

19 Really Useful Techniques for making difficult conversations history

by Ian Berry CSP



Introduction

I have worked with more than 1000 business owners and leaders, women and men, in over 40 countries since 1991. **I have observed the following about most workplaces.**

There is a reluctance to have conversations about performance particularly when there is conflict, disagreement and/or difficulty.

And the results of this:

Less than desirable performance from lots of people,
and massive negative effect on cash flow, revenue, and profits in your business.

A lot of the trouble starts with how we see people.

Real leaders have a great attitude towards other people. Fake leaders don't.

Research clearly shows: most people don't leave organisations - they leave their bosses!

Appreciating people is not a strength of most leaders and managers. It can be.

Holding people to account is not a strength of most leaders and managers either. It can be.

Our attitude towards ourselves and other people really matters.

The great German playwright, poet, and novelist Goethe said:

If we see man as he is, he can only get worse.

If we see man as he could be, he can only get better.

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See my story [here](#) about how I was very fortunate to learn this philosophy early in my life, how it has served me well for 40+ years and how it can serve you well too.

How do you see yourself and other people?

Appreciating ourselves and other people

The eminent psychologist William James observed:

The deepest principle of human nature is a craving to be appreciated.

How well do you genuinely appreciate yourself and other people?

Accountability

The lack of accountability across the board in the world today is the biggest reason in my view for our troubles as a human race. Just think Wall Street, Banks, Politics!

Accountability is the other side of the coin to appreciation. And one without the other is a recipe for poor performance.

How well do you hold yourself and other people to account for less than agreed performance?

Key words: **Agreed performance.**

I find that there are three main reasons for human conflict:

- 1) disagreement about the goal/s, objective/s, or aim/s.
- 2) disagreement about how the goal/s, objective/s, or aim/s will be achieved.
- 3) assumption of agreement in 1) and/or 2), and a negative response when such assumptions result in perceived betrayal.

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Best use of the 19 techniques that follow assume that you have real agreement with the person or people you are addressing on goal/s, objective/s, or aim/s and how the goal/s, objective/s, or aim/s will be achieved.

Be remarkable.

Ian

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1. Getting people to commit to behaviour change

Insight

We are creatures of habit. Optimum performance or lack of it has a lot to do with whether we are creatures of successful or non successful habits.

Changing our habits is generally not easy. The good news is that even old dogs can learn new tricks despite the adage that says the opposite. It is a matter of our willingness to change.

We usually need all the encouragement and support we can get!

Putting insight into practice

Every time we are asked to change or are considering change ourselves we need the answers to one question, what is in it for me? (WIIFM?)

1. Know how your staff/employees will benefit in the short and long term before you discuss behaviour change with them.
2. Have them consider the benefits of changing in the short and long term.
3. Help your staff/employees to see the negative consequences of not changing as well as the positive results of changing.
4. Discuss with your staff/employees their fears and concerns in relation to changing.
5. End the conversation with an agreement on the FGF's (Feel Good Factors) of changing and make an appointment for the next phase as described on the next page.

Why doing the above can be really useful

You will have helped your staff/employees raise their level of self esteem.
You will have paved the way for real behaviour change to occur.

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2. Actual behaviour change

Insight

Providing you have followed the recommendations on the previous page it is more than likely you or your staff/employees are ready to change. Fear of change is more than likely still a factor however.

Putting insight into practice

The following is a formula for overcoming the fear of change as well as actually changing.

Before we can modify or change our behaviour in order to improve results or outcomes in our lives (or our business) we must ensure our intentions, feelings and thoughts are in alignment with our proposed behaviour modifications or changes.

No alignments, no lasting behavioural modification or change!

1. Ask the **intention** question. Is this really what I want? (the result, outcome, change etc.)
2. Ask the **feeling** question. What are my true feelings about what I really want?
3. Ask the **thinking** question. What thoughts, beliefs, mindsets, paradigms must I change or modify to eliminate any negative responses to the previous question? Am I really willing to change or modify these negative thoughts, beliefs, mindsets or paradigms? **If your answer is no go back to 1. If your answer is yes proceed to 4.**
4. Make the changes or modifications identified in step 3. over a period of time through a series of small, interconnected steps, celebrating your achievement after completing each step.

