

Foreword

Artists for thousands of years have conveyed messages through their selected medium. Ancient cave painters ground pigments into rock to depict scenes from their lives. Hellenic potters used black slip and careful etchings of warriors, geometric shapes, and later more elaborate faces and figures. Renaissance painters made light dance out of dark canvases with their use of color. Other artists followed, each working in a medium to convey a message, inspire an observer, engage a viewer, and promote reflection.

New media artists take a different approach to art. Many work in multimedia rather than a single medium as earlier artists did. They select their media to underscore their message or to feature the beauty of what exists. Living artist Deborah Butterfield sculpts and casts exquisite horses from driftwood, and Clare Graham constructs art from found objects such as buttons, bottle caps, scrabble tiles, yardsticks, and pop tops. These common everyday objects take on new form and meaning beyond their essence at the hand of the artist.

Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968), a French artist considered to be among the most important artists of the 20th century, took a unique approach to his art for a period. He substituted for his own work ready-made objects, either alone, assembled, or constructed from other objects. Some of his more famous readymades included a bicycle wheel, comb, bottle rack, and typewriter cover. He chose ordinary, familiar objects and displayed them so they held new significance through their unique point of view. By withdrawing the artist from the art, Duchamp engaged the observer in personal and unpredictable ways. He allowed the observer to take an active role in the process of experiencing art. Duchamp believed that art emerged from the intersection of the artist's intention and the observer's response to the work as the observer became a partner in the meaning-making experience.

Duchamp's exploration with art signals how the authors in this book use the readymade of conversation to provoke, inspire, engage, and create art at the intersection of the coach and client. Words and conversations are everywhere. We use them to convey greetings, to order online and in restaurants, to comfort, to express feelings, to learn, and to conduct business. Because conversations are ubiquitous, appreciating the meaning and value of them is challenging. Yet when a coach takes the familiar, a conversation, and shares it in a new way, possibilities emerge. If the coach then engages the client to become a partner in the experience, significance radiates.

As readers unpack the scenarios and conversations shared by experienced coaches and education leaders within this book, they are invited to reflect on how they use words combined artfully into conversations to promote personal and professional growth in their clients and colleagues. The authors model through the scenarios drawn from their experiences how leaders artfully construct conversations to move heads, hearts, and hands. The book depicts how change agents catalyze others to clarify their goals and take action to achieve them. Serving others in this way is both a gift and an opportunity for leaders. Leaders will study the scenarios as models of how conversations support others to reach their highest potential, to solve complex problems, to resolve conflict, to build relational trust, to achieve high standards and audacious goals, to serve others, and to create possibilities. As readers enjoy the scenarios and various perspectives shared by the authors, they will find themselves reflecting on how they use words combined artfully into conversations to promote personal and professional growth.

Coaching conversations are the medium of leaders as the authors convey throughout this book. They depict how conversations used in a new way, as a form of art that intends to inspire an observer, renews the importance of conversation as an art form. Coaches select the medium of words for their art because words are familiar, and they mold them as an artist does into a work of art that offers a new point of view to engage their clients as partners at the intersection of the artist's intention and the partner's experience.

—Joellen Killion

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