

Dana Bass Solomon: On The Art Of Listening

[Sherry Kallergis](#) 4 days ago



Dana Bass Solomon

The world often categorizes people by their role in life. Are you a leader or a follower? Talking with Dana Bass Solomon, CEO of Hollyhock, causes one to reframe that question and ask, “Are you a listener?”

Dana has spent the last 18 years nestled at the end of the road in North

America where thought leaders, big thinkers and innovators are cloistered, listening. The exchange of knowledge, wisdom and experiential learning is paramount in the effort to make the world better.

As Dana is getting ready to retire her position in the fall, she shared with At Forty-Five what she has learned. First, there are many kinds of listening:

Listen To Learn

As the director of a world renowned hot springs spa, Dana met some of Hollyhock's founding members. At the time, social enterprise was a cutting-edge topic that piqued her interest and social consciousness. Listening to descriptions of Hollyhock, she wondered if such a place really existed. A beautiful island campus where eagles fly by and salmon swim, offering a hundred programs per year. She and a friend arranged to attend the Social Venture Institute at Hollyhock on Cortes Island.

Listen To Understand

Listening and hearing what is being said or asked for is to listen to understand. Dana believes this is a critical and important life skill. She has fine-tuned it in her own daily