Why doing the above can be really useful

Continuous improvement is a fact of life. This process helps us accept this fact and to undertake the journey necessary. Less fear of change and success in changing leads to a more innovative life.

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3. WisingUp: a technique for changing paradigms, mindsets and thinking systems

Insight

John Kehoe once remarked *the only thing that keeps us down and stuck is our thoughts*.

Our paradigms, mindsets and thinking systems can not only be our major blocks to behaviour change they are also the big barriers in the way to us becoming all we are capable of becoming.

Putting insight into practice

What is WisingUp? Being ahead of the game by continually asking and answering the question: What could I/we do right now that I/we are not doing that would fundamentally change the way we create value in our business?

How

1. Continually asking how can we add value to every transaction and interaction we engage in?
2. Asking more questions that we give answers e.g. What if? What happened? What do you feel we should do? Have you got an update on? Where are we at with? What could we do differently to ensure this doesn't happen again
3. Not taking the feelings, thoughts and actions of others personally.
4. Anticipating behaviour and adapting ours.
5. Being proactive.
6. Having systems in place to ensure change desired can be implemented.
7. Not engaging in the blame and shame game.
8. Not confusing people with problems.

Why doing the above can be really useful

All organizations exist to create value. We get what we focus on. The more we focus on creating value, the more we will actually provide value.

The more we challenge the way we think the less set we are in our ways and therefore the more open we are to new and innovative ways of creating value.

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4. The 3 point turn technique for getting people to act in their best interests – phase one

Insight

Agreement between you and your staff member/employee concerning goals and the actions to achieve them is a must have for leading performance. A further must have is to ensure these agreements are in writing. When goals aren't being achieved use the following technique.

Putting insight into practice

1. Make an appointment to see the individual and state the purpose is to review their goal achievement plan.
2. At the beginning of the appointment make it clear the sole purpose of this meeting is to review progress towards achieving goals.
3. Reiterate agreements (e.g. I understand we had an agreement that you would fulfill two productive appointments with prospects each working day) and confirm this is your staff member/employees understanding by asking, Is this your understanding?
4. Ask: What has happened? Our records show you are only fulfilling 1 appointment per working day.
5. Ask: What do you need to do to get back on track?
6. Ask: Anything I can do to help/support/encourage?
7. Ask: Anything else?
8. Summarize new agreement in writing and both sign it.

Why doing the above can be really useful

There are two main reasons people fail to achieve goals. One, they didn't really have any goals in the first place. Two, for some reason focus on agreed actions has waned. This technique will remove both these issues.

Most people are driven by goal achievement. This technique acts as a reminder of this. This technique is also half of what I call the Double A Technique. You can learn more by watching the video under sparkenation 19 at <http://www.ianberry.biz/appreciative-leader-handbook-ian-berry/>

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5. The 3 point turn technique for getting people to act in their best interests – phase two

Insight

Only proceed with this phase if you have completed phase one on more than one occasion with the same individual.

Putting insight into practice

1. Make an appointment to see the individual and state the purpose is to review their performance possibility plan.
2. At the beginning of the appointment make it clear the sole purpose of this meeting is to review progress towards achieving goals.
3. Reiterate agreements (e.g. I understand we had an agreement that you would always let me know well in advance if you felt you were having trouble meeting our agreed deadlines on month end reports) and confirm this is your staff member/employees understanding by asking, Is this your understanding?
4. Ask: What has happened? We missed deadlines on five out of the nine reports.
5. Ask: What do you need to do to ensure this doesn't happen again?
6. Ask: Anything I can do to help/support/encourage?
7. Ask: Anything else?
8. Ask: What are the possible negative consequences for you of not following through this time?
9. Summarize new agreement in writing and both sign it

Why doing the above can be really useful

Your staff member/employee will understand there are possible negative consequences for them for not being responsible and accountable.

