

A portrait of Marco Buschman, a middle-aged man with dark, wavy hair, smiling warmly. He is wearing a light blue button-down shirt under a grey blazer. The background is a plain, light grey.

CREATING CHANGE THROUGH POWERFUL INTERACTIONS

MARCO BUSCHMAN

Leadership Expert, Team & Executive Coach, International Facilitator,
Inspirational Speaker, Bestseller Author
Oss, North Brabant, Netherlands

After graduating from the Dutch Royal Military Academy, I was trained to become an intercept controller and learned to guide fighter aircraft to their aerial targets. I guided Dutch pilots and those of our NATO allies – via radar and radio – during aerial defence manoeuvres and aerial combat.

The job came with high levels of responsibility and extreme peak loads. I enjoyed it initially, but I realized very quickly that it wasn't the career for me. The focus lay too much on developing routines and 'just' executing your task. I yearned for a job with more variety and dynamics.

During my period as an intercept controller, I developed an interest in business and began studying the subject at the Radboud University Nijmegen in my spare time. My manager at the Defence Department knew about my education, as well as my dissatisfaction with being an intercept controller. So, he gave me the opportunity to work on an organizational change.

In addition to a valuable lesson in leadership ('Give people responsibilities that match their interests'), this was a perfect chance to apply the knowledge I was acquiring and to learn more about how organizations work.

As an enthusiastic amateur in the field of organizational change, I constructed ambitious plans and deadlines to implement

the changes. And I expected that others would cooperate in executing these plans out of a sense of loyalty, especially if they had agreed to them. The reality was of course much less simple.

What I learned during that period is that organizations are made up of people, and people want to be seen and heard when it comes to implementing change. That means you need to get onto the work floor, contact them and engage in a dialogue. These conversations create the opportunity to build your message based on their answers and create a basis for change.

I also learned the distinction between nice interactions and powerful interactions. In this article I want to share with you my most important insights.

Multiple interactions a day

Interactions form the basis for creating a connection with the other, your team and organization, for organizing work, making joint decisions and ultimately implement change. Your whole day is a constant stream of interactions. And the more powerful these are, the more impact they will have on the connection, the collaboration processes and therefore on implementing the change. To support you in creating powerful interactions, I have selected eight tips you can apply right now.



TIP 1: GETTING FROM 'BUT' TO 'AND'

Some words in our language have an enormous impact on the effectiveness of our interactions. For example: 'You did a good job, but next time, make sure you deliver on time.' By using the word 'but', the focus switches to the second part of the sentence and this is perceived as a judgment. Or, as the old expression so beautifully puts it: Everything before 'but' is a lie. It's more powerful to make use of the 'and' word. This has a connecting influence and lends a positive charge to the second part of the sentence. 'You did a good job, and next time, make sure you deliver on time.'

TIP 2: GETTING FROM 'WHY' TO 'WHAT MAKES'

Another word that has a lot of impact on the effectiveness of interactions is the 'why' word. For example: 'Why did you choose Laura as your replacement?' It gives the other person the feeling that what he did wasn't right and that he must justify his decision. And yes, of course it depends a lot on your tone, your intonation, and your non-verbal communication whether the question you start with 'why' is received in this way. It's more powerful to start your question with 'what makes.' For example: 'What made you choose Laura as your replacement?' 'What makes' usually comes across as being more positive. This construction is typical for an inquiring and researching attitude, inviting a reply, and maintaining the connection.

TIP 3: GETTING FROM 'WOULD NOT' TO 'WOULD'

A lot of people have trouble answering the question of what they would like to change about their work. If they have an answer, they very soon start talking in terms of what they don't want anymore. For example: 'I wouldn't work overtime anymore.' These 'would not' answers generally fail to produce any positive energy. Instead of specifying what you want to get away from, it's much more powerful to indicate where you want to get to. For example: 'I would like to work from home every Friday afternoon.' You can almost feel the energy in that statement. If your conversation partner starts talking about the 'would not' side, stop them in mid-sentence and ask: 'And what would you like to do?'

TIP 4: GETTING FROM 'WE' TO 'I'

When talking with team members about what works well and what could be improved – for example, in the collaboration within the team – people very soon tend to switch to talking in the 'safe' mode. By this I mean that instead of saying what they really think, they make use of generalizations. Instead of 'I don't take people to account,' a team member will say: 'We don't take each other to account.' The general statement is of course important. But it doesn't alter the fact that the more someone formulates in the 'I' form, the more responsibility he takes for his actions and the greater the chance that he'll start to make changes himself. Therefore, if people are talking in general terms, ask them to talk from their own point of view, starting with 'I.'



TIP 5: GETTING FROM PASSIVE TO ACTIVE

As soon as the subject turns to personal responsibility, a lot of people switch to talking in the passive voice. They say: 'A lot of gossiping is happening; something should be done about it.' This is quite a passive, not very concrete, statement. But it is based on a good observation. It becomes a little less passive if someone says: 'I should really do something if people are gossiping.' There is a positive intention embedded in this statement. Build on this constructively. The vagueness of the follow-up allows a person to remain passive and not act. You can easily change this if you say: 'From now on, I'm going to ask anyone who starts gossiping to justify their behaviour.' This is what I call making results-based use of active language. So, next time you're in conversation with others, ask them what they will do.

TIP 6: GETTING FROM BEHAVIOUR TO INTENTION

One reason irritations arise is that other people demonstrate behaviour that you consider unacceptable. For example, an employee might keep asking you whether the next step in a certain project is the right one. You could call that person to account by telling him that this really must change. But it's unlikely that he will change his behaviour. It's more powerful to ask him

what he intends by constantly raising this question: 'What makes you always check the next step with me?' This way, you will discover what motivates him and you can start a conversation around this. You are tackling the core problem and not just its external manifestation.

TIP 7: GETTING FROM THE GENERAL TO THE SPECIFIC

Good feedback contributes to the growth of the other. A statement such as 'You did well' isn't helpful. It's too general and doesn't tell the other person what you are talking about. What is meant by 'did' and what does 'well' mean exactly? It's more powerful to specifically indicate what you have observed, what the other person should continue doing, and what could be improved. For example: 'Your report about yesterday's incident is factual and clearly formulated. This gives me confidence in you. And next time, I'd like to see you also suggest a possible solution.'

TIP 8: GETTING FROM COMPLIMENT TO ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Good feedback contributes to the growth of the other. A statement such as 'You did well' isn't helpful. It's too general and doesn't tell the other person what you are talking about. What is meant by 'did' and what does 'well' mean exactly? It's more powerful to specifically indicate what you have observed, what the other person should continue doing, and what could be improved. For example: 'Your report about yesterday's incident is factual and clearly formulated. This gives me confidence in you. And next time, I'd like to see you also suggest a possible solution.'

ARE YOU READY FOR A CHALLENGE?

So, here's the invitation: which tip on powerful conversations are you willing to take into action? Rather than trying to implement all eight tips at the same time, choose the one that makes sense to you and that you're willing to commit yourself to. Experiment, fail, celebrate, and so on, until it becomes a 'natural' pattern. And then move on to the next. What are you noticing about the impact you create on yourself, the other, your team and the organization? Enjoy the change!

