



**This Is Your Life Podcast**  
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**Michele Cushatt:** Welcome to *This Is Your Life* with Michael Hyatt, where our goal is to give you the clarity, courage, and commitment you need to do what matters. My name is Michele Cushatt. I'm your cohost today, and I'm sitting in the studio with Michael Hyatt. Hey there, Michael!

**Michael Hyatt:** Hello, Michele!

**Michele:** Well, the old model of leadership is all about having all of the answers, and according to that theory, you get to the top by being able to answer all of the tough questions that come up with compelling answers.

**Michael:** Yep.

**Michele:** You just have to be always on your feet and always know the answers to everything.

**Michael:** That's right.

**Michele:** But there's a new model of leadership that's taking root, and we've seen it already many, many times. It's this: The leader's primary role is to initiate conversations that bring out the best thinking of the tribe and direct those conversations toward a positive outcome.

**Michael:** That's exactly right. It's more of a dialogue, not a monologue.

**Michele:** So today we're going to talk about how you can create a lead transformational conversations, because it's not always easy.

**Michael:** No.

**Michele:** And there are some people who are naturally good at those kinds of conversations, but for the vast majority, it takes some effort and some practice to be able to do that.

**Michael:** It does, and the good news is that you can get better at this. You really can bring out the best thinking of the people you're leading so that it's not just left up to you to be the smartest guy in the room. With the collective effort of everybody involved, you can get to the best answer with the most resources to accomplish the biggest result.

**Michele:** Okay, so that's one benefit. I want you to give me some others. When we create and lead transformational conversations versus having all of the answers, what's really the benefit to this? There are many, many different benefits to this.

**Michael:** Well, in addition to getting the best thinking, the most creative thinking, you get collective buy-in.

**Michele:** Okay.

**Michael:** People don't feel like they're just following somebody else's program where they don't have ownership, but they feel like they have co-created this with you. There is this collective ownership so that everybody is rowing together in the same direction, really pulling for a big result.

**Michele:** I would also imagine that if there's any misunderstanding, that becomes very clear during that conversation as well.

**Michael:** It does, and that's a huge advantage because sometimes leaders think they're being clear when they're broadcasting, just kind of dictating and giving a monologue. But when you're in a conversation with somebody and you have the opportunity to ask questions, to ask that second question and keep peeling it back and getting people's feedback, then you really find out if you've communicated. Communication is not complete until the receiver receives the communication.

**Michele:** It has long been thought that a strong leader is decisive and unyielding, but this approach basically implies the opposite, that leadership requires a bit of flexibility, openness, and transparency.

**Michael:** Yep.

**Michele:** So my question is this: In this approach, is there a risk that a leader who invites input is soft?

**Michael:** Um, possibly.

**Michele:** Okay.

**Michael:** I think it depends on what happens after that conversation. The way I've always done this is to guide the conversation, bring out the best thinking, have vigorous debate, create an environment where it's safe for dissent so there can really be some good give-and-take or even pushing and shoving.

**Michele:** Mm-hmm.

**Michael:** But at the end of the day, the leader has to take all of that and set the direction, so what you can't do is just sort of defer to a committee or a collective decision. You get the input and you get the best thinking, but at the end of the day the leader's job is to assume accountability and responsibility, set the direction for the organization, and lead from that position.

**Michele:** Just to clarify before we dive into these strategies for initiating and leading transformational conversations... We're going to talk some about having these kinds of conversations in an organization, so in a business setting, maybe with your team or a board or whatever it may be.

**Michael:** Yep.

**Michele:** However, this very much applies to any kind of situation where you are in relationship, so you can do this with your children. If you have a group of friends or even if you're just going out to lunch with one friend but you really want to stimulate a more in-depth, transformational conversation, you can use these same strategies in that kind of environment as well.

**Michael:** You totally can. In a ministry context, nonprofit context, or just about any situation where you're with other people and you really want to utilize all of the resources that are at your disposal... Yes.

**Michele:** You know, we can learn so much from other people, and sometimes we satisfy ourselves with such superficial conversations. This process really kind of forces us to take that next step and get into a place where we're really, truly... Well, this is exactly what we're talking about: transformational conversations. It creates life change for all of us.

