

Miracles Do Happen!

The DNA of Healthy Conversations

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Words Create Worlds

Co-creation is a driving force in my life. It was a word that set a new level of engagement – a new level of conversation – and opened up my thinking about how our brain works when we are in co-creation. Three decades of observation and experimentations with clients followed the discovery of this magical word, and have given me data to suggest that when we are in co-creation with others, energy emerge that has ‘the power to heal’ and the ‘power to generate a life force’ that is transformational and magical in its nature.

Companies have hired me to bring co-creation into their culture and with every engagement, something major happened in the company that released an unstoppable energy for growth, that seemed to heal wounds, minimize conflict, and elevate a level of innovation that I had never seen before. Mid-size companies seemed to grow and innovate faster; people seemed to find ways to innovate together not alone, and those who had felt outside became insiders. It was as though when companies discovered how to live in co-creation they had an ‘**energy of activation**’ that healed what didn’t work and activated what did work for the culture to be healthy, inclusive and innovative in ways I’d never seen before.

I became a student of co-creation, and wanted to know not just a dictionary definition of this new word, I wanted to understand where in our brains this incredible ‘**interaction dynamic**’ took place and how to replicate it in every company I worked with.

Then, in the midst of my pursuit of the most creative and fascinating research, I discovered I had breast cancer again – in fact this time I had two cancers – breast cancer and pancreatic cancer side by side. As someone who has BRACA II genes, I would learn that cancer was in my blood, and in my family, and no matter how much I prayed alone for this not to be true, cancer was in my genes.

My first cancer appeared on September 11, 2001. The day World Trade Center was attacked was the exact moment I was diagnosed with my first bout of Breast Cancer. It's a day the world will never forget, and a day I have relived a thousand times as I worked my way back to a healthy body and healthy mind. Now, 15 years later with two more cancers invading my body simultaneously, I can look back and read my journal with more distance. When first discovering cancer it's scary, it's confusing, and it's not so easy to digest. While **co-creation** was something you do with others, cancer, at least in my early understanding of it, was something I would do alone – *or so I thought*.

But something unexpected started to happen that even my doctors called a **miracle**. Miracles are *“a surprising and welcome event that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws and is therefore considered to be the work of a divine agency.”*

I got through the double mastectomy in a few months, and expected healing from it was going to be easy. My mind was set for healing and my family support was high. Yet for some strange reason, I didn't have the healing experience. I started to lose weight, became jaundice, and felt deep pains under my breast – giving me no other choice than to put myself in the hospital for a thorough examination of what was causing the new illnesses – new pain, weight loss, and appetite loss.

Miracles do happen – and the right doctors showed up as though I had a direct line of sight to each one.... I'd put myself into the hospital for tests, and tests I got – but from a Gastroenterologist who was filling in for another general physician (who likely would not have seen the signs that my internal health was being compromised).

“You are jaundice” and, *“we must operate today”*. The operation meant putting in a stent so we could move bile into my liver to digest my food. But what caused the jaundice, and what cause the bile ducts to close down? More exploration to find the trail leading back to – what we learned was Pancreatic Cancer.

Feeling the pain under my chest – I knew something was not right – yet the only way to give eyes to the pain was MRIs and other body scans. Within 12 hours we had the story laid out in front of us., *“You have a 4.4 cm tumor wrapped around your pancreas. 4.4 is big, and it's lethally big. It's wrapped itself around the veins and arteries at the top of the pancreas, rendering it inoperable.”*

After 5 days of tests, and scans, and diagnosis, I traveled to meet with the best doctor in New York for Pancreatic Cancer - Dr. Joseph Ruggiero. December 24th, the day before Christmas, I learned I was a candidate for the strongest chemo known to man. Folfirinox was designed for people with BRACA II Cancer – *the miracle of Christmas* was about to pave the way for another cancer chapter never anticipated.

The faster we act on Pancreatic Cancer the better our chances for recovery. This cancer is like a petulant child that, when angry, throws its own cancer cells into the lymph system and other parts of our body – which we can't see or feel until the pain makes it known. My ribs hurt; they were being spread apart. The pressure of the tumor was a statement of power: *"I am the boss now!"*

My chances of life over death were being calculated by the strength of the tumor over my state of mind. I was not giving in. I was not hiding my disease. I was going to lean into this unexpected petulant child and give back a love for waking me up to things that I needed to do differently.