Your staff member/employee has been reminded of the necessary commitment required to fulfill their role to the best of their ability.

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6. The 3 point turn technique for getting people to act in their best interests – phase three

Insight

At various times in our lives we need tough love. Only proceed with this phase if your staff member/employee has totally failed to fulfill the agreement you reached in phase two, otherwise repeat phase two.

Putting insight into practice

1. Make an appointment to see the individual and state the purpose is to review your last written agreement.
2. At the beginning of the appointment make it clear the sole purpose of this meeting is to review this agreement.
3. Place the written agreement in front of your staff member/employee and state: From my perspective you have failed to fulfill this agreement. Is there any reason why I should not proceed with writing you a warning letter? (or whatever is legal in your state, territory, or country). If your staff member/employee says no write the letter and begin to performance manage this person out of your organisation by following the remaining legal steps to the letter. NB This does not necessarily mean this is the beginning of the end. Many people recover from this and go on to become optimum performers.

If your staff member/employees answer is other than no complete the following steps.

4. Ask: What has happened? (if this question has not already been answered in the preceding dialogue) Then ask: What do you need to do to ensure this never happens again?
5. Ask: Anything I can do to help/support/encourage?
6. Ask: Anything else?
7. Summarize new agreement in writing and both sign it.

Why doing the above can be really useful

You have either begun the necessary process of letting a non performing, uncommitted person go, or, your staff member/employee has been reminded of the necessary commitment required to fulfill their role to the best of their ability and it is in their court to act accordingly which reinforces the need for personal accountability.

Warning: there are most likely laws about dismissal where you work. Make sure you are in compliance before using this technique.

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7. Clarify roles more than jobs or tasks

Insight

Most job description documents are not worth the paper they are written on because they fail to really clarify what people will be responsible and accountable for and how they will fit in and belong. Good role clarification need not take up any more than two sides of an A4 page providing standard operating policies, procedures and practices are up to date and accurately describe how jobs or tasks are accomplished.

Putting insight into practice

Have role clarity documents for all staff/employees that describe the following:

1. Ultimate purpose of your business.
2. Purpose of this role.
3. Key accountabilities and responsibilities.
4. Key performance indicators. (In high performance cultures indicators have been replaced with areas and staff work out their own indicators).
5. Key Relationships of the role and the value that must be delivered to each person. Sometimes the heading here is: Key outcomes of role (lag measures).
6. Key talents (gifts) required and that need to be enhanced to excel in this role and prepare for future roles.
7. Learning, development and career path opportunities.
8. How you will be appreciated and helped to be accountable by others.

Why doing the above can be really useful

You eliminate excuses for unacceptable performance.

People feel a greater sense of belonging and are more likely to perform at optimum levels on a consistent basis.

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8. Provide coaching for your people

Insight

Coaching is fundamentally about maintaining or improving competency or skill.

Putting insight into practice

Ensure you are aware of all the competencies or skills required and performance standards for each to perform the role of the person/s you are coaching. If you don't have the skill, the time, or the energy engage expert coaches from outside your business.

Continually work on your ability to

1. Articulate how performance should be.
2. Share insight clearly and succinctly.
3. Create diverse, fun, practice methodologies.
4. Be tough yet fair.
5. Challenge people respectfully.
6. Separate problems from personality.
7. Be general with praise and specific with critique.
8. Always have people's best interests at heart.

Why doing the above can be really useful

You will build strong relationships.

You will eventually surround yourself with people with high competency or high skill levels.

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9. Provide mentoring for your people; engage mentors for yourself

Insight

Mentoring is fundamentally about commitment or the will to persevere no matter what.

Putting insight into practice

Ensure you are aware of all the will (what it really takes to perform the role) of the person/s you are mentoring.

Continually work on your willingness to

- 1) Influence others yet allow them to make their own decisions.
- 2) Listen more than speak.
- 3) Ask more questions than you give answers.
- 4) Give advice but more provide encouragement for people to find their own way.
- 5) Experience delayed gratification.
- 6) Give away hard earned wisdom and insight.
- 7) Be patient.