**Michael:** Yeah, and sometimes it's as simple as a situation where you're trying to create unity or some sense of being in it together, a sense of teamwork when you don't have a lot of time to create that, on a team. You and I were talking offline before we began our podcast... At a recent Platform Conference, I was sitting at a table with a group of the speakers. One of the things we've done differently at that conference is that...

At a lot of conferences they have a speaker dinner at the end of the conference, so there's no sense of teamwork going into the conference. Everybody is just kind of a hired gun. They come in, they deliver their speeches, and they leave. One of the things we try to do at the Platform Conference is have speakers come together, create a sense of teamwork at the very beginning, and then go in as a unified force aligned around a vision of what we're trying to create over a few days.

One of the ways we did that at this last Platform Conference... At the table I was sitting at (we didn't have all of the speakers at one table), I took the initiative to lead us in a conversation about what we wanted to see over the course of the next few days. I shared my vision, they shared their visions, and by the time we were done, there was this collective ownership.

So then we went into the week with this shared ownership of what we were trying to create. It became powerful and even palatable. We had a lot of comments on the reader surveys. I've seen those. People were just saying, "Man, I just loved how invested the speakers were. They stayed the whole time. They were in each other's sessions. It just seemed like you guys were pulling together for a common outcome."

**Michele:** Yes, definitely.

**Michael:** That doesn't happen by accident.

**Michele:** No.

**Michael:** It takes a process. It takes an intention. That's part of what we're going to talk about here.

**Michele:** I love that. Okay, today we're going to talk about *10 different strategies to lead transformational conversations*. What's the very first strategy?

**Michael:** Well, the first one is to *select the topic*. Another way to say that is that you have to narrow the focus. You're not going into this conversation just to talk about anything, but there's usually a problem you're trying to solve, or there's a dream you're trying to chase, or maybe there's a product or service you're trying to create.

**Michele:** Mm-hmm.

**Michael:** But you have to get very specific on what the topic is. I think that's part of the role of a leader: to set the parameters of the discussion so it isn't just (we've all been a part of these) a sort of wide-ranging discussion where everybody is chasing rabbit trails and it doesn't really go anywhere.

**Michele:** Uh-huh.

**Michael:** You have to be clear as a leader. What is the outcome you want? Like, "We're here today to brainstorm how to create a great conference," or, "We're here today to talk about this new product," or, "We're here today to consider this product that's being proposed to us." Whatever it is, you as a leader have to select the topic and select the parameters.

**Michele:** True. So select a topic. You do all of this. By the way, the first couple of strategies are really what happens before you ever meet and have that face-to-face interaction.

**Michael:** Yeah. It's why you're calling the meeting, really.

**Michele:** Yes. Okay.

**Michael:** Now they may not know until they get there, but you're not showing up unclear about what you're trying to accomplish.

**Michele:** So you don't want to... Let's say you're sitting down with just one person doing this. You don't sit down at the table and all of a sudden pull out your notebook and start selecting a topic.

**Michael:** That's right. Or hand them an agenda. I mean, you might do that.

**Michele:** You could, but...

**Michael:** It depends on the meeting, but no. You go into it with an intention.

**Michele:** Kind of think it through ahead of time. It's that intentionality.

**Michael:** And it could be just as simple as, "I just want to deepen this bond."

**Michele:** Yes. Totally.

**Michael:** "I want to ask questions..." I always think of the outcome first, but what is it that I want to be different as a result of this encounter with this person? I'm going to go to dinner with my wife, Gail, and hopefully you after we're done here, unless you have another commitment. I think, "What's the outcome?" Well, I'd like us to know each other better, to deepen our friendship.

**Michele:** Yes.

**Michael:** I don't really have much of an agenda beyond that, but that requires some give-and-take, being conscious of the conversation and where it's going, what questions I might ask, and all of the rest.

**Michele:** Exactly. You know, it's occurring to me even as we're sitting here that these strategies we're walking through are basically what we do every time we record this podcast.

**Michael:** That's true!

**Michele:** We come into this as an interaction, and we establish a topic.

**Michael:** Yep.

**Michele:** We'll continue walking through this, but this is basically what we do every season, every episode.

**Michael:** I can't believe I didn't think of that before now, but thank you. You're right.

**Michele:** You're welcome. No problem. That's why I'm here.

**Michael:** "You're welcome."

**Michele:** The first strategy is to select a topic. What is the second strategy?

**Michael:** The second one is just to *create a list of possible questions related to the topic*. You know, questions are incredibly powerful. So often before we go to a meeting... Let's say we go to a mixer or show up at a meeting, and we're really focused on what it is we're going to say instead of what we're going to ask.

