



Disruptive leadership

*Insights from three
Leadership Conversations*

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

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Chapter I

Taking on the dementors

Challenging the Dementors



Dementors drain peace, hope and happiness out of the air around them... Get too near a Dementor and every good feeling, every happy memory will be sucked out of you.

Extract from a description of Dementors by Remus Lupin, Professor of Defence Against the Dark Arts at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

When we think of ourselves as disruptive leaders, so many of us have noble ambitions.

We can see the future that others can't quite see and believe it's our responsibility to share our vision.

We can see compromised standards and inefficiencies in the ways we do things at the moment - and want to change them, fast!

We can see how some of our people could be so much better than they are - and want them to step up now!

We want to help our people, and our organisation, go to the next level - and keep on driving up standards across every aspect of our business.

Whilst we talk the language of positivity and big ideas, we find that many of those around us talk a language of negativity and nit-picking.

We tell ourselves that we need to show resilience and determination.

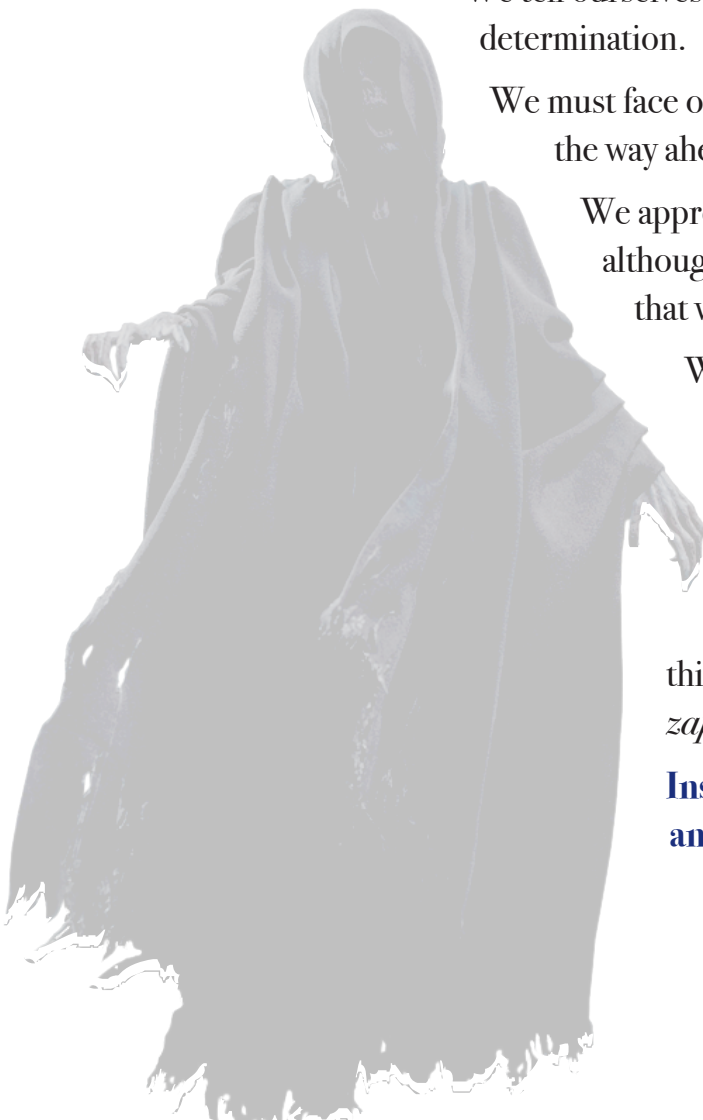
We must face our fears and keep on smiling and pointing the way ahead.

We appreciate it when some come on board, although we're not surprised because we think that what we're proposing is just so obvious.

