

The WE webinar series for British Parking Association Two webinars, "Better Conversations" and "Video Stars" Working towards better engagement. One conversation at a time.

The Space Between....An invitation to experiment

The space between the two webinars is an opportunity for you to choose something from the first webinar and try it out. Pick an area and challenge yourself to do something differently. Have a go and notice what happens for you and your audience.

You get to decide what to work on. And you also get to design the experiment that you undertake. It's entirely your free choice. The only advice is, just choose one thing to try. Go easy, don't overload yourself.

Deciding on your focus and creating your experiment

Here's how to get started. Followed by some experiment suggestions if you're up for it but need a bit of inspiration.

1. Choose an area to focus on

Reflect on which areas of the *Better Conversations* webinar interested you. Which aspects did you find yourself warming to? And which did you find yourself backing away from? A strong reaction in either direction may be a sign that this is a useful area for you.

Another way to pick might be to match your experiment to an area that you've had some feedback that you'd like to improve on. From your list, pick one to work on. Don't put too much pressure on yourself. If in doubt, make your best guess, (close your eyes and drop a pin!)

2. Design your experiment, do it and note, then reflect

When you've chosen your area, here's what to do next:

Design your experiment: decide what you will do, when, and who else might be involved. Write this down. It could begin as "I will notice when I...." It also includes how you will measure it. For this writing and noting comes in useful. Grab a new page of your journal (or open up a note on your phone) and dedicate it to your own development. Write down what you will do, in simple clear language.

Do it and note: The big thing here is to remember to do it. Make yourself accountable. Create a calendar entry on the days/times when you've committed to do it. Have your journal nearby to record your experiences.

Reflect: At the end of the week, read over your notes. Use the following questions to guide your review: What happened? What do you make of it?

What have you learned? What's new?

What difference will this new information make for you?

Imagine sharing this with the group. What would you say?

3. Suggestions for experiments

Here are some ideas for experiments. When they require a partner, you could ask a work colleague or someone in your personal life.

i) Notice when you receive someone's full attention

Notice when you receive someone's attention: How do you know that you have their attention? What effect does that have on you?

ii) Give someone your full attention

Notice when you give your full attention to another person: what are you doing more of? And less of? What do you notice about this? And what is your attention doing for them?

iii) Thinking in Pairs by Nancy Kline

The following experiment requires two people.

This is an exercise, developed by Nancy Kline. She created something called *The Thinking Environment*. One of her guiding principles is that we can often surprise ourselves with our own insight and thinking. And that this happens when we are given time to speak, think aloud, uninterrupted and not be judged by the listener.

Here's how to set it up and have a go:

Decide on a topic area you'd like to think aloud about. It could be anything, perhaps a problem you've been trying to solve, or something you are curious about and want to explore generally. Find someone to talk to, someone you trust, and ask them to listen to you talk for 15 minutes.

Here's your brief to them:

Ask the person listening to you, to simply listen. To pay attention to you.

Ask them not to contribute verbally, no questions or interjections. No sharing of their own experiences.

Ask them to not say anything, agree or disagree. All you want from them is their full attention to you. For them to be still and at ease. And be interested in what you have to say.

If you run dry, and stop speaking, brief your listener to let the silence sit for a moment. And then say that they can ask you: "What more do you think, feel or want to say?"

You will probably start to talk again. And after a while you may fall silent again. Brief your listener that if this happens, to ask: "Is there anything more?"

When you say "No, that's it, thank you" then you're done. You can take longer than 15 minutes.

For you, this time is yours. Simply give voice to your thoughts. Go where you will.

In practice

Here's what it looks like, after you've briefed your partner. The person doing the listening starts things off by asking:

"What do you want to think about and what do you think about it?"

And then you speak. And the listener pays attention, as briefed. Allow for pauses and silence.

If you run dry, and stop speaking, the listener lets the silence sit for a moment, then they can ask: "What more do you think, feel or want to say?"

And at another, later silence: "Is there anything more?"

After 15 minutes you say, "thank you" to your listener.

Then have a break. And ask your partner if they would like you to listen to them.