**Michele:** Oh goodness. I have done that too. I mean, I've caught myself doing that way too many times in the past.

**Michael:** Oh, me too.

**Michele:** I've tried to change that, but where I would go... I was so caught up in myself, and I think, "Really?"

**Michael:** Well, maybe three years ago, Gail and I discovered... I can't think of the name of the product now, but on Amazon we found a list of these table cards that had one question per card. They were by topic, so you could do it with the family. You could do it with friends. They were awesome, so we didn't have to do the thinking so much. We would show up at dinner, pull out the table cards, just pull out a question, and say, "Tonight we're going to talk about this."

**Michele:** Oh, I love it.

**Michael:** I mean, we didn't do it that many times, but sometimes we would stay there for two or three hours, just talking about one question and where that question would lead us. But there's a huge power in questions.

**Michele:** Yes. True.

**Michael:** I think people love to be asked questions and love to give their opinions, but usually we think of it in terms of, "Well, I want to give my answer." We're thinking about ourselves, not the other person.

**Michele:** Our family uses something called The Ungame.

**Michael:** Oh, yeah.

**Michele:** I don't know if you've heard of that.

**Michael:** I have heard of that.

**Michele:** We have a couple of different boxes of cards. Again, it's called The Ungame, and it's similar to what you were talking about. They have questions, and they're all different levels, so you can buy it for children, teenagers, or just the family in general.

We don't do this every night, but we do this sometimes. At the end of dinner, each person gets one card, and they get to answer their unique question. The rules are that you have to let them talk. Nobody talks over them, and we all listen to what they have to say.

**Michael:** Ahh.

**Michele:** But it's the same idea. For children it would be something like, "What's your favorite food and why?" or, "If you could spend your afternoon doing anything, what would you choose to do?" or whatever.

**Michael:** Yeah. I like that.

**Michele:** First of all, it gives these small children, my 7-year-old and 8-year-old, an opportunity to talk about their interests and think through them.

**Michael:** Right. Yep. They feel respected, considered, part of the team, and all of that.

**Michele:** What I like about what you shared about the table cards and what I shared about The Ungame is that even if you can't come up with a list, there are tools out there.

**Michael:** That's right.

**Michele:** You can purchase The Ungame on Amazon for like \$8 or something like that, I think. But it just helps to kind of give you some ideas to get started.

**Michael:** Oftentimes when Gail and I will go to dinner with another couple, we'll talk in the car on the way to the dinner appointment. "Okay, now what questions do we want to ask?"

**Michele:** Oh, I love that.

**Michael:** "What do we know about that couple? What would we like to learn? What would we like to discover?"

**Michele:** I think I've been at a dinner like that before where you must have plotted ahead of time. I'm pretty certain.

**Michael:** Well, we do it almost every time, and it really does open up the conversation and deepen the relationship.

**Michele:** Oh yeah. I love it. I mean, I actually do remember having dinner with you one particular time, and Gail actually wasn't there, but your children were there.

**Michael:** Really?

**Michele:** When we were having dinner in Portland, all of the questions that were going back and forth... I mean, to this day I can say it was one of my favorite meals with friends because of the questions that were asked over the course of a couple of hours.

**Michael:** Wow. I remember that dinner. My girls are actually very good at this. I think they've learned a lot from their mother by sitting at our table, but asking those questions... One rule we have which is

not on our list, actually, and isn't appropriate in every situation (but it is appropriate in almost every situation) is that it's one conversation.

**Michele:** Oh, so you don't have little groups of conversations?

**Michael:** You don't have side conversations.

**Michele:** Nice.

**Michael:** I know who I learned that from. I learned that from Luci Swindoll, who's a fellow introvert.

**Michele:** By the way, I love Luci.

**Michael:** I do too.

**Michele:** I just love her.

**Michael:** Those of us who are introverts are very sensitive to noise, and we get easily distracted when there's a lot of noise going on, so she just said at a dinner party we attended at her home, "Look, I only have one rule. I'm thrilled that you're here. We have a great meal planned, but I only have one rule." She said, "That rule is that we have one conversation, so I just want to ask you to avoid the temptation to have side conversations. If you have something to say, say it to the whole group. Let's just have one conversation."

