

The Ecology of Conversation

by Gary Tomlinson

“Learning from the school of hard knocks can be very informing, but often the tuition is too high! We should learn from other people’s experiences.” The purpose of this column is to share great business wisdom from the experiences of authors like Jim Collins, Michael Gerber, Gary Harpst, Michael LeBoeuf, Ron Willingham, Stephen M.R. Covey and others. Because when you combine great business education with your own business experiences the outcome you’ll receive is far greater than the sum of its parts.

The wisdom of Judith Beck’s book *The Ecology of Conversation – Learning to Communicate From Your Core* has been chosen to share with you this week. “Our interactions with others are one of our most precious gifts. They rank right up there with the air we breathe and the water we drink. Without a history of a parent’s touch, family’s words, membership in groups, or some facsimiles thereof, we live a solitary, if not wretched existence. Our lives are so enriched by interactions with others, and yet we are steadily moving toward a society of increasing solitude and loneliness.”

“We move away from family. We marry and bear children later, or have fewer of them. We telecommute. We email, Google or text instead of call. We go to work early and come home late. We skip vacations with our families. It’s no wonder that a quarter of Americans queried admit the absence of a close confidante in their lives, a figure that has doubled in just twenty years.”

“Authentic conversation, the kind where all participants are comfortable in their own skin and eager to exchange thoughts on what they know, feel or question – is a panacea.” Judith Beck believes great conversations “generate mutual learning, empathy, problem solving, conflict resolution, innovation and that ever-so-important sense of well-being and belonging that leads to a long and authentically lived life.” But great conversations are rare. So how does one overcome the fear of loss associated with acquiring the courage and skill sets necessary for deep and generative interactions? The answer to this question is the basis for Judith’s *The Ecology of Conversation*.

The Greek roots of the word ecology are *ecos* or *oikos* – translated as “home or place to live in;” and *logos* – translated as “word, thought, principle, study, speech.” In her book, Judith translates the word ecology “as the study of the thoughts, principles and words that reside in us and thus influence our interactions with others.” She believes that “deep and generative interaction is not just simply a matter of honing one’s listening or social skills but rather it requires knowing oneself well enough to *freely put that knowing aside*.”

The Ecology of Conversation is divided into two sections. The first section encourages you to examine your *Inner Ecology*. “Its purpose is to shed light on your embedded and automatic responses. You’ll gain conscious awareness of baggage, cultural influences and prejudices from your past, that are preventing you from moving forward in your quest for

meaningful conversation and relationships today.” Section two is devoted to your Outer Ecology. “The purpose is to direct your newfound awareness toward deeper and more authentic interactions with others. In it, you will examine the energy of your thoughts on the spoken word. You will acquire generative conversational skills. You will gain the ability to let others into your hearts, where previously there was no room. You will improve your listening skills.”

The Ecology of Conversation isn't a long book. It doesn't take a great deal of time to read. However, at the end of each chapter, Judith offers thought-questions relative to the subject matter. She encourages the reader to consider these questions and record their conclusions. She believes doing so will strengthen and solidify the reader's learning experience. *The Ecology of Conversation* also makes a great book for book clubs. By exploring your thoughts, answering the questions and sharing your insights in a group setting you can further optimize your learning experience. *The Ecology of Conversation* is an important book for anyone who seeks to communicate truthfully and authentically.

You can purchase *The Ecology of Conversation* at all major booksellers or contact the publisher at www.trafford.com. You can engage Judith Beck at kmbeck@skybest.com.

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