



LEADERSHIP FOCUS AND ATTENTION

From 6.00pm on Tuesday 6th May until 12.00 noon on Friday 9th

This is a Conversation about focus. We all know that what we focus on as leaders gets done. It is therefore probably the single most important aspect of our leadership. There are always too many things to do. So we have to choose what we focus on. There's the nub of the challenge.

The core quality that underpins this is our attention. But our attention needs attending to! Why? Because it is often reactive and 'caught' by the wrong things. We often talk about 'paying attention', which is an interesting metaphor. What do we 'pay' with? All too often it is with a life not lived, opportunities lost – all the things we could have done or made happen (or just enjoyed!) if we had not been distracted, or focused on the wrong things. If you look back on your own life, you will see the self-evident truth of this!

As well as the focus of our attention, the capacity of our attention is important too. We can have different levels of 'awakeness' and the more 'senior' we get, the more, by necessity, we learn to be able to attend to multiple things and notice which ones need our focus, with what intensity and for how long. For example, holding both the strategic tomorrow and the operational now - or simultaneously holding in mind the task and the team and the person, as John Adair's 'Situational Leadership' teaches us.

We also need to be able to attend to our own inner state and notice the quality of our attention – for example is it fear-based or hope-based – because how we focus also affects the atmosphere we create around us and the likelihood of good outcomes arising from this.

Time and time again, as is revealed most tellingly in the recent Post Office Scandal, the focus, quality and capacity of our attention is what matters most. Leaders rarely get it wrong because of incompetence or malevolence, most of the time we get it wrong because of conditioning in our context, focusing on the wrong things and simply, purely, failing to stay alert to what really matters.



AGENDA

Who is this for?

This Conversation will work at two levels, content and process. It will be right for you if you want to explore or enquire into specific questions in your leadership right now:

- Things that seem to be 'crowding out your attention' or sucking up all your time – and why?
- Things you are not getting to that you really want to?
- Things you can see developing in your context that are starting to 'catch your eye' and, whilst smaller now, may be of huge significance soon?
- Any sense in your gut that something just doesn't 'feel quite right' but you either don't know what it is or can't put your finger on why?
- How you might relax and start enjoying your life more as a leader rather than over-worrying, or over-striving.

It will also be right for you if you want to develop your strength and versatility in this most important facet of leadership. Specifically, to:

- Expand the capacity of your attention; the skill to hold multiple perspectives in mind at the same time and so be less 'thrown'.
- notice and master your own reactivity and defences; the capacity to sense what really matters rather than what triggers you
- develop your sensitivity to give the right level of focus to the right things
- cultivate a more expanded 'field' of awareness, to be able to pick up more and more of the subtle undercurrents and the energies that are driving what is really going on in a situation.
- Strengthen your inner awareness and so align your own energy, poise and presence and can trust your own intuition when it is needed.
- be able to hear the voice of 'wisdom' present within you and others – amidst all the clamour of the situation.



AGENDA

How will it flow?

This is probably the most foundational of our 'Wisdom Conversations' which is why we are giving it three days. It will involve the conscious practice of techniques to expand our capacity for awareness, manage attention, and develop our own poise and presence. This will involve a variety of exercises, (some 'deep' some 'fun' ! 😊) in which we will learn to see more and see beyond our own reactivity - and so access fuller and higher states of awareness and the clear thinking that comes with this.

It will also build on some of the foundational work we have been doing in most of our Conversations on accessing the combined 'intelligences' of head, heart and gut and take these to a new level of presence. These processes are actually quite simple and readily available to all of us. The problem is that we just 'forget' to use them. It is a matter of attention and practice ('not perfect!') to keep them online for when we really need them – in the hurly burly of our busy lives.

Following our usual flow, the Conversation will proceed through three phases:

- **"This is Me"** – taking stock of where we find ourselves currently in relation to this theme and the questions that are arising from our experience
- **"Tell Us More"** – enquiring more deeply into our learning and insights as we probe into this experience
- **"Yes I can, Yes I will"** – turning wisdom and insight into intention and practice

“THIS IS ME!”

We will begin our time together sharing our own understandings and experiences of awareness, beginning as we always do with sharing stories that help us to access the wisdom that is present in our experience and to get to know each other (and ourselves?) better. We will invite you to reflect on times when you seemed to have an expanded state of awareness somehow, that had you able to see more, and more clearly and to be much more effective and wiser in your interventions as a leader.



As we start to do this, we will begin to notice what these expanded states actually feel like and what is flowing in us when we are in them.

This starts to increase our freedom of choice about how we respond.

“TELL US MORE”

As we access more of our awareness, using techniques that Karen and Chris will provide, we will be more able to apply this to some of the big themes in our own personal leadership contexts.

We will do a couple of prioritising exercises in which we will look with bare attention at the reality of what is consuming most of our time and energy now. This will focus on the important distinction between these different facets of attention – what we give time to and what we give energy to and, of course, how we can align these better.

As we engage in this work we will act as 'mirrors' to each other, helping each other see how and where and even why distortion creeps in and we find ourselves unconsciously prioritising the wrong things – or the right things with the wrong energy!

“TELL US MORE”

We can then move into more of the subtlety of the Conversation – in terms of:

- looking quite radically at our own situation and what might be possible when we see it with different eyes
- managing and observing our own inner process and how our attention gets 'colonised' by other things.
- Most importantly, stimulating this kind of expanded awareness and ability to prioritise in our teams and those around us

We will then broaden into more of an organisational perspective - how we initiate a leadership discourse that expands and hones intelligent attention inside our systems (rather than dumbing this down as leadership communications can so easily do). In this way, the leaders and people around us can respond with greater initiative, clarity and anticipation in changing conditions.