**Michele:** I love that.

**Michael:** It went on for hours, and it was so rich and so meaningful. I did that at the speaker dinner at the Platform Conference. I said, "This is the only rule: One conversation." It was powerful.

**Michele:** Okay, I'm adopting that rule.

**Michael:** Okay. Good. It's great in your family.

**Michele:** Right now that's probably my favorite little nugget so far in this podcast. Okay, the first strategy is to select a topic. The second one is to create a list of possible questions related to the topic. What's the third?

**Michael:** The third one is to *create an environment that's safe for dissent*. Here's what I mean by that. I mean you want to give people the freedom to disagree with you so that if they have a different opinion, a different point of view, you want them to be able to express that. It's not that if you don't have that rule, suddenly the debate goes away or you just might think everybody agrees with you.

It's just that it's not surfaced. It's not expressed. So you might as well make it safe for people to give that. You'll be better informed as a leader. You'll get information you wouldn't get otherwise, and

you'll be able to fold that perspective into the conversation and come up with a better decision than you could without it.

**Michele:** So briefly tell me... What does that look like? How do you create safety?

**Michael:** Well, I would state it. I would just say, "Look, I just want you guys to know (I'm not giving lip service to this) it's okay to disagree with me. If there's something I say that you disagree with, that you may feel passionately that you disagree with... Obviously I know we're all going to be respectful with one another. I'm going to be respectful toward you if I disagree, but if you don't express that, you're doing a disservice to the group." Now that's the easy part. The hard part is when it happens.

**Michele:** Not to react or respond.

**Michael:** Not to react.

**Michele:** Yes.

**Michael:** You have to reaffirm it in real time. If you just go silent, like if you ignore it, that's not good either. So you have to affirm the person, whether you're just saying, "Jim, thank you for having the courage to say that. You're probably not the only one thinking it. My guess is that there are other people here who share that same perspective, and that's totally legit..."

Say, "I want to hear that. Let me tell you what I heard you say." Then repeat that to them. Then ask another question or two to even dive deeper. If people feel like they're being heard, they can live with almost any decision within the bounds of morality.

**Michele:** Yes, that's true. I even feel like that in family, marriage, or whatever.

**Michael:** Yeah.

**Michele:** If I feel like I'm heard, I can go with just about anything.

**Michael:** That's right. This is one of the key ways of creating alignment in a team too. Make sure everybody has an opportunity to express themselves fully and that they know they've been heard, and then you can take the group just about anywhere.

**Michele:** All right. Create an environment that's safe for dissent. What is the fourth strategy?

**Michael:** I think it's to *set a timeframe*. I think that if you don't have a boundary on this... Now I'm not talking about casual dinner conversation, but there has to be an ending place.

**Michele:** If it's for a meeting or...

**Michael:** In a meeting, there has to be an ending point. Otherwise the conversation can become unfocused, and it can become a distraction.

**Michele:** Okay.

**Michael:** So to have an end time is good. Then really adhere to that. I usually announce that at the beginning of a meeting, and I'm as disciplined about the end times as I am about the beginning times. I've been in those meetings before (you probably have too) where leaders weren't disciplined about the end time and had no consideration for the fact that I had other appointments or other commitments. The meetings just wouldn't end.

**Michele:** Yes.

**Michael:** You just go, "Dude, land the plane."

**Michele:** Oh, I know. There's nothing worse.

**Michael:** "We're done."

**Michele:** It's good to also communicate that to those you're talking with. They know what's coming. They're not constantly looking at their watches. They know it's coming.

**Michael:** That's right.

**Michele:** All right. Let's go on to the fifth strategy. What's that?

**Michael:** I would just say it's to *open up with a question*. I would say to open up with a pretty low-risk question in the group. Don't go to that one that really requires them to disclose something personal or embarrassing, but ask something that's easy.

**Michele:** A low-risk question. I like that.

**Michael:** We talked about this before, but I used to do the Pizza with the Prez meetings with my employees at Thomas Nelson. I did that department by department. The first question I would ask is, "Okay, it's a Saturday when you're at home. What is your favorite thing to do on Saturday if you have total control of your schedule and money is not an object?"

