

A Practical Pathway  
to Positive and  
Productive  
Relationships  
for Unparalleled  
Results

# OASIS

## CONVERSATIONS

Leading with an Open Mindset  
to Maximize Potential

**ANN VAN ERON, PH.D.**

*Creator of the OASIS Process*

## More Praise for Ann Van Eron and *OASIS Conversations*

“As an HR Executive who has experienced several career transitions, I have learned the importance of real collaboration and engagement. At the World Bank Group, Ann Van Eron has been an essential person in making this happen, and in her book, *OASIS Conversations: Leading with an Open Mindset to Maximize Potential*, she shows how this occurs. I highly recommend this book for every executive who wants to make change real.”

—Sean McGrath, Ph.D., SVP,  
World Bank Global Human Resources

“We all face challenges relating to people with different perspectives. *OASIS Conversations* offers practical tips on how to be open-minded and work effectively with others—at work, at home and in life. I am glad to have experienced the OASIS process with Ann Van Eron and recommend her process for other leaders interested in improving relationships with their teams and colleagues, boosting morale and making their workplaces more effective, efficient and enjoyable.”

—Jennifer Flake, Executive Director—Communications,  
Ford Motor Company

“I have worked with Ann for over twenty years across several organizations; she has consistently encouraged individuals to confront the challenges with open and direct communication using the OASIS model. She not only teaches it but practices OASIS in life, making her a highly effective and sought after communicator and coach. Many have found her approach of open communications to be simple, useful, and practical, both in the workplace and in their personal lives. It is clear that OASIS can help foster a better approach to communication for all.”

— Sunita Holzer, EVP, Chief Human Resources Officer,  
Realogy Holdings Corp. (previously with Chubb,  
American Express, and GE Capital)



“The beauty of this book—which is practical at the same time—is that Ann Van Eron, with her vast experience as an executive coach and organization change consultant, has provided an easy-to-remember-and-follow rubric, OASIS, yet allowed for flexibility and individuality in its implementation. Call it “structured agility.” Whether one aspires simply to be more socially intelligent or a more effective change leader—or both—following Ann’s advice and suggestions will lead the way for such a worthy journey and set of goals.”

—W. Warner Burke, Ph.D., Edward Lee Thorndike Professor of Psychology and Education, Editor, *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, Teachers College, Columbia University

“The OASIS Conversation process is valuable for leaders today. Ann Van Eron’s OASIS process has been extremely well-received by United Nations leaders and staff globally. People routinely report successful results using the memorable and practical process. It is great that more people will now have access to this critical skill for emotional and social intelligence.”

—Maryel Jansen, (retired) Manager, Learning, Leadership and Organization Development, United Nations

“Ann Van Eron has helped my team achieve a higher level of performance through her coaching on the OASIS model. Her methods are based on leading edge science and are easy to understand and practice. Developing these skills will help anyone become a better listener, establish better relationships, and achieve superior results.”

— Colleen Moynihan, Oshkosh Corporation  
Senior Vice President, Quality & Continuous Improvement

“Ann observes that our personal and professional worlds are increasingly VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous). In her new book, she describes OASIS Conversations as a structured way to be present and effective through vulnerability and openness in inevitably difficult social, family, work, and community contexts. Ann asserts that we can be taught to be emotionally smarter, and she provides clear instruction for her proven method. Ann has modeled herself and taught me about vulnerability and openness, and I believe her book will make this path available for others.”

— Raymond E. Crossman, Ph.D., President, Adler University

“I worked with Ann and her OASIS concept in the last few years both at IFC and the World Bank during significant reorganizations and general resistance to change. I was very impressed with how her notion of ‘positive intent’ changed the way I and many of my colleagues now look at the change process. Assuming a positive intent and trying to put yourself into the shoes of another colleague to try to understand how things look from the other side has changed the way I work with people. I don’t think that any modern organization can survive without practicing OASIS, and I am very grateful to Ann for introducing it to me. I am also glad that wider audiences will now have access to this concept through Ann’s new book *OASIS Conversations*.”

— Nena Stoiljkovic, VP Global Client Services,  
International Finance Corporation

“Ann Van Eron taught me the OASIS method at a critical time in my career, moving from manager to director level. She taught me to really connect with my team, peers, and leaders. The OASIS method has been a safe haven for me in an uncertain world. Ann’s approach and her coaching showed me the value of checking my own assumptions by observing first and really paying attention to the person in front of me. It has helped me in many areas as diverse as dealing with performance issues on my team, to influencing peers on strategy, to communicating with senior executives and board members on talent issues. With the playing field ever-changing and our companies driving even more innovation to keep up, our past success and experience mean less today, and yet there is incredible power in cultivating a disciplined practice of opening to the present moment and building confidence that you can lead others to what is needed now. OASIS provides me a mental framework to do just that, to stay open and agile, to be creative amidst change. It helps me connect, gain perspective from different angles, and be more confident in taking action, especially when bold steps are required, as they often are in leadership today. Ann is a wise coach with an approach purpose-built for the volatile environment so many of us find ourselves leading in today.”