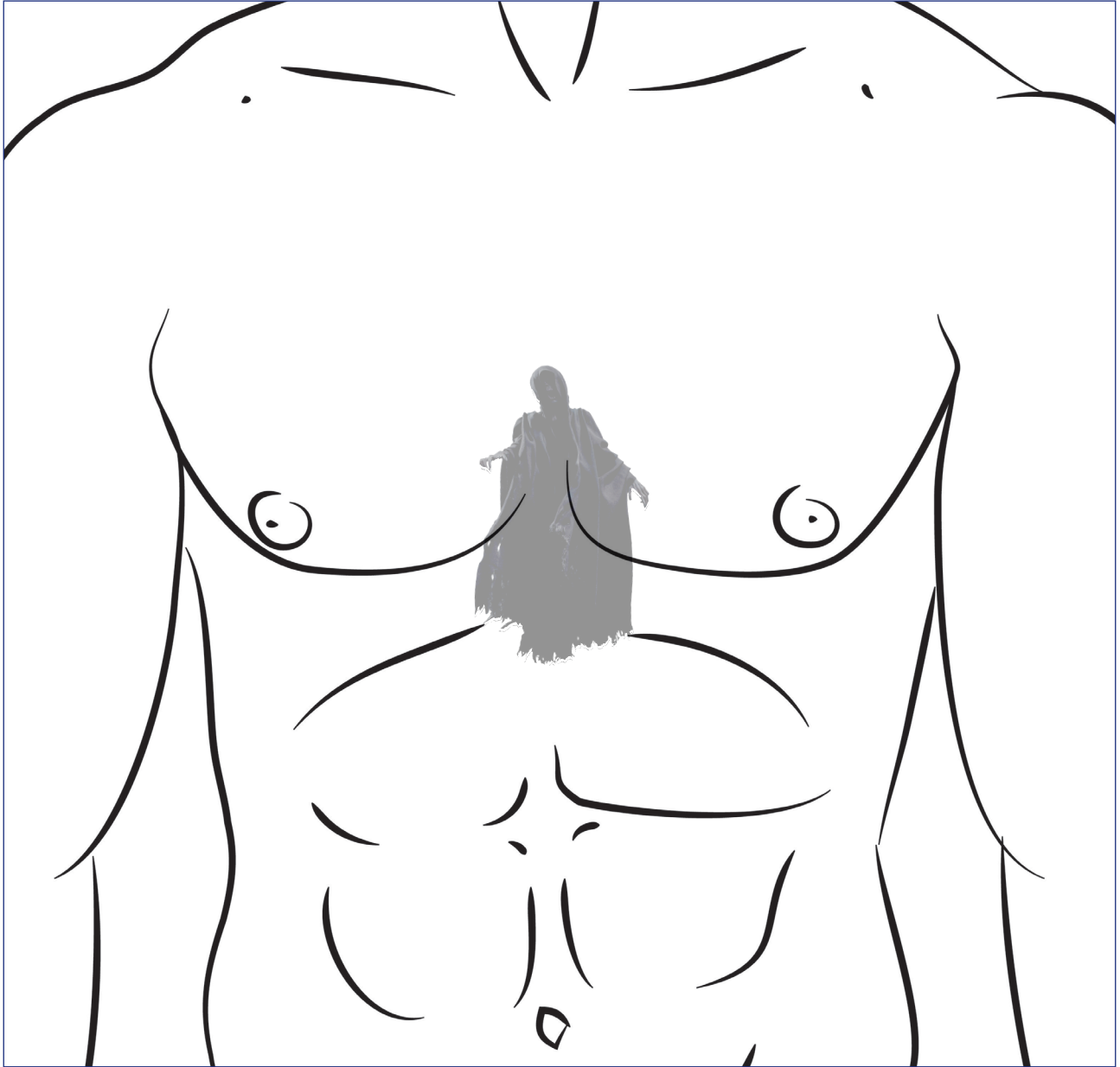
We feel our energy draining away when we encounter the "energy vultures" and "mood hoovers" that seem to delight in telling us why we can't achieve what we want.

"What a bunch of Dementors," we think. "They just don't get it. If only we could zap them!"

Instead, they're zapping us - and our energy.



Facing our inner Dementor



As the Dementors try to block our path and drain our energy, what do we do?

Do we try to persuade and reassure them, constantly appealing to their higher selves?

Or do we tell them to get on the bus **now**?

We haven't got time to wait for them to catch up.

The crisis is here and if they're not on the bus they'll get run over!

One of the things that drives us forward is our sense of **impatience**. In our minds we can sometimes see what will go wrong before it's happened, unless others get into line now.

So we don't apologise for letting this impatience show itself sometimes.

What we tend not to see is the impact this can have on others.

The energy behind our impatience and urgency can become quite overwhelming for them.

This is why they get so bolshy. They think this is their only way of avoiding being flattened by us.

Whilst we might think we gave them time to reflect on the case we put to them, they saw it as tokenistic. We had already made up our minds and then had the cheek to say we wanted their buy-in!

If we're being really honest, we have to admit that we do rather like a crisis. We know that once we've got everyone used to the idea that we need to disrupt old habits in times of crisis, they will soon get used to non-stop disruption. How great is that!

Gosh, they thought they were our Dementor.

Without realising it, **we've become their Dementor!**

Whether it's our impatience, or our variable listening skills, or our reluctance to accept that we are ever wrong, or our so called resilience that can easily turn into bloody-mindedness.... whatever it might be, we can become rather 'Dementorish' when we don't get what we want.

Do we acknowledge our inner Dementors?

Hardly ever.

Finding our own Patronus



Those who are followers of Harry Potter will know about the importance of the Patronus as a guardian for wizards and witches against the Dementors.

Different wizards have their own Patronus: Harry's (above) is a stag, Hermione's is an Otter and Ron's is a Jack Russell Terrier.

The wonderful thing about these silver animals is that **they can not feel despair**. This is why they can see off the Dementors.

Just imagine yourself, as a disruptive leader, having the capacity to protect yourself from ever coming close to despair.

It wouldn't only protect you from the external Dementors. It would protect you from your inner Dementor, too.

How many of us own our inner Dementor? Not many. Strange, isn't it, because we know that the strengths of any leader can quickly turn "dark" when they take them a little too far.

What we tend not to see is how this works at the level of energy – and especially our own energy.

Precisely what the Dementors out there do is to sap our energy.

This is why so many disruptive leaders will talk of how they have experienced exhaustion and burn-out.

So often our response is to mirror what is happening to us and strike out at the energy sappers.

In some ways, this is no surprise.

What **is** a surprise is the extent to which we don't take responsibility for the fact that we're doing this.

The great irony is that when we ourselves become energy sappers, we are doing the opposite of what we claim to be doing as disruptive leaders.

Some disruptive leaders will talk of how our role is to **free up energy** where it has become blocked in the inner workings of an organisation.

Others will talk of how our role is to **turn negative energy into positive energy**.

