

# Transformation: a dialogue

## Sustaining hope

Norton Bertram-Smith and David McAra



### A learning journey

In this thirty-five-minute conversation (recorded here: [audio](#), [video](#)), Norton and I reflect on the challenges of transformation for individuals and organisations. We started from a point of disagreement, about publicity material he is drafting for a new workshop. I found it too ‘new agey’ to be taken seriously by commercially driven business people. “But those aren’t the people I’m speaking to,” he explains.

In his own career, Norton was making rapid progress up the corporate ladder until he realised it was the wrong ladder. “It wasn’t even against my wall.” Paradoxically, before he stepped away to found [On Purpose](#), his progress was accelerated by the mindfulness, self-awareness and deep reflection which ultimately changed his direction.

### Appreciation for Appreciative Inquiry

While I can let my frustration get the better of me, Norton is patient. Our conversation helped me to find more optimism. I remember learning this once before, years ago at an Appreciative Inquiry presentation. It’s all in the structure of the sentence.

I can be carried away so easily by the excitement of the successful workshops before my hopes are dashed when the new manager cancels the programme. Norton expresses his disappointment about the setbacks first and his 'but' comes later. Sadly, the transformed team was disbanded but the individuals carried their new thinking into their new situations.

## Compassion and listening

Norton quotes [Andrew Bennett](#), a member of the UK parliament for the Labour Party between 1974 and 2005. "The longest journey you will ever take is the 18 inches from your head to your heart."

I know too well how persuasion is an ineffective tactic and yet I need reminding so often but at least I realise more quickly now. (See how I'm learning?) Transformation only comes about through a change of heart, one heart at a time. It takes the time it takes and can't be rushed.

Norton believes that businesses in the USA are ahead of us in rethinking the 'social architecture' of corporations. The day after we spoke, I saw [Eileen Fisher's inspiring contribution](#) (starting at 55 minutes 30 seconds) to Otto Scharmer's [#GaiaJourney](#). I recommend it. Forty minutes well spent for anyone who might ever need reminding that listening is the most important work of leadership.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to all the members of **AMED**, Council members, supporters and contributors, past and present (and future), who have created our fragile vessel and kept it afloat over the years. May we find a new name and refreshed purpose to sail on for decades to come.

## About the authors

In 2003, after twenty years, high-flying in the corporate world, **Norton** founded On Purpose, to work with organisations, teams and individuals, developing and fostering the spirit of purpose, collaboration and compassion.

He can be contacted at: [norton@onpurpose.co.uk](mailto:norton@onpurpose.co.uk)

**David** is an enthusiastic, lifelong learner and a member of AMED Council and the e-O&P Editorial Board.

He can be contacted at: [david.mcara@gmail.com](mailto:david.mcara@gmail.com)