— Kelly Wojda, Director of Diversity & Talent, Caterpillar

“Ann Van Eron’s OASIS process is easy to remember yet incredibly powerful for people in all walks of life. The beauty of OASIS is that it offers a visually memorable model we can ‘see’ in our heads even when we are in the midst of difficult interactions and that can guide us through conversations—whether or not we are able to plan them beforehand. Using and internalizing the OASIS process enables us not only to achieve better results but also to strengthen our relationships with others. Given years of teaching MBA students from multiple cultures about leading and influencing with integrity, I firmly believe that the skills and open mindset fostered by the OASIS process are among the most valuable assets that leaders, and indeed all of us, can have.”

—Mary Trefry, Ph.D., Sacred Heart University,  
USA and Luxembourg

“*OASIS Conversations* is a must read for all leaders who want to influence others and deliver compelling results. To help navigate the challenges in today’s innovative, complex, volatile world, Dr. Van Eron has contributed a truly valuable, actionable approach to creating open-minded conversations that yield an oasis of possibilities and ultimately greater impact.”

—Nisha Advani, Ph.D., former head of Executive Talent  
and Organization Development, Genentech

“While many books and much research emphasize the need to be emotionally and socially intelligent, Ann Van Eron shows us *how* to be so in a practical and memorable way. The OASIS process enables leaders to be engaging and create a positive and productive environment amidst diversity. I am glad to have experienced OASIS with Ann, and I highly recommend the process for all.”

—Frances Sinha, Human Resources Director,  
Human Rights Watch

“Dr. Van Eron has spent years researching and refining her approach to ensure people have the most productive conversations possible, even when feeling uncomfortable. *OASIS Conversations* gives you the framework and steps you can easily follow to get the results you desire.”

—Dr. Marcia Reynolds, author of *The Discomfort Zone: How  
Leaders Turn Difficult Conversations into Breakthroughs*

“The OASIS Conversation process provides relaxed awareness of self and others, through shared understanding in interaction. The process and metaphor are invaluable in flowing through barriers of mind and culture, thus enhancing freedom of interaction and communication. The OASIS Conversation skills can be used for all ages and works in families, classrooms, and meetings. OASIS goals to enhance emotional intelligence, reduce conflict, and develop a better sense of self, and appreciation and understanding of others are applicable in most human interactions. I have found them useful in graduate classroom teaching, conference seminars, and curriculum meetings, as well as in my daily interactions.”

—Dolores G. Norton, Ph.D. Samuel Deutsch Professor Emerita  
The University of Chicago

“For many years, my leadership style has been dominated by achieving results, and when faced with opposition or challenging relationships, I have relied on blunt force to drive through the resistance. Ann introduced to me the OASIS model...which despite its simplicity, ultimately became a powerful tool that helped me manage conflict and difficult conversations in a much more positive manner. It gave me a process & discipline to proactively think through the biases and lenses that others look through and ultimately build capabilities to constructively manage differences. My career has been focused on change...and with all change comes resistance; finally, I have a structure to help me recognize that people have different needs and that gives me a structured process to pause and move from simply reacting to fostering a positive interaction.”

— David Herbert, CFO Caterpillar Electric  
Power Division, Caterpillar Inc.

“Early in my career, I used to shy away from tough human conversations: Ann’s OASIS model helped me understand what to improve and the results for me have been magic.”

—Erika Ratcliffe, Organisational Improvement Consultant,  
Market Lead, Kepner-Tregoe Europe

“The OASIS process offers a pathway to break the us-versus-them pattern of escalating reactions, defensiveness, and lack of progress. While this destructive pattern is increasing in our culture, our politics, and our world, this book offers us the skills to step back and SHIFT the direction to possibilities and solutions. *OASIS Conversations* will feed people’s hunger for something different. Learning the OASIS model increases our awareness of how we are pulled into destructive patterns. With this new self-awareness and armed with OASIS skills, we are able to shift our mindset and the nature of our conversations. It is then that old reactive patterns lose their pull on us. Ann Van Eron has demystified the magic of her skills in this book so people all over the world can SHIFT the conversation in these volatile times. Thank you, Ann.”

—Pat Ruzich, Ruzich Consulting/High-Performance Coaching

“The importance of having an open mind and being curious about the other person’s point of view is so important. Assigning inaccurate motives to others gets in the way of productive solutions, so many times. The OASIS Moves can help both sides suspend judgment, understand the facts, and find solutions that are win-win for both sides.”

—Robert Trefry, former CEO of Bridgeport Hospital and  
Yale-New Haven Health System; Board Chair of  
United Way and Executive Coach

“Ann’s approach is about truly connecting with people based on finding common ground and synergies. In today’s fast-changing, socially-connected world, leaders need to connect with everyone around them to maintain and grow their circle of influence. This connection requires the leader to influence people who have different opinions and experiences. It is easy to read about emotional intelligence and talk about being open. Actually, being open and connecting requires identifying your own personal path and then actually walking that path every day until it becomes habit. I have found Ann’s OASIS approach to be a refreshing way to evolve my leadership skillset.”

—Nehal Trivedi, Senior Vice President,  
Title Resources Guarantee Company

“Ann is, without a doubt, the best executive coach I have had in my career across the public and private sectors. She made me realize that to be a good leader and change manager, you need to carry the team and bring about a cohesiveness and purposefulness in the team. All leaders and teams will benefit greatly from the coaching and open mindset shared in *OASIS Conversations*.”

—Anita George, Senior Director, World Bank Group

“I have had the pleasure to work with Dr. Van Eron for more than a decade. In that time, I have been impressed by her mastery of both classical and modern approaches to communication and leadership. What truly sets her apart, however, is her empathy. She is the rare expert who demonstrates her power by listening, and doing so, she is able to teach colleagues and clients by understanding their needs. I am more successful in all of my endeavors because she has taught me so well what she practices so seamlessly.”

—Brion Fox, Ph.D., Madison University

“I find OASIS a succinct process to follow. Open communication is an essential need to build connections and trust in business and life. It gives us insights in how we create win-win situations. The process is easy to remember and well set out. More importantly, clients enjoy using it. It is fun and rewarding because the effects are immediate and apply to all areas of life. I have personally benefited from it and would recommend it thoroughly.”

—Shamim Nasser, Director, Discovering Potentials (London)

“Do you want a simple process to be the most effective leader you can be, creating the results you want? Ann Van Eron’s *OASIS Conversations: Leading with an Open Mindset to Maximize Potential* shows you how with her powerfully proven, time-tested OASIS Conversation® method. Insightful examples from her worldwide leadership consulting engagements bring to life how to incorporate her winning process into our own lives and start benefitting right away.”

—Joseph Vranich, President and Author,  
Speaker—Spectrum Location Solutions

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“If you lead people or aspire to lead people, you must read this book; otherwise, you’ll shortchange your ability to realize your desired outcomes. Ann Van Eron has combined years of executive coaching and leadership consulting with brain science to produce compelling results around the world. Now, in her book *OASIS Conversations*, she distills those years of experience and scientific findings with her easy-to-use OASIS Conversation® process. Give yourself an advantage by buying this book.”

— Marie Meade, Senior Account Manager,  
Verizon and Founder of Computious.com

“*OASIS Conversations* is a readable, practical guide to holding conversations that work. Ann Van Eron’s process is easy to remember and will help you turn around challenging communication issues. I love the book and highly recommend it to everyone.”

— Laurie Zuckerman, Executive Coach and  
Organization Development Consultant

“OASIS is a powerful process for helping people, and leaders in particular, go deeper in understanding themselves, others, and issues and creating responses that reflect their awareness. Ann Van Eron demonstrates the power of creating an oasis with an open mindset to offer support and challenge for real change.”

— Hassane Cisse, Director, World Bank

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Creator of the OASIS® Process

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Chicago, IL

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A Practical Pathway to Positive and Productive Relationships for Unparalleled  
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**O**bservation



**A**wareness

(of assumptions, emotions, and background)

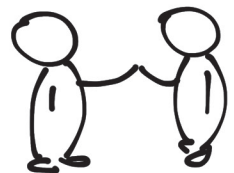


**S**hift

(to being open)



 **Importance**



**S**olution



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# Introduction

## *Envisioning an Oasis of Positive and Productive Interactions*

- o-a-sis /ō'āsis/ 1. a fertile or green area in an arid region (as a desert).  
2. something that provides refuge, relief, or pleasant contrast.*

— Merriam-Webster Dictionary

Do you live and work in environments with misunderstandings, miscommunication, and mistrust? Are you finding interactions with others challenging and a drain of your energy?

Are you having impactful conversations with colleagues and others that inspire innovative and creative solutions, or do you feel like you're just overwhelmed by the pace of work and life and the challenges of influencing others?

What will help you be more successful in our fast-changing, diverse global world where the “rules” continue to change?

Sometimes it's difficult to believe there are any positive answers to these questions and issues. After all, turbulence has become such a constant that the U.S. military coined the term “VUCA world” to characterize our current environment of continual volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity.

Add to this situation that we have become a truly global society and in our own workplaces, schools, and even homes, we have an increasingly diverse mix of cultures and viewpoints. These days, four generations are often in a workplace, not to mention in our communities. These and many other converging trends are causing us to rethink our tried and true ways of communicating. We are recognizing that we need to be open to new possibilities amid the turbulence. Most of us, whether in a formal leadership position, or as a parent, teacher, partner, or subject matter expert, think we are open-minded. Yet, in reality, we are all naturally biased and our judgments impact our interactions.

Thus, even when we are well-intentioned, we often find ourselves feeling frustrated, and quite frankly, at a loss as to how to “get through” to those who differ.

A lot of energy is wasted because we misunderstand each other, make uninformed judgments, and have difficulty coming to agreements—causing both relationships and results to suffer. For most of us, communicating with others is one of the most challenging aspects of our professional and personal lives.

What we need most are open-minded leaders who are emotionally mature and self-aware, and who are willing to pause and withhold judgment long enough to arrive at a new understanding of “what is.” This often requires a shift to being open and a mindful response that allows for heretofore impossible solutions. If you are reading this book, I suspect you are wondering how you can be that leader—how you can go from draining interactions to creating an engaging workplace or environment and moving it forward into successful and dynamic new possibilities.

In the past, leaders were expected to manage by command and control. Today’s leader needs to learn how to operate in uncertainty and to grapple with problems he or she can no longer solve with an easily issued directive. People all over the world are less apt to follow orders or be coerced into complying. Instead, leaders need to influence and to collaborate. Furthermore, the complex dilemmas we all face require many diverse inputs and views to solve. Leaders need to be open-minded and know how to have impactful conversations with diverse others (everyone) to be effective and successful. Leaders need to learn and innovate, without relying on past answers. Leaders require resiliency and openness to new ways of working and co-creating, and they must build relationships across different groups and boundaries.