I would ask, "What do you like to do on a Saturday? I'll go first." Then I would just share what I like to do on a Saturday morning. That was something that was kind of fun, and you learned a lot about people, but it was safe. It was an easy first question.

**Michele:** Mm-hmm. That's great. All right, we've gone through five of the strategies on how to create and lead transformational conversations, and the first four were just kind of for preparing ahead of

time. On this fifth one, we're actually starting that conversation. We have five more strategies. However, we're going to take a little break, but stick with us. We'll be right back.

**Michael:** As a busy and successful blogger, podcaster, author, speaker, and consultant, I'm constantly asked about the tools I use to get it all done. Now for the first time, I'm going to pull back the curtain and let you peek inside my toolbox to see the software and hardware I use for everything from blogging and podcasting to productivity, social media, and speaking, plus so much more. You can't buy *Inside My Toolbox*, but you can get it for free by subscribing to my free email newsletter.

When you subscribe, you'll receive my newest content right in your inbox. You'll never have to worry about missing an important post or update again. To get your free copy of the *Inside My Toolbox* ebook, visit [michaelhyatt.com](http://michaelhyatt.com) and enter your name and email address into the form on the page. Don't waste any more time or money using the wrong tools. Sign up today at [michaelhyatt.com](http://michaelhyatt.com).

**Michele:** Today we're talking about how to create and lead transformational conversations. That's because (as we've already discussed) leadership really is more about kind of honing in on the ideas of the organization, kind of opening it up to the best possible ideas from multiple people on your staff and then pointing it in the right direction. So it's not about you having all of the answers anymore.

**Michael:** That's right.

**Michele:** It's about really tapping into your resources, which are your people who you're working with. Or it could be family if you're talking about that, or whatever. We've gone through five of those strategies for creating and leading transformational conversations. Now we have opened up the question. What is next?

**Michael:** The sixth one is to *listen with your heart*. Now just listening is a huge skill.

**Michele:** Mm-hmm.

**Michael:** But to be an active listener... When other people think most of us are listening, what we're really doing is thinking of our next answer, the next thing we're going to say. So we're not even focused on what the other person is saying. But to really listen means to take it all in, to not be thinking of how we're going to be responding but just to be listening to that answer and absorbing it. When I say to listen with your heart, I mean more than just your intellect. Yes, you need to use your intellect...

**Michele:** Yes.

**Michael:** For sure. But are there things that are being said with body language, emotion, or things that are there below the surface? This takes some emotional intelligence. It takes some experience, but just to open yourself up to the possibility that what you're hearing verbally is like the tip of the iceberg.

**Michele:** Yes.

**Michael:** There's usually a lot more underneath the surface, and I see myself almost like a... I want to excavate the conversation by digging deeper, digging under the surface and prying a little bit. That's the use of other questions where you can ask and go deeper.

**Michele:** Yes.

**Michael:** Sometimes you should ask those emotional questions of the why behind what they're saying.

**Michele:** All right. After you open up with a question, you want to listen with your heart...not just listen, but listen with your heart. What is the seventh strategy?

**Michael:** The seventh is to *be aware of how much you're talking*.

**Michele:** Should we star that one? Maybe highlight it in yellow?

**Michael:** I know! We've been with those leaders before, and we've probably been those leaders.

**Michele:** I've been that leader before. I've been in those conversations where I've later thought, "I totally dominated."

**Michael:** I've talked way too much. Yeah, and you're not learning when your mouth is open.

**Michele:** No. Okay, that right there could bear repeating. Can I take that home and use it?

**Michael:** You're not learning with your mouth open. But to really become more self-aware... "What's the give-and-take here in this conversation, and am I talking too much? Or am I talking about the right amount? What's the right proportion?"

**Michele:** That really leads us into the next strategy.

**Michael:** Yeah. The next strategy is to *hit the ball back over the net*. A good friend of mine said that a great conversation is like a game of ping-pong. So you hit the ball over the net, and then the other person hits the ball over the net. By the way, this is the essence of a good interview also, and this is kind of a metaphor I've used for interviewing other people.