Engaging mentors from outside your business to help you with your own commitment is one of the best investments you can make because it will help you to see and understand matters that are crucial to your personal and business growth that you will not know otherwise.

Why doing the above can be really useful

Your staff members/employees will become more and more self reliant and they will begin to mentor others themselves. You will learn as much as you teach if not more.

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10. Effective communication from a sending perspective

Insight

Effective communication is an essential yet often elusive skill for successful leadership and management. The key to effective communication lies in knowing what communication actually is.

My best definition is: Effective communication is when two or more people agree on something, even if the agreement is to disagree.

Putting insight into practice

1. Check your intention before opening your mouth.

An intention to achieve an outcome of mutual benefit is generally a sign it is ok to open your mouth.

2. Use words, tone and body language that is appropriate for the receiver/s and the situation.

3. Ask questions to ensure what you have sent is the same as what has been received.

Why doing the above can be really useful

You will say less and be more succinct in what you do say.

What you do say will be better received and over time others will be looking forward to hearing what you have to say.

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11. Effective communication from a receiving perspective

Insight

There is no doubt listening is an art which is why it is a critical success factor in leadership. Genuine listening means we must suspend our perceptions, paradigms and mindsets and seek to understand the sender/s point of view even if it is different to ours.

Putting insight into practice

1. Suspend all that is you and focus only on understanding the other person/people.
2. Tune in to others with all you've got, your five senses and particularly your intuitive feel as to what others mean.
3. Ask questions to ensure what you have received is the same as what has been sent.

Questions are so important I've put together a separate paper about it. Please telephone me should you want me to email it to you.

Why doing the above can be really useful

You will become known as a good listener, a critical aspect of being respected and trusted by others. People will tell you more and as a result you will learn more about what is really happening in your organisation.

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12. Communicating on a feeling level

Insight

Communication usually occurs on **five general levels**; a **basic** level where nothing more than clichés or everyday statements are used; the **fact** level where we share what we believe is fact and others agree or disagree or we simply share what is accepted as fact; the **opinion** level where opinions are shared and agreement or disagreement results; the **optimum** level where words are often not required, yet meaning is transferred; and finally the **feeling** level where we share our emotions.

The most vital level to communicate on is the feeling level. Buying from us or buying into what we want is fundamentally a feeling transaction.

To get to the feeling level often means we must interact through the other communication levels of basic, fact, opinion, and optimum.

Putting insight into practice

- 1) Use I feel statements.
- 2) Reflect back to others your feelings.
- 3) Ensure your tone and body language fit the feelings you are expressing.

Why doing the above can be really useful

Relationships are fundamentally about feelings. We enhance our relationships by communicating well on the feeling level. Communicating on the feeling level requires a willingness to be vulnerable which is inspirational for others.

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13. Be assertive yet seek win/win, never win/lose, lose/win, or lose/lose

Insight

Some people feel and think aggressively and therefore behave aggressively. The usual result of such behaviour is the aggressive person wins and others lose.

Some people feel and think submissively and therefore behave submissively. The usual result of such behaviour is that the submissive person loses and others win.

Our challenge is to be neither aggressive nor submissive but rather assertive. Assertive people think and act win/win and therefore behave assertively. The usual result of such behaviour is that everyone wins.

Putting insight into practice

- 1) We must genuinely intend and want all parties to gain. To think win/win is possible all of the time is unrealistic however the more we strive, the more it happens.
- 2) We must agree on the goal, outcome, or desired result.
- 3) We must agree on the strategies and tactics to achieve the goal, outcome, or result.
- 4) We must agree on what all parties can and can't and will and won't do in order to achieve win/win.
- 5) We must all take the action we have agreed to.

Win/win generally occurs when we follow these five steps and the exceptions are generally a result of events occurring over which we have no control.

Why doing the above can be really useful

Most negative conflict is avoidable. More often than not following these steps catches conflict before it kills performance. Less unnecessary negative conflict means greater relationships which mean greater productivity, which means greater results.

