

# Change how you communicate to change your life



By Leona Dawson

**I support people to be the change they want to see in the world.**

My focus is on people.

I believe in the power of one.

I believe that each person has a unique gift to offer the world.

And I believe when we know our own power, we connect to the power of those around us.

This is how we can all contribute to the change we want to see in the world.

One way or another, this is an inside job.

We start from the inside and move out into the world.

## Contents

Changing how we communicate changes our world .....	4
Road blocks to communication .....	6
The 4 D's that disconnect .....	7
Communicating to connect .....	11
Our Language Choices: .....	12
Look for language clues .....	15
Don't presume...ask! .....	18
Embracing Judgments .....	24
10 steps to making disagreements useful .....	33
So...what's so useful? .....	47
Get out of your personal bubble .....	49
Make yourself feel better - yourself.....	52

# Changing how we communicate changes our world

“One of the most effective ways I know of to help people bring about the changes and transformation they’d like is through words and language.

When you watch a sunset do you find yourself searching for words to describe it?

When we change our language, we change our thinking and invariably change the outcome. If we truly want to shift into a new way of being, we need to learn to see and experience the world differently.

We need to learn how to interact with others in ways that create space for different outcomes.

When we say we want a different world, what we often mean is that we want others to change so we can enjoy the comfort of staying as we are. **‘Becoming the change’** ourselves is a tremendous



challenge because the more aware we become, the more vulnerable we become and the more likely we are to encounter things about ourselves that we don't like.

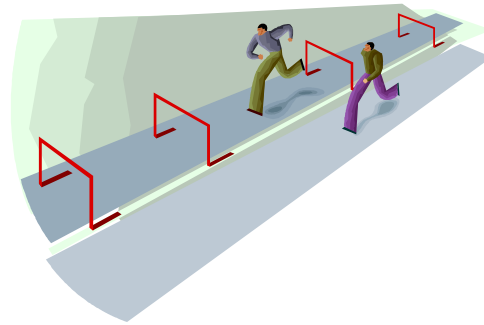
It is often in this very state of raw and connected 'aliveness' however that we are most capable of effecting changes that will truly serve life."

*Excerpted from ["Effecting Change through Our Words"](#) by **Rachel Lamb, Certified NVC Trainer***

## **How can we do this?**

**We can notice what we do & say that blocks communication  
and then  
learn to communicate to connect....**

# Road blocks to communication



The basic premise underlying Transformative Communication is that people are trying to connect when they communicate. Unfortunately sometimes the “way we connect” such as our words, behavior or strategies do just the opposite -they lead to a communication breakdown. Furthermore, our culture has developed a language structure that may contribute to this breakdown.

# The 4 D's that disconnect



1. Diagnosis through judgments, analysis, criticism & comparison
2. Denial of responsibility
3. Demands
4. Deserve-oriented language

### **1. Diagnosis**

- a. Judgment = She is lazy. Those people are greedy.
- b. Analysis = They are just attention- seeking. She is so needy.
- c. Criticism = That's the wrong way. When will you grow up?
- d. Comparison = Your sister always tries harder at school.

### **2. Denial of responsibility**

- a. You made me angry/sad/punish you.
- b. I have to....x, y, z
- c. They made me....
- d. I have to follow the rules.

### **3. Demand**

- a. Direct: You have to do the dishes/clean up your room/go to bed.
- b. Indirect: Can you swap shifts with me? Remember I swapped with you for your sister's wedding.

### **4. Deserve-oriented language**

- a. He broke the law so he deserves to be punished.
- b. What goes around comes around

**So when we communicate this way there are predictable consequences for our relationships and how people respond to us.**

**1. Ordering & Commanding**

- a. You must...
- b. You have to...
- c. You will...
- d. You'll have to stop doing that...

**Consequence**

*Fear & resistance*

*Promotes rebellious behaviour*

**2. Warning & Threatening**

- a. If you don't, then...
- b. You'd better, or...

*Fear & submissiveness,*

**3. Moralising & Preaching**

- a. You should...
- b. You ought to...
- c. It is your responsibility

*Anger & testing*

**4. Advising & Giving Solutions**

- a. What I would do is...
- b. Why don't you...
- c. Let me suggest...
- d. If I were you...

