

What's Behind Door #3? Adults Choosing to Engage in Powerful Conversations in the Workplace and Beyond

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by M. Parker Anderson

There is an old show that still comes on television that I love to watch. The audience is filled with anticipation, anxiously waiting to hear their name called; and when they do, they come running down to the front of the stage with shrieks and yells of glee and delight. They stand there with hearts pounding, eyes filled with anticipation to learn what possible prize lies ahead for them behind Door #1, Door #2, or Door #3.

- Some close their eyes and think for a long time, deliberating cautiously, seeking a winning result, yet not knowing behind which door the booby prize lies.
- Others just know, without giving it much thought, well in advance of choosing, what door they are going to select. They appear to have a formula for choosing Door #1, Door #2, or Door #3.
- Still there are others who somehow recognize that the important part of the whole event is the joy and delight of being in the audience; they seem to recognize that the running, screaming, and jumping are all part of the show, and they get the prize regardless of which door they choose.

There are times when I see this show that remind me of how adult conversations frequently occur, both within the workplace and beyond. People want to win, be seen, be noticed; and they will often go to extraordinary lengths to achieve this objective. They will yell, even scream and carry on in all sorts of ways just to demonstrate that they are in charge or important, or should be valued. Individuals will often get so caught up in acting out that they may forget that the real value of conversation occurs with the very first "hello." I have actually observed the shrieking, yelling, and running through corridors, but it is occurring in the workplace. Sometimes this is done in pure joy, yet too often this behavior of anger, disappointment, and excess emerges within everyday conversations. These are not the powerful conversa-

tions that make a difference in the workplace and beyond.

The need for powerful conversations

As a coach, one of the recurring conversations that clients share and hold in common with me are the problems brought forward when powerful conversations are absent within the workplace or even in our own personal lives. Conversation requires an exchange between two or more persons. Webster's dictionary defines conversation as *an exchange of sentiments, observations, opinions, or ideas*. A powerful conversation requires an exchange that leads to win-win interactions, even in the face of differences. Powerful conversations allow both parties to feel supported, nurtured, respected, and honored, recognizing that this is the end result upon which success can be measured. But what prevents this from happening?

- What interferes with our keeping the end in mind when we engage in workplace conversations?
- What stops us from engaging in powerful conversations that support and nurture?
- What are those things that we do inside of conversations that we can do slightly differently, without much effort, and end with a hugely different result?

Let's examine some typical conversational patterns that we fall into, both inside and outside of the workplace.

Exposing conversational patterns

Similar to the television game show mentioned above where the contestants choose either Door #1, Door #2, or Door #3, within conversations we also get to choose 'Conversational Doors' that we can go through.

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The door we choose can lead us into familiar patterns and beliefs that influence our conversational experiences. Within any conversation we can choose Conversational Door #1, Conversational Door #2, or Conversational Door #3. Each of these Doors leads us down a path that all too often is both familiar and unknown. In choosing one of the doors, we can be thrust into a spiraling upward cycle or into a downward gravitational pull. The pull downward can lead us into a valley of desperation where we may feel alone and isolated in contrast to the upward cycle that draws us into feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction.

Door #1: Anxiety, aggression, and anger

My assessment of Conversational Door #1 is that it fosters expressions of anxiety, aggression, attitude, anger, and ambition within conversations. Conversations may start out casually enough, but before either party is aware of what is happening, tempers, signs of frustration and hostility, and disgruntled colleagues can emerge. These conversations often represent a huge annoyance that is unsettling to all involved in the exchange. Conversations behind Door #1 often represent the false beliefs that individuals struggle against. For example, people may demonstrate more aggression or negative attitude because they are combating a sense of worthlessness, or feeling undervalued, unappreciated, or even, at times, ashamed.

Conversational Door #1 often shows up in the workplace as someone who is whining, complaining, emerging as a cynic, or even a victim of his or her surroundings. Caught in a downward spiral of dissatisfaction, individuals may choose Door #1 because they believe that it will give them added authority or an increased sense of value. Nonetheless, Door #1 always results in the same outcome: It does not serve the individual or the circumstance. From Door #1 there is a slippery slope, dragging the individual, as well as the organization, down.

Door #2:

False bravado and unacceptable behavior

Conversational Door #2 is often chosen by those demonstrating false bravado or unacceptable behavior within the workplace through their language and/or actions. People who choose Door #2 often engage in conversations to be right, at any cost. These individuals want to act and feel important, even

though they often have little to say of merit or worth. When Door #2 is chosen, individuals browse inside different circles looking for others to agree with them and, in so doing, form a band of insiders who often are unable to hear or see the merit and/or value in others.

