Be More Roshi, 'The Culture Code', (extract) – Coyle, (2018) p149-157

"I try to create the conditions for good things to happen." – Roshi Givenchi

"While questions comprise only 6 percent of verbal interactions, they generate 60 percent of ensuing discussions." – Robert Bales

Roshi Givechi works in the New York office of IDEO, the international design firm headquartered in Palo Alto, California. IDEO has won more design awards than any other company in history. The group consists of 600 people who are divided into small teams and tasked with meeting challenges that range from designing global plans for disaster response to building a smartphone charging handbag and everything in between.

Officially, Givechi is a designer. Unofficially, her role is to serve as **a roving catalyst**, involved in a number of projects, helping the teams navigate the design process. *"When teams are stuck, or if there's a tough dynamic, Roshi is like magic,"* says Duane Bray, an IDEO partner. *"She's incredibly skilled at* ***unlocking teams, asking questions that connect people and open possibilities."***

Givechi, a small woman in her forties... radiates a contented stillness, as if you've met many times before.

"Socially, I'm not the chattiest person," Givechi says. *"I love stories, but I'm not the person in the middle of the room telling the story. I'm the person on the side* ***listening and asking questions.*** *They're usually questions that might seem obvious or simple or unnecessary...* (e.g What are the barriers? Where is the friction?) *But I love asking them because I'm trying to understand* ***what's really going on."***

She gathers the group and asks questions designed to unearth tensions and help the group **gain clarity about themselves and the project.** The word she uses for this process is '*surfacing*'.

Be More Roshi, cont.

"I like the word connect," Givechi says. *"For me, every conversation is the same, because it's about helping people walk away with* ***a greater sense of awareness, excitement and motivation to make an impact.*** *Because individuals are really different. So you have to find different ways to make it comfortable and engaging for people to share what they're really thinking about. It's not about decisiveness – it's about discovery. For me, that has to do with* ***asking the right questions in the right way."***

When you talk to Givechi's colleagues, they point out a paradox: She is at once soft and hard, empathetic but also persistent. *"There's an underlying toughness to Roshi,"* says Lawrence Abrahamson, an IDEO design director. *"She doesn't present an agenda, but of course there is an agenda behind that, and it's gentle guiding... There's* ***a spirit of provocation*** *constantly at play, to nudge, to help us think beyond what's immediately in front of us. And it usually starts with questioning the big obvious things... You find yourself comfortable opening up, taking risks, telling the truth."*

The real power of the interaction is located in the two-way emotional signalling that creates an atmosphere of connection that surrounds the conversation.

Roshi has the ability to pause completely, to stop what must be going on in her head, to focus completely on the person and the question at hand, and to see where that question is leading. She isn't trying to drag you somewhere, ever. **She's truly seeing you from your position, and that's her power.**

"The word ***empathy*** *sounds so soft and nice, but that's not what's really going on,"* says Njoki Gitahi, a senior communication designer. *"What Roshi does requires a critical understanding of what makes people tick, and what makes people tick isn't always being nice to them. Part of it is that she knows people so well that she understands what they need. Sometimes what they need is support and praise. But sometimes what they need is a little knock on the chin, a reminder that they need to work harder, a nudge to try new things. That's what she gives... She doesn't let things stay unclear, even when they're uncomfortable. Especially when they're uncomfortable."*