

Igniting Leadership at All Levels:

*ORD Working Together
to Ensure the Earth's Vitality*

Pre-Summit Conversation Guide

Purpose of Pre-Summit Conversations

ORD is actively engaged in a positive transformation toward a culture that seeks to nurture and encourage the inherent leadership abilities within each employee. In this new culture, we envision a workplace that embraces innovation, is strongly integrated both internally and externally, and is characterized by pervasive leadership and ubiquitous trust. ORD functions as an interrelated community whose very existence is dedicated to ensuring the Earth's vitality.

This transformation is grounded in the many examples of leadership at all levels that already exist within ORD. We are holding conversations throughout our organization to identify our people's best experiences and our organization's strengths.

As part of this process, we will look at:

- What core factors enable success in our organization.
- What we can learn from our experiences, especially when we examine those times when we were at our best.
- What our most effective strengths and qualities are — those things we need to preserve as we transform.
- What important lessons we can draw from our experiences.
- What kind of organization we want to create in the future — an organization that we and others want to be part of.
- How our positive past, the best of our experiences, can help us become more daring and innovative as we think about our true potential as an organization.
- What our specific hopes and images for the future of ORD are in the context of ensuring Earth's vitality.

Application of Conversation Feedback

- All conversations will be reviewed to identify common themes.
- Themes will be shared and discussed based on their relevance to the cultural transformation.
- At a three-day off-site summit, attended by ORD employees and EPA and external stakeholders, these themes will be used as a key input in designing the future cultural model.
- All comments from the conversations will be anonymous unless participants deem otherwise.

Introduction

Late last year ORD's senior management team challenged a group of 75 ORD scientists, engineers, managers, and administrative staff (ORD Leadership Coalition) to begin a process that would invigorate the whole leadership within our organization. After a series of meetings, it became apparent that leadership at every level was a goal that the Coalition believed would enrich people in our organization and begin a renewal to increase communications, collaboration, and teamwork. Our aging workforce coupled with the enormity of an ever increasing workload, were drivers for discovering new strategies for changing the status quo and unleashing the potential within each of us.

Several months ago ORD Leadership Coalition members met together at our Duluth Lab and enthusiastically held the possibility of effecting a leadership culture change throughout the ORD network influencing all 2000 of us. Pervasive Leadership, Trust, and Liberating Collaboration quickly became the focus of the work ahead. A meeting of 400 to begin this culture change effort is now planned. In January 2003, the ORD Leadership Coalition will sponsor an organizational Summit titled *Igniting Leadership at All Levels: ORD Working Together to Ensure the Earth's Vitality*. The intent of the Summit is to have our whole system participate in the change effort ahead. We need experience and wisdom from each of our Labs, Centers, and Offices, from each of our geographic locations, and a representative composite of scientists/engineers, managers, and administrative staff that parallels the make up of our occupational areas. Other creative staff, new hires, entry level staff, and stakeholders external to ORD will provide a diverse and holistic participant level.

Today the first step is to hear your story and to begin to catalogue the best experiences you have regarding leadership in ORD. Additionally, this is an opportunity to answer any of your questions about this initiative, which will be an on-going opportunity for each ORD employee. It is an initiative that will be successful because of your help today. **Our success as ORD depends on you.** The stories shared during the many conversations we will have will be used to discover trends and to help design the Summit.

The ORD Leadership Summit is a beginning step for us on our culture change journey and you are an important part of the change process. While we wish everyone could participate in the Summit, please know that we are at the beginning. With the success of this Summit, we will build future events so that everyone will have a time and an opportunity to become involved in changing our culture and in realizing leadership at every level of ORD.

Tips for Conducting Conversations

- Use the conversation questions provided for guidance and note-taking. You may choose to use only some of the questions or to adapt the questions to what you find works best for your conversations.
- Allow the conversationee to interpret whether the questions apply to work or to personal situations.
- Use questions and statements like the following to probe further:
 - Tell me more.
 - Why was that important to you?
 - How did that affect you?
 - What was your contribution?
 - How did the organization support you?
 - How has it changed you?
- Let the person you're speaking with tell his or her story.
- Take notes and listen for great quotes and stories.
- Try to be curious about the person's experiences, thoughts, and feelings.
- Some people will take longer to think about their answers – allow for silence.
- If somebody doesn't want to or can't answer a question, try another.

More Tips— What to do with the Negatives¹

Most people will respond positively to the statements and questions you will be posing and identify instances when they or others were at their best. Some people may want to talk about problems that need fixing. This is ok, although they shouldn't be the focus of the conversation. The following techniques will help prevent any conversation from becoming too negative:

- **Postponing:** Indicate that you have noted what the person said and will come back to it later. Then discuss these “negative” data when you get to the question about what the conversationee would wish for the organization in the future.
- **Listening:** If the person has strong feelings about specific problems, it is best to let him or her express them, since he or she must vent these feelings before he or she will move to positive comments. Help this transition by maintaining a caring and affirmative spirit.
- **Redirecting:** If the person is adamant about dealing with the negative or if you have listened sufficiently to understand the negative issues, find a way to guide the person back to the positive. For example: “I think I understand some of the problems you see (paraphrase a few of the ones you've heard), and now I would like to guide us back to what is happening when things are working at their best. Can you think of a time, even the smallest moment, when you saw innovation (for example) at its best?” If the person says it never happened where he or she works, find out if the person has had the experience of something working well in any organization or work context.
- **Using Negative Data:** Everything that people find wrong with an organization represents an absence of something that they hold in their minds as an ideal. For example, if the conversationee says, “The communication in this organization is terrible,” say “When you say that the communication is terrible, it means that you have some image in your mind about what good communication would look like. Can you describe that for me?” In fact, one could argue that there is no such thing as negative data. Every utterance is conditioned by affirmative images. If the conversationee cannot reframe his or her statement into a positive image, use the negative information and reframe it yourself into a wish or vision statement and then confirm that statement with the conversationee.

