



## ***ROAD SIGNS FOR SUCCESS***<sup>®</sup>

Your Weekly Guide on the Road to Maximizing Your Potential • May 9, 2007

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By Sondra Whitt

“Over ten thousand hours of one-to-one conversations with industry leaders, as well as workshops with men and women from all walks of life confronting issues of relationship and life direction, have convinced me that our work, our relationships, and, in fact, our very lives succeed or fail gradually, then suddenly, *one conversation at a time*,” writes Susan Scott, author of *Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work & in Life, One Conversation at a Time*. How could this happen? When, in our effort to protect ourselves or others, we compromise the authenticity, the honesty, of our conversations.

It can happen when our spouse asks us, “What’s wrong?” and we reply, “Nothing.” Or when we don’t have the courage to speak up in the meeting and tell our boss what we’re really thinking about her latest project. Maybe it’s like the meeting Jim was in where no one would admit to the bank president that they didn’t know the mission statement. We can all think of times when we were less than honest about what we thought and felt, sometimes to the detriment of the long-term project, purpose, or relationship.

A fierce conversation isn’t an opportunity for a bully to steamroll over people, leaving them bleeding and gasping in his or her wake. A fierce conversation is, says Scott, “one in which we come out from behind ourselves into the conversation and make it real.” We can make every conversation fierce by following Scott’s basic principles.

- **Master the courage to interrogate reality.** “We are all changing all the time. Not only do we neglect to share this with others, we are skilled at masking it even to ourselves.” We interrogate reality by asking questions, seeking truth.
- **Come out from behind yourself into the conversation and make it real.** “Unreal conversations are expensive, for the individual and the organization. No one has to change, but everyone has to have the conversation.” Saying what we really think and feel will keep us in integrity with ourselves, will keep it real.
- **Be here, prepared to be nowhere else.** “Speak and listen as if this is the most important conversation you will ever have with this person. It could be. Participate as if it matters. It does.”
- **Tackle your toughest challenge today.** “Burnout doesn’t occur because we’re solving problems; it occurs because we’ve been trying to solve the same problem over and over.”
- **Obey your instincts.** “An intelligence agent is sending you messages every day, all day. Tune in. Pay attention. Share these thoughts with others. What we label as illusion is the scent of something real coming close.”
- **Take responsibility for your emotional wake.** “For a leader, there is no trivial comment. Learning to deliver the message without the load allows you to speak with clarity, conviction, and compassion.”
- **Let silence do the heavy lifting.** “Memorable conversations include breathing space. Slow down the conversation, so that insight can occur in the space between words and you can discover what the conversation really wants and need to be about.”

Just think what a difference committing to fierce conversations would have in our lives, work and relationships. It would mean *success*, one conversation at a time.