How can you be a leader who builds relationships and bridges over the boundaries that seem to exist between people? You do it by having mind-opening conversations. All meaningful change, innovation, and results happen through conversation. That’s what this book is really all about—conversing with people—not just commanding or telling them, but listening to them, being curious about them, dialoguing with them, and coming to understanding and agreements that are mindful of everyone involved. It requires being open-minded when interacting with someone with a different perspective (i.e., everyone).



As a leader of the future, in these pages you'll learn how to adopt an open mindset, be open to potential opportunity, and engage in mindful OASIS Conversations that will lead to shared goals and solutions. A critical need for leaders and a key focus of this book is knowing how to stop, suspend judgment, and shift to a more open perspective and stance. Leaders need to create an oasis of possibilities. This book will show you *how* to keep yourself from reacting based on your judgment and learn how to respond thoughtfully from a place of openness and curiosity. You will learn a concrete set of skills that can transform almost every interaction into a satisfying and productive one. Once you attain the critical skill of open-minded conversations, you will be more successful in all of life's facets. Open-minded conversations are core to creating successful environments and the relationships that are critical for creating impactful outcomes. OASIS Conversations involve being aware and non-judgmental with an intent to create an oasis-like environment for exploring, learning, agreeing, and co-creating. It is through mind-opening conversations that leaders align people of diverse perspectives around a shared vision, agree on responsibilities and processes, and ensure understanding, agreement, and accountability.

An open mindset and collaborative behaviors are key to realizing the potential available in our new world. In a word, we need to "open-up"—that is, we need to be open-minded, open-hearted, and to embody openness to ourselves, others, and opportunities. Becoming open requires being mindful of our reactions and judgments, catching ourselves, and shifting to being open to creating solutions with others.

In my work, as an executive and team coach and consultant in organizations, I continually hear about the challenges leaders face when they are unable to influence others effectively. Dealing with others who hold different views or with individuals who seem closed to new and different ideas is often one of the greatest challenges leaders face. They experience frustration and waste time and energy when their efforts to influence are futile.

Organizations have begun to emphasize the importance of collaboration in our diverse world. Those who once succeeded by obtaining results at any cost are now being penalized if they are unable to work effectively with others. Leaders are expected to be emotionally and socially intelligent.

By applying the practical, proven OASIS conversation process

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provided in these pages—whether you are an executive, professional, manager, teacher, parent, partner, thought leader, or a neighbor, you will be more emotionally and socially intelligent and be more confident about being a positive influence in your interactions.

In this book, you will learn the OASIS Moves for effective conversations with anyone in any situation. Each of the moves draws you closer to experiencing an oasis or a respite where positive and productive interactions can thrive. Research supports that when we are in such an open state, we are more creative and can envision new opportunities. Cues will help you to remember the moves when you need them. You will learn each component of the OASIS Conversation process:

- setting your intention and building rapport
- separating observations from assumptions
- becoming aware of assumptions, emotions, and background conditioning
- shifting from judgment to openness
- identifying what is important to you and others
- developing options and agreeing on solutions

You will benefit from understanding that people have different definitions of respect. You will discover how to work with resistance and difficult situations. You will learn how to embody an open mindset and assess both your inner climate and the relational and social environments in which you move. Finally, you will learn tips for creating habits that use the OASIS Conversation skills.

A mindset is a way of thinking that influences a person's perspective, attitude, and behavior. An open mindset is the belief, perspective, and behavior of being present and aware of "what is" and also anticipating "what is possible or unfolding." An open mindset involves being responsive and welcoming rather than reactive and dismissive. An open mindset involves being curious, compassionate, appreciative, non-judgmental, and optimistic. What are some results for leaders who embody an open mindset and engage in OASIS Conversations? Many report the ability to be centered and present amid turbulence. Open-minded leaders grow to trust themselves. They are able to cultivate the emotions related to high performance. Open-minded leaders have the ability to identify compelling goals and inspire others to see possibilities and become engaged. They are able to create positive cli-

mates and cultures that support open conversations enabling positive outcomes. With the mindset of openness, leaders approach others with genuine curiosity and thoughtfulness; they are more apt to ask rather than tell. Open-minded conversations facilitate more engagement, more innovation, and positive results. Embracing the open mindset and OASIS conversational skills will support you in being an effective and successful leader who fulfills your potential and makes a difference in your sphere of influence.

## **Examples of When to Engage in Open-Minded OASIS Conversations**

For a long time, I have been trying to figure out how leaders can create an environment where people with different viewpoints can work together in a satisfying way that still allows productivity to skyrocket. As an organization development consultant, executive coach, and leadership development expert for over twenty-five years, I find challenging situations that consume a lot of energy to be the norm. Let me give you some examples of how this is the case both in the workplace and at home.

### *At Work*

- Detail-oriented Melissa works on a team with Joe, who typically focuses on the big picture—details annoy him.
- Anita, an executive star at a Fortune 100 company, feels that her boss is not supportive of her ideas. She feels exhausted and unappreciated.
- Jeff, who sees himself as creative, considers deadlines a target rather than a fixed point. He reports to Robert, who rules by strict deadlines.
- Managers from a paper company complain that their new teammates from a merger speak French in front of them instead of English. They assume their counterparts are talking negatively about them. The colleagues, speaking their native tongue, believe they deserve a break from the challenge of speaking a second language for hours at a time and see no reason for their teammates' concern.
- While a company president has exceeded his target goals, his

board of directors questions his forthrightness in sharing information. He spends a lot of energy feeling undervalued and not trusted.