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14. Seven special steps to successful collaboration

Insight

A few times in my life I have felt let down by what I perceived was betrayal by others of perceived agreements to do certain things. The last time this happened I allowed myself to feel hurt for many months. The positive consequence was that I developed a process for reaching agreement with others. I trust you will find it valuable in making your collaborations successful.

There are three worlds. The one in here - that's my world; the one out there - that's your world; and the one that is vital when it comes to collaboration - the world we share.

Seven special steps to successful collaboration

- 1) Establish that there is agreement concerning the goal/s, objective/s, or aim/s. Don't move on until you are absolutely certain there is agreement
- 2) State what you can and will do to achieve the goal/s, objective/s, or aim/s
- 3) Ask the other person or people involved to state what they can and will do to achieve the goal/s, objective/s, or aim/s
- 4) State what you feel are the milestones or measurements that will indicate you are on track to achieve what you say you will in 2)
- 5) Ask the other person or people involved to state what they feel are the milestones or measurements that will indicate they are on track to achieve what they say they will in 3)
- 6) Agree on dates and times you will be in touch with each other to discuss progress and celebrate achievements
- 7) Confirm in writing via email or letter your agreements in 2) through 6) and ask for a confirmation response from the other person or people involved

Why doing the above can be really useful

We live in the age of collaboration therefore the ability and willingness to collaborate is an essential skill of any real leader.

PS For more on the concept and application of shared-view and reaching and sustaining it please visit <http://www.ianberry.biz/sustaining-shared-view/>

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15. Make meetings meaningful

Insight

Nothing kills productivity as rapidly as ineffective meetings, whether they are informal or formal. In my opinion most leaders/managers could reduce the number of meetings attended by at least 50 percent.

Putting insight into practice

The following are guidelines for best practice in conducting meaningful formal meetings:

1. Agenda distributed well in advance (include standard items).
2. Follow agenda.
3. Have clear, agreed purpose for the meeting.
4. Have agreed starting and finishing times and stick to them.
5. Rotate Chair Person.
6. Review value of meeting and achievement of purpose for all participants at the end.
7. Give feedback to Chairperson at end of meeting regarding pre-determined performance parameters.
8. Ensure that as a result of the meeting people leave with a shared agreement of what behaviour and/or action will occur and how these will be measured and feedback exchanged.
9. Make participation mandatory.
10. Have a rule that only one person speaks at a time.
11. Ensure there are no interruptions.
12. Keep in mind the ultimate measure of successful performance is Customer Satisfaction (both internal and external).
13. Focus on the performance not on the person by asking what happened, rather than who did it.
14. Find ways to improve performance that will help the person.
15. Focus on the problem not on the person.
16. Follow agreed ways to solve problems and make decisions.
17. Distribute agreed action plan separate from the minutes.

Why doing the above can be really useful

Effective meetings reduce reasons for conflict, difficulty and disagreement because they help build better relationships and a shared view about performance.

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16. Love the result long before it is realized

Insight

In 2002 I was the Convention Chair for the Professional Speakers Association of Australia Ltd's annual convention. This was the first time the association had held this event in Adelaide since 1996. The great reputation of the 1996 event was uppermost in the minds of myself and the great team of people with whom I worked. In a debriefing after what was a landmark weekend, one of the team, Colin Pearce, said *We loved the result long before it was realized.*

We did, and it made all the difference.

Putting insight into practice

Knowing possibility is a tremendous energizer. Turning possibility into reality is an even bigger thrill.

- 1) Seek to be discovering possible performance all the time.
- 2) Be passionate about achieving what is possible.
- 3) Break the steps from current performance to possible performance into small achievable steps.
- 4) Gain agreement with those who will take the steps on how each step will be taken.
- 5) Appoint and/or seek champions to lead the taking of each step.
- 6) Love every bit of the journey.
- 6) Celebrate the achievement of each step.

Why doing the above can be really useful

We stop panicking about the result.

We learn to focus on processes and detach from outcomes.

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17. Practical, negative conflict free, big problem solving

Insight

Unsolved problems and unmade decisions are two of the biggest causes of ineffectiveness and inefficiency in organisations. Unsolved problems and unmade decisions have a negative impact on morale and client/customer loyalty and therefore also impact profitability.

