

Ten Conversations for Creating Action and Alignment

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An organization's results are determined through webs of human commitments, born in webs of human conversations.

Fernando Flores

At the heart of leadership is the capacity to create results that matter to the people with whom you work and the people you serve. When you and those with whom you work have a common understanding and a shared commitment to achieve measurable results that matter to you all, then acting together effectively can become your daily practice. Having the ability to know the kind of conversation to have in a particular situation, to be in alignment and take action together, is a powerful leadership skill.

Contents	
1.	Identifying Levels of Action and Alignment
2.	Types of Conversations to Create High Action and Alignment
3.	Creating a Practice to Track the Impact of Your Conversations

1. Identifying Levels of Action and Alignment

The first step is to notice the current level of alignment and action for yourself and those with whom you work. Find your places in one of the quadrants below:

<p>High action, low alignment A leader working actively and independently to contribute to the result, but not reaching out to build relationships with others to achieve complementary efforts.</p>	<p>High action, high alignment A leader with resilient relationships acting on collaborative decisions and being accountable for measurably improving results.</p>
<p>Low action, low alignment A leader observing what is going on and not engaging in either relationship building or taking action that can contribute to results.</p>	<p>Low action, high alignment A leader joining with others and fostering relationships, but not using the relationships to leverage contributions to the result.</p>

2. Types of Conversations to Create High Action and Alignment

Once you know the situation you are in, the second step is to choose a powerful conversation that will move you toward or sustain you in the **“high action and high alignment”** quadrant. Types of conversations that may help you get there, as well as ways to start the conversations, are included below.

Moving Towards High Alignment

Leaders engaging people to work together for a common result require connecting different interests, commitments and perspectives in a new way so that everyone has a relationship to each other and a shared result. Low alignment is a symptom of undeveloped relatedness.

Conversation	Possible ways to start the conversation
1. Meaning	This is what is important to me and what I want to do with you... What is important to you? What matters to you? What do you want to do together?
2. Relationship	I'm not satisfied with our level of commitment and I'd like us to talk about it. I'd like to hear what you value about our working together. How can we build a cohesive working relationship?
3. Success	What is a successful outcome for each of us? What are our conditions of satisfaction for our work together?
4. Possibility	What can we create together? What is possible? What are the different options? What is open to us? What is our true potential? What haven't we considered?

Moving Towards High Action

Mobilizing action requires addressing issues of pace, capacity and competency and peer accountability.

<i>Conversation</i>	<i>Possible ways to start the conversation</i>
5. Accountability	This is what I am contributing. What are you willing to contribute towards our success? When are you willing to make that contribution? What are you willing to say yes to? What do you say no to? What are the consequences for each of us of taking this action? Are there areas that no one else has taken responsibility for that are key to success?
6. Commitment and Promises	What is your commitment to the results and the work so that we can meet our goals? What is your commitment to me so that I can be successful? What commitment do you need from me so you can be successful? What has each of us promised?
7. Action	Let's coordinate the timing and communication of our tasks in order to get this work done in time. This is how I am progressing on my commitments... How are you progressing on your commitments? Do you want my input? Do you have any input for me? What proposals do you have for who needs to do what and by when?
8. Results	What outcome do we want to see? How important is that result? What are we willing to do, stop doing, not do or change to achieve that result? Is this bottom line reasonable? What do others expect of us? What do you expect as a result of our working together? What do you expect that our work will produce? Who will benefit from achieving the result? How will we know if we have achieved the result? Who are partners who can contribute?

Conversation to Move Out of Low Action and Low Alignment

The cornerstone conversation to move out of a place of both low alignment and low action is one that allows you or those with whom you work to reflect on their own personal power – the power to act and the power to forge relationships.

<i>Conversation</i>	<i>Possible ways to start the conversation</i>
9. Personal Power	If you could move forward on your own, what would you do? What prevents you from exercising your power? What are your sources of power? From your own unique gifts, talents and experience? In your roles of both formal and informal authority? In the systems you are part of? If there were no constraints, how might you approach this? What do you need from us to support you? What can you give yourself permission to do? Is there risk you need to mitigate? If this is not a place you want to be, what can you do to make it meaningful? What do you need to do to leave?

Conversation to Sustain High Action and High Alignment

Once you are in a place of high action and high alignment, there are conversations of reflection and learning that can sustain this high level of engagement until the program results are achieved.

<i>Conversation</i>	<i>Possible ways to start the conversation</i>
10. Reflection	What just happened? What did we learn? What should we do next time? Were our working assumptions accurate when we started? Isn't it time to stop and reflect? Which of the conversations that got us here do we need to have again?

3. Creating a Practice to Track the Impact of Your Conversations

A key leadership practice is reflecting on your planned and actual actions, results and impacts. As you try out different conversations related to High Action and High Alignment, set aside time to: (1) identify what conversation you need to have with whom; (2) decide what you hope to achieve with this conversation; (3) have the conversation; and (4) outline the impact of the conversation and what happened during and after it. Use a journal to note these reflections and if something doesn't work the first time, try again.

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