You have to learn to talk in sound bytes. You can't just sort of thread a series of soliloquies together and call it a conversation. So to hit it back over the net... Hopefully, if they're a good conversationalist, they'll hit it back to you and give you a chance to respond, and so it goes back and forth, back and forth.

**Michele:** You actually do a very good job of this even as we do our podcasts. You're very good at keeping it to short sound bytes and then throwing it back over, so I've watched that. But I'm sure that's a skill you've learned over time.

**Michael:** Well, it is a skill, and I will say I've had a lot of media training and needed a lot of media training. I didn't get it the first time I went through it, but that was one of the things I was told over and over again by my media coach, Joel Roberts. He just said, "Look, when you're on the air... First of all, it's not about you; it's about the host."

**Michele:** True.

**Michael:** "It's their show."

**Michele:** True.

**Michael:** "So you can't just keep going. You have to come up for air. You have to give them a chance to respond, so you have to say it succinctly." He said to us, "You don't want your answer to be more than about 20 or 30 seconds long before you yield the microphone."

**Michele:** That's good. That's good advice. What was that coach's name? Can I get his number?

**Michael:** Joel Roberts. Yeah, you can. He's very good.

**Michele:** What a great piece of advice. Okay, hit the ball back over the net. What would be the ninth strategy?

**Michael:** The ninth strategy would be to ask follow-up questions. Now the easy thing, Michele, is to ask that first question. Then the other person responds. You feel like you've done your duty. "Now it's my chance for my monologue."

**Michele:** You're chomping at the bit, just trying to talk.

**Michael:** That's right. "Just hurry up and answer the question so I can..."

**Michele:** "So it can be my turn."

**Michael:** Yeah, "So it can be my turn." But the artful thing to do as a conversationalist or while leading these conversations within your organization is to ask that second question. The only way you can do this... This isn't a technique. It's not a manipulation, but you just have to cultivate curiosity.

**Michele:** Okay.

**Michael:** You have to be really curious. You have to be fascinated with that other person. What is it behind that? If you don't know anything else to ask, one question you could always ask is, "What's important about that to you?" So the person gives you an answer and you say, "Wow. Well, why is that important to you?" or, "What's important about that?" Anything about that will drive the conversation deeper.

**Michele:** Just a little bit deeper.

**Michael:** A little bit deeper.

**Michele:** Not to mention the fact that it shows you're so interested in listening with your heart that you're engaged with that they're saying.

**Michael:** Yes! I think the real challenge (Megan, my oldest daughter, does a great job of this) is to ask not just the first question or the second one but a third question. If you do that, people will walk away from that conversation thinking, "Oh my gosh. That person is awesome." They got you talking about yourself.

**Michele:** Yes.

**Michael:** Our favorite subject is ourselves. Let's be honest.

**Michele:** Let's just be frank. Thank you for that. All right, let's move on. Let's recap really quickly before we do that, because we're almost on the tenth one. These are 10 strategies for creating and leading transformational conversations. The first is to select a topic.

The second is to create a list of possible questions related to the topic. The third is to create an environment that's safe for dissent. Fourth, set a time frame. Fifth, open up with a question. Sixth, listen with your heart. Seventh, be aware of how much you're talking. Eighth, hit the ball back over the net. Ninth, ask follow-up questions. Take that conversation deeper. What is the tenth?

**Michael:** *Provide positive feedback.* Even if you disagree with what the other person is saying... I've had this conversation many times where the person was responding with something I may have violently disagreed with. I remember a conversation I had with my brother-in-law about a political topic. I was diametrically opposed to what he was saying in every way, and I felt it viscerally, so there was even emotion involved.

**Michele:** There was emotion too, yes.

**Michael:** But I provided positive feedback. One of the best ways to do that is simply to repeat the answer they've said in your own words to make sure you understand it. Because the truth is that when we're just talking to people who agree with us, we're not really learning.

**Michele:** No, we aren't. I mean, it's comfortable.

**Michael:** Yeah.

**Michele:** But it's not really challenging. Honestly, if we all agree all the time, we're not really going deeper either.

**Michael:** We're not going deeper. Early in my career and in my 20s and 30s, I'd love to get together with like-minded people. Then I discovered that when I was with people who I disagreed with, that was even more stimulating, but you have to provide the positive feedback.