What we **don't** talk nearly enough about is how we might protect ourselves from the despair that begins to take us over when the blockers and resisters and underminers – and all of the other sorts of Dementors that are out there – respond to our passion and vision with cynicism and indifference.

What many of us tend to do in the face of these external Dementors is to become less tolerant and more impatient.

We continue to talk the language of inclusivity and collaboration, whilst entrenching and drawing on our inner Dementor to get into a tussle with the external Dementors that are instilling in us a sense of despair.



Finding our own Patronus

If we were to picture ourselves as having our own Patronus, we would be more likely to protect our own energy and keep well away from any counsel of despair.

We would **engage more** with the refuseniks and dissidents, and share with them more of the case for the disruption that we seek.

We would be open to adjusting our timetable for delivery, to some degree at least, and maybe even rethinking some aspect of our core proposition as part of a process of real negotiation.

We would want to **reassure** those who are concerned and fearful that all will be fine and we will be alongside them as we go through the change process together.

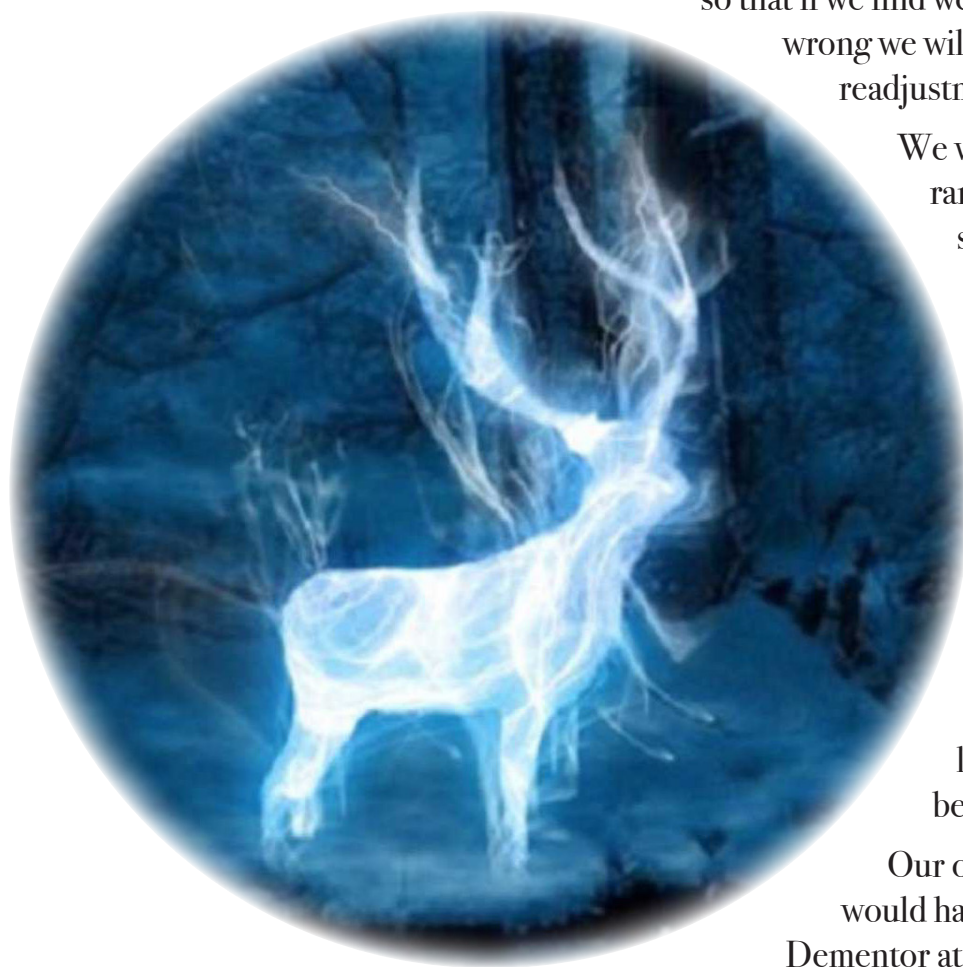
We would build up the confidence of our people, telling them that we respect their fears and will constantly review our plans as we move forward, so that if we find we've got some things wrong we will be able to make rapid readjustments.

We would draw on the full range of our leadership skills, and our personal humanity, to ensure that everyone feels listened to and seen.

Our bottom line would be that there's no room for despair on this bus.

It's this more than anything else that would enable us to leave all the Dementors behind at the bus stop.

Our own inner Patronus would have kept our inner Dementor at bay too.



Wizards
Way

**Dementors
Queue on
the left**

**No wands
on the bus**

*I was about to get
on and this bloke
Patronus said
there's no room!*





Chapter 2

Avoiding burn-out



Becoming a change-maker

So, how should we set about making sure that we really **do** avoid taking on the negative energies of others whilst at the same time rebuilding our own positive energies?

We returned to this challenge at a Leadership Conversation in September 2019 and came up with a series of ideas about developing our own leadership roles as "change-makers".

These could help us a lot with avoiding burn-out as leaders as well as offering strategies for raising the energies of those around us.