- Despite the adage that “the most valuable asset is a truly satisfied customer,” few customers in airports or retail clothing stores believe they receive effective service or that their complaints are heard.

### *At Home*

- Some family members differ in how they value saving versus spending money. Others have preferences about how the dishes should be washed. More seriously, they may differ about the nature of the religious beliefs they practice and the best way to raise children. In the realm of everyday matters such as house-keeping, Jerry labels his partner a “pack-rat” and in return is called a “neat freak.”
- Neighbors have become polarized over a proposal for a museum to be built in their community that would replace a park. They resort to name calling and labeling each other as “racist” rather than exploring the range of options together.
- A great divide exists where people cannot talk freely to their neighbors and family members who support different candidates and different political solutions.

Few of us have formally learned the skills to have effective conversations that address challenging issues such as these and result in satisfactory interactions. The OASIS Moves detailed in this book will give you a way of assessing what is needed in an interaction and how to create a positive and productive interaction for unparalleled results. Each move represents a component found in productive conversations. Each move has a kinesthetic action that helps you move closer to creating an oasis of possibilities. My hope is these moves will enable you to interact more effectively with others and experience more impact and confidence in influencing others as these moves have done for many others around the globe.

Understanding the following principles has supported me and others in experiencing more effective interactions:

- We all see and experience the world differently based on our backgrounds and conditioning.
- We naturally pay attention to different things.
- We all want respect, yet we each have different definitions of respect.
- We are naturally biased and tend to judge others to protect ourselves.
- When we are in judgment and closed, others naturally become closed and defensive.
- We have a basic human need for empathy and understanding.
- Emotions are contagious.
- When we help others to feel understood, they relax, are more open, and can envision more possibilities.
- When we are clear about our agreements, things go more smoothly and significant change is possible.
- When we have open-minded conversations, we are more satisfied and productive.
- Conversations enable real and substantial change.

One challenge is that we fail to remember these principles when we most need them. OASIS Conversations is a way to recall them and engage in satisfying and productive interactions. The good news is that you can create the habit of engaging in open-minded conversations for better results. You will find OASIS Moves particularly useful in those challenging conversations when you disagree with or misunderstand another person's viewpoint or behavior. You might believe that you are "right" and the other person is "wrong." If you feel particularly strong about your viewpoint, it is time to call on the OASIS Conversation pathway to support you. You can also use the process to assess what is needed in your interactions.

### *Proven Results*

The OASIS Conversation process has been tested with leaders all over the world in organizations such as the United Nations, Cleveland Clinic, GE Capital, Chubb Insurance Group, New York-Presbyterian Hospital, Ford Motor Company, Caterpillar, International Finance Corporation, the World Bank, Consumers Union, and a wide range of

nonprofit and private organizations. Many participants have reported significant shifts in how they interact, greater productivity, and more fulfillment. People report that the tools and concepts are easy to remember and they continue to embody an open mindset and employ the OASIS Moves in their daily interactions. Many report that learning the OASIS Conversation Moves has been life-changing. I wish the same for you.

Using OASIS Moves, Jim and Harold, executives of a Fortune 100 company who had been feuding, came to understand each other. Jim was the head of information technology at the corporate headquarters and Harold was responsible for information technology in the company's key business operation responsible for implementing new technology to meet customer demands. Because they could not agree, Harold essentially duplicated Jim's corporate efforts. They ran into a firewall problem that could not be solved by the two of them. Many consultants were brought in at great expense. Finally, I spent a few days with the two of them and taught them the OASIS Conversation process. At first, it was difficult for them to be in the same room. After learning and using OASIS, they created a workable solution that could not have been imagined previously, resulting in multimillion dollar savings.

A consumer goods company acquired a previous rival, but the two company's leaders did not see eye-to-eye. The sales forces continued to compete with one another rather than working together. After learning and using the OASIS Conversation process, leaders came to agreement on fundamental issues, which allowed them to stop wasting energy fighting, gain significant market share, and increase their bottom-line.

Carli, an executive at a Fortune 50 company, contemplated leaving after twenty years of success because she was exhausted from the lack of support by her manager. She believed he did not like working with her, was withholding information, and was not including her in some meetings. She assumed it was because she was a woman and direct in her communication. After some coaching, she tried the OASIS Moves and discovered he was angry because he learned she was complaining about him. After their mindful conversation, he became one of her best supporters. They found common ground and began working well together. Within a short while, Carli was promoted, based on her manager's support.

People using OASIS Conversations in workplaces report that they are enjoying their peers, working more effectively, experiencing less stress, and feeling more engaged at work. Others tell about promotions and advancement in their careers. For instance, Mark went from low performance ratings and almost losing his job to becoming a partner in a major consulting firm. Maddie, a law firm partner, said she now knows how to work more successfully with her staff. Rather than fire a staff member recently, she had an OASIS conversation with him, clarified their expectations of each other, and celebrated his growth into a strong performer. She confesses that she fired many before him when she was unaware of what else she could do. Now she knows the process and can function more effectively.

Others have forged new business partnerships and developed creative innovations, resulting in significant savings and profit. People from different and often differing departments successfully had meaningful conversations, came up with a plan, and took effective steps to support the organization's success. Companies gained significant market share and became more competitive. Many managers conducted fruitful conversations with their staff and colleagues, despite contentious interpretations about expectations. In one organization, some of the most talented staff were leaving because of the leader's demanding expectations. After a meeting using OASIS Moves, Julie, the leader, and her team came to a shared understanding that gave greater flexibility to individuals, but still helped them achieve organizational goals.

Companies acknowledge more satisfactory customer relations and enhanced employee engagement scores. Many individuals report more energy and better health. As you may be aware, the correlation between stress and poorer health has been well-documented.

In one company where OASIS was introduced, 99 percent of managers reported continuing to use the OASIS Conversation process three years after taking a workshop. Ten years later, participants continue to praise the value of OASIS and how the process has improved their work environments. Another client had an outside firm conduct focus groups, interviews, and surveys to assess the impact of its training programs. Programs that taught OASIS Conversations have consistently received the highest scores and praise, even years after people take the workshop. In fact, the organization expanded the OASIS courses

to most levels and locations across the world. A Wall Street firm was concerned about low engagement scores and mistrust among staff and management. After OASIS Conversation workshops, post-scores on employee engagement and satisfaction surveys skyrocketed. Tensions between departments and within areas were greatly reduced. The leaders of a Fortune 100 company engaged in OASIS Conversations dealt with longstanding issues and found common ground. The alignment of the senior team positively translated into a smoother running company and better results.

OASIS Conversations have proved valuable across cultures, functions, and levels. It has been shared in many countries around the globe. It has also worked in diverse organizations from manufacturing, financial services, health care, government and non-governmental agencies, privately held companies, and technical and consulting firms.

People using OASIS Moves share that they have more confidence and skill in all of their conversations, and thus, their personal lives are more enjoyable. One couple developed a solution to their ongoing and annoying skirmishes over the use of their TV's remote control! On a much deeper level, many parents enjoy more genuine conversations with their children. Some report having some of their most meaningful connections with adult children, family members, and friends after having used the process.

Finally, the OASIS Conversation pathway will support you in being more emotionally intelligent. Daniel Goleman, author of books and articles on the subject, defines emotional intelligence as the capacity to understand your own and others' emotions, as well as the capacity to motivate and develop oneself and others to improve work performance and enhance organizational effectiveness. Goleman's review of research across various disciplines shows that being emotionally intelligent is a critical ingredient for success. Ninety percent of the difference between outstanding and average leadership is linked to emotional intelligence. Research suggests that emotional intelligence may be the best predictor of success in life, much more than cognitive intelligence or IQ. While there is strong support for emotional intelligence, less information is available on *how* to be emotionally intelligent. The OASIS Conversation process will show you *how*. You will learn how to be more self-aware and to manage your own emotions. You will also become aware of oth-



ers' emotions and views and be better able to relate to them and create results together.

I am glad to be on this journey with you. I welcome hearing your thoughts and what you learn as you experiment with this process. Please share your insights with me at [Ann@Potentials.com](mailto:Ann@Potentials.com).

With regards,

*Ann Van Eron*

Ann Van Eron, Ph.D.

# What Are OASIS Conversations?

## *An Overview*

*“It all depends on how we look at things,  
and not on how they are themselves.”*

— Carl Jung

An OASIS Conversation is a powerful, five-step, easy-to-grasp process for creating a positive environment and communicating productively with others to produce agreements, solutions, and fulfillment. Each of the “moves” involves an internal awareness and choice of action. Over time, the process becomes seamless for its practitioners, and it is what we do naturally in successful interactions. Knowing the components enables you to assess what may be needed to ensure a positive and productive interaction. The acronym stands for:

**O = Observation**

**A = Awareness** (of assumptions, emotions, and background)

**S = Shift** (to being open)

 **= Importance**

**S = Solution**

OASIS is also a metaphor. What would be possible if you could create the experience of an oasis in your interactions? What if you could turn the desert of miscommunication that exists between you and others into an oasis where you can meet and have a refreshing

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conversation—one that allows you each to understand where the other is coming from so you can develop empathy and insight and reach mutually beneficial agreements? You and your partners would feel more relaxed and refreshed understanding “what is” and be open to new possibilities.

Let’s explore OASIS Moves in detail.

### **O = Observation**

The first move of the OASIS Conversation process is identifying what is observed or heard—separating the data from our assumptions or interpretations. For a reference point, think about the suspenseful ’60s TV series *Dragnet*. “Just the facts, ma’am,” the main character, a police investigator, would say when interviewing a woman about a particular crime. To observe takes practice. Read the following example.

Imagine you have a regularly scheduled 9:00 a.m. staff meeting and one of your team members arrives at 9:30 a.m.—again. You immediately feel undermined in your authority. After all, this is the third time in a row he has been late. You might think, *He clearly does not respect me*. You wonder whether other team members are watching your reaction. You note that others are also beginning to come late and are not expecting to start right away. After all, if he comes late, why can’t they be late? They know he’s critical to the meeting and that it probably won’t start without him. So you ask yourself: Will anyone turn up on time for next week’s meeting? I had to get up early to be here on time. What makes him think the rules don’t apply to him?

