

A FLY ON THE WALL

Observations from the side of the room.

By Mary Corrigan of *Tracking the Wisdom*

Since I was a child I've always been interested in bringing people together. Whether typing up membership cards for the neighborhood tree house, organizing weekend excursions and dinner parties among friends, maintaining book clubs, designing workshops to explore creativity, or changing the way people have conversations in a school community, I've always been curious about how people come together and how they stay connected.

For the past ten years as a graphic recorder I have listened to thousands of conversations and tens of thousands of stories. Since my role is silent— hearing what people say, synthesizing ideas, capturing themes and (literally) drawing them out on large murals that fill the walls of a meeting space – I have developed a different kind of listening. I hear the words and sense what is important to be recorded. There is an energy at the heart of what someone is saying. Capturing that seed, blending it with the seeds of all the other participants and illustrating the bigger picture of the whole conversation is a special skill. Much more than the resulting art, it is about listening - deep listening.

Listening is a skill that we are losing in this age of information, speed and virtual communication. As effective as e-mail is in allowing a global marketplace to grow and thrive, much is getting lost. Tone of voice, body language, humor and nuance do not communicate electronically. We depend on icons to let people know if we are making a joke ☺ - or not ☹. The potential for conflict is ever present. Listening is a vital skill we must not only preserve but actively cultivate in our increasingly complex world.

I have worked with leading edge thinkers and practitioners in the field of organizational change and learning. Appreciative Inquiry, Open Space Technology, Dialogue, and The World Café are all powerful tools to deepen understanding using conversation as a core practice. At the heart of any good conversation is listening; which is more about truly *hearing the other* than about making your point. When we hear and reflect *before* responding an entirely different kind of dialogue emerges. The person with the most compelling thing to say is often the quiet voice in the back of the room, not the one with the biggest slide deck.

As a “fly on the wall” in meeting rooms, conference rooms, board rooms, hotel rooms, classrooms and church basements around the world, I hear the primary barrier to achieving what we want: the lack of effective communication. Good communication starts with good conversations.

At *Tracking the Wisdom* the core practice I facilitate is good conversation. With that foundation, we build on what is already working in your organization while surfacing and addressing whatever is in the way of moving forward.

Let's talk...