Turning to energy healers was not something I knew a lot about. I believed in energy healing yet had not allowed myself to be a part of it. This time was different – this time I was harvesting miracles – from around the world and from my back yard.

Master Park came to our apartment and blew me away. She was so pure of heart and so full of energy healing wisdom. Brought to me through Barbara Biziou – one of my 'Goddesses' from the Goddess Group started years ago. I knew Master Park would bring healing and insights. She worked my body at an energy level, and circled my tumor with love. I felt better, and different, and open to receive the energy healing that was going to change my life.

Bonnie Hughes, a wisdom healer who has brought me insights with her touch, gave me a word to focus on; *"Allow,"* she said. *"You must focus on 'Allowing' energy to come to you and through you."*

Miracles do happen – and at the right time and right place a new quantum level of energy was about to knock on my door. Four months before being diagnosed with breast and pancreatic cancers, I was selected out of hundreds of thought leaders, to bring my work to the world. My work is called Conversational Intelligence® (C-IQ). It's a new

‘intelligence’ that sits alongside of Emotional Intelligence and Intellectual Intelligence, as one of a small number of universal intelligences that all human beings have.

An honor of a lifetime, I excitedly agreed to work with Ben Croft, President of WBECS (World Business Executive Coaching Summit), to enable executive coaches globally to become certified in my work, and to become representatives of C-IQ globally.

Our program was to launch January 18th 2016, and on December 24th, 2015 Ben, who had hand-picked me for this honor, found himself sick, sleepless, and shocked that his ‘bet on the right horse’ might now become the nightmare of a life time. Ben had good instincts and picked me out of a crowd, yet nothing showed up to warn him (or me for that matter), that this was part of our shared journey ahead.

My diagnosis stunned us all, and as I found my health failing we all began to wake up to the possibility that if the chemo didn’t work, the year-long program I’d signed up to do with Ben and his whole team – with outreach to 12,500 coaches globally – could fall apart over night. Ben invested in this program with his heart, soul and pocketbook. With the uncertainty of my future – our relationship was now filled with confusion.

Eleven months of webinars, reaching almost 1,000 coaches globally needed to be sustained by me (and my team) – and yet every two weeks, chemo was to be shot into my body over a multi-day period, which would render me at times too sick to talk, too sick to teach, and too sick to think.

We had a backup plan that went into full gear immediately ... if I were to die, the program would be lost – unless we taped all our sessions while I was still alive – giving us a way to create the experience of ‘life’ the best we could.

Miracles do happen – and I didn’t die. In fact, the opposite became a new way of life. Chemo was disorienting, and cancer was defiant, yet my healthy attitude and will to live became bigger every day. I didn’t feel alone. I didn’t feel rejected, fearful, or sad. In fact the opposite took over my body, mind and soul. I felt alive. More alive and more connected than I had felt in my whole life – ***WHY?***

Being transparent about my health was a big step for me. I had to let people know what was going on. And I had to let the 1,000 coaches who signed up to study with me know what I was going through. No, I don’t mean all the details. I mean I wanted them to

know my diagnosis, and I wanted to share the updates to let them know how I was getting better. I knew, in my heart of hearts I would not die, *but I didn't yet know why*.

Within my first two sessions of sharing, a movement began. Imagine, almost 1,000 coaches signed up to work with me! Imagine, I wanted to do my sessions live, not taped – which meant that somewhere in my body there was pre-cognitive insight that the right forces were surrounding me, yet I didn't know more than that.

Imagine, I didn't cognitively know how the chemo would work, or if I had the stamina to show up for each and every session. Yet, when I was on the calls I felt alive, engaging with coaches who wanted me to heal. Their aspirations became realities as people around the globe started **prayer circles** to move energy of the universe to my little frail body. While chemo robbed me of my body weight -- being less than 110 lbs. and 5'7" tall gave me a body like a resident of Auschwitz, prayers helped drive the cancer out of me, making room for the healing energy my body learned to thrive on.

When I started chemo, my cancer markers were 579, which is high, given normal and healthy people are in the range of 0-33. I was on the extreme side with cancer owning my body and feeling no remorse. Yet by the third chemo session we saw my cancer markers take a deep dive -- from 579 to 144, and then to 77, to 44. No one could believe it. My doctors called it a miracle; the staff called it a miracle. After eight chemo rounds my markers have dropped to 17 – about as normal as anyone can get.

My tumor originally was 4.4 cm and wrapping itself around the veins and arteries in my pancreas. There was no way I could live unless the tumor disappeared. *“It is too dangerous to do surgery,”* my doctor said, so chemo was my pathway to life. With all angels and energies on my side, I leaned that after the last chemo and a new scan, my tumor was not only smaller, it was ‘gone’!

Miracles do happen! My cancer is gone. More than all gone – it is not visible to scans and the tumor has disappeared. Why is this so unusual? Because most patients go for years of chemo and still are not cured from Pancreatic Cancer – or they die within the first few months because the Pancreatic Cancer has found ways to throw cells into different parts of the body, which then spread the cancer through the body, weaken the immune systems – and poof! Lights out.

My doctor calls what happened to me a **miracle**. The only medicine that's changed over the course of the past five months is the love and prayers that came from my coaching team globally. Early in my chemo, one coach suggested that everyone on the call would pray every morning at 9 AM in their country – and they did. And at the start of every Webinar – my coaching team wanted an update, and each call was one miracle after another – tumor shrinking, tumor disappearing!

Triple prayers are even more powerful, so I am learning. Spiritual friend Jan Goldstoff enlisted the help of spiritual healers around the globe, and my daughter enlisted our friends, and family and friends of family! I get tears in my eyes and a lump in my throat when I think about how every moment matters, how over the past five months every conversation, every commitment was to bring energy of healing to me. Every moment was full of guardian angels working behind the scenes in **'not allowing'** the cancer to take me down – and **allowing me** to be open to the most pure, and beautiful energy of the earth – the energy of love healing.

It All Started With a Conversation

Today I am, knock on wood, *cancer free*. Moreover, I am of a healthy mind, and wiser about the relationship between *healthy cells* and *healthy organizations*. Some of my insights came from my research into the neuroscience of conversations, and some came from a conversation with my husband during the last phase of my chemotherapy in 2001, where cancer first appeared in the form of a lump in my breast.

It began like this One morning at 5 am, I could not sleep and found my husband awake and up, at his computer. *"I've been dreaming,"* I said, *"about the nature of healthy companies and toxic ones and I want to talk about it with you. Tell me what you are learning about cancer, and I'll share what I'm learning about healthy companies—let's see what's at the intersection of what you know and I know."*

As a life-long student of conversations, I know that not every conversation is alike, and I've discovered there are three levels – each has its' own unique dynamics. Many conversations are what I call **Level 1: Transactional:** these conversations confirm what you already know. They consist of a lot of telling, a little asking, and low levels of listening for what is new. Other conversations are **Level 2: Positional:** they are selling

what you know and defending what you know. Your mind is not open to influence; rather you converse to ensure your voice is heard and followed.

What I discovered with my husband was another level of conversation that changed our lives. It went beyond telling, selling and defending. It required an open mind to listen deeply, to take in what others were saying, and to be willing to change my mind. I called this higher level of conversations **Level 3 – Transformational**, and this morning Rich and I had discovered Level 3 at its best.

Co-Creating Conversations

Our conversation opened up a window to our minds. Rich and I started to see connections we'd never seen before. We were so energized that we almost couldn't keep up with the new insights that were flying out of our minds and our mouths. Big questions emerged—questions for which we had no answers. We had to think together and **hold the space open** for the sublime and the ridiculous.

I gave these conversations a new name; **co-creating conversations**. *Co-creating* is when people think together, define reality together, and take on the shared responsibility for the health of another person, and even the health of an organization together. Through our conversation, we learned that the same principles apply to healthy cells and healthy organizations. When healthy conversations exist inside a culture, everyone thrives; when healthy conversations exist inside the body, every human being thrives.

What we realized that day was profound, and our learning has unfolded over the last decade into a depth of wisdom about how organizations and organisms use **conversational intelligence** for *Creating 'WE'* – the healthiest state of existence for cells, for individuals, for teams and for organizations.

Conversations are not just about talking, sending and sharing information, telling people what to do, and expressing what is on our minds. An *intelligent conversation* is much more interactive and inclusive. In fact, *conversational intelligence* impacts how we connect, engage, interact, and influence others, enabling us to shape reality, events and outcomes in a collaborative way. *Intelligent conversations* move us from *power over* others to *power with* others, to get on the same page and experience the same reality by bridging *reality gaps* between *how you see things* and *how I see things*.

Conversational intelligence gives us the power to express our inner thoughts and feelings. Conversations trigger emotional reactions. By learning how verbal messages and nonverbal behaviors trigger different parts of the brain and stimulate certain reactions and responses, you and I can develop our conversational intelligence to build healthier, more resilient relationships and boost desired results—to confront each other face to face, say what is in our hearts and on our minds, and at the same time build and strengthen our relationships with others.