Your emotions have to do with your judgment of the situation and the assumptions you have made. However, they are *not* the observable data or the facts. Your observation (without interpretation) is simply that a staff member arrived at 9:30 a.m. three times in a row when the meetings were scheduled for 9:00 a.m.

**A = Awareness** of assumptions, emotions, and background,  
all of which prompt us to judge the situation

After noting your observation(s), it’s important to be aware of the assumptions, emotions, and background experiences that influence your thinking. These are separate from your observation and lead to judgment.

Assumptions: You might assume that the person who arrived at

9:30 doesn't care about being on time or is not committed to the team. Or you could assume something's wrong. Regardless, it is important to be aware.

Emotions: You might notice tightness in your chest and feel angry or disappointed when the team member arrives at 9:30 instead of 9:00. Identify your emotions by noting your sensations and by completing the sentence "I feel \_\_\_\_\_" with one word. Using this example, you might notice, "I feel disappointed."

Background: You might have had the background experience of working with another colleague who was often late, so you are reminded about that person's lack of reliability. Maybe you recall a parent telling you it is unacceptable to be late. Your background includes your past experiences, standards, and expectations.

### **S = Shift** (to being open)

Notice your internal reaction or signal. Then stop, step back, suspend reacting to your judgment, and shift your perspective and stance to being more open. Most of us have a physiological reaction when we are judging and believe the other is wrong. We also have an internal voice or conversation that says, among other things, that we are "right" and the other "wrong." We can learn to identify our judgment signals. At this point, it is critical to substitute judgment with openness to and curiosity about the other person's perspective. This involves activating a different part of the brain that is creative and open to possibility. Others sense when we are open rather than judging.

Perhaps you have judged the team member who arrived late as unreliable. You may be thinking, "I am right and he's wrong." Often, people experience a recurring signal when they make judgments. Internal signals vary from person to person. Yours could be a tightening of your stomach or jaw or another physical cue. If your emotions are strong, the OASIS Conversation process has strategies for cooling down. When you notice your judgment signal, remind yourself to assume positive intent and remember your intention to create an OASIS experience with the other person and become open to the possibilities.

### **I = Importance**

Now that you're open, you are ready to communicate. When you say, "I've noticed that for the past three weeks, you've arrived at 9:30 for the 9:00 a.m. meeting," you are calm and not being accusatory. As you

ask questions of the other person and listen actively, the task is to focus on what is important to you, what is important to the other person, and what is important to you both. You seek understanding.

What you discover is that your team member has been late because he has another meeting at 8:00 a.m. in a distant building across the corporate campus. Your colleague sent you an e-mail some time ago and assumed you recalled he would be attending these other meetings. You don't recall the e-mail and recognize that you don't always read all of your messages. You share that you have missed the input of this individual and that his absence has had an impact. Perhaps others are coming late because they think if he can, they can too; others may simply be irritated that he is late. You also are wasting valuable time by repeating important information when he comes in—time you don't have to waste because you are two days behind on project Z.

This move of the OASIS process is about increasing understanding. You end up with a statement like, “We are both committed to our team working well and making headway on this project. Given that it is important for you to attend the other meetings and it is important for me to have you included in our team discussion and update, what are our options?” If it were not a misunderstanding and oversight, as in this case, you would still want to understand what was going on for the other person and express your needs and what is important to you. When joint goals exist, there is incentive to find a solution.

### **S = Solution**

After you understand what is important to all involved, you then explore possible options and solutions. You could change the time or location of the meeting, your colleague could call in from a cell phone, the staff member could provide a written report that could be read, etc. This is where you both agree on what each of you will do—what concrete behavior or action each of you will take. Your team member may agree to poll other staff members about their availability for an alternate meeting time. You may agree to change the meeting if the rest of the team can make another time. What could have become a negative situation now has become an opportunity to connect with each other.

Many managers and teammates have struggled over such situations. One of my clients, Jim, actually fired a staff member publicly when he was late for the third time to a staff meeting. Jim, the man-

ager, was new to the organization and intuitively “knew” he was not being respected by this longtime employee. Engulfed by his anger, Jim told the staff member to leave immediately. This action cost Jim a lot in respect with his other colleagues, since everyone but Jim knew the staff member had a long-standing arrangement to arrive late because of family obligations. (Luckily, this issue was re-addressed in a more positive way soon after.)

The OASIS Conversation process works in many complicated situations because it helps you to understand your response and to remain open-minded so you can understand others without judgment and come to a mutually satisfying agreement. If an employee is coming late to meetings because he or she doesn't value meetings and you believe they are important, the process will support you when you talk about it with him or her.

In contrast to the example above, Mike, a group leader, was able to slow down and be open to hearing why his staff member, Julie, was having difficulty getting to meetings on time or at all. Julie was in sales, so she was often on the road and meeting with clients at the meeting time Mike had established. After exploring what was important to each of them, they agreed that reaching sales targets was most important. Mike needed to be kept informed and provided information, while Julie needed to meet with key clients when they were most available—hence, the conflict around meeting time. They agreed on an arrangement that worked for both of them so each felt respected and valued. In this case, Julie would inform Mike in advance if she would not be at a meeting and she would provide a written update. She took responsibility for getting information from her coworkers. By using OASIS Moves, Mike and Julie had a conversation that saved their relationship. Both felt satisfied and they achieved their business goals.

