“Speak Up for a Change” is a concept that is drawn from the Resiliency Project, a two-year effort to develop an organizational resiliency model, produced under a cooperative agreement between the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) and the University of Texas at Austin, Institute on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault.

Creating an organizational culture that supports resiliency means creating an environment where it is safe for people to speak up, and improve not only individual relationships but those with the organization itself.

The idea of speaking up for a change has its roots in the research of one of the project’s contributors, University of Texas researcher Dnika Travis. She and her colleagues have explored the connection between child welfare workers’ “speaking up,” that is, using their employee voice, and disengaging from their jobs. (Travis & Mor Barak, 2010; Travis, Gomez, & Mor Barak, 2011). Another article, “Fight or Flight,” recounts their cross-sectional study that tested a theory-driven conceptual model looking at factors that support or hinder child welfare workers’ efforts to speak up (use their voice) or disengage psychologically (neglect) or physically (exit) from their jobs (Travis & Mor Barak, 2010). Findings from their study of 359 child welfare workers found that workers who feel included in decision-making are more likely to exercise voice, and less likely to engage in (their own) neglect.

For the Resiliency Project, these evidence-based concepts were incorporated into an activity to provide participants with skills to help them “speak up.” The curriculum forwarded a model called AHI that offers a three-step process for people to follow to have courageous conversations. As the project director of the Resiliency Project, I found working on this module to be one of the most fulfilling in the entire curriculum. Having the courage to “speak up” is a core practice I continue to use in my life and my work. This session builds on those concepts with additions I have made as I apply its wisdom for today’s session at NCVC.

Karen Kalergis  
Mani Partners  
Karen.Kalergis@gmail.com  
512-775-4534
Set the intention for the conversation from all parties and perspectives. Ask yourself, “What do I really want from this conversation?”

The Three Easy Pieces

- Authenticity – is about you and how you approach the conversation
- Humanity – is how you perceive the other person
- Inquiry – is what you do

Authenticity

Keep your heart open. Acknowledge the connection you have and want to maintain with that other person as the reason why you want this exchange to go well.

Honor the intention. Keep focused on that.

Let go of saying the right thing. It’s ok to say “My thoughts are jumbled because I am feeling so hurt and confused. I don’t know what to say but here goes.”

Be aware of your boundaries and limits. If you know you tend to get really upset in these conversations, practice what you’re going to say; schedule the meeting so you are as prepared as possible. Breathe!

- How attached am I to the outcome?
- What are my choices (considering my story and my perception of the other’s story)?
- Where do I draw the limits?
- Under what circumstances would I shift my approach? What would this shift look like?
Humanity

“We all live in meaning making; hence recognizing one’s humanity can be a major starting point for powerful conversations, and making change happen.”  (Bushe, 2007)

Recognize red flags. Red flags are important because of the potential to dismiss or reject another person’s perspective; thus, one’s humanity. Be aware of the extent to which this happens and check yourself on this periodically during a conversation, either internally or by asking the person you are talking to.

Questions to consider in this stage---

- Am I interjecting?
- Am I trying to convince them of something?
- Am I correcting them?
- Am I telling them they are wrong?
- Am I paying attention?
- Can I summarize the main point?
- Am I dismissing a person’s perspective or feelings? E.g., “You don’t know what you’re talking about.” “That seems silly.”

Explore one’s vantage point or perspective. The vantage point relates to meaning making and the idea of making sure you understand another’s perspective.

1. Disentangle intention from the impact of one’s actions.
2. Distinguish facts from assessments or critique of the facts.
   - What assumptions have I made that may or may not be true?
   - How can I distinguish the facts of the situation from my assumptions about the issue, the receiver, or any other factors?
Inquiry

Inquiry is the action stage.

Inquiry can help make change happen in these ways:

**Ask authentic questions.** Authenticity means that you have a genuine interest in another’s perspective.

**Ask questions that speak to one’s intentions.**

**Ask questions to gain clarity and explore alternate perspectives.**

**When in doubt, most of us are hurt, unclear, angry, or unsure of what to say… ask a question.**

- Stay within inquiry when you are communicating with others.
- Remember, “Every sentence has a history.” (Patterson et al, 2002)
- Remember, the purpose of the conversation is to really understand someone, to connect.
- If you struggle, go back to authenticity, revisit the purpose of the conversation, maintain that connection, and use it to explore and resolve challenges.
Remember

- Everyone is human.
- Be willing to try and feel free to make mistakes. It is part of the process.
- Change doesn’t happen in one interaction.
- It can be learned with practice.

*Speak up for a Change in the Workplace*

- Model how to speak up for a change and encourage co-workers to do so.
- Train on positive communication skills.
- Encourage team work and open communications.
- Train on working with challenging clients.
- Bring in an outside consultant when large conflicts arise.
- Identify, take and celebrate small steps to change.
Lessons from Geese

**Fact 1:** As each goose flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the birds that follow. By flying in a “V” formation, the whole flock has 71% greater flying range than if each bird flew alone.

*Lesson 1:* People who share a common direction and sense of community can get where they are going quicker and easier, because they are traveling on the thrust of each other.

**Fact 2:** When a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of flying alone. It quickly moves back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird immediately in front of it.

*Lesson 2:* If we have as much sense as a goose, we stay in formation with those headed where we want to go. We are willing to accept their help and give our help to others.

**Fact 3:** When the lead bird tires, it rotates back into the formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird immediately in front of it.

*Lesson 3:* It pays to take turns doing the hard tasks and sharing leadership. As with geese, people are interdependent on each others’ skills, capabilities, and unique arrangement of gifts, talents, or resources.

**Fact 4:** The geese flying in formation honk to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.

*Lesson 4:* We need to make sure our honking is encouraging. In groups where there is encouragement, the production is much greater. The power of encouragement (to stand by one’s heart or core values and to encourage the heart and core values of others) is the quality of honking we seek.

**Fact 5:** When a goose gets sick, wounded, or shot down, two geese drop out of formation and follow it down to help and protect it. They stay with it until it dies or is able to fly again. Then, they launch out with another formation to catch up with the flock.

*Lesson 5:* If we have as much sense as geese, we will stand by each other in difficult times as well as when we’re strong.

*Lessons from the Geese* was written in 1972 by Dr. Robert McNeish of Baltimore, Maryland, a biology teacher who was intrigued by observing geese on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Dr. McNeish wrote the piece for a lay sermon he delivered at his church. The facts in “Lessons from Geese” are based on a flyer Dr. McNeish picked up near where he went to observe the geese. In 1987, a nurse asked his permission to print "Lessons" on small cards to hand out at the National Nurses Convention that year. It has since been used by several groups including Boy Scouts of America. Initially credited as anonymous, Lessons from Geese was correctly attributed to Dr. McNeish in research done for the Resiliency Project. Dr. McNeish retired in 1992 as Associate Superintendent of Baltimore Schools. (See also [http://www.pullingtogethermovie.com](http://www.pullingtogethermovie.com))
Courageous Conversation I want to have with ________

Set your Intention

Tap your Authenticity

Reflect your Humanity

Inquire with curiosity and authenticity
References, Resources and Reading List


McNeish, Robert, Lessons from Geese


LeadingConsciously.com - a training and research organization dedicated to increasing capacity for leadership. Co-founders Dr. Jean Kantambu Latting and V. Jean Ramsey.


Vivian, P., Hormann, S., 2013, Organizational Trauma and Healing, self-published, available through Amazon.

Strengths and Shadow diagram from Vivian and Hormann, Organizational Trauma and Healing. Available through Amazon.