*Obligation, guilt, stubbornness*

**5. Judging, Criticising & Blaming**

- a. You're not thinking maturely...
- b. You are so lazy, incompetent, slow...
- c. It's your fault...

*Implies incompetence, stupidity or poor judgment*

**6. Praising & Agreeing**

- a. Well, I think you are doing a great job!
- b. You're right, they sound awful!

*Implies high expectations*

**7. Name Calling & Ridiculing**

- a. Cry baby...
- b. Wuss...
- c. Cat got your tongue?

*Patronizing and manipulative*

**8. Diverting, Sarcasm & Withdrawal**

- a. Let's not talk about that...
- b. Well, why don't you try running the world?
- c. Remaining silent, turning away
- d. No eye contact
- e. Why do you have to talk about that; you know it upsets me.

*Can lower self-esteem, provoke verbal retaliation*

*Implies difficulties are to be avoided, person's problems are petty*

# Communicating to connect

In Transformative Communication we follow a simple principle to change how we communicate.



**We say connect, connect, connect *then* communicate.**

When we take the time to connect with others or ourselves we become explicitly aware of our needs and the needs of others and begin to communicate in a way that supports curiosity, compassion, and connection. From this place our whole life can change.



## Our Language Choices:

So, how do we learn to connect?

First we can pay attention to the **language we use** to describe what is going on.

1. Try not to use the verb "to be"
2. Try to avoid all-inclusive words e.g. always, all, every
3. Try to avoid all-exclusive words e.g. none, never, nobody
4. Try to eliminate loaded words like stupid, dumb, smart, crazy, beautiful, interesting...words that communicate judgment.

For example:

From:

"I'm always so greedy and selfish"



To:

*"I notice I took the last two slices of cake and I feel sad because I value sharing so next time I will take care to offer the last slice around."*



From:

"You are a rude little girl."

To:

*"I see you poking your tongue out and rolling your eyes at your grandmother and so I feel concerned because Grandma might interpret those gestures as indicating disrespect. Can you tell me if you are playing around together and she is ok with this?"*

# Look for language clues

If language can help us to understand someone's perception of their world, what day-to-day clues can we look for?

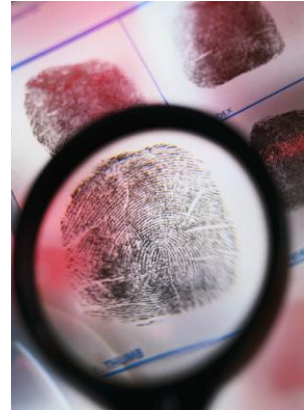
**Nouns:** may tell us about which portions of the world the speaker sees as relevant.

*Freedom fighters vs terrorists*

**Verbs:** may explain behaviour patterns and attitudes. Does the speaker use active or passive verbs?

*The teenagers sped up the street.*

*The car was driven faster than the speed limit up the street.*



**Adjectives:** in adjectives will be found their opinion of the world; the judgements they make about it.

*lazy vs relaxed*

*conservative vs prudent*

*wild vs adventurous*

**Connectives:** establish relationships. Someone who uses

*but, however, on the other hand - focuses on difference*

*and, also, as well as - focuses on similarities or commonalities.*

# Metaphors

How the speaker describes the world gives us clues to what they find important:



- **Mechanical metaphors** - input, feedback, output - might suggest a world view of people and the world they live in as being able to be manipulated, as a resource.
- **Wellness/illness metaphors** - the environment is sick, the economy is robust we may be alerted to a person who likes to fix/treat or cure.
- **War & winning metaphors** - see the world and life as a winner takes all, the battle to win e.g. we need to overcome these barriers to efficiency, we need to win the war against terrorism, we must fight poverty.

# Don't presume...ask!

How many times in life have we missed an opportunity, created a misunderstanding or just plain got it wrong because we presumed we knew what someone meant, was thinking or their motivation?



Don't presume - just ask!

There plenty of **questions** you can ask and I suggest there are 3 themes which can cover most situations.

**You can choose to ask questions that connect:**

- "What's going on for you around that?"
- "What's important to you in this?"



You can find out about their world as they are experiencing it.

This doesn't mean it is the same as your world or that you have to agree.

Just that you now have more information to work with and fewer presumptions based upon your own experiences and psychology.

## Ask questions that clarify:

- "What is it you need me to understand?"
- "What do you notice?"
- "What do you take from that?"
- "Can you tell me more?"