We set out by reminding ourselves of one of the wonderful phrases at the heart of the "fish philosophy", inspired by the story of an ever-smiling fishmonger running an incredibly successful market stall in Seattle (fishphilosophy.com):

"We choose our attitude"

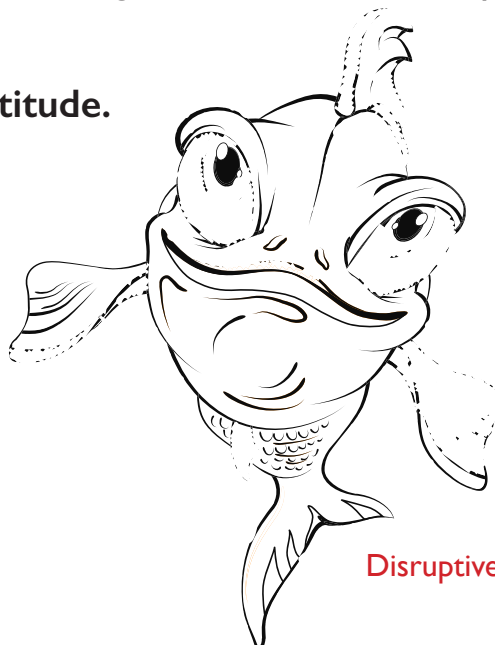
As leaders, it is up to us to decide how we wish to respond to what life throws at us.

Whilst there might be some truth in the fact that Dementorish behaviours on the part of others can sap our energies, the simple fact is that our behaviours are our responsibility.

We choose our attitude.

If we do - or do not - have a smile on our face when we walk into a room for a difficult meeting that is about to take place, that's down to us and no-one else.

We choose our attitude.



The dangers of over-sell!

Some of us love change. When we hear the term disruption the very word makes us feel that something good is **bound** to emerge.

We're up for it and instinctively assume that everyone else feels the same.

So we find it incredibly easy to say what's wrong and isn't working, and how what we really need is to turn a whole load of practices upside down and inside out - and in some areas start again from scratch.

Then we look round the room and see the demoralised and in some cases rather scared looks on people's faces.

A few people might have shining eyes, but they are in the minority.

Hesitant

The more excited we become, the more wary - and hesitant - some others become.

Sometimes we pick up this response and then compound our mistake by justifying the case for change in terms of what is **wrong** rather than how we want to build on what is already good to make it even better.

We tell ourselves that we had no choice but to give chapter and verse about the dire work practices that need to be brought to an end as soon as possible - and are already past their "sell by date"!

Yet all we've done has been to convince the doubters that we're not only reckless, we're actually rather **dangerous**!

Disruptive and dangerous?

Hardly a winning ticket if we want to take people with us.

Is there another way?

Instead of starting with our critique of others, how about starting with a critique of **ourselves** and how we argue the case for the disruptive ideas that we favour?

The right way up!

Disruptive leaders have a tendency to give the impression that they want to turn the world **upside down**!

One Leadership Fellow challenged this directly:

*"As a disruptive leader, I'm much more effective when I can say that the world is upside down **at the moment** and our mission is to turn it the right way up!"*

How powerful is that! What a brilliant way of challenging the image that some project of disruptive leaders as people who are destined to be thwarted by the ill-informed majority.

This approach of turning the world the right way up is all about disruptors presenting themselves as talking **for the majority** and correcting something in order to "put things right"!

It's so much more difficult for others to become Dementorish in response to this line of argument.

Less "broadcasting"

This approach chimes with another criticism that is often made of disruptive leaders, which is that they leave others feeling they have been "broadcasted at".

Some disruptors can come across as bombarding others with words, and prepared to keep on bombarding them until they keel over and say "Yes, I give in - you're right!"

We all know that culture change is at the heart of disruptive leadership.

As we have agreed time and again at various Conversations on this theme, there are two other C's at the heart of culture change: **communication** and **connection**.

Less broadcasting and greater connection with the thinking of others: they are surely what's needed for more disruptive leaders to achieve lasting culture change.



Respecting others' "deal-breakers"

The vast majority of leaders have their own "deal-breakers" that are key to their contentment at work.

Some find it easier than others to articulate their number one deal-breaker, but this doesn't deny the fact that it's there.

If anyone - especially their Board or CEO - challenges their deal-breaker, they do so at their peril.

Some describe their deal-breaker as

- their need to *be appreciated*, whilst others talk of
- their need to *make a difference* (and be seen to be making a difference), or
- their need to be able to *take decisions*, or
- their need to *offer insights that influence others*, or
- their expectation that others *respect the space they work in*.

Whatever others' deal-breakers might or might not be, we need to challenge ourselves, as disruptive leaders, as to whether or not our latest disruptive idea might be seen by some to be a step too far, and a potential deal-breaker.



What's **our** deal-breaker?

That's a good question to ask.

If we assume that many disruptive ideas are potential deal-breakers for others, how about inviting anyone who feels that something **could** be a deal-breaker to come and talk it through?

Bringing others in on the act

One of the characteristics of some disruptive leaders is that they can come across - rightly or wrongly - as assuming that they alone know the truth.

Hence all of the problems with broadcasting and bombarding!

They are the inevitable behaviours that flow from a mindset which assumes that all the rest of us need to do is to take their word for it and get behind them!

This is why some argue that our role as disruptors should be to make it as easy as possible for **others** to come up with the case for disruption.

The more it's **their case** rather than ours, the better!

The more they feel we are backing them, the more **sustainable** the disruption will be.

Engaging with the dissidents

In this spirit, one Leadership Fellow told the story of how she had established a SHAPE programme to disrupt some working practices in her organisation that were getting in the way of some changes that were long overdue.

