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## crystal clear enough

As churches grow and develop their ministry, they often bring in more staff such as full-time volunteers, interns, curates or employees. With different ages, backgrounds, experiences and expectations it can be confusing to navigate our way through the communication minefield. Yet, clear communication, clear working engagement is vital for healthy leadership.

### Who am I?

In a day, and even in a conversation, a leader changes hats frequently – pastor, leader, manager, friend, mentor, listener, logistician, evangelist, priest, chief executive, problem solver, parent, ambulance driver... This is very helpful when it works well. But although we measure ourselves on our intentions, other people measure us on our impact. And colleagues can be confused if we think we are wearing one hat and they think we are wearing another – or worse, they can't work out why we are doing what we are doing.

### What can only be done by me?

However gifted you are at being a friend-mentor-youth leader-colleague-pastor-coach-etc..., there are some roles that only you in your leadership role can fulfil. If there needs to be a tough or tricky conversation with someone in the team about performance or other issues, only the leader can have that. That means that, whether you like it or not, you will have to let others fulfil the other roles for them in this season.

Paul talks about 'speaking the truth in love' and some conversations need to be high in love and high in truth. In those situations, pastoral care and friendship may need to come from others. Blakey and Day (*Challenging Coaching*, 2012) suggest many conversations in organisations are cosy. The church is particularly good at that. Blakey and Day would define these as high in love and support, not dishonest, but not quite truthful enough. As leaders we are often the only person equipped to have conversations that are full of grace and truth – or support and challenge. Such conversations take practice and courage.

We owe it to the people in our teams to tell the truth early when there are still plenty of opportunities for development, and to be clear which hat we are wearing and which hats need to be worn by other people.

### Where am I sitting?

All of us have a preference for the way we do one-to-ones, and we often have these conversations in the same place – regardless of which hat we are wearing. Whether you prefer the local Starbucks, your study or a comfortable break out space, it can help to have different physical space for different types of conversation. So it's useful to have a team meeting in a different room from your development chat with a curate.

If you have to use the same room for one-to-ones with colleagues as you use for



pastoral conversations, try sitting in a different chair. It really helps pay attention to what you're doing.

### What are we doing today?

Conversations are more effective when we know what they are for and how we are going to have them – even if we decide that they're just talking and seeing where they are going. If you're part of a large set up, or if you are all busy doing work on the ground, one-to-one conversations are precious time and we can't assume what will make them useful for our colleague unless we ask them. A common starting point is 'How's it going?' And that dialogue can take over much of the conversation – whether or not it is useful.

Some of the things it's helpful to consider before a one-to-one are:

- What would I like to be different by the end of our time together today?
- How will I know it's been a useful time for me? For them? For the church? For the kingdom of God?

And it's good to ask them, too. This is not about creating a fixed agenda, but it is a great way of ensuring that you both know what you're doing. If you remember chemistry lessons at school, change and transformation happened in a conical flask or a test tube when you put chemicals in and then applied heat or another catalyst. And in that container, transformation happened at a lower temperature and faster than elsewhere. Creating enough boundaries to make your one-to-one useful is important – even if you renegotiate as you go.

Starting well can include questions like:

- SUBJECT: What do you want to talk about today? I'd also like to talk about...
- TIME: Given that we have an hour, what would it be helpful to focus on at this stage? (This reduces 'I want to change the community' to the key areas it is most helpful to talk about.)

- OUTCOME: What would you like to be different by the end of this time together? (And what is a good outcome for your area of work, the church, the kingdom of God etc?) I'd like...
- KNOW: How will we know it's been useful?
- ROLE: How are we going to do that today? (This is where you negotiate which hat they want you to wear, which hat you want to wear – and agree to change them for different parts of the conversation.)
- START: Where shall we start? (This helps them take some responsibility and helps you avoid talking about things they have already thought about.)
- And mid conversation, it's useful to keep that clarity with questions like 'Where are we now?' 'What do we need to do next?'

It may feel artificial, but knowing what we are talking about makes a huge difference. We use the acronym STOKeRS to remember this. The stoker is the person on the back of a tandem whose role is to help the front person start well, and then add extra power on hills. As the leader you may occasionally have to ask them to get off and get on the front seat yourself. Most often you won't. And if you do, it's polite to ask!

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### Reflection

- How clear am I in a one-to-one conversation with staff about what we are doing?
- How will I get feedback?
- What one thing do I need to pay attention to?

