what they want with little regard to the consequences. As a result, he is duty bound and not very entrepreneurial. What is John interested in? Paul has no idea, he has never really connected with John outside of a work based transactional relationship. This question/answer comes as a bit of a shock to Paul. He is beginning to recognise just how much objectification he has enacted with John. There is no relationship beyond the transactional nature.

How would John feel he has done an exceptional job? If he gets a glowing report from his boss?

What does John want from Paul?

Paul suspects that John wants Paul to live within the rules, and the rules today are that we as a company are not hiring people. Because of John's world view he is unable to see much beyond this. Paul has to accept that even though he doesn't like this, and doesn't agree, it is John's way.

I reiterate at this point that to be able to answer these kinds of questions in such a way requires that you already be at a high stage of cognitive, emotional and egoic development. The higher the stage of development, the easier it will be for you to get passed your own petty egoic issues, and take the view of the other, plus be willing to allow their view to be right for them. To accept it, and then have compassion towards them.

If you are struggling with the questions, please do recognise that you would make more progress if you work with an independent third party who is able to coach you without a personal agenda. Struggle with moving past your own emotions and reactions simply means that there is more at stake for you personally - that the issue is a YOU issue more than it is an other issue. You are the one that needs the coaching, not the other.

## **Step #6. How have I contributed to this situation?**

We have finally reached the place where we can look at our contribution to the issue, breakdown or misunderstanding. Every step and question has been a moment of truth - this step is when we take ownership of our contribution. During the self inquiry process, many people start to realise that they have contributed to the issue very significantly. They are not completely surprised when they respond to this question. For others, this question and its answer comes as a complete shock. They are still heavily based in blame.

In the workplace, the only time you can let yourself off the “how have I contributed?” hook is if you have a new person on your team and it is a very short term (as in hours or days old) relationship. Otherwise, you have contributed in some way.

We contribute by:

- Not speaking up
- Doing nothing
- Allowing aberrant behaviour to go unchecked
- Our own poor attitude
- Our own lack of clear communication
- Not listening
- Not paying attention
- Assuming
- Expecting without qualifying
- Not taking time to explain, support, help..
- Being too busy
- Unwilling to understand another
- Not trusting your own intuition
- Procrastination

The moment we start to own our contribution and take responsibility for our own actions, we are now able to be part of the solution.

When we show up in a conversation having taken ownership for our contribution, we immediately create a space where the other person feels less under attack. They are going to relax just a little. They will feel a lot safer. As the conversation proceeds, they will feel increasingly safe the more we hold what we want for them (step #1), and refuse to attack them, by continuing to own our contribution.

Reviewing our case studies, Bill is starting to become aware that he wants his daughter to call him, and yet he rarely calls her. He has always justified it because he doesn't want to speak to her mother, however, he has put much of the burden of generating the relationship onto his daughters shoulders. He also realises that he has never taken the time to be with his daughter as she wants him to be. It has always been as he wants to be with her. He has not created the opportunity to really talk with her, to speak heart to heart. He has expected her to want to hang out with his extended family, even though she hardly knows them.

Mary realises that Bill was doing all he could as a father based on his upbringing and experience. He doesn't have another reference point, and as he has never been a full time, fully responsible parent, he cannot possibly understand. She has not helped at all. She has not accepted that this is the way Bill is. Nor has she taken the time to speak with him patiently and without losing it. She has always gone into communication on the defensive, expecting him to attack. She could certainly have included Bill in many more conversations over the years, grateful that he does love his daughter, that he cares for her and would never do her harm. She also realises that she has had little compassion towards Bill. Only anger and frustration. While she never stopped him from spending time with his daughter, she

could have built a better bridge between them for that to occur naturally.

Paul has learned that he has de-humanised John. He is just an obstacle to his own desires and plans. He knows nothing of John as a person, and has never taken the time to seek to understand John's reason for the decision about extra staff. He just assumed right off the bat that John was an idiot. He could have approached the situation differently, with more understanding and less reaction. His whole demeanor to John has been quite childish.

Please be assured that the **Seven Step Process** is not a love fest. This is not about being saccharin "nice", or politically correct.

We can speak the hard/harsh truth with compassion. As you will experience when we sum this up, it is Ok for Paul to say to John that he feels John is very confined by the rules. However, we have to be sure that when we do this, we do it from the right context.

Again, as with answering all of the questions, do be sure to keep asking the question until you get to the very bottom of the iceberg. Your commitment to doing this will allow the cleanest communication possible. If you feel there is more that you need to surface, and for what ever reason can't see it, seek support from a coach who will bring an objective and higher altitude perspective.

## **Step #7. Would you be willing to...?**

This final step is the permission step. We cannot make someone converse with us, answer our questions, engage in dialogue. They have to be willing. Just because they do participate may not mean that they are really willing. Many people do things that they don't want to, for various reasons - the desire to be liked, difficulty saying no, a sense of obligation, because they have been shamed, etc.

We ask this question of the person once we have formulated the previous six steps into an opening statement that sets the context for the conversation.

Ask if someone would be willing to discuss this is grounded in respect for the other person. It allows them to choose. Of course, it doesn't guarantee that they will choose with full conscious agreement. They may say yes automatically, without really being in alignment to their yes. If you sense this is happening, ask the question again.

