

Voices

Be courageous to guarantee getting the message across

There is a method to avoiding miscommunication, writes **Karen O'Donnell**

How sure are you that what you think you are communicating is reaching the person you are talking to?

Frequently we experience miscommunication where part of the information is lost or misunderstood. We believe communication has occurred, but it hasn't! Both people think they understand what has been passed between them, but the ideas they have are not the same. This is where the illusion can be most damaging.

Have you ever been on the receiving end of someone misinterpreting your words, or at a meeting with your colleagues only to realise afterwards that their interpretation of that meeting is very different?

Perhaps you sent an innocent email or text and the recipient took offence – their interpretation was not your meaning.

What causes the problem?

The words we hear and their meanings are filtered through our own unique context grid, which is made up of our strongly-held opinions, beliefs and attitudes shaped and reinforced over a lifetime. This results in us all unknowingly putting our own interpretation or spin on the words of others, often creating misunderstanding and hurt feelings.

At work, when you are dependent on someone to get a task accomplished, it is essential you build a relationship that will lead to open task-related communication.

Conversations tend to be defined by what we tell, rather than by what we ask. Yet all my coaching experience has taught me that what builds a relationship, solves problems and moves situations forward is asking the right questions.

We need to adopt the ABC of Courageous Conversations; the art of enquiry:

Asking questions to which you may not already know the answer

Building a relationship based on curiosity and interest in the other person, and seeking...

Clarification to understand what is being said.

An objective of every courageous conversation is to enhance the relationship – with a work colleague, family member or

friend. With these we can connect, communicate and collaborate more effectively at a deep level of understanding.

Think about an important person in your life that you may be avoiding having 'that' conversation with. Remember, you and the other person use different context filter grids and working through likely assumptions that may have been made is essential to improving our ability to handle conversations.

All courageous conversations start with self-enquiry, which follows the 'WOW' approach.

What happened: what actually happened and how does that make you feel? Who else is it affecting?

Own it: how might you have contributed to this situation?

Win-win it for you and the other person: when it's resolved, what positive implication will it have for you the other person and family or work?

Once you are clear on where you stand with this issue, is there someone you need to have a courageous conversation with? Is there anyone who can influence the desired outcome? Before you start, bear the following in mind.

■ **Tip 1:** park your emotions on the shelf. Instead, come from a place of curiosity.

■ **Tip 2:** Have the end in sight. What is it you want to achieve?

■ **Tip 3:** Be patient and listen.

Courageous conversations can enhance your working relationship. Making room for them can deepen that connection, communication and collaboration.

Communication is vital in all aspects of work. When communicating, be crystal clear. Where it is appropriate, seek clarification that what you meant was actually what was understood.

The skill of enquiry is necessary to identify needs for collaboration among work colleagues and departments and to facilitate such collaboration.

Teams at work often consist of a variety of conflicting personalities and styles. Getting to a point where a team can collaborate and work in harmony can take time. Teams can be transformed by actively encouraging courageous conversations and using the art of enquiry.

Karen O'Donnell is from Toastmasters International, a non-profit educational organisation that teaches public speaking and leadership skills; see toastmasters.org



Good communication is vital in all aspects of work, says Karen O'Donnell, and it is important to be crystal clear and to seek clarification, if necessary

Review

Porter lives up to glowing reputation

"Sometimes I leave the stage thinking, 'That was good for me, but was it good for them?'" beams Gregory Porter as he returns for a few more songs.

Gregory, let me speak on behalf of everyone in Colston Hall when I say that it most definitely was.

But the performance doesn't get off to the smoothest of starts. As the Grammy winner departs the stage for the third time in the opening 15 minutes, people begin to murmur to each other with puzzled expressions, questioning the reasoning behind the repeated departures. Are there technical difficulties? Is he slightly unwell? Or is he simply leaving the stage during lengthy instrumental sections to let his insanely talented band have the limelight?

We don't find out, but thankfully whatever's causing the abrupt exits is resolved and we can then enjoy the blues and jazz sensation and his fantastic band in all their glory.

Opening with *Holdin' On*, the song given a makeover by Disclosure back in 2015, which in turn introduced Porter to a wider audience, his remarkable, inimitable baritone vocals instantly wrap the crowd in a fluffy blanket.

It's a varied set from there on, with tracks from his four studio albums making the cut. Singles from his latest release, *Nat King Cole & Me* – an ode to his musical idol – including the rousing *When Love Was King* and *Nature Boy* show Porter at his most pensive as he delivers them from a stool next to pianist Chip Crawford, while more upbeat numbers like *Free* and *Liquid Spirit* see him more animated and clapping along enthusiastically; people in the audience wishing they, too, were standing so they could dance along.

After the beautiful *Hey Laura*, a song so charming and sincere it has some people dabbing tears from their eyes, Porter declares "there's a good vibe in here", clearly relishing performing as he always seems to. He's not wrong. Other standout moments include *Take Me To The Alley*, the title track from his critically-acclaimed sophomore album, and *Water Under Bridges*, for which all the band except Crawford depart the stage, creating the evening's most solemn moment.

Rather than an encore in the traditional sense, all musicians take turns blowing the crowd away with jaw-dropping solos before leaving one-by-one to rapturous applause, which proves to be another of the night's highlights. Porter then returns to perform his Nat King Cole tribute, followed by the whole band for one final song. There is a deserved and heartfelt standing ovation.

It's the opinion of many esteemed critics that Porter is one of the great jazz vocalists of our time, and with performances like this it's hard to disagree.

Robin Murray