

5 phrases that unlock ideas

5 little phrases that have a big impact if you want to generate ideas and solve problems in your meetings.

If you need the ideas to flow then people need to feel heard, valued and safe. Use these 5 conversation keys to unlock engagement, thinking and ideas.

Conversation
Engineering®

What we say at work matters...

Feel as confident leading people as you are solving tough technical problems



“yes, and...”

A positive & aspirational way to respond, even when you disagree.

This is a great way to respond when someone shares an idea with you. Starting your response with a “yes” helps the person you are talking to feel safe as it’s non-judgemental and makes them feel heard and valued as you are responding positively. This can then open everyones minds to adding further to the conversation.

This little phrase is brilliant to use when you have doubts or questions about what somebody has just said.

For example: “yes, and we also need to think about how X might work.” Try this instead of: “No, that won’t work because...”



“tell me more about...”

Encourage people to expand on what they have shared & explore things they might not have considered.

When we share ideas with the group, we're taking a risk, putting ourselves out there. If we feel the opinion we've just shared is being judged unfairly, dismissed or ignored, we are pushed into a defensive mindset. When we feel like this, we don't think creatively, don't share, and don't take risks.

This is why we need to respond carefully when people share their ideas. “Tell me more about...” is a powerful way to respond as it:

- Shows we're interested in what people are sharing
- It contains no judgement, so won't trigger shame
- It forces us to listen to what's being said



“What I heard you say was...”

Great for helping people feel heard & valued, plus it helps you understand.

Repeating what someone has said using your own words is a powerful way to help someone feel heard and give yourself the time to process how you want to respond to their idea.

To think creatively, share ideas, feel safe enough to take risks and make mistakes – we need to feel a valued member of the team. Feeling listened to and understood is a powerful way to make someone feel valued. This can be achieved by repeating back what they have said using your own words.

Using this opener also lets your team hear their idea repeated back to them, which in turn prompts their own thinking, strengthening the process of idea evaluation and exploration – Is that what I meant? Does that sound like a good idea?



“Could not should”

Stay positive & aspirational, whilst
also avoiding judgement & shame.

We should be doing this

We could be doing this

Whilst there is only a single word that has changed in these two statements, one is much more likely to feel like judgement and so trigger shame.

Judgement and shame slow down the flow of ideas, and the words we use can make us feel valued and included or judged and excluded.

Replacing should with could shifts what you want to say into a much more aspiration place, opening our thinking toward what might be possible.



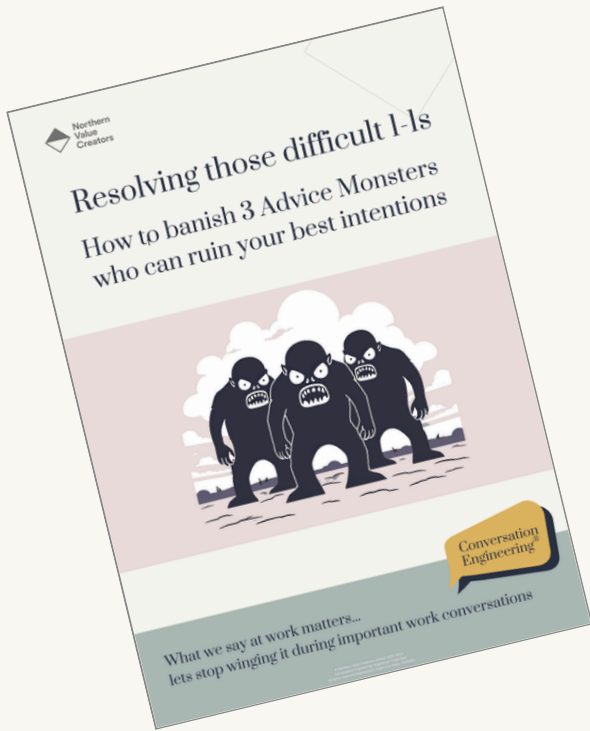
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“What else?”

Creative ideas and innovations rarely come from our first thoughts. Our brain will think of what's most obvious, closest to us and what's worked before, we need to expand on these first thoughts if we want to think creatively.

Asking - “what else?” signals to people that they can keep thinking and gives permission to carry on with idea generation.

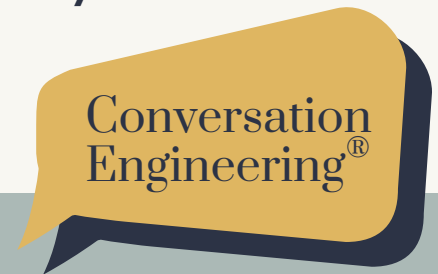
When using “what else” it's important to give some space to let more ideas flow. This might involve some silence, as we give that space for people to think. Silence can feel uncomfortable, but it's important so don't jump to the next thing too quickly.



Do you know Advice Monsters could be spoiling your 1-1s?

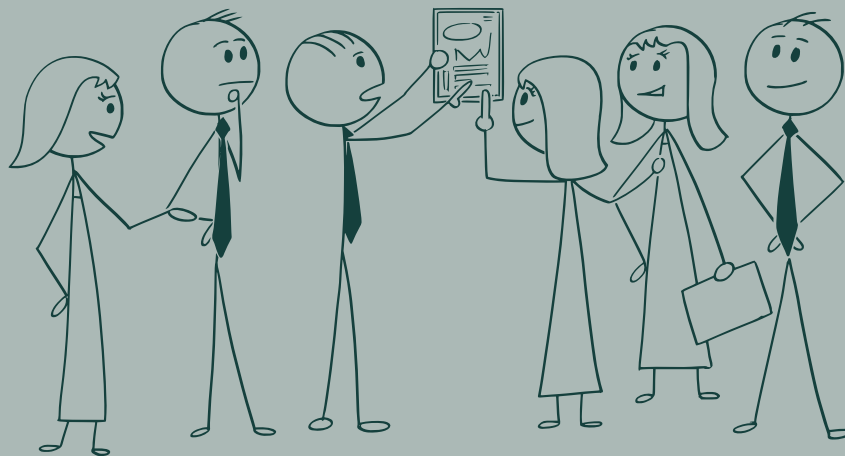
Learn how to banish the monsters from your 1-1s. Get our workbook packed full of practical advice, learning and tools to help you have awesome 1-1s.

Download it today



The conversations you have with your team can change everything.

Conversations can build trust, solve problems faster, and make work better for everyone.



Start small, try something.
You've got this.