The effect of this will be a greater freedom of thought and action in how we approach our leadership and a greater clarity and focus about what is really important right now – (exactly what St George's House was founded for nearly 60 years ago by the late Prince Philip!)

We will have also developed a capacity to notice the difference between what we may call our '*habitual awareness*', which we need to get on with life at pace and efficiency and our '*expanded awareness*', which is what we need when something significant is happening or stirring in our context.



“YES I CAN!”

In the final phase of the Conversation, we will start focusing on what is possible to us as we inhabit this greater freedom of thought and action.

In this again we will really challenge and support each other to keep our focus and clarity of intent as we 're-enter' the context that will immediately if we are not careful start to distract our focus, drain our energy and steal our time. This is the perfect learning opportunity for this wisdom in practice! We will therefore help each other develop useful personal practices to keep our awareness expanded and our attention on the right things.

There will be the opportunity to support each other in these commitments and practices after the Conversation and to come back together to explore our progress and review our learning in a follow up call a couple of months after the Conversation.





Timings: Tuesday 6th May

- 1430** You are welcome to check in to your room in St George's House.
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- 1630** Tea/ Coffee available in the Sitting Room of the House.
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- 1705** (Optional) Evensong in in the Chapel.
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- 1750** **Vicars' Hall.** Gathering together. Refreshments, then start of the Conversation at 6.00pm. Introduction to the Guiding Principles and then on to Stage One: **This is me!** We take an agreed question into small groups and then share our personal stories and experiences of this.
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- 1945** Drinks followed by dinner in the House Dining Room at 8pm.
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- 2115** Tea/coffee and after dinner drinks in No. 25 The Cloisters.
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- 2145** Private floodlit tour of St George's Chapel, departing the Sitting Room (optional).
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Wednesday 7th May

- 0745** Breakfast in the House Dining Room.
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- 0845** We start again promptly in the **Vicars' Hall**, continuing on the **"This is me!"** theme with a deeper sharing of our personal stories.
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- 1100** Personal reflection time.
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- 1130** We draw out key messages from our reflection time and take our particular challenges into another round of small groups where we start to sense into where powerful and potential change is really stirring – both within us and around us.
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- 1300** A hot buffet lunch in the Vicars' Hall and we work together in our groups.
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Wednesday 7th May cont...

1355 Team photo on the West Steps of the Chapel ...Then back together as one group in the Vicars' Hall as we move into Stage Two of the Conversation. **"Tell us more"**. Here we seek to enquire more deeply and fully into the bigger questions that have arisen in our opening sharing. We start to focus on those relevant to us, and 'mine' the wisdom that lies beneath the surface of them, supporting and challenging each other in the process. This may be 'inner work' on our own leadership or 'outer work' on how we shape and transform our team and organisations – or both.

1600 Personal reflection time.

1705 (Optional) Evening Prayer in the Chapel.

1800 The Conversation resumes as we share our reflections and notice what is starting to move in us, as well as doing some more practical work on how to embody and experiment with this.

1945 Drinks in No. 25 followed by Dinner in the Dining Room at 8pm.

2130 Tea/coffee and after dinner drinks in No. 25.

Thursday 8th May

0745 Breakfast in the House Dining Room.

0845 We start again in the **Vicars' Hall**, beginning with some personal space to notice what we are awakening with after our work yesterday. We start to explore our deeper aspirations and help each other harness our energy, will and passion for change.

1100 Personal reflection time.



Thursday 8th May cont...

- 1130** Back together as one group we start to work on stepping into change. What is really possible for us? Drawing upon our diverse perspectives and different life wisdom we release creativity and expand our practical options.
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- 1300** A hot buffet lunch in the Vicars' Hall and we work together in our groups.
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- 1400** We move onto Stage Three '**Yes we can!**' Working in small groups we start to explore the practical wisdom of change – where is the invitation for us to step into change and what might this mean for us in how we engage differently with those around us?
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- 1515** Refreshments.
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- 1615** Personal reflection time – sharpening up our intentions and focus.
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- 1705** Evensong (*optional*).
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- 1800** **Vicars' Hall.** As we continue with this 'stretch' stage, where we start to ground our learning and self-awareness in our own specific context, we encourage more feedback. We also focus attention on any 'stuckness' amongst us, where anyone may appreciate group support to help to unblock their energy and move forward.
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- 1945** Drinks in No. 25 followed by dinner in the Dining Room.
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- 2130** Coffee, drinks and conversation in the Sitting Room.
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Friday 9th May

0730 Breakfast in the House Dining Room. Please clear your luggage from your bedroom because the domestic staff need to service the rooms. You are welcome to leave bags in the Sitting Room or bring them down to the Vicars' Hall where we will be for the remainder of the Conversation.

0845 **Vicars' Hall.** We start again **promptly** and take some 'pause time' to notice what is becoming clear for us as we begin this final day. From this we help each other focus and firm up our intentions. Where is the invitation for each of us more fully to embody the wisdom we are accessing? Then into small groups to work on our leadership **practice** going forwards. What will sustain the level of 'being' necessary to support the ambition of our 'doing'.

1045 We then invite each of you to work in pairs or trios over tea or coffee to sharpen up your specific personal resolves and commitments in the light of your intentions and practice.

1140 Closing words and a whole group 'gathering up' of the wisdom that has flowed, both major insights and smaller practical tips.

1200 Close of the Conversation.

Video link-up:

At the end of the Conversation, we will confirm the arrangements for our follow-up zoom call to check in on the progress we have each made in progressing our resolves.

The key to us making the best possible use of our time in this is for Fellows to post a brief Whatsapp beforehand updating the rest of us on how you have been getting on, and especially which ones you found the most challenging. We then take it from there!

Suggested date and time: tbc