



Provoking Flourishing Not-for-profits

Call forth your best, then play above that

COOL Conversations

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Dysfunctional organizations are filled with heated conversations. If you want to change the temperature, you have to introduce COOL conversations into the mix.



To help you imagine and compose such conversations, consider a style of jazz — cool jazz — that emerged in the 1940s and 1950s. By remembering these key elements of cool jazz, you can compose conversations that replace conflict with cooperation, one conversation after another:

- Cool jazz is reflective and mindful, seeking clarity of purpose and expression
- Cool jazz has a memorable melodic flow, integrating emotion and intellect into 'sweet' sounds
- Cool jazz invites collective creativity, welcoming innovative ideas from a wide variety of sources

Here's my current acronym for COOL to play around with in your team. Invite team members to tell stories about a time when these key elements worked best in their experience, then explore what made that happen.

Collaborate — work together. Every conversation works best if it composed as a bid to connect and contribute. To be resilient in face of all the pressures that threaten to pull teams apart in heated disputes, every team member must stay focused on the benefits of working well together and compose that melody one conversation after another.

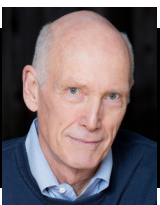
Observe — pay attention to what's going on. This involves watching and listening to yourself, the others on the team, and the dynamics in the environment. With the whole team observing and sharing what they see and hear, your conversations will create a much fuller and robust contribution.

Originate — produce creative innovation. Lasting innovation arises, most frequently, from teams putting together things they already know in novel and more effective combinations. Use your conversations to create this kind of insight and impact.

Lead — model the way by doing your best, then even more. Miles Davis, whose 1959 album, *Birth of the Cool*, is one of the classics in this style of jazz, said he asked his musicians to play their best, then play above that. For him, coolness captured the sweetness of humanity. Your conversations can model a cool creativity that sustains continuous improvement.

These self-coaching questions might help to keep you in sync with COOL conversations:

- Is my attention focused on generating space that invites collaboration?
- Am I looking for and listening for the best in people and seeking ways of supporting that?
- What improvements can I imagine and suggest?
- How am I helping to create sweet space for COOL conversations?



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