She was confronted by a small number of articulate dissidents, who were whipping up a wide degree of staff opposition to her proposals.

Her response was seen at the time as risky, but it succeeded beyond anyone's expectations:

*"I realised that the dissidents were digging their trench in debate. So I thought that if I can't change them by persuasion the only option left is to change them by making them the **agents for change**."*

So I made each of them work stream leads in the wider SHAPE programme.

From that moment on, they were on side - and more effective than anyone else could have been because staff knew that they had started off in the 'No to disruption' camp."

**NO TO
DISRUPTION**

Defining a specific job purpose

This story about engaging with the dissidents underlines one hugely important principle about disruptive leadership:

- We need to be very deliberate in **not** assuming that we're just talking about disruption from the top.

We need a broad definition of disruption that enables us to talk about disruptive leadership coming from **the top, the middle and the bottom** of an organisation.

A better way

Of course, certain disruption needs to be led and driven from the top if it is to be successful.

At the same time, sustainable disruption is all about embedding within an organisation's core workings all of those processes for **scrutiny and challenge** that make it possible for staff to disrupt existing practices on the basis that they are constantly seeking new ways of working that better serve the interests of the organisation and its customers.

This is why more and more organisations are moving away from the language of "Managers" and instead using terms such as "change-makers".

They are also scrapping traditional job descriptions and agreeing a specific "job purpose" with each member of their staff team, highlighting the link between their particular job and the wider purpose of the organisation.

For staff who see themselves as **change-makers with purpose**, it is natural and inevitable that they should occasionally act as disruptors.

Disruption is one part of their role, as and when it is required to help the organisation achieve its wider purpose.



Focusing on disruptive IDEAS

One of the downsides of having called this theme "disruptive leadership" is that we have tended to focus on our leadership **styles**, with the clear implication that we need disruptive styles if we are to live up to our reputation as disruptive leaders.

Suppose we focus instead on disruptive ideas. This frees us up from some of those negative connotations associated with the term disruptive leadership.

Why should we be so OBVIOUS?

In the spirit of those disruptors who want to turn the world the right way up, let's try and do the same with disruptive leadership!

How about assuming that the best disruptive leaders are subtle and thoughtful in the ways they go about promoting disruptive ideas?

As well as making a point of engaging with dissidents and sceptics, they are also careful not to be too obvious. So they try **not** to over-sell their ideas or appear too "in your face".

Instead of letting themselves be seen as outwardly disruptive in their style of leadership, they make a virtue of being **quietly spoken** and asking those who don't favour their ideas what alternatives they would rather take forward instead.

They want to **take people with them** and so they are inclusive and always looking forward, full of optimism and belief in others.

They have a certain urgency about them, and yet are careful to be open-minded and **patient** when others question their ideas.

In short, they **choose their attitude**.

One of the many benefits of this sort of attitude is that it helps them to **avoid burn-out**.



SHHH, let's talk quietly - I'm a disruptive leader!

Respecting others' comfort zones

At this Conversation, we had a powerful discussion about how much respect disruptive leaders should show for the "comfort zones" of others.

This made us pause for thought, because one of our Guiding Principles as a Society is that *"we are open to feeling uncomfortable"*.

Yet as we discussed this we appreciated how **cavalier** some disruptors can sometimes appear to be towards the comfort zones of others.

They can be quick to say that it's time to leave their comfort zones behind - and there's no going back!

Offering reassurance

We know that quite a few people become rather panicky when they feel they are on the edge of their comfort zone, and need a fair degree of **emotional holding** if they are to remain there for any period of time.

This is why in Leadership Conversations we try to reassure Fellows whenever they say they feel their comfort zone is being threatened.

In practice, we've found that this is nearly always part of an individual's creative process in which they are building up to achieve a breakthrough in their thinking.

When others find themselves on the edge of their comfort zone, they should be able to expect us to appreciate the fact that this is a difficult stage and they're bound to be feeling vulnerable.

So let's hear it for comfort zones!

Any who exhort others to fall off the edge need to recognise that they risk forfeiting their trust.

No wonder some of those on the receiving end of disruption become rather Dementorish!

They are entitled to expect their disruptive leaders to be **alongside them**, offering the reassurance and support necessary for them to manage the consequences of their leadership.



In choosing the right attitude we keep the Dementors at bay!

*Cor blimey, my guy
has stopped being Mr
Angry and become so
bloomin' reasonable!*

*Huh, I've got the same
problem. She's just SO
positive about everything
that I don't know how to
get in there and zap her
energies!*