You can use clear observations to find points of agreement.

You can hear nuances and detail.

You can hear what matters to them. You can get information you missed or angles you hadn't thought of. You can expand your perceptions and field of awareness.



## **Ask questions that go to the next level**

Go beyond strategies to underlying values.

"So are you really needing (and guess at their underlying value or need)?"

"Is x,y,z really important to you in this situation?"

My life has changed since I learned to ask better questions more often. I feel more connected to my colleagues, family and friends. I feel more comfortable going for clarity and there is less confusion in my life and mind. I am getting more curious.



## What are Needs & Values?

Needs are what's important to us in this moment. Values are needs we hold long-term. Values are something we literally need in our life to be true to ourselves.

Values are personally derived and we live them in our public lives too, so it pays to be curious about our values. The ways we choose to live our life is a clear expression of our values.

Sometimes we prioritize one need over another but on the whole our values remain consistent.

Often we choose one or two, familiar strategies to meet our values, and then experience frustration when things don't go our way.

Once you know the underlying need or value then a **wider range of strategies** become available.

[Marshall Rosenberg](#) says that judgments are tragic expressions of unmet needs. They are tragic because judgments disconnect us from ourselves and decrease the likelihood we can have this need met. Judgments are also tragic expressions of **unrecognized** needs.

We are often not aware of our own needs or values and our judgments are a red flag for us.

Inside the judgment is always the **precious gem** of our values or needs. When we hear judgments in our head we can ask ourselves:

“What am I needing/valuing and not recognizing?”



# Embracing Judgments

Surprising as this may sound judgments point us to the living energy of our needs.

Whether we hear ourselves judging others or others judging us, judgments are a signpost which points towards something of deep value in our life, either being met or not met.

Values are an expression of our shared humanity.





Values are universal.

Since they are common to everyone they can be our common human language. We can connect with others through our values, even if we disagree with the strategies employed to meet those values.

A useful list of [needs/values](#) is available from the [Centre for Nonviolent Communication.](#)



So, I invite you to consider the following. What if every time you made a judgment or heard a judgment you could translate it into really understanding what is important for yourself or someone else.

Let me take you a **3 step process** to translate judgments using the following statement:

*"She is so controlling".*

## **Step 1:**

Convert: "she is so x,y,z"

To: "I value, or I care about"

In other words take the other person out of the sentence.

**Step 2:** Let the judging word you use or hear be a clue to the underlying values. The word *controlling* is a clue to what is really valued. Could it be autonomy? Could it be freedom?



### **Step 3:**

Now connect with how it feels to be in touch with your own values.

*"Oh, I really do value autonomy. I enjoy the opportunity to make choices in my life. Yes, that's how it is."*

I invite you to stay with poignancy of this moment of deeply connecting with your values or needs.

**Here are a couple more examples:**

*"She's irresponsible. We all agreed to let someone know if we weren't going to show up".*



Do the words 'irresponsible' and 'agreed' flag a need or value?

Translation possibilities: *I care about reliability or consideration.*



*"There he goes again - I wish someone would shut him up."*

Do the words 'goes again' and 'someone would shut him up' flag a value or need?

Translation possibilities:

*I value equity.*

*I care about contribution.*

*Being able to participate matters to me.*

"You're always late. I simply can't rely on you!"

Translation possibilities:

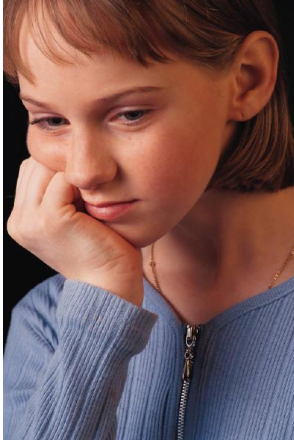
*I value reliability.*

*I value courtesy & consideration.*



**See if you can guess the needs or values behind these judgments.**

1. "All that company thinks about is their bottom line. It's all about the money to them."
2. "This is boring. I'm wasting my time here."
3. "This place is a pigsty. Why can't you pick up after yourself?"
4. "She is such an airhead."



### **Try this:**

In the next week translate at least one of the following:

1. A self-judgment
2. A judgment you hear yourself making about another person, or organization or group.
3. A judgment you hear someone making about you.