The moment we have an aligned willingness, the door is open to gently proceed. It is vital that we keep the door open. The moment it slams shut, nothing we can say and do at the point will be heard. We then have to go back and re-establish the grounds to open it again.

When the door is closed, when someone is not willing to discuss an issue, or to participate, we have

to look to create a different environment where the safety factor goes up. Until that time, we have to accept that the door is closed. This comes back to changing the way we show up in the communication, supporting others around this person to change the way they show up, versus focusing on and blaming the person who won't play.

## Wrapping this all up. The *Seven Step Process* of Setting the Context Examples

When we deliver this workshop, we demonstrate live to the group how we can wrap this all together.

A few pointers.

1. Speak from the heart - below the neck.
2. Be authentic - only say what is really true for you.
3. Anchor yourself in Step #1, "What you want for them"
4. You do not need to put all of the first six steps into the context setting summary.
5. You do need to ask if the person would be willing to have this conversation with you, after you have delivered your context summary and before you proceed.
6. The context setting summary should only take a minute or less to deliver - this is not a sermon or a plea.
7. Remember you can always take time out, pause, state that you are losing alignment with your intent and would like to reconnect to that before you proceed. This is especially important if you feel the conversation has shifted from safe to unsafe for either party.

Using our examples, lets start with Bill.

Sue (his daughter), you know I really want for you to be happy and safe and have a good life (Step #1-said with full connection to its truth). I have not always been the easiest Dad, I realised I have expected you to call me and show that you loved me, when I have not done the same for you. Nor have I really taken the time to get to know your world, and your friends.(Step #6) I am a bit nervous about having this conversation with you (Step #4), because I really want us to be closer and that the time we spend together is good for both of us (Step #2), but I am not sure how to do this well. Would you be willing to work with me on this, to allow me to hear more about your life, what matters to you, and how I can be there for you?(Step#7)

If Bill stays in his truth during this delivery, in his heart, and connected to his daughter, she will hear him. She may not be willing to engage today, however, if he continues to come from this same space in his ongoing relationship, and gently repeats versions of the offer - and does all of this with great consistency, then she will one day say yes.

Mary's Contextual Summary

Bill what I want for you is for you to know that I value your contribution to our daughter, which I consider has been significant (Step #1). I know I have never expressed that to you in any way, either

through my words or my actions and I am sorry for that. (Step #6) I am also sorry for the way I have not included you in many of the decisions. (Step#6) I now realise I was cruel to you by not doing this, and that you may well have felt hurt and isolated from your daughter in this process. (Step#5 and 6) I also know that both of us could have done this parenting thing better as a separated couple, even though neither of us had any role model to reference. (Step #3 and 6) However, here we are with an almost adult daughter, and I was hoping that maybe you would be willing to accept that I am sincere in my desire to create a far more positive relationship with you as Sue moves into adulthood, and that we can create a space to talk about how we can work better together from now? (Step #7)

Mary has realised during this process that even though her original complaint was about how Bill was wanting to contribute less financially to their daughters expenses, the real issue was the strained relationship between Mary and Bill. Bill would probably feel more inclined to contribute financially if he was included in the decisions. Also, he may want to choose how to contribute financially, either directly towards the school fee's for example, by paying the school, or into a general account.

### Paul's Contextual Summary

John, I know you and I have not seen eye to eye, particularly around this issue of new staff. (A combination of Step 4 and 5) I have given this a great deal of thought, and realised that I have harbored anger towards you for this, when I now clearly see that you are doing what you have been asked to do by the company. (Step 3 and 6) I do want for you to be seen to do a great job by your superiors. (Step 1) I was wondering if you would be willing to reopen this conversation from a different context, for example, exploring if we can show the company that engaging these staff will bring in more profit for the company, and therefore create a win for you, me, and the company, plus my staff? (Step 7) I am appealing to you, if you say yes to this exploration, to keep an open mind, just as I need to be willing to hear your point of view/counter arguments with due consideration? (Step 7)

There is no guarantee that Paul's Contextual Summary will create a yes. Indeed there is no guarantee that anyone will say yes to the willingness question. However, people are more likely to say yes when they do not feel threatened, intimidated, or unsafe. They will also be more likely to say yes when they get the authenticity of the contextual summary, and the heartfelt intent behind it.

To recap:

This process is a self inquiry process designed to get us to explore our truth about the situation, to recognise our contributions, and ultimately to change the way we show up within the conversation. It sets the context, however it is not the content. For that, we need to proceed to the next step, The Communication Process.

For more on The Communication Process, please see:

- Listen Till You No Longer Exist: <http://www.positive-deviant.com/listening.html>
- Tell the Truth: <http://www.positive-deviant.com/truth.html>
- Trust Your Intuition: <http://www.positive-deviant.com/trusting-intuition.html>
- Clean Communication: <http://www.positive-deviant.com/clean-communication.html>
- Conversation for Understanding:  
<http://www.positive-deviant.com/conversation-for-understanding.html>

Please email me at [christine@christinemcdougall.com](mailto:christine@christinemcdougall.com) with questions, feedback, or to share your experience of applying the **Seven Step Process**.

May your relationships move to ever greater joy and ease.