Chapter 3

Disruptive leaders and challenging conversations

Challenging conversations

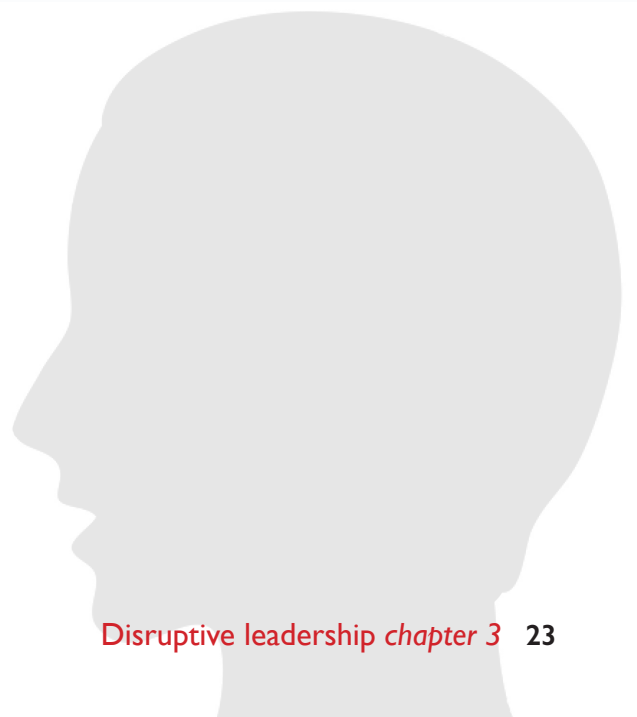
Rethinking our approach

Nearly all of us dread the idea of having a “difficult conversation”. It’s why many of us tend to put them off for as long as we can – and then when the moment comes we want to say our piece and put it behind us as quickly as possible.

So we dive in and blurt out what we have been worried about saying, and then when others are thrown by this tend to find ourselves reassuring them that what they heard wasn’t quite what we meant!

Sometimes we put the difficult conversation off for so long that the moment it happens is actually a moment of **anger** for us. A concern or resentment that we have held on to for too long comes bursting out and we surprise ourselves by the ferocity with which we deliver our message!

Then we find ourselves almost certainly having to spend a lot of time afterwards in “damage limitation” mode, trying to pick up the pieces whilst telling ourselves that we made things so much worse by putting the conversation off to a point where our anger took over!



At other times, when we think we have a really positive and upbeat message to convey, we don't give it more than a few seconds thought before we open our mouth – only to surprise ourselves by the degree of confusion and anxiety that we have generated among some of our very best people.

So – yet again – we have to think about how best to convey our message in a different way, knowing that some are now bound to interpret this as us wanting to calm troubled waters.

This is why one of the major insights for us at this Leadership Conversation was that when we see ourselves needing to initiate a challenging conversation, we should first ask what we want to **achieve** through a conversation with a key work colleague, or a team or group of staff, that we know will in some ways be difficult.

It's incredibly important that we create time beforehand to think through how we want to convey our key messages.

Applying our principles of *trust/connect/stretch*

In this Chapter, we follow through the logic of facilitating a difficult conversation, using the framework of trust/ connect/ stretch that we use for all of our Leadership Conversations.

We see it as key to us being effective as disruptive leaders who are known for our **success in achieving change** rather than the amount of noise that we generate at any one point in time!

TRUST
TRUST
CONNECT
CONNECT
STRETCH
STRETCH

Facilitating a challenging conversation

Re-establishing your bedrock of trust

- Start with affirmation
- Then show some vulnerability
- Stress that you're about to share an idea and not a decision
- Say that you see this conversation as off-the-record and completely open

Developing a stronger connection

- Explain what you hope to ACHIEVE through your idea
- Express the hope that they will want to achieve this too
- Explain what you are ASKING of them and what you yourself want to OFFER if they agree to this ask

Going for the stretch

- Before ending the conversation, capture in a few words what your ask makes possible over time
- Make sure that within the next 24 hours you have a date agreed for your follow-up conversation to come to a shared decision.

STAGE I

Re-establishing your bedrock of trust

When you start a difficult conversation with Board members and/or senior Executives in your organisation, it is really important to say something right at the beginning to acknowledge the level of trust that you have already achieved with them.

Remind them of all that you feel you **take for granted** in your working relationship with them and how much it means to you, as well as what it has made possible for you to achieve together.

Start with affirmation

So many leaders under-estimate the importance of affirming other people, face-to-face. Please don't be one of them, especially in this moment. Look them in the eyes and say how important they are to you and all that your organisation is about.

There is no better way of starting a challenging or difficult conversation than by offering some affirmation.

Then show some vulnerability

After this, you need to say something that reminds them – in a fairly light way – that you know you are far from perfect and in your work with them you've had to struggle at times to play the role that you wanted to play.

However you say it, you need to offer something that shows some vulnerability on your part.

STAGE I*continued*

Whenever we are on the receiving end of a leader saying something difficult to us, it is so easy to go away thinking to ourselves that “it’s all right for them, they seem to find everything easy”.

Something from you that involves you showing your humanity and imperfection, without making a big deal of it, would help to ensure that this conversation feels personal – and you are not seen as sitting on some sort of pedestal offering your judgement from on high.

An idea and not a decision

This is now the stage when you can say that you have an idea that you want to share with them. Whilst you’re not looking for a firm decision today, you want to explore this idea with them because you’ve been thinking about it recently and want them to have a chance to think about it too, **before** you come to a decision - hopefully shared with them.

Off-the-record and completely open

You can also say that you see this conversation as completely off-the-record and one where you hope that they will be completely open with you, just as you intend to be with them.

You think that the trust you already have means you can have this conversation without any need to try and paper over any cracks or dance around any difficult issue.

STAGE 2

Developing a stronger connection

Now you are ready to establish a stronger connection before coming to the key words that you know you want to say but could well cause the wrong impression if you blurt them out now.

Give the key reason **WHY**

The key to achieving a stronger connection now is that you say something to explain why the idea that you're about to share is important to you. As simply and positively as you can, say what you are trying to achieve.

If you achieve a connection with this, and are right about your idea being able to bring this about, you will have done what so many leaders fail to do in difficult conversations, and actually conveyed the case for your proposal **before** its consideration is clouded by any defensive reactions.