What happens when you recognize and connect with YOUR need/value? How do you feel about yourself, the situation, the other person or group?



## **10 steps to making disagreements useful**

There is no point in hoping we can get through life without disagreements. I, naively, thought if I learnt enough about conflict resolution, nonviolent communication, self-awareness and if I meditated enough I could avoid arguments.

I wanted to avoid disagreements because of how I react to them; that is I am more scared of my own ways of being in an argument than I am of the argument itself.

So, now I ask myself, how can I respond to this situation? So here are some tips that are helping me.



The first 5 tips are all about my inner world.  
The second 5 tips are all about me in the world.

## **1. Take a breath and notice how I am feeling in my body.**

Counting to 10 works for some people, but it didn't for me. By the time I got to 10 I was more wound up. I find saying hello or acknowledging how I feel inside brings insight and relief. Now, I might notice a physical sensation (tight, holding my breath) or a word/emotion (frustrated, impatient, scared) or an image (a brick wall, a ball of steel in my belly) or a sound (a siren, a loud buzz, a muting of sound). So, I simple say, "hello, steel ball in my belly, I sense you there" in a curious, friendly way. I don't try and change it or get rid of it. I just acknowledge it.

## 2. I ask myself, "What would a camera see here?".

That is I try and make an **objective** description.

"I notice that the washing is still on the line, it has started raining and my partner is watching T.V."

Rather than: "How lazy is that! I hung the washing out and he can't even be bothered to bring it in. Now it's going to get wet and I will be the one who has to get it dry again and...and..." in an intensifying vortex of difficult emotions which are coming from what I am saying to myself.



### **3. I try and notice my thoughts and ask myself if this is absolutely true" and "can I be 100% sure of that"?**

This is from the work of [Byron Katie](#).

- Is it absolutely true that my partner is lazy?

No, it is what I am telling myself.

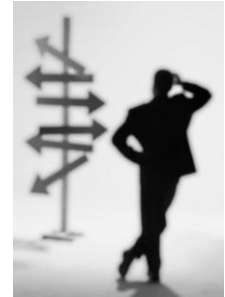
- Is it absolutely true that I will have to get the washing dry?

I can't be sure of that either.



#### **4. Now I go in search of my needs/values.**

See other posts of mine all about needs & values. I check in with what I LOVE. Oh...I LOVE it when we all work together to get the chores done because I really value support, consideration and contribution.



“When I notice the washing is taken off the line before the rain starts I feel *relieved* because that really supports me in getting the laundry done.”

How different is that than hearing any of the following:

“Can't you see it's starting to rain, are you blind?”

"Why can't you help out just once? I am sick of being responsible for everything!!!"

or

"I feel frustrated and sad when I notice the washing on the line, the rain starting and that you are watching T.V. because I value support and contribution. Would you be willing to help me get the washing in?" *(This is better but still has a slight insinuation that they're not doing the right thing).*

So, this shift in energy is in the form of a positive request based upon the [visioning of needs-met](#).



## **5. I take some time to relish my needs met vision.**

Imagining my needs met connects me with what I love, and how I like to feel. It may be that my partner won't get off the couch and help bring the washing in but by connecting with my own needs and values I am getting some clarity about how I like to live in this world, what I care about (beyond the strategies I employ) and I empower myself. I can build on my request like this:

“When I notice the washing is taken off the line before the rain starts I feel *relieved* because that really supports me in getting the laundry done.” To meet my own need for getting the laundry done I'm going to go out and get it. Would you mind giving me a hand?”

Now...here comes the second half of the 10 strategies...

## **6. I try and hear the needs behind the words or actions.**

That is what positive intent is behind what this person is doing/saying?

Does my husband need a rest? Is he tired too? Has he genuinely not noticed because he is absorbed in his show? Does he hold a belief about what he 'should do' to support the family and he is only acting out of that belief.

Curiosity is very useful here. I become a needs detective!!!! Also try and separate intention from impact.

## 7. Quality Questions

Oh boy, did I ever get to understand the power of these the other day. My husband and I were about to slide into a very familiar argument and I was about to slide into my habit of trying to analyze his motivations (not a good move for staying connected)! And, miraculously, some little angel in my brain leapt out of my mouth and asked him, "What is it you need me to understand?"

Well, talk about watching a pattern break. We had a wonderful discussion, reached an agreement and found connection with each other. **Another tip:** try not to use the word 'why' at the start of your questions. That invites justifications.