- These people tend to yell at others as a form of communication.
- They speak in loud gravelly voices, and they are even known to use bad language and swearing as a means of getting attention.
- These individuals squelch the performance of their staff, never allowing their real gifts and expertise to shine through.

If we choose Door #2, there is a strong tendency to blame others for not doing what they should, or for their disposition to always be bothered about one thing or another. Nothing ever appears to be good enough for those who operate behind Door #2. They descend into a big, dark hole of ridicule and shame, taking others with them.

Neither Door #1 nor Door #2 serve us when we are creating powerful conversations. When we choose either one of these doors, we must recognize that we will have to climb out, slowly and deliberately. The good news is that we *can* climb out. It's important to remember that within each conversation or exchange, we have choice. We can choose the door we want.

Setting the foundation for powerful conversation

Before moving on to speak about Conversational Door #3, let me address ways in which we can set the foundation for having powerful conversations. In setting the stage for powerful conversations, we have to be willing to discover the leader within. We must ask, "How do we want to be treated?" and "How do we want others to treat us?" When we discover the leader within, we open ourselves up to move to our personal best, accept our unique role and responsibility within conversations, and learn to value opportunities to have others win right along with our winning.

Changing course

Should we find ourselves in a conversation that has led us to Door #1 or Door #2, there are steps to take

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that will lead us out from behind those doors that are 'going nowhere fast' and help us enter Doors of Possibility:

- **Step 1:** Acknowledge that you have chosen the wrong door.
- **Step 2:** Recognize that if you are trying to have a conversation and you are in the wrong door, you are in a no-win situation, so begin climbing out of it.
- **Step 3:** Breathe and know that this situation can be improved, as long as you are willing to take charge of yourself.
- **Step 4:** Establish short- and long-term goals. Many times people just fix the problem for the short-term by saying "I am sorry" or "I apologize," which is good; however, it is also important to spend some time reflecting on what drew you into Doors #1 or #2 in the first place. In other words, "What were you thinking at the time?" and "What influenced your judgment in that moment?" Look at the short- and long-term fixes that are available to you.
- **Step 5:** Communicate your intentions to effectively communicate with a difference in the future. When others win, you win. Keep your word by creating change in yourself. In so doing, you get to create a whole new reality for yourself that includes engaging in powerful conversations.

Capturing the cornerstones of powerful conversations

Come to each conversation from a new place of listening and engaging:

- Set the intention from the outset that the conversation you are involved in is going to be both powerful and beneficial to you.
- Listen for the gold nuggets that occur within each conversation.

- Believe that each person is doing the best that they can in that moment, understanding that in the very next moment they can rise to an even higher level of possibility.
- Even though you may be the boss, the kingpin, the chief cook and bottle washer, remember the value in asking questions, remaining engaged, and appreciating conversations as opportunities to learn.
- Be open *and ready for success*.
- Embrace an attitude of wonder, fascination, and delight in all conversations.

Choose powerfully: Door #3

When you choose Conversational Door #3, you enter into a world of caring, collaboration, and commitment that will envelope both you, the speaker, and the listener. This door allows you to look for the good, the beautiful, and the inspiring within each conversation. You will:

- Release the need to know everything.
- Be open to your own personal growth and development.
- Turn down your own volume and listen for the beauty that emerges in the background.
- Let go of the need to make yourself overly important.
- Learn to graciously accept the praise and acknowledgement of others.
- Build trust and confidence in yourself as a powerful leader.
- Nurture and celebrate the gift of what others choose to share with you.
- Let go of the false beliefs that we are not good enough, worthy enough, or deserving enough. None of these beliefs are true.

Choosing Door #3 opens up the possibility of engaging in powerful conversations that make a difference in the workplace and beyond.

Using Beginnings Workshop to Train Teachers

by Kay Albrecht

Which door is your dominant choice?: Anderson identifies three doors to conversation. Which one rang bells for you when you read the description? If your choice is Conversational Door # 1 or #2, reflect on what that might mean for you.

Do you have powerful conversations?: Think of a conversation that wasn't as powerful as you would have liked it to be. Work through the tips suggested in the article to replay the conversation in your head with a different outcome. Practice makes perfect. Try this whenever your conversations don't go as well as you'd like.

Acknowledge wrong doors: Consider whether there are situations where this is exactly what you should have done. Then, plan to do it in the future.