If you can, make a point of giving one or two figures to capture what you hope to achieve. They can do so much to help **ground** the conversation.

One more step

Then there's one more step before you say the difficult part of what you have to say. Make clear that you genuinely hope that they share the ambition that you have just outlined.

We know that the ends don't always justify the means, but if the ends are clear and agreed it is much easier to achieve sign up to your proposed means!

STAGE 2*continued***Express your ASK linked to your OFFER**

Then with no further delay say clearly what you are asking of them.

Once that is out there, make clear what you want to offer by way of ongoing support if they decide, after some reflection, that they agree with your ask and commit to making it succeed.

The key to keeping a strong connection here is that your ask and your offer are seen as much as possible as a “single package”.

In this sort of situation, it is so easy for people to think it's unfair that they should be expected to change, whilst the person calling the shots doesn't intend to do anything different themselves!

It might well be that you won't have to change anything whatsoever, in which case it's important not to pretend otherwise.

If you **are** going to have to change what you do it is useful to flag this up, at the same time as making clear that your support for them and what they are doing is unaffected.

Also, if you are able to argue that what you are asking demonstrates your commitment to their career development within your organisation, this is the time to flag that up, too.

Your tone needs to make clear that you hope your support for them is something that they **take for granted**.

Suggest when you can next talk

In principle, it is much better to have this sort of conversation if you can say that they will have time to reflect on what you have suggested before you talk again in a few days' time.

Our desire to get a difficult conversation over and done with can so often leave the other person feeling “bounced”.

STAGE 3

Going for the stretch

DON'T just end the conversation now!

Once you have said something difficult or challenging, there is every temptation to close down the conversation and move on, with a sense of relief that the deed has been done.

Whilst you might be feeling that you got off fairly lightly, the fact is that this way you run a high risk of leaving the impression that you were happy just to throw in a “hand grenade” and leave them to deal with the fall-out.

That’s the hallmark of a stropky leader rather than a facilitative leader!

Part of the case for linking an offer to an ask is that an ask on its own can easily be received as a sign of you “offloading” and changing the rules of the game to make life easier for you.

This is why you don’t want to end the conversation on this note. Instead, it is nearly always best to go back to the **higher purpose** that your ask is all about.

Explaining what your ask makes possible

This a great opportunity for you to raise the bar, very deliberately, and talk about what you see as becoming possible if on reflection they agree with the proposal that you have just made.

One of the reasons they trust you as a leader is because they see you as having a capacity to stretch them.

In the process, you are also helping them to see the **benefits** that should flow out of the disruptive experience of a conversation they might have been half expecting, but were nevertheless hoping to avoid!

STAGE 3*continued*

So make a point of going for the stretch and letting yourself share some **enthusiasm** about what could now become possible, with some change in your respective roles that you will have already outlined.

This will make it easier to ensure that when you come back together to talk again, you can start that conversation by asking whether or not they feel that the **ambition** that you have shared with them now is right for the business, and right for you as individuals.

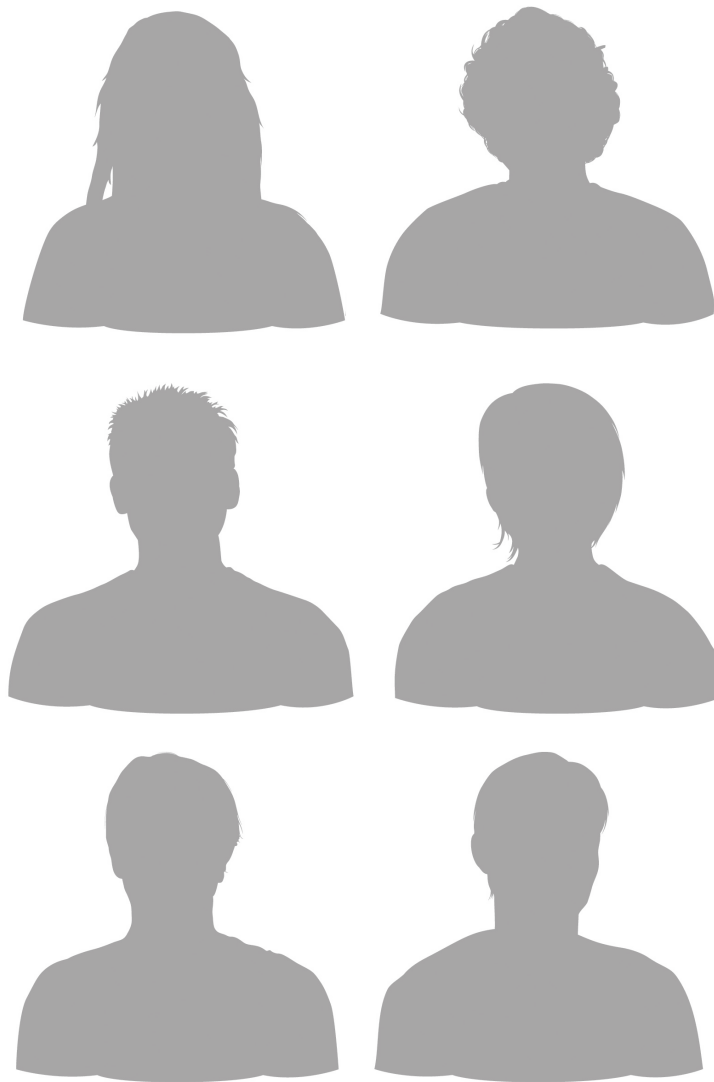
As you conclude this conversation, it is important to give every indication of taking it for granted that if they agree with you, you will do whatever is necessary to carry through what would then be a joint approach, even though it might cause a few ripples in the short term.