Putting insight into practice

1. Clearly identify the problem.
2. Clearly identify who owns the problem.
3. Obtain suggested solutions from all those affected.
4. Ask what choices are possible?
5. Eliminate choices not congruent with cause, virtues, and performance possibility plans.
6. Evaluate effects of choices remaining on clients/customers, staff/employees.
7. Ask what are the likely outcomes of each choice?
8. Ask what choice or combination of choices will be best for the common good?
9. Make the decision.
10. Agree on who will be responsible and accountable for implementing the decision.
11. Agree on how best to ensure communication with all those the decision affects.
12. Agree on who will be responsible and accountable for communication.
13. Update all policies, procedures and practices affected by the decision.
14. Stick with decision.
15. Remove/eliminate the cause of the problem in the first place.

Why doing the above can be really useful

Having a track to follow means we should not miss crucial detail.

Having a system means less confusion between problems and people and problems and personalities, let alone the power of transparency to inspire.

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18. Practical, negative conflict free, small problem solving

Insight

Small problems often take away our energy and focus. We need a process for solving small problems that enables fast solutions.

Putting insight into practice

The following process called the *I've Got A Problem technique*, designed by Peter Marshman, one of my mentors in the early 90's, is as good as I have seen.

1. Make an appointment to see the person or people that the problem is with.
2. Ensure the environment is appropriate.
3. Build the other person's self esteem by asking for help. Saying "I've got a problem, can you help me" makes it easy.
4. Describe the relationship you want.
5. Describe your goal.
6. Describe mutual goals.
7. Get agreement on mutual goals.
8. Relate your problem. Use feeling talk wherever possible.
9. Support your problem with specific evidence wherever possible.
10. Ask for help to solve the problem, ensuring you keep the problem.

Why doing the above can be really useful

Other people will see you as a problem solver instead of a person who passes on problems. Over time and through the growth of our relationships small problems disappear.

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19. Fool proof quick decision making

Insight

Quick, common sense decisions more often than not save time, energy, and money.

Putting insight into practice

1. Ask what choices are available?
2. Eliminate choices not congruent with your cause, virtues, and performance possibility plans.
3. Make the decision.
4. Communicate the decision.
5. Note decision for discussion with others to ensure all implications are considered and appropriate changes to standard operating policies, procedures, and practices can be made if required.

Why doing the above can be really useful

People are inspired by decisiveness and transparency.
You will eliminate procrastination over time.

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Please feel most welcome to contact me for clarification of any of the techniques.

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About Me

I have been married to my wife Carol since 1973. This is the partnership I am most proud of.

Following a highly successful career in financial services when at the end I was leading a 100million dollar business unit, since 1991 I have been privileged to help business owners and leaders in over 40 countries to achieve better business results at less personal cost, primarily through conference and in-house presentations, seminars, workshops, webinars, master-classes, change projects, and mentoring.

I hold the Certified Speaking Professional (CSP) designation which is the highest available to professional speakers internationally which places me in the top 7% of my profession. I am a past National President of the Professional Speakers Association of Australia Ltd.

Today I focus on the following:

Who Before Do presentations <http://www.ianberry.biz/speaking/>
and program <http://www.ianberry.biz/who-before-do/>

I'm currently writing (May 2018) the Who Before Do book which is the final in a trilogy that began with Changing What's Normal and the sequel The Appreciative Leader. You can keep abreast of my progress at <http://www.ianberry.biz/books-and-companion-resources-web-page/>

Leaving a legacy via the above and <http://www.ianberry.biz/leadership-management-and-culture-enhancement-complimentary-resources/>

Plus hosting the Accountability Accelerator Roundtable online exclusive for my clients on the first Monday of every month <http://www.ianberry.biz/accountability-accelerators-and-online-courses/>

I also conduct a master-class in person near my home on the fourth Wednesday of every month and online on the second Tuesday of every month <https://www.eventbrite.com.au/o/ian-berry-5879090561>

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