**Michele:** Yes.

**Michael:** This is what you don't see on TV when you're seeing people who disagree. They're oftentimes shouting over one another, not listening to one another, and not providing positive feedback. I mean, when was the last time you heard two people on TV who disagreed with one another...? Somebody would say, "You know, that's a fair point," or, "That's something I hadn't considered before."

**Michele:** I don't think I've ever seen that happen.

**Michael:** No. I don't think I've seen that happen either, but it ought to happen in normal, ordinary conversations where we affirm that other person. The truth is we don't have all of the right perspectives. We don't have all of the right points. Sometimes other people who differ with us culturally, politically, or even theologically will make points we ought to consider. We can acknowledge that, and it will advance the conversation.

**Michele:** Not to mention our own kind of awareness of the world, our own intelligence, and our ability to relate to other people.

**Michael:** Yeah.

**Michele:** Fantastic. Okay, for the person who... We've given a good list of strategies for creating and leading those transformational conversations, but you started back at the topic, so I want to talk about the person who doesn't even know where to begin, doesn't know topics. We mentioned the cards, but what are just some general (I know I'm putting you on the spot) topics that are always good to talk about?

**Michael:** Well, you can always talk about the frustrations or problems that the organization, the family, or whatever else is facing and just discuss that together as a group.

**Michele:** Yes.

**Michael:** Now we did this as a very structured thing when I was leading Thomas Nelson. Once a quarter we would have our leadership meeting. This was with our 70 vice presidents. We would put them together in one room. We would start the conversation with just an update of what we had done the last quarter. Every quarter we were getting together. We would have a short update that would include the financial performance of the company for the last quarter.

**Michele:** Okay.

**Michael:** Then we had a series of questions. We had people sitting at round tables of eight, and then we had a table coach (who was one of my direct reports) sitting at each table. Their sole job was not to lecture everybody else at the table but to facilitate the discussion. We used an agreed-upon set of questions beforehand. Now all of a sudden we were discussing in small groups...

We had some business problem we were trying to solve, some real life issue (this wasn't hypothetical) we were facing. For example, we were in the process of trying to digitize our backlist, and that may sounds like gobbledygook for people who don't know the publishing business, but we were trying to turn all of the books we had in print into digital books, like Kindle books, so we could sell them in a digital format.

**Michele:** Okay.

**Michael:** There were a lot of approaches we could take, but we threw that question open to the group, so we had all of these different groups of eight working on it. That was one conversation. Then I facilitated a larger discussion where all 70... We'd have people standing up, and we'd have somebody running microphones to anybody who wanted to talk. Again, it was one conversation.

But then people would share the best insights from their table, so that facilitated a larger discussion. Over the course of about two hours, we'd do maybe five or six questions like that, and it was incredible. Again, we created this shared ownership. We used our best thinking to solve the problem, and I think everybody left there feeling like there was this cohesiveness as a team that we didn't have before we walked into the room.

**Michele:** That's great. Now you mentioned one of the topics that you said you can always talk about, which was what you're frustrated with, what you're struggling with within the organization, but isn't it risky at times to open up that kind of conversation to the team? In other words, because it's unscripted, it can turn extremely negative. You want to create safety for that, but how do you keep it from being like this huge negative coup that kind of takes over your meeting, or does that matter?

**Michael:** Yeah. Well, it does matter, but it's all in what you do to direct it. I would rather get it out than drive it underground.

**Michele:** Okay.

**Michael:** So let people express it. Again, use all of the same strategies we've been talking about. Listen with your heart. Let somebody express it. Acknowledge them. Let them know it's safe for dissent. You get it. Ask a few more questions to drive it deeper. When you're getting those repeated issues where people are repeating the same answers over and over, what they're really doing is testing to see if you get it. Once they know you get it and you're going to take it seriously, they'll usually drop it.

**Michele:** Okay.

**Michael:** Now it depends a little bit on your history and credibility with that group, but once you demonstrate that you get it, then you can drop it and begin to turn it toward a positive outcome. If you try to do that too soon, it looks like you're trying to gloss it over, like you're in denial.

But if you let it really sink in and make sure the group has adequately processed it, then your job as a leader is to turn that conversation. Say, "Okay, great. Now let's all take a deep breath because we don't just want to live in the status quo. All of us have agreed this is a problem we want to improve. What does this make possible?"

