

Hippocrates and Socrates: Dialogue #9 – Transforming Space

Socrates has designed an event for Hippocrates to engage with his top 300 leaders. We join this event, just as Hippocrates is sitting down after his opening remarks

H: So, in closing, I realise that this has been a difficult time for us all, and I chose to bring us all together so we can hear from each other how we are progressing collectively, how we are feeling individually and how we can all accelerate to success together.

Socrates explains the format of the event, in which 30 groups of ten share their views on progress of the change. They also will share their personal hopes and fears. As he describes this, a strange hum emerges from the audience. Rather than continue, Socrates elects to explore this openly...

S: I noticed that when I announced the format of the session, an odd atmosphere seems to have descended on the room. Would anyone like to say what they think is going on?

After a pause, Pheidippides stands up in the middle of the room and begins...

P: I cannot speak for the other 29 groups in the room, but the mood in our group was somewhat cynical. We know that there is an official project plan and risk register, and so what do our views about progress matter? Also, we worry that if we share our concerns in this room, they will be used against us.

At this point Hippocrates stands up with two rolls of papyrus. He unfolds these and holds them up...

H: Pheidippides, thank you for your courage in voicing the concerns of many in the room today. Let us begin with the review of progress. The principal reason that we are here today is to truly understand how well our change is proceeding and to surface issues which are slowing us down. Until now, I fear that I may have placed too much weight on the value of the project plan and risk register. I want to stress that the only progress review of any value is that which will emerge from our conversations today. Here's how valuable I see these documents when compared to your evaluations. *(He tears up the papyri.)* As for your fears about how your views will be subsequently used, all I can do is ask you to trust me and my direct team. I have asked each of them to begin this process of sharing, and specifically to be very open and honest and to be prepared to acknowledge their weaknesses as well as their fears. I will begin.

Socrates smiles as he watches his mentee engage with the 300 in a way they have never experienced.

H: Let me first say that I will not offer my views on progress right now. My views are no more valid than yours, and I do not want to influence or constrain your deliberations. Let me instead tell you something of my personal story over the last year or so. When I sought the leadership of this great city more than a year ago, Socrates helped me to realise I was doing so for the wrong reasons – for my own glory rather than that of Athens. Since then, I have endeavoured to share this change as widely as possible amongst the people, and yet I realised quite recently that I was falling back to my old ways – using my oratorical skills to excite people about *my* vision and *my* leadership. I know that for many, if not all of you, this change is something with which you have no experience. Let me acknowledge here, that I too am learning new ways of leading every day, and with the help of Socrates and many of you, I have sought to face up to several of my weaknesses as a leader. There have been times over the last year when I have wanted to abandon this so-called high-engagement approach and assume tight control over the change. But with the strength that I have drawn from many of you, I have resisted this temptation thus far. I was afraid about today's session, as I was concerned that it might uncover a torrent of overwhelmingly negative emotion and energy, which I would not be able to control. If that is so, then so be it! Whatever comes from today, we, the 300, will find ways of channelling the energy created and never again will we ask 'who are our leaders'. Our leaders are all the people in this room, and from now on, I will work with you to give you the support and challenge you need to release your potential as leaders. Now let's get on with our discussions.

The groups begin talking and the atmosphere is electric. Socrates sees that soon he will be redundant!