



BRAVE HONEST CONVERSATIONS™



A MANIFESTO FOR BRAVE, HONEST CONVERSATIONS™

We have some real challenges facing us; struggles we aren't dealing with very well. What we are doing a lot is talking at each other, over each other and about each other.

WE NEED A NEW WAY.

This is a call to action for a different way of solving our problems. We hold the keys to making positive change real - together.



1. PRACTICE COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP

It takes courage to bravely commit to tough conversation about issues that have no easy solutions, and to invite others to talk together in ways that build something new. It requires clarity of purpose and integrity, to consciously choose solving a problem over winning or seeing your view as the right one. It takes not knowing the outcome and going ahead with the conversation anyway.

It requires taking a stand and advocating for civil discourse and meaningful dialogue, and being held to account for Brave, Honest Conversations™ that are really brave and honest. It takes saying “*no, that isn't meaningful or ethical or fair*” about processes that are compromised and contribute to damaged public trust, because that doesn't serve anyone.

It takes being willing to commit to talking with those who you may view as the “enemy”. It takes withholding assumptions, judgments, and really seeing the other human being across from you.

It takes a willingness to try and fail and not get it right. To acknowledge and accept and lean in to our mistakes and mis-steps for the greater good because we are committed to solving the real challenges that face us, rather than because we want to be right, look good or are afraid of what could happen.

It takes being afraid and doing the right thing anyway, because we need to change the way we talk together about things that really matter or our own futures will be negatively impacted.

2. WORK WITH THE WHOLE SYSTEM

We need to stop having conversations one project or issue at a time. Stop narrowing down who has a stake or a position or the ability to influence a specific cause, and start thinking about who cares about the issue, and the longer-term impacts over time on human systems and environments.

We need to step back from the conflict of X or Y decision and instead explore new ways of finding solutions to the larger issues that confront us.

Stepping out of the specifics and into the larger picture means we also expand our lens of who has power, influence and opportunity to participate in the conversation—and by doing so we expand the possible seats at the table.

That enhances the views we hear and creates more possible solutions, more diversity of ideas, and allows us to find better ways forward that consider all consequences and outcomes.

3. EMBRACE THE WHOLE PERSON

It's time we agreed that feelings matter. They aren't the only things that matter but they are more important than we think. They are part of being fully human, required for fulsome and sustainable decision-making, and a reality of having Brave, Honest Conversations™. The sooner we release the myth that we are a rational, fact based society governed solely by science and data, the sooner we can move on to solving real problems.

What we are is a rational, fact based society full of emotional, flawed, messy, beautiful human beings, and we will be far more successful at solving tough problems when we embrace the whole of our humanness.

It matters that we put heart at the centre of our tough conversations. Caring is the key to building trust, and strengthening relationships. It is not a coincidence that trust in public institutions has declined as we have increased our reliance on facts over feelings. I'm not saying get rid of facts. Facts matter. And so do feelings .

When we have a conflict or public opposition on an issue, we can't separate the issue from the people. People come with their whole life experience and values—how they've been treated by an organization; their fears, hopes and desires for the future; how other related issues connect to the topic...How many times have you heard "*that's not in the scope of this project*"? People are more than the issue or project, so engage with the whole person in order to build relationships, trust and find a solution to real challenges.

4. RECOGNIZE RIGHT AND RESPONSIBILITY

IAP2 Core Value #1 reads, "*Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.*" It's a powerful statement that speaks to the underlying foundation of democratic society. It infers power on those with a voice to speak it out loud and claim their rights. That value is not to be taken lightly, and must be exercised fully for democratic societies to thrive.

However, it is not enough to have a right. A right on its own lacks integrity without responsibility.

We live in societies where right is paramount—the right to protest, march, petition, disengage, blame, shame and ridicule, the right to attack, discriminate and slander – on-line and in person.

We've created an illusion that when we sign a petition, post on Facebook or march in a protest that we've changed the world. Often, we haven't changed much—we've contributed to the collective exhale of opinions, opposition or resistance without creating the future we are calling for. We haven't seen into the hearts of those who see the world differently than we do, or who hold different opinions. Usually we've talked to people who believe what we do, and demonized and separated ourselves from others, often justifying that they are wrong, and we are right.

When we value right over responsibility, we are all for one, and no one for all. We value our own right to an opinion over the needs of our neighbours, those who are marginalized, or the collective good. We need to bring back responsibility—for the quality of our democracy, for the practice of talking with each other, for the ability to truly solve tough challenges in our lives, organizations and communities.

5. PRACTICE MEANINGFUL INCLUSION

The dictionary defines inclusion as *“The act of including, or the state of being included.”*

Meaningful engagement includes representation AND inclusion. When we have Brave, Honest Conversations™ we need people at the table who represent different interests, groups, experiences or backgrounds. The challenge with a Brave, Honest Conversation™ that includes only representatives is that they grapple with the key issues, work through perceptions, perspectives and possibilities to come up with solutions, learn together and build trust and relationships...and yet only they are changed by the conversation. The broader organization, community or public are not changed. We need to extend beyond representatives to inclusive process.

If we expand a conversation we are identifying who we know needs to be at the table for the creation of sustainable solutions AND we are openly saying that we welcome anyone who cares, who chooses to participate, who wants to be part of creating a solution to come talk together with us.

We reduce the risk of talking to the same people over and over again (or talking only to those who already hold power and influence), we remove the bias of talking only to like minded people, and we expand the pool of values, needs and ideas we have to work with creating possibility for greater success.

It's the only way forward. Together. A space for all of us at the table.

6. COME FROM A PLACE OF COMPASSION AND INTEGRITY

It matters that you believe in the possibility of the Brave, Honest Conversation™ and have faith in what can happen when people come together to talk with each other about tough issues. When you come from a place of unconditional, positive regard you manifest that in others and in the conversation. When you commit to working through the conflict and to finding solutions, that commitment echoes when things get heated. When you are open to possibility, to new ideas, to deeply understanding other ways of thinking and seeing the world you hold space for Brave, Honest Conversations™ to emerge. When you practice empathy and commit to building trust and relationships, others follow suit.

When you know what you stand for, why you are showing up as a leader, participant or facilitator, when you consciously choose “yes” to finding new solutions and deeply commit to inclusion, trust, responsibility and the important conversations we need to have, you can change the world.

It is about more than what you do or what you know, it is about how you want to be. To do that, first you need to choose where you stand, and what you stand for.

7. DO IT AGAIN, AND AGAIN

Dialogue isn't about projects or one-time activities or events. It isn't simple or easy.

Brave, Honest Conversations™ require time, effort, trust and relationships. They require ongoing investment by organizations, communities and participants. They require us to recognize that engagement is an ongoing process, over time, and is about all of our interactions, connections and the inter-relationship between people in organizations and communities over the long-term.

When we do that we contribute to vibrant communities, thriving organizations and quality democracy.

That's worth a Brave, Honest Conversation™ any day.

**JOIN ME IN THIS CALL TO ACTION.
IT'S TIME WE ALL SHOWED UP
COURAGEOUSLY AND CALLED FOR
BRAVE, HONEST CONVERSATIONS™
ABOUT THE ISSUES OF OUR TIME.
IT'S TIME WE COMMITTED TO
CONVERSATIONS THAT CREATE A
NEW AND DIFFERENT WORLD.**



**COURAGEOUS
LEADERSHIP
PROJECT**
DARE TO MAKE A LASTING DIFFERENCE