Agreeing a time

Before the conversation finishes, it is important to agree a time when you might talk again.

You're of course keen to hear any first reactions that they have, and just as you want them to have a chance to reflect on what you have said, so do you want to have a chance to reflect on their first reactions, too.

TRUST
TRUST
CONNECT
CONNECT
STRETCH
STRETCH



Capturing six moments in challenging conversations

Capturing six moments

Trust

I Showing some vulnerability

Strong CEO to Executive team, trying to end the habit of over-dependency on the part of his Executives:

“As the founder of this business, I’ve got involved in everything – and I’m now struggling to let go. I know that now is the time for you and others to step forward more and I need your help for me to step back.”

2 Asking for a conversation that is completely open

Chair of Board to Non-Executive Directors, asking for advice as to whether she should stand for a second term:

“We know that in our Board meetings we’re always very polite, and I would say sometimes too cautious. I want us to spend the next 45 minutes having a discussion in which anything can be said, and we take it for granted that we can assume the best of each other. I’m genuinely unsure as to whether I should stand for a second term, and I want your advice on the basis that all that matters is what’s right for our organisation. Any outcome is fine for me, so long as I believe I’m doing the right thing.”

Capturing six moments

Connection

3 Explaining what you hope to ACHIEVE through your idea

Sales Director to a team of senior Managers from across the business, trying to build their confidence after a period of declining performance:

*“We’re still 5% down on our sales target and only have 8 weeks to go to the end of the year. I’ve looked at our performance over the last 5 years and think we can still meet our target. But it will require a big push from all of us. If we can achieve this, we will have **outperformed our three main rivals again** and all of our staff will be in line for the additional bonus that the unions negotiated last year. So I think it's worth giving this all we’ve got, don’t you?”*

4 Explaining what you are asking in terms that build up the other person

CEO to Chief Operating Officer, who has lost faith in himself due to under-performance and has one last chance of demonstrating stronger leadership before they have a very different sort of conversation:

*“I’ve said that I want this to be an off-the-record discussion just between the two of us, because I know that your confidence has taken a real hit these last few months because of our under-performance. I can tell you that I’ve had times in my career when I’ve felt that everything was against me and I’ve made myself get back in the saddle and tell my team that we were going to conquer all that was in our way – and we did, largely because I insisted that we would. It’s these moments that define the sort of leader we are and I’m completely confident that if you **step forward** and show the confidence and passion that we now need, you will be stronger than ever for these setbacks. And you will have no bigger cheerleader in this organisation than me.”*

Capturing six moments

Connection

5 Expressing the hope that they also want to achieve the same as you

Incoming CEO to a meeting of Senior Managers, trying to raise their ambitions and convey the message that she intends to lead an outstanding business in which “good” is no longer good enough:

“Since I became CEO just over two months ago, I’ve been on my mission to ‘listen and learn’, and I’ve really valued my time with some of you in this room. It’s been important to me that you could tell me to my face how unsettled you have been by the criticisms that I’ve made of this company’s previous performance.

So I want to use this chance to share with you one of the most important lessons that I take from just over 8 weeks of learning. I am convinced that a lot of the people working in our business - and I include most of you in this room when I say this - are a lot better than you seem to think you are. I think you have had a culture that goes back a fair few years of talking yourselves out of things and at times putting yourselves down. Well, my job as CEO will be to support you in leaving that behind. My intention is that we will become one of the market-leaders in our sector and every one of us here will be as proud as punch of what we’ve achieved. We can achieve whatever we want, so long as we first believe this simple truth.

I said earlier on that I want you to feel that you can be completely open with me. If you think I’m in any way wrong in my belief that we can all aim to be outstanding, and among the very best, please say so now and I will absolutely respect you for speaking your truth. I’m a great believer in diversity, especially diversity of thought. So, please tell me what you think about what I’ve just said?”

Capturing six moments

Stretch

6 Capturing what your ask makes possible over time

Co-founder of new start-up to business partner, at a stage when he knows that he now needs to back off and wants the other one to take over more without feeling in any way unsupported:

"As I've said, from the moment we first had our idea for this new start-up, I feel that we've grown it – and parented it – together. It has been an incredibly special and powerful experience. I've explained why I think it's now time for you to step forward as our CEO, with me always alongside you and backing you every step of the way, and in more of a support role. I think this will give our small staff team greater clarity and actually greater confidence that we intend to be here for years to come as a successful business.

I think some of them do wonder if we might tire of this, as we apply ourselves to the sheer graft of establishing our niche in the market and building our client base. From what they have said to me, I know how inspirational they find you and so I am very clear in my mind that if we now put your name over the door as our new CEO, we will be making one of the most positive and optimistic statements about the future of our start-up that we could ever make."

A large white dove is shown in flight, its wings spread wide, filling most of the frame. The bird is white with a black eye and a small orange beak. Its wings are fully extended, showing the intricate structure of the feathers. The background is a clear, bright blue sky. The text 'TRUST CONNECT STRETCH' is centered in the upper half of the image.

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