¹Adapted from “Appreciative Inquiry: Change at the Speed of Imagination,” Jane Magruder Watkins & Bernard Mohr, 2001.

Conversation Preamble

Please take your time and read aloud

ORD is actively engaged in a positive transformation toward a culture that seeks to nurture and encourage the inherent leadership abilities within each employee. In this new culture, the Leadership Coalition envisions a workplace that embraces innovation, is strongly integrated both internally and externally, and is characterized by high levels of collaboration, pervasive leadership, and empowering trust. It is a culture that, by our very existence, is dedicated to ensuring the earth's vitality.

We believe the key to becoming a more daring and innovative organization is in examining and celebrating our most positive experiences. These positive experiences help us discover the pockets of excellence that already exist in ORD, and start us on the journey of creating a new ORD that can meet the challenges of the future.

Throughout our discussion, I will be asking you a number of questions about your experiences. This is a unique kind of conversation and I'd like to explain how we want to frame it. The questions I will ask you will be focusing on your peak experiences, those moments that were the most positive. I would like you to focus on concrete stories. It might take a few moments for you to recall a story. That's fine. Do not feel rushed or pressured to come up with a grand story. There are no right answers. Sometimes we achieve greatest insights from even the simplest events.

All comments from this discussion can be anonymous. Names will not be attached to any of the stories, suggestions, examples, or comments made without your express approval.

Conversation Questions

1 Beginning: Initial Attraction, High Point Moment

I'd like to learn about your beginnings at ORD.

- When did you come to the organization and what attracted you?

- What keeps you at ORD?

- What sets ORD apart and makes the difference for you?

In your work at ORD, you have probably experienced ups and downs, high points and low points. For a moment I would like you to think about a time that stands out to you as a high point at ORD—a time when you felt most alive and engaged, most passionate about your work and most effective—a time when you were able to accomplish more than you imagined.

- Please describe in detail the situation, people involved, and what made it a high point experience for you.

- What were the circumstances?

- What did you do? What did others do?

- How did these actions translate into successful results?

- Describe the kind of leadership and collaboration that helped make this high point experience possible.

2 Collaboration: Bridging to Make Connections

Innovation and discovery require collaboration. One must be able to connect people across departments, levels, specialties, external organizations and industries. We want to learn what is true collaboration.

- Think of a project or a time when you've been part of a collaborative effort that resulted in an outstanding achievement. Tell a story and share your insights of what made this happen.

- Can you think of a time when you saw someone achieve a kind of transformational collaboration between disparate groups—a time when diverse groups were brought together in a way that resulted in unexpected and extraordinary achievement?

(Hint: we are trying to understand how to achieve coordination and collaboration in spite of bureaucratic boundaries.)

3 Continuity: Carrying Forward What We Value Most

Effective organizations transform themselves setting the pace of change and innovation. In moving toward an ideal future, the “positive core” of what an organization does best is preserved, and things no longer needed are let go.

- In transforming ORD, what are the **three** things—core strengths, values, qualities, ways of working—you want to see preserved and leveraged as we move into the future?

- What leadership qualities would be needed from our people in order to preserve our strengths and create new potential for our organization?

- Where do you see examples of this type of leadership already in ORD?

4 Image of the Future of ORD

Tonight when you go to sleep, you have a very deep sleep, and wake up 3 years later. It is 2005. When you arrive at work, you discover that ORD has reinvented itself. It is the organization you always imagined it could be. In particular, you notice the people, their interactions, and the high level of energy with which they pursue their work.

- Describe what you see happening. What does “leadership at every level” look like? Describe what is happening in 2005 that exemplifies the ideal ORD you have always imagined—an ORD that ensures the vitality of our planet.

- What **single small change** could we make that would have the biggest impact in moving ORD in the direction of the ideal ORD of the future?

- What **bold** change could we make that would reinvent ORD for the future?

5 Other—Required for All Conversations

Do you give us your permission to associate your name with any of your comments or stories? (*Circle one*)
yes no

Do you want to participate in the Summit? (*Circle one*) yes no

If yes, provide the following information.

Lab/Center/Office: _____

Location (City and State): _____

Position: (*Circle one*)

Scientist

Engineer

Administrative

Management

If management, what position? (*Circle one*)

L/C/O Director

Deputy Director

Asst./Assoc. L/C/O Director

Division Director

Branch Chief

Conversation Summary Form

Name of Conversation Facilitator: _____

Date of Conversation: _____

Name of Conversationee: _____

Lab/Center/Office: _____

Location (City and State): _____

Position: *(Circle one)*

Scientist

Engineer

Administrative

Management

If management, what position? *(Circle one)*

L/C/O Director

Deputy Director

Asst./Assoc. L/C/O Director

Division Director

Branch Chief

What was the most quotable quote that came out of this conversation?

What was the most compelling story that came out of this conversation? What made this story so compelling?

Overall, what was your sense of what was most important to this individual?

What were 1–3 positive themes that stood out most for you during the conversation related to:

Leadership

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

Collaboration

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

Carrying Forward What We Value Most

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

Image of the Future

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

Other Observations/Comments
