



Becoming more effective as a thought leader

from 10.30am until 4.30pm on
Thursday, March 14th 2019

Background Note and Agenda for our 29th Leadership Conversation

Society of Leadership Fellows, St George's House, Windsor Castle

**“Thought leadership is
when a leader's thoughts
are being used by
leaders to lead others.”**



Onyi Anyado

Author

Introduction

We hope that through this Conversation every Leadership Fellow joining us will end up with a clearer sense of how you can increase your influence as a thought leader across 2019 and 2020.

We will engage with the Conversation in three parts, within the framework of our Guiding Principles for Leadership Conversations:

- **Building trust**
- **Achieving stronger connections**
- **Going for the stretch.**

In this Background Paper we follow them through, setting out the key question that we will explore in small groups as we move into each Part. In this way, the answers that you bring back from groups will drive the energy of this Leadership Conversation and ensure that the ideas-building process is truly shared among all of us joining the Conversation.

Defining the core term

For all of our Leadership Conversations, we are always careful to offer up a phrase or sentence that someone has used to define the core term that we are debating. This is intended not in any way as a definition that we ask everyone to sign up to, but rather as a form of words to help us get the Conversation underway.

This is why we include the quote from Onyi Anyado. As a good number of you know very well, it captures something powerful about effective thought leaders, namely:

- **The importance of your ability to persuade all sorts of other leaders to take on your thoughts and **make them their own** as part of their mission as leaders.**

“Thought leaders advance the marketplace of ideas by positing actionable, commercially relevant, research-backed, new points of view. They engage in “blue ocean strategy” thinking on behalf of themselves and their clients, as opposed to simply churning out product-focused, brand-centric white papers or curated content that shares or mimics others’ ideas.”



Dr Liz Alexander and Craig Badings

<http://leadingthought.us.com>

Part I **Building trust**

BUILDING TRUST

The challenge for our first round of small groups

Once we have agreed our guiding principles for the day, we break into small (standing) groups for 15 minutes, in which we ask each of you to come up with your personal answer to the question:

- ❓ **If you were to use one phrase to describe yourself as a thought leader, keeping the word count in single figures, what words would you use?**

We realise that the quote from Liz Alexander and Craig Badings doesn't set a very good example! We wanted to include it to capture how some people differentiate between thought leaders and many other sorts of leaders who are thoughtful and reflective and highly successful but do not see themselves as drivers of ideas and influencers of the thinking of others in the same sort of way.

At this stage, all we are after is some sort of input from each of you capturing **how you see yourself as a thought leader**.

Please use whatever language works best for you

Needless to say, if you would rather not describe yourself as a thought leader and want to describe your leadership in another way, please do so. All that matters is that you use whatever language works best for you – and for the benefit of the rest of us absorbing what you come up with, **please** keep the word count down to single figures. Many thanks!

At the end of your time in this small group, please write up your words on the whiteboard, followed by your first name. Many thanks.

The process of answering this question should provide a good basis for us to move on to the next stage of this Conversation that will require more engagement and questioning on all of our parts.

Part 2

ACHIEVING STRONGER CONNECTIONS

THOUGHT
LEADERS
CONNECT
STRETCH

Once we have had a few minutes to absorb your answers on the whiteboards, we want to progress to the second part of the Conversation under the banner of our guiding principle about achieving a greater connection across the group.

We will agree the precise question that we take into new small groups at the time. At this moment, our thinking is that it should be:

Please picture in your mind some of the people with whom you work most closely. You are having a cup of coffee with them and one says that you're a great thought leader, and yet you're still not having the impact that you should be having. The other two agree and say that they also feel that you could be more effective than you are.

So, imagining that you are challenged in this way by people who know you well and rate you highly, will you please challenge yourselves with this question:

- ? If you were to think of one fairly "safe" way in which you might become more effective as a thought leader, and one rather more risky and radical way, what would they be?**

We hope that in the process of answering this question you will each make a point of picturing yourself stepping forward as a more confident and effective thought leader.

As we consider the answers that you bring back from small groups, we will give the lion's share of our time to the more radical ways that you come up with for becoming more effective as thought leaders.

TRUST
TRUST
CONNECT
STRETCH

Part 2

ACHIEVING STRONGER CONNECTIONS *continued*

THOUGHT EFFECTIVE CONNECTIONS

Please don't spend too long in the "safe zone"!

The reason we are asking you to differentiate between one fairly safe and low risk way of moving forward, and one altogether more risky and radical way, is that we can often have a tendency to stay in the "safe zone" for rather a long time!

When we have an overnight Conversation, we have enough time to let ourselves move forward cautiously, if that's what we need to do.

In a one-day Conversation, we don't have this luxury if we are to come up with some significant outcomes that could be of lasting use to you.

This is why we want to ask you to make a point of engaging with some risky options for developing your leadership role at this relatively early stage in the process.

It is also why we always emphasise the importance of the first round of small groups for building trust among us.

We are very conscious that within an hour of this Conversation getting underway we are asking you to trust each other enough to be willing to engage with some pretty life-changing options that can leave you feeling vulnerable with your small group.

It's a **big ask** and we hope that on the day it will feel natural and right to say "yes, we'll go with it!"

Letting yourself fly!

On the basis of our previous Leadership Conversations, we know that the more you can open up with each other at this stage and think out loud about how you might develop your thought leadership role if you really let yourself "fly", the more we will all gain as we move into the third Part over lunch and **go for the stretch**.

“Thought leadership is by its nature evolutionary, in that it must always be part of an ever-evolving flow.”



Pearl Zhu

Digital leadership visionary

Part 3

GOING FOR THE STRETCH

STRETCH

In very few words, Pearl Zhu – herself an awesome thought leader and “digital visionary” – captures something powerful about the nature of thought leadership and the need to see it as in a state of constant evolution.

For any leader who seeks to be a thought leader, “standing still” is not an option. In the very moment when you share one insight or business proposition that you regard as market-leading, you feel yourself under pressure to engage with your next one. And so it goes on!

For successful thought leaders, the idea of “resting on your laurels” simply isn’t an option.

Going forward by two years

We regard this as a good challenge to ourselves to step up our pace of critical thinking – and thought leadership – as we prepare for our next round of small groups to work together over lunch at 1.00pm.

So, with your consent we would like to stretch ourselves further by going forward in our minds by two years and then retracing our steps!

Hence our challenge on the next page that we will ask you to engage with in small groups over lunch:

TRUST
CONNECT
STRETCH

Part 3 GOING FOR THE STRETCH

continued

Our challenge for lunchtime groups at 1.00pm

Please imagine that we are back here as a group in two years' time, on March 14 2021. It's been a busy two years for you and you have achieved so much more than you thought would be possible when you left Windsor two years ago today.

You ARE so much more effective as a thought leader now.

- ❓ How would you describe your role now, and how different would you say it is from your role when you were here two years ago?
- ❓ In particular, which of your strengths as a leader has come more to the fore over the past two years to enable you to increase your impact as a thought leader as much as you have done?

Please imagine yourself in a role that excites you!

For this to work and help us generate some fresh insights to move us on in our shared thinking, we need to ask you, please, to go with it and be ready to imagine yourself in a role that really excites you, even though it might be slightly beyond what you think you are likely to achieve within the next two years.

As before, please be aware that if we all play it safe at this stage our offer to each other will be relatively modest, whereas if we let ourselves follow through our own ambitions for ourselves as thought leaders, we should find that a number of us are able to "paint some powerful pictures" that really inspire the rest of us as we think about our own development as thought leaders.

TRUST
CONNECT
STRETCH

Part 3

GOING FOR THE STRETCH

continued

STRETCH

One volunteer from each group

At the end of your lunchtime group, we will ask each group to identify the Fellow in your group (**only one**, please!) who seems to have the clearest image in their mind of:

- themselves as a **high impact thought leader in 2021**, and
- their personal strategy for **maximising their strengths as a leader** in a way that makes it possible for them to step up and take on this thought leadership role.

Whilst the rest of us have a 5-minute break, we will ask one Fellow from each group to capture on a whiteboard:

- **Their role as a thought leader in 2021 and the impact they ASPIRE to be having by then**
- **The one or two leadership strengths of theirs that they have converted into even greater assets than before and that have enabled them to step forward in the ways they have done.**

Just after 1.50 we will all go round the whiteboards and hear the pitches from Fellows who have allowed themselves to be volunteered for this role.

If you find yourself in this position, please take it for granted that we know you will be describing how your leadership career **might** evolve!

We will not regard your story as a prediction on your part and will be grateful to you for having allowed your ambitions for your role as a thought leader to put you in a position where you are able to offer the rest of us some personal thought leadership at this stage in the Conversation!