**Michele:** So you're really turning the tide of the conversation from negative to positive.

**Michael:** That's right. Again, that's leadership./

**Michele:** Yes. Yes.

**Michael:** Otherwise you're just kind of caught up in this drifting conversation, and you're just caught in the drift with everybody else.

**Michele:** Well, you don't want to end this meeting with just everybody dumping everything that's wrong, so you have to somehow turn it toward... You have to acknowledge it without glossing over it.

**Michael:** Totally. Yep.

**Michele:** But then turn the conversation to what it makes possible or say, "Let's talk about solutions," or ask, "What can we do?"

**Michael:** Make it constructive. That's right. Yep.

**Michele:** That's so powerful outside of an organization and in the family as well. I mean, I'm thinking of how this applies and could be so powerful in multiple ways.

**Michael:** Yeah. Well, sometimes people will just test you because they want to see if you're taking it seriously. They might remain cynical because, frankly, cynicism is a way to not have any risk. It's a self-protective thing.

**Michele:** Yeah. Exactly. It's self-protective. You're shut down and you don't want to have to feel vulnerable.

**Michael:** That's right.

**Michele:** So you get cynical.

**Michael:** Sometimes if you have people who persist in that... I mean, some people have decades of that as a learned behavior, a learned way to respond. I've had to go to some of those people one-on-one and

just say, “Look, I just want to talk to you about something. I don’t know if you’re aware of it, but it really comes across as cynicism, and here’s what I see. You may not intend it that way, and I definitely don’t want you to be the Pollyanna and just gloss over it, but I have to have you work with me.”

**Michele:** Uh-huh.

**Michael:** “This is not an environment that’s safe for cynicism. It’s safe for dissent, but it’s not safe for cynicism.”

**Michele:** Those are two very different things.

**Michael:** They’re two very different things.

**Michele:** This is how I see it, but let me know if you agree. Dissent would be disagreeing for the sake of the relationship and the organization.

**Michael:** Yeah.

**Michele:** You just disagree, but you’re still working for the best interest. Cynicism is just almost like a wound. It’s like knifing something.

**Michael:** Yeah. It’s like there’s no answer that can satisfy the cynic.

**Michele:** It’s just for the sake of venting.

**Michael:** Yeah. They don’t really want a solution.

**Michele:** There’s no purpose.

**Michael:** There are a lot of times when people get a sense of significance from creating drama and being the lone dissenter.

**Michele:** Yes. I’ve known one or two people like that.

**Michael:** I know. We all have.

**Michele:** It happens. Yes.

**Michael:** So I think you just have to go to those people one-on-one and just kind of call it out, work with them, and try to get them to move off of this cynicism. There have been situations where I’ve had to fire somebody just because their cynicism was incorrigible.

**Michele:** Because of that attitude.

**Michael:** I couldn’t do anything with it.

**Michele:** Yeah. That's so critical.

**Michael:** It was poison.

**Michele:** But the point is that when you get into those situations that start to be negative or whatever, you want to acknowledge it because it's some kind of valid concern and they want to be heard.

**Michael:** Yeah.

**Michele:** But then redirect the conversation toward something constructive. That's how you can stay on task in creating and leading these transformational conversations.

**Michael:** That's right.

**Michele:** Well, if you enjoyed today's conversation, you can get all of the show notes and a full transcript of the entire episode at [michaelhyatt.com](http://michaelhyatt.com). If you'd prefer to watch rather than just listen, we also have the entire video posted at [michaelhyatt.com](http://michaelhyatt.com). Can you do us a favor today before you go? I'd love for you to take about 30 seconds and head over to iTunes and rate the program.

This is huge for us. It's really the only way we can get this content into as many hands as possible. There are people who really would love to have this kind of information, so thanks for helping us out. Any final thoughts today, Michael?

**Michael:** Yeah. You know, leading transformational conversations is an art.

**Michele:** Yes.

**Michael:** The more you do it, the better you'll get at it. See every encounter as an opportunity to do just that...not to just let the conversation sort of take its natural course but to lead it in a direction that's helpful for you and the other person and meaningful for both of you.

**Michele:** Wonderful. Well, thank you for being with us today.

Until next time, remember: Your life is a gift. Do what matters.