



Provoking Flourishing Not-for-profits

Call forth your best, then play above that

Calm, Curious, and Constructive

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When the leadership in a team is anxious, stubborn, and ineffective, the organization suffers. Every team goes through periods when these things seem to dominate and all too often they get stuck there. People withdraw, or underfunction, or undermine.

To break this system of toxic behavior, someone on the team has to take on the responsibility of being **calm**, **curious**, and **constructive**. Someone has to find the courage to disrupt the negativity and introduce constructive possibilities by being curious in a calm way. That someone can be anyone on the team.



The feel and flow of this kind of disruption of negativity can be seen and sensed in this picture from the recording of *Kind of Blue*, a collaboration that originated a new era in jazz in the late 1950s. In this photo, Miles Davis (trumpet) is working on the best approach with Bill Evans (piano), while Paul Chambers (bass) listens for the input of John Coltrane (tenor sax), Cannonball Adderley (alto sax), and Jimmy Cobb (drums). From the **calm** and **curiosity** evident in this picture arose **constructive** creativity that changed the world.

So, how can you become **calm**, **curious**, and **constructive** in ways that change your world? Here are some very simple, but powerful, habits to cultivate, one conversation after another.

1. To be **calm** in the midst of your anxieties, take three deep breaths, repeat your positive purpose as you do, then be curious.
2. To be **curious** in the midst of your stubbornness, shift your perspective from being a participant to an observer. Be curious about what's going on, especially what values are being pursued by the various interests involved, then explore the possibilities for being constructive based on a foundation of common values.
3. To be **constructive** in the midst of your ineffectiveness, invite others into the process of discerning and deciding on the best possibilities for serving the common values you have discovered, then try them out.

It will take time to cultivate these habits for the benefit of your team. They can be practiced every time you have a conversation with yourself and with others. If you pay attention to becoming calmer quicker when you feel anxious, becoming curious quicker when you feel stubborn, and becoming constructive quicker when you feel ineffective, you will exercise a positive leadership from wherever you may be in the formal structure of the team.

Your most positive and powerful tools in making these improvements are your conversations. Be calmer, more curious, and more constructive in your conversations, with yourself and with others, and you will disrupt negativity in your team and cultivate positive possibilities.



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