Part 3**GOING FOR THE STRETCH***continued***STRETCH****Preparing for our final stretch**

We will be especially interested to hear which particular leadership strengths of yours you see as making it possible for you to achieve a significant shift in your role as a thought leader. We are keen to focus on key leadership strengths at this stage, because we know how much they can enable leaders to achieve a real surge in their own development when they manage to deploy their strengths for the benefit of a higher purpose.

We are also keen to focus on our strengths at this stage, because we want to ask ourselves a different sort of question for our next and final round of small groups that will enable us to swivel the spotlight.

Instead of focusing on our strengths, we will ask what it is about us as leaders that could get in our way **unless we do something about it.**

The challenge for our final round of small groups

By around 2.20 we will want to be sharpening up the precise challenge for our final groups, in light of our discussions by this stage.

We want to start off with a clear focus on asking what it is about ourselves that can so easily **hold us back** from achieving our ambitions as leaders.

For so many of us, this is the single most important issue that we need to engage with to raise our game significantly as a thought leader: **our capacity to get in our own way.**

TRUST
CONNECT
STRETCH

Part 3

GOING FOR THE STRETCH

continued

STRETCH

So often, the barriers that stand in the way of our own development as leaders are actually in our heads, and what we really need to address is our own mindset and our definition of what we can – and can't – do as leaders if we are to maximise our impact in our chosen role.

Therefore, as part of the challenge that we set ourselves in the final round of small groups, we want to ask:

- ❓ **What can we each do to ensure that we don't get in our own way so that we really can step forward as more confident and effective thought leaders?**

However many challenges you might have put to yourself since we started this Conversation together, it is your answer to this challenge that will have a huge impact on your ability to take forward some clear resolves and convert them into a practical strategy for becoming more effective in the “ever evolving flow” of your development as a thought leader.

Aiming for breakthroughs in our thinking

After our final round of small groups, we will join the circle again as one single group at 2.50pm.

As we share the ideas that we have each come up with, we hope that we will be ready to respond to other Leadership Fellows by building on their ideas and suggesting any possible variations that come to mind in the moment.

This is the stage in previous Conversations when some Fellows have achieved real breakthroughs in their thinking as a result of others diving in with their ideas and advice.

It is remarkable how much we can all gain from this final lap, not least because our “no recycling” ground rule means that it's not an option for anyone to repeat anything that they have already shared with the group!

Agenda

Thursday, March 14th 2019

10.15am+	Coffee and light refreshments served in the Vicars' Hall
10.45am <i>(prompt, please)</i>	We welcome you to the Conversation and invite you to agree on the Society's guiding principles as providing the framework for today's Conversation. We then break into small groups of 3 or 4 for 15 minutes to consider our first question, as set out on page 5. At the end of groups we each write up on one of the whiteboards a phrase to describe ourselves as a thought leader. (Refreshments available)
11.15am	We go round the whiteboards taking stock of everyone's answers, and after a few minutes to reflect on them and any common themes and points of difference, we break into a new round of small groups
11.40am	2nd round of small groups considers the questions on page 6
12.00 noon	Refreshments available
12.05pm	Back in the circle in new seats, we capture the key messages coming forward from this second round of groups. As this part of the Conversation develops we make a point of giving the lion's share of our time to the more radical ideas that Fellows come up with for becoming more effective as thought leaders
1.00pm	Lunch is served in the Vicars' Hall. Over lunch, working groups engage with the questions on page 10. At the end of lunch, each group nominates one of their number to share with us how they would like to see their role as a thought leader in two years' time, the impact they aspire to be having by then and the key leadership strengths of theirs that could help to make this possible
1.50pm	We work round the whiteboards from each of these Fellows and draw inspiration from them as we gear into our final round of small groups
2.30pm <i>Refreshments available</i>	In groups we engage with the challenges that we set for ourselves and ask what we can each do to ensure that we don't get in our own way, so that we really can step forward as more confident and effective thought leaders
2.50pm	Back together again as a single group for our final stretch, we explore how we each see ourselves developing as ever more effective thought leaders, drawing on our core leadership strengths, whilst doing all in our power to minimise any tendency to get in our own way. We have a ground rule of "no recycling", so that we all need to find fresh language if we wish to go back to an idea that was raised earlier on. We have a 5-minute comfort break at 3.25, and light refreshments are available to bring back into the circle (to different chairs, please). We ensure that everyone has an opportunity to benefit from quality feedback from others in the group before we bring the Conversation to a close on the dot of 4.30pm.



I'm a thought leader
– I think.

Leading thinking,
thinking about leading,
leading as I think



What do you think?