What to notice

As a speaker

What was that like? To be given the space to speak uninterrupted?

What do you notice about your thinking? Where did you go?

What have you learned about yourself as a result?

What difference will this make?

As a listener

What was that like? To give someone the space to speak uninterrupted?
What did you notice about your attention and thoughts?
What was easy? What was a challenge?
What will be different as a result?

iv) Practise comfort with silences and pause

The following experiment requires two people

Practise 1

Find someone and sit opposite them for two minutes on screen, but not paying any particular attention to them. Look at them from time to time. Don't say anything.

Take a minute or two to share your experiences: how did you both find that?

Take a short break.

Practise 2

Next do the same thing, but this time, give each other the most attention you possibly can. Be still, be silent, make eye contact. For two minutes.

Take a minute or two to share: how did you both find that?

What did you learn about yourself and your responses to silence and pause?
What difference will your learning make?

v) Deepen your listening

Decide you're going to reflect on your listening in a conversation that you're due to have with someone. Notice where your listening goes: to level 1, 2 and 3.

Afterwards, reflect on the conversation and become aware of:
When you notice yourself listening to your own inner voice (level 1),
When you notice yourself listening to their words at a factual level (level 2)
When you notice you listen for meaning beneath the words (level 3)

What do you notice overall about your listening?
What difference will this make to you?

vi) Interruptions

In day to day conversation, notice how many times you jump in before the person who is speaking has finished their sentence. And notice how many times you are interrupted before finishing yours. Notice what happens when you let someone finish. Notice what happens when you are allowed to finish. What is the difference in the quality of your thinking?

vii) Try bending a habit

Habits get in the way of becoming ACES. They are also hard to break. But you can start by bending them a bit. Here's the experiment. Identify a habit that you associate with your natural communication style from the list below.

Then when you're in conversation:

- Notice when you are about to do it or when you do it.
- Take a breath. And pause.
- And try a bend (something else).

You can spend as much time as you like at any of the above stages. Before moving on to the next.

The habits and a suggested bend for each (feel free to devise and try your own bend)

Attentive

Habit: Going straight to business

Bend: Go to human first: try an icebreaker eg “who are we, where are we, how are we?”

Habit: Distraction: the screens in our lives, diluting the life in our screen.

Bend: Focus: Look for and see the person not the screen. Make eye contact with the camera.

Habit: Multitasking: all apps and emails open, your time and space is cluttered.

Bend: Close everything not required for the call and put your mobile out of reach.

Habit: Back to back calls/Zooms: no room in between.

Bend: Block out time before and after calls. Say 15 minutes. Use that time to reflect and prepare.

Curious

Habit: Suggesting an answer: as a way of trying to be helpful.

Bend: Ask a question, based on your thought that starts with “what” or “how”.

Habit: Asking closed questions, coupled with assumptions: “Did you like it?” “Were you annoyed?”

Bend: Ask open questions: “What did you think?” “How will you go forward?”

Habit: Asking multiple questions: failing to just ask one, short one.

Bend: Keep it short and simple. One question. Few words. Stop talking.

Expand

Habit: Our inner voice dominates: we hear only our own thoughts

Bend: Hear your own voice. Refocus on what you are hearing, reconnect with the other person’s words.

Habit: We jump in: we hear something we recognise and we want to share our experience.

Bend: This is your inner voice. Notice it, quieten it down and refocus on the speaker.

Habit: We’re waiting to speak: we are forming our response while the other person is still speaking.

Bend: Politely park your inner voice and return your attention to the other person.

Speak

Habit: Speaking fast, because we expect to be cut off.

Bend: Slow down, trust your listener to let you finish.

Habit: We focus on our idea: and then we assume the audience will love it as much as we do.

Bend: Spread your attention. When you prepare, consider your audience and you.

Habit: We ‘cross our fingers’ and hope that when we open our mouths it will all be OK.

Bend: Write down what you’ll say and practise it twice. Embrace this as a chance to learn. And when you learn anything, you give yourself some time to practise. Be kind to yourself.