## 8. Change the focus of your language

Try any of the following:

**and** instead of **but**

**I** instead of **you**



Try adding "*to me*" to your sentence:

"It looks like it is raining *to me*." Or "I am worried the washing is about to get wet because it looks like it might rain *to me*."



## **9. Look for shared values**

What can we agree on?

Is this disagreement about a value or a strategy?

What is this disagreement really about?

Find agreement on the broad relationship values such as trust, respect, and consideration and then get specific with the strategies.

## **10. Check for understanding *during* your conversation**

Ask the other person some simple questions:

- Do you mean...?
- Can you tell me what you heard me say? Or Can you tell me what you thought I said so I can be sure I have been clear?
- I would like you to tell me how you feel and what you need.
- How do you feel when I tell you this?
- Can I just say back what I thought I heard you say?
- What's the most important aspect of this for you?

## **Bonus Tip: Practice self-awareness**

Find out which core values drive your life.

Which can be prioritized?

When we talk about values they can mean different things to different people.

How would you know if you can trust someone or, what does respect look like, sound like to you? If you don't know how can you expect your partner to know too?

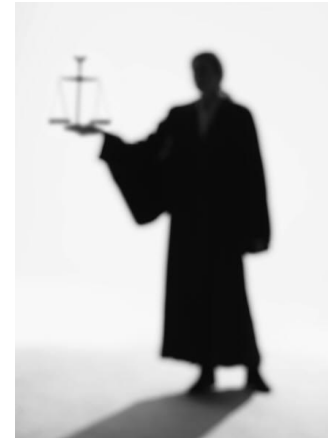


The last "argument" I had with my husband was about the concept of *fairness*.

It turns out what we think is an example of fairness differs for each of us.

His idea of fairness is my idea of "accounting". He thought paying exactly half of the bills was fair. I thought us both paying to the best of our ability was fair. Sometimes more from me, sometimes more from him was fair because over time we are both contributing all of our income jointly to our living.

Now I realize that my idea of fairness leaves him feeling vulnerable as the amounts vary according to the circumstances. Understanding this I now have more empathy for his needs in this part of our relationship.





## So...what's so useful?

1. Well, by the time I have done all of this I am communicating **with** the person I am in disagreement with rather than talking **to** or, worse still, screaming **at**.
2. I better understand my own needs and how I can meet them...I have usefully found how to empower myself.
3. I better understand the other person's needs and values and this may lead to fewer arguments because I will get why they do what they do.
4. I can see where our values overlap even if our strategies differ. This becomes a point of agreement rather than disagreement.

5. I have described what has happened objectively and this is also something we can agree on. It is not personal.
6. I am learning what kind of language supports communication that connects and what kind of language disconnects.
7. I am asking awesome questions and the quality of my partner's responses are going up exponentially.
8. I am releasing my, somewhat paranoid, tendency to assume the worst intent (a glass half full approach).
9. I love hanging out in my "needs met" space...it feels physically and emotionally wonderful. My stress and resentment levels are plummeting. WHEW!



*AND:...My husband and I are falling in love with each other again because we are hearing what is in front of us and not what we think is in front of us (just another story).*

*That's the best part of all !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*



## Get out of your personal bubble

Want to get out of your personal bubble...you know the one...where we think we are the only person who is lonely, afraid, stressed, struggling and so.

The same bubble also causes us to compare ourselves to others.

We or they are better, faster, skinnier, healthier, nicer, more intelligent, and more successful.

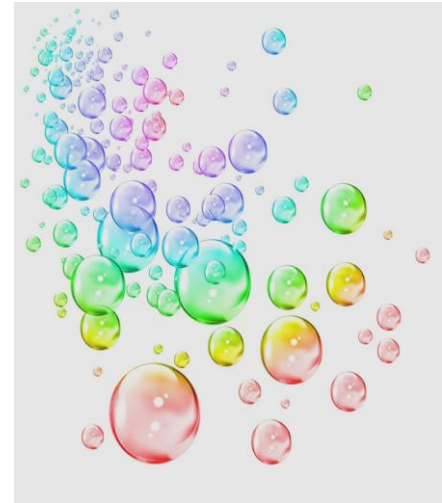
And then there is the flip side of those judgments: we or they are ruder, angrier, less self-aware, more delusional, stuck in patterns, fuzzy thinking, disorganized etc.