OASIS Conversations enable us to complete the circuit that connects us with others. Just as incredible power exists in an electrical connection, equal or greater power exists in those magical moments of human connection. OASIS Conversations empower us to create those magical moments every day, which means more creative, productive, and harmonious relationships. Then, we actually experience an *oasis* with each other. I personally use these skills daily—with my colleagues, family,

clients, and neighbors, and they have made a wonderful difference in my life. My clients in organizations around the globe report the same satisfaction and positive results. Your own sustained practice will allow you to use OASIS Moves increasingly quickly and effectively in ever more challenging moments. The process works when conversing with one person or with a group. Think carefully about some of your most challenging interactions as you read the rest of this book. Next, plan your conversations with the people involved.

In summary, you will benefit from this book when you:

- Learn the OASIS Conversation process, and work to incorporate it into your life.
- Practice using OASIS Moves in your interactions.
- Commit to creating an environment of openness and respect.
- Discover your questions.
- Reinforce the concepts.

In the next chapter, I will define and investigate the meaning of respect, a critical ingredient for effectively influencing others and producing results. Then we will examine how to prepare for OASIS Conversations. The chapters that follow explore each of the OASIS Moves: Observation (O), Awareness (A), Shift (S), Importance (I), and Solution (S). Then, in Chapter 10: Putting It All Together, you will review a successful OASIS Conversation and learn how to work most effectively with resistance. Next, we will explore how to work with especially challenging situations where there are struggles. We will highlight some stances that support having an open mindset. Finally, we will explore ways to build the OASIS Moves habits and provide support for your journey.

# About the Author



Ann Van Eron, Ph.D., MCC, is founder and principal of Potentials, a global coaching and organization development consulting firm coaching leaders and teams all over the world for over twenty-five years. She specializes in creating positive environments where people have open-minded and productive conversations for greater results.

Her clients include Fortune 100 corporations, nongovernmental organizations, healthcare agencies, and non-profit and privately held companies. Ann promotes leadership development and teaches managers how to be effective in coaching their teams. She assists organizations in creating cultures of respect and openness for unparalleled results. She engages people in having mindful conversations for impact using her proven OASIS Conversation process. She is an author and speaker and offers training, coaching, and consulting to leaders, teams, organizations, and coaches. She is certified as a Master Coach and has a doctorate in Organization Psychology from Columbia University. Ann is committed to assisting people in fulfilling their leadership potential and enjoying life.

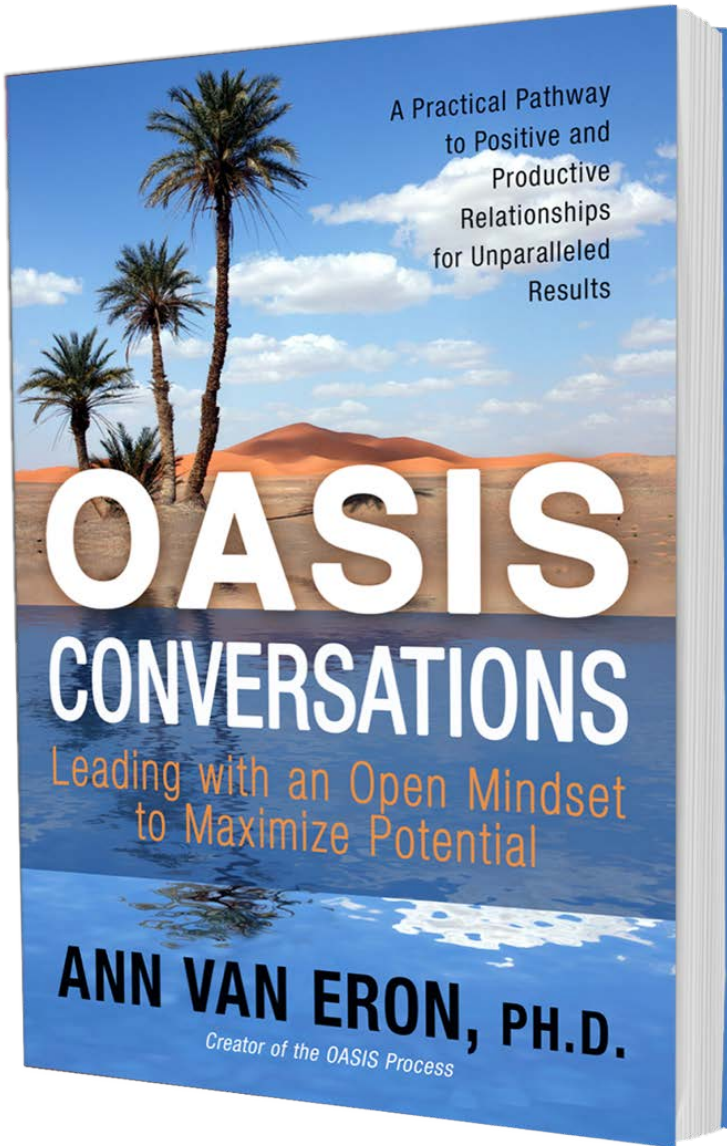
Ann lives in Chicago and enjoys photography, art, nature, traveling, and learning new things with colleagues, friends, and family. She is committed to being of service and making a difference.

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