

In Search of Conscious Conversation

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What is a Conscious Conversation, and how does it differ from any other conversation? When done right, a Conscious Conversation offers the potential for true connection and communication and may yield rewarding, revealing, and potentially transformative insights for all parties.

What defines this experience? There are four key attributes that distinguish a truly Conscious Conversation from an ordinary conversation or monologue. These attributes aren't binary conditions, but the more fully realized they are, the more likely it is a Conscious Conversation will erupt.

Committed. Put down the mobile phone. Focus first on truly understanding what the other person's understanding, before expressing your own. A Conscious Conversation is fully engaged, but more than that, it is committed to achieving a mutual benefit for all parties, without self-serving narcissism or multi-tasking distractions.

Honest. To the extent possible, a Conscious Conversation is grounded in an unfiltered, unbiased, and shared truth. This truth may not be held by all participants at the outset of a Conscious Conversation, but it should be by its end, if not sooner. This doesn't preclude the possibility of one or both parties having a disagreement or differing desired outcomes, but these elements should be fully disclosed, with no hidden agendas or manipulation. This may rarely exist in a pure form, but the more, the better.

Compassionate. Empathy, respect, and caring regard for all parties involved. Even if competition, anger, or other volatile emotions are present, they should be subservient to a compassionate compass. Honesty is a required ingredient of a Conscious Conversation, but not if it manifests as excessive, unwarranted candor, e.g. "No, those pants don't make you look fat. You ARE fat. The pants are blameless". A Conscious Conversation can be direct and provocative, but only in a spirit of caring, not abuse.

Exploratory. Conscious Conversations are most likely to occur when they reflect a search for shared truths, as opposed to declaration of a rigid and singular ideology. Preconceptions, data, and hypothesis should be mutually validated, and challenges and new understanding must be welcomed.

If these are the dimensions of a Conscious Conversation, where do they occur in life? Are they common, or exotic? What is their natural habitat? To determine this, I began by reviewing if and where I've seen Conscious Conversations in my own life.

In one of my life roles, I'm an entrepreneur, business consultant, and salesperson. I help companies communicate or sell their ideas, and I may communicate or sell my own ideas to them. Any of those roles might entail a conversation to learn about their views and aspirations and align with my needs. Are those Conscious Conversations? Probably not. While I strive to achieve meaningful connections, I also see at both the micro and macro levels, achieving the required quadfecta of reciprocated commitment, honesty, compassion, and exploration in a profit-driven business setting is rare. I can't speak for every circumstance, but I've been a plumber, electrician, car mechanic, and a pizza delivery guy and I didn't see many Conscious Conversations happening in those settings either.

What is your experience? Do you routinely experience Conscious Conversations among business or salespeople? My observation is Conscious Conversations are also infrequent among politicians, lawyers, health professionals, soldiers, police officers, farmers, clergy, service workers and countless other arts and professions. There may be many people with many good intentions, but there are also a lot of opposing gravitational forces at work. Conscious Conversations may happen, but like a total solar eclipse, it's unusual and special when everything lines up perfectly.

I'm also a college instructor and teacher. Does the crucible of education produce a Conscious Conversation? Maybe, though it seems more likely in a one-on-one mentorship setting than in a classroom lecture with an overhead projector, a lesson plan objective, and an auditorium full of over-caffeinated and mobile-phone-irradiated students. I may aspire to deliver a

committed, honest, compassionate, and exploratory learning experience, and my students may want to experience it, but there are a lot of variables and antagonists. That's not to say it's a bad experience, but in education as well as business, I find true Conscious Conversations are the exception.

Beyond work, I am a husband, father, and friend. Do love and loyalties produce Conscious Conversations? While it may be easier to align the required foundation elements, I believe the answer is still a firm "maybe". The boiling cauldron of visceral emotions, expectations, and orientations in these familiar settings often impede Conscious Conversation. A couple expressing their love and relationship goals may be successful, as may someone comforting a child or close friend in need. On the other hand, a parental lecture, the deception of an unfaithful partner, or a banal chat about the cable bill probably don't cross the threshold of Conscious Conversation.

Then there are the dialogs one has with oneself, God, or a spiritual North Star. Are these Conscious Conversations? While it may be easier to achieve, it's still not inevitable. These internal dialogues are often hijacked by feelings of pain, guilt, fear, or undefined aspirations. There may be challenges stemming from self-doubt or the echoes of a corrosive relationship. Still, this type of self-reflection or prayer may offer the best tinder to ignite a Conscious Conversation.

As a personal example, I fight an ongoing battle with a chronic, debilitating, and currently incurable medical condition. This illness has significantly impacted me, my career, and relationships; in little over a decade, I went from being an avid mountain hiker and cyclist to spending significant time in a wheelchair, with an uncertain future ahead. That's not to say I'm helpless or bitter; I feel very lucky to have the love and support of people around me and I continue to thrive despite a series of relatively dismal prognoses. As the medical community currently lacks satisfactory answers, I'm largely on my own to find solutions, manage my emotions, and determine how, how fast, and how far to push myself. At times, I feel like a fugitive on a prison break, savoring sought-after freedoms or abilities

that may be suddenly denied by barking dogs and a stethoscope-wearing warden.

As unpleasant as this may sound, it has also led me to have many valued and transformative Conscious Conversations with myself. The intensity of this solitary experience often delivers the commitment, honesty, compassion, and exploratory qualities that are generally lacking elsewhere. Here, there are no easy answers and no room for delusions, hidden agendas, or cruelty. Everything is on the table, centered on shared discovery and purpose. It's taught me to show myself compassion and appreciate the good in even the most challenging experiences. I have also developed empathy and understanding of challenges faced by others, health-related or otherwise. In turn, these perspectives have better-equipped me to have substantive Conscious Conversations with those around me.

I believe this type of deep introspection may be the most common habitat of the Conscious Conversation. Illness is not the driver; spiritual people may also get to this level in prayer or meditation, when having a conversation with God or whatever truth or energy they are drawn to.

Perhaps this captures the full essence of what a Conscious Conversation might be. If one can find commitment, honesty, compassion, and open exploration in a conversation, it's hopefully there. If that's true, it may be necessary to bring that same level of integrity, openness, and love into the conversations that you have in daily life.

Perhaps achieving Conscious Conversation with oneself is a prerequisite for participating in a Conscious Conversation with others.

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