## How can we burst this bubble?

Try the following exercise anytime, anywhere; the more often the better.

You can do this exercise at airports, in the grocery store, on the train platform, watching T.V., at the beach and when you are driving.

It should be done on strangers as unobtrusively as possible - in other words - try not to stare. Try to do all five steps on the same person.



**Step 1:** With attention on the person repeat to yourself:

“Just like me, this person is seeking some happiness for his/her life.”

**Step 2:** With attention on the person repeat to yourself:

“Just like me, this person is trying to avoid suffering in his/her life.”

**Step 3:** With attention on the person repeat to yourself:

“Just like me, this person is has known sadness, loneliness, fear and despair in his/her life.”

**Step 4:** With attention on the person repeat to yourself:

“Just like me, this person is trying to fulfil his/her needs.”

**Step 5:** With attention on the person repeat to yourself:

“Just like me, this person is learning about life.

# Make yourself feel better - yourself

The strongest feelings of self are those that make us feel solid, permanent and separate from others. Typically these are feelings which lead to a kind of contraction of our energy such as self-righteousness, anger, self-pity, certainty about an opinion and so on. I can't say they are pleasant feelings, in fact, many of us say we are suffering when we feel this way.



I know I suffer when I cling to how I think things should be. I suffer when I hold on to what I think is my space, my rights, my house...my, my, my...its all the word “my”. As I have said before...[its all about me](#).

Let me offer a couple metaphors that have helped me recognise when I am in my “its all about me” state. One is that I create a metaphorical sense of my own turf and then I fence it. Now, this fence not only keeps me in, limits what I can do and where I can go, it also keeps others out. I start to feel increasingly isolated and also territorial. Does this sound familiar to anyone?



Another is the not dissimilar to the Gordian knot. My stories, interpretations, theories, history, excuses, and desires wrap themselves around each other and around me. The knot gets more tangled and tighter and tighter the more I struggle with it.

So, how to reduce suffering of this kind; the kind of our own making? Here are some tried and true invitations from wisdom masters across the ages:

**Find one small gate in the fence** ~ something that you can do to step through.

1. Call a friend to overcome a bad mood by choosing to have a cheerful conversation.
2. Go for a walk rather than dwelling on the problem finding one thing that is beautiful, interesting or to be grateful for in every block you walk.
3. Volunteer to help someone...even just carrying their groceries to the car.
4. Listen to uplifting music, watch some comedies, listen to canned laughter or dance outrageously.
5. Practice self-empathy getting to the heart of your needs using NVC or Focusing.
6. Practice loving-kindness meditation or compassion meditation.

This is all about **connection** - all about seeing the world as being bigger than us *and* yet a part of us.

**Untying the Gordian Knot.** The Gordian Knot, seemingly, has no beginning thread and no end thread. Well, as legend would have it Alexander the Great untied the knot by cutting through it with his sword. Cutting through is an underpinning concept in self-awareness practices.



1. Practice [Focusing](#) so that you can hear what your body knows about this experience and how to resolve it.
2. Take up [Insight Meditation](#) - gently noticing your thoughts and feelings as they arise and pass away. In the noticing you gain awareness of the patterns within your own Gordian Knot and can slice through them with the insights that arise.
3. Keep a reflective journal - notice what you pay attention to, the language you use and how this serves or doesn't serve you. You might also like to keep a [journal](#) of your meditation practice.
4. Try out the work of [Byron Katie](#). Her simple prompts often cut to the crux of any matter.
5. Learn more about [Nonviolent or Compassionate Communication](#) ~ a language for life.

These practices are about seeing things as they are. When we can accept reality then we suffer less. We stop making up stories and work with what is real and possible. This is not about giving up at all. From a place of acceptance life flows. From a place of resistance it stops. Just a law of nature.



Good luck

Enjoy your journey  
because  
life is about the journey  
not the destination.

Curious about learning more?  
Wanting to explore Transformative Communication  
in your own life & relationships?

Wondering if this may be useful at work?  
Transformative Communication can improve

- Customer satisfaction
  - Team meetings
- Relations between staff

Contact: [leona@transformative.com.au](mailto:leona@transformative.com.au)  
Training & Coaching  
[www.transformative.com.au](http://www.transformative.com.au)