

Zoom On: Vonda Vaden Bates



[Vonda Vaden Bates](#)

*****@***10thdot.com

CEO - 10th Dot

[LinkedIn](#) [Twitter](#) [Facebook](#)

Vonda Vaden Bates is an alliance builder and leadership coach with over 30 years of experience helping professionals and organisations succeed. In 2012, her husband, Yogiraj Charles Bates, died from one of the most common preventable causes of death, known as hospital-associated venous thromboembolism. In 2013, Vonda decided to contribute her skills to the Patient Safety Movement Foundation to help advance the mission of Zero Preventable Harm. Vonda uses her compassionate voice, strategic skills, and collaboration expertise to help improve communication and safety in healthcare.

She believes that a multidisciplinary approach is needed to ensure the safe delivery of medical care -- and that safety science is strengthened with interdisciplinary collaboration from social scientists, behavioural scientists, organisational systems development professionals, artists, and the public which depends on safe medical care. Vonda is the CEO of 10th Dot®, a company founded by her late husband, which coaches and trains individuals, teams and organisations to perform at their best.

What are your key areas of interest and research?

My professional fields encompass Organisational Development, Systems Development, Relationship Consulting, and Engagement Strategy. My experience has been primarily applied toward helping people develop personally in order to succeed professionally and organisationally. I also apply years of training in mindfulness philosophies (with a focus on navigating the nervous system with contemplation, breath and meditation) and community building through artistic endeavours and audience engagement.

In terms of research, my greatest curiosity is how executive function, errors and mindfulness stress reduction are related. I'm particularly interested in executive functioning, which is the brain's ability to deploy attentional resources and flexibly adapt to provide optimal decision-making.

Questions that I'm interested in include:

- What helps increase executive function?
- How can individuals identify what helps their own executive function?
- How can safety be improved by attending to a person's executive function while giving and receiving medical care?

What are the major challenges in your field?

Two major challenges faced in my field of work are similarly found in healthcare. Much like the fields of organisational and systems development, the medical arts are founded upon addressing personal matters by people who are guided and constrained by the structure of systems.

To address this dynamic, my colleagues and I hone skills to relate both intimately and strategically. Taking an intimate approach means to work with what is without attempting to change it. This is a helpful way to orient with a person or a new situation. It's also a great learning strategy. This is in contrast to taking a strategic approach which intends to change behaviours or a situation.

Both an intimate and strategic approach are valuable. A challenge commonly faced by clinicians, which I also face in my profession, is knowing
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which of the two approaches is more likely to support good outcomes in a given situation. Challenging, also, is gaining the skill to be nimble enough to approach many circumstances with an intimate or strategic approach, given what is called for. Most people, not just clinicians, will tend to use one of these approaches as a solution for most circumstances. This can limit their effectiveness.

What is your top management tip?

Instead of complaining about someone or something, I take a look at how I might be like that or might avoid being like that. It's easy to focus on improving others without first attending to one's own opportunities for positive behavioural change. It's easy to believe that if I control circumstances around me, I'll have a better experience. In most situations, however, changing my own perspective and behaviour gives me far greater control over a situation.

What would you single out as a career highlight?

One of my career highlights happened while contracting with a Fortune 500 retailer. We collaborated to shift from a 'Tell' culture to an 'Engaged' culture. I remember getting the initial call from an executive leader who presented a familiar problem I had seen with other clients. The corporate sales executives were noticing that their regional, district and store leaders were not meeting their annual sales goals. With the support of the communications team, I was successful in convincing them to draw out annual goals from these leaders and to measure their success based on what they wanted to achieve rather than what they were told to accomplish. The corporate team was surprised when the store and district managers actually set their annual goals quite a bit higher than prior years. We used participant engagement tools to track engagement and achievement over three years. Everyone saw noticeable performance improvements.

This directly aligns with patient-centred care in my opinion. When a person is engaged as an investor in their own outcomes, they will very often set higher expectations and find the wherewithal to achieve those aims.

If you had not chosen this career path you would have become a...?

I would have become a geologist. I'm fascinated with how the land has been and continues to be formed.

What are your personal interests outside of work?

I love spending time in solitude and quiet. I dance nearly every day. Spending time with family and friends brings me great joy, as does traveling to places I've only heard about and experiencing a wide array of people and places.

Your favourite quote?

Our organisational vision is to 'Share all things as the sun shares, without hesitation or discrimination'. I also love what my late husband proclaimed as his life goal – to "Love all and exclude none".

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