Confrontation saps energy, limits focus and destroys good intentions...

Confrontation takes most of us to the edge of our comfort zone, and so we tend to avoid it. Having difficult conversations scares most people into thinking they will lose a friendship, and so they avoid confronting the truth. When we feel frustrated or angry at someone who we feel has stood in our way of success, undermined us or caused us to lose face, we get so upset we just can't find the words to express ourselves. We end up pushing, not pulling, expressing our worst behaviors, or we may hold it all inside until we boil up with frustration and then blast someone.

Much of what goes on in situations with high emotional content takes place primarily in our minds. This is our “story” and how we put words to the drama of our experience. Much of our frustration comes from the words we use to tell the story. How do we communicate with each other when we feel pushed to the edge? How do we deal with these challenges in a way that builds relationships, rather than erodes them? How do we masterfully walk ourselves down the ladder of conclusions instead of climbing the ladder of assumptions, inferences, and stories about each other that only serve to reinforce our separateness rather than our connectivity?

Our brains disconnect during conversations every 12 to 18 seconds, as we get hooked on key words that send us back to emotional memories. Our movie-making mind brings up these old memories and edits them into a draft of the current situation, changing the meaning, from your perspective, of the meeting you are experiencing in the now. Bringing emotion-laden memories into the present only amplifies the present. If the memories are ‘feel bad’ you bring more pain and feel bad into your interpretation of the present. If the memories are ‘feel good’ you bring more pleasure into the present.

DNA of Healthy Conversations

When we join an organization, we enter a new community with expectations to make a difference, contribute, and to be part of something greater and bigger than we can accomplish on our own. And yet, all too often, we get sucked into territoriality or reactivity, leading to cycles of behavior that erode relationships, dissipate energy, and take away from being productive, healthy, high-performing individuals, teams, and organizations. We become harvesters of politics, power, control, and arrogance, with egos that fill organizations with invisible signs that say, “..., *don't go there., you can't do this., you don't know that., save face, blame, protect, and win at another's expense.*”

When we are stuck in territoriality, protecting what we have and fearing loss, we are living at a low level of effectiveness, which ensures we will never achieve our greatest aspirations. In the face of negativity, positional power struggles and self-limiting beliefs, our courage and ambition shrink, and mundane mediocrity becomes a way of life. Often, the pattern becomes a death spiral, as we extinguish the faith and flame needed to risk and learn new and better ways of thriving with others.

When territoriality fills our organizations, the culture feels toxic, activating behaviors that cause us to retreat and protect ourselves. Our survival instincts are turned on, and our *Vital Instincts* turned off. While we are familiar with the notion of *survival of the fittest* and the term *survival instincts*—first introduced by Herbert Spencer and then developed by Charles Darwin in 1864 to explain evolution¹—few of us are familiar with the term *Vital Instincts*.

Walter Bradford Cannon, a physiologist from Harvard Medical School first coined the term *fight-or-flight* in the early decades of the 20th century² to explain a disruption in homeostasis caused by threats. I coined the phrase *Vital Instincts* to explain a whole other dimension of behavior that originates from the prefrontal cortex and heart connection activated when human beings are vitally connected through our higher brain connections. I believe the lower brain represents the ‘I-centric’ part of our humanity, and our higher brain represents the ‘We-centric’ dimensions of our humanity. When activated the higher brain elevates human beings from *surviving* to *thriving*.

¹ Wikipedia – Charles Darwin

² <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1447286>

We now are learning through neuroscience that *Survival Instincts* are hardwired in our lower brain—our Reptilian Brain—while our *Vital Instincts* are hardwired in our higher brain or our Executive Brain. I believe that every person has *Vital Instincts* for greatness. We *instinctually* want to do well, contribute, be recognized and included on a winning team. However, the level of conversation we have with others determines whether we activate our Reptilian Brain or our Executive Brain.

Parallel Universes: Cell Behavior and Organization Behavior

My conversation with my husband revealed several parallels between *Cell Behavior* and *Organization Behavior*. First, cancer depletes life energy from a system. Cancer cells behave like they are in survival mode; healthy cells are in a growth mode. The secret to re-instructing a cancer cell to become a healthy cell again is revealed in ***three basic principles*** that also apply to changing toxic cultures and relationships back to healthy ones. These simple principles break the code on culture change.³

Principle 1: Ensure Dialogue is open, healthy and transparent. When the body is healthy, the immune system works at all times to ensure that anything that is a threat to health is attacked immediately. Immune system *flags* arise from cells, directing the immune system to know where and how to target their action and marshal the internal resources to restore health. When our bodies are healthy, each cell has a responsibility to the whole—and signals where help is needed from the immune system. Everyone works as a connected, healthy team. They work in a partnership. The cells and system have a *dialogue* and from this arises a higher level of immunological support to handle threats.

When cancer forms, normal cells lose their system *flags*—people avoid conflicts and don't speak up. People pull away and hide. People act toxic in the same way cells become toxic -- cancer takes over the body and the organization.

Toxic Signals: Making yourself the center of attention

Healthy Signals: Making your organization the center

This principle reminds us of the importance of ***healthy dialogue*** between each cell and the immune system. When leaders make themselves the center of attention, ignoring

³ Based on the scientific research from NYU School of Medicine

signals coming to them, the culture breaks down. In healthy organizations, each person sees challenges and speaks up. People come together – put issues on the table – and work with leadership and engage with the leadership team to take on the challenges together.

In business, we need to learn how to create safe environments where we can make our issues, concerns and beliefs visible, and we need to feel safe enough to become more transparent about what is on our minds. We need to learn how to audit our mindsets so that we are always operating out of our healthiest beliefs. When we fear speaking up – the organizational immune *flagging* system breaks down – threatening the vital health of the organization. Having healthy dialogue and making our *flags* visible and our belief systems transparent – is core to sustaining a healthy thriving organization.

Principle 2: Become more Sensitive to Others' Needs and Aspirations.

When cancer cells grow, cells lose their sensitivity to each other and grow anywhere they can. The chemistry for facilitating conversations between cells, called Contact Inhibition Factor (CIF), dries up and the cells break away from their cell partners, seeking a new form of contact. However without CIF, the cancer cells can't find contact points and invade the body, growing into tumors that can block the normal functioning of organs and the body's systems designed to sustain health. This principle reminds us of the importance of restoring cell sensitivity and instructs us how.

Toxic Signals: Insensitivity to others

Healthy Signals: Sensitivity to others

Translated into business terms, this means creating a *feedback-rich culture* that enables individuals to establish healthy conversations and healthy relationships with their neighbors and coworkers – even when the conversations are difficult.

In a feedback-rich culture, a new level of awareness emerges so that we 'don't grow all over each other.' Rather than creating environments full of territorialism and competition, we learn how to reach out and connect with others – to give and receive healthy feedback, to ask for support, and engage in enabling each other to achieve our highest aspirations. Where healthy, open, trusting, caring relationships exist in companies, an organization will thrive. Our Vital Instincts to connect with others in a healthy way drives healthy relationships and cultures.

Principle 3: Be Open to Adapt to New Thinking. Cancer cells multiply by creating

their own growth factors. They build their own vascular system (angiogenesis) that supplies oxygen and nutrients to the cancer cells, enabling them to grow at a rapid rate. They become self-sustaining and encapsulated from the rest of the system, drawing out nutrients from inside the system for their own sustenance. Healthy cells, on the other hand are serum dependent, and need nourishment from the outside to grow. These new influences from the environment activate higher levels of intelligence and facilitate growth.

Toxic Signals: Entrenchment in your own point of view

Healthy Signals: Open to be influenced and change your mind

We need to be mindful when we create a focus on the past, an internal view of the world, and an entrenchment in our view of the world. We get *Addicted to Being Right* or *Entrenched in our Own Point of View*. We become so convinced we are right that we stop listening or being open to others' perspectives. This internal view saps energy out of an organization. Instead, we need to turn outward— to learn, grow and nourish each other; to support, engage, build strong partnerships, collaborate and innovate, and focus on growing to our next level of greatness.

Conversational Intelligence: Putting it All Together

We have *Vital Instincts* to connect, and the quality of the connection defines our trajectory moving forward with others. Through a powerful *Level 3 Conversation* with my husband, we discovered a new level of conversation. Until my journeys through cancer, I was unable to see there was a conversational level that I was not spending enough time living in for my own health and the health of those I care so much about.

By learning how to master the *three Levels of Conversational Intelligence* and the principles they represent, we can master and activate our *Vital Instincts*, ward off toxicity that limits our health, and create the space for profound and energetic conversations that transform our world.

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