

## Online Moderating 2: Introductions

How do we get beyond small talk? How can we do this right from the beginning of our dialogues?

***Accessing the unconscious is easier than you think.*** All of those models of it being hidden away like the base of an iceberg are inaccurate. It is much closer to the surface, dancing in and out of sight from moment to moment.

The simplest access to it is through what I call your Background Voice – that means the voice you hear in your head all the time, the one that talks to you continually – that you might think is ‘you’. This voice is the script of our mentalisation of the outside world (what we make of what is happening out there) combined with the promptings from our unconscious, including all the established schema (Goleman) and heuristics (Kahnemann) that have been created by experience through the years.

The interesting thing about these schema and heuristics is that they were initiated either to defend you from potential upset or trauma, or to optimise your efficiency and minimise inconvenience. All of them arose as a result of emotions arising from a formative experience. Some are – or seem – logical, others less so. You can test your emotional intelligence or EQ here:

[http://psychology.about.com/library/quiz/bl\\_eq\\_quiz.htm](http://psychology.about.com/library/quiz/bl_eq_quiz.htm)

How can we, moderators who are seeking to discover people’s real motives, contact this Background voice and get access to its drivers from the unconscious? It is easy. Let’s say we are introducing or meeting people in an online qual community for an activity or even for the first time as they join the group. Ask them to tell the other members something important about themselves by way of introduction. Let’s say that member Marie says,

“I’m Marie and what’s most important about me is that I’m a working mother to two gorgeous girls.”

This is exactly the sort of remark that folk make when introducing themselves. Within the conventions of small talk, we might expect the moderator’s follow up to be along the lines of:

“How old are your girls and what are their names?”

***But don't do that! We are not really interested in small talk: we want talk that reveals motives and drivers! Say instead:***

“Marie, of all the things you might have said to the group, what made you choose to talk about your girls?”

Allow that it might not have been a deep reason, but what you have done by asking this is to bring into the foreground the presence of the background – and show how it shapes and determines what we say in line with our motivations and wishes. It is possible that Marie may have chosen this information in order to avoid other, less comfortable, facts. So, after checking in with Marie with “of all the things etc.” ask Marie:

“I’d be really interested to hear one of the other important things about you that came up in your mind that you chose not to say to the group.”

If this seems to intense for just one member, Marie, to be followed up in this fashion, all in one go, direct this last question to another group member as they introduce themselves.

Be sure to normalise and praise every piece of information yielded and to reinforce safety and acceptance in the community. You can even use the response framework from Accurate Empathic Listening if you have practiced that in sessions with me.

What is important is that you don’t probe people about the content – you ask them why they chose this content. Here we are seeking to discover their desired effect on others – and who they imagine these others to be since, online they cannot see them and are denied all the clues from body language, posture, expressions and tone of voice.

In this way, even in the first minutes of our interactions we are working with background unconscious material and bringing it to light in an interesting and innocuous fashion. As your community proceeds, you have already created permission to delve into the unconscious intentions of the group at any time along the way – providing that you update the group’s permission, deal sensitively with the material and keep everyone safe.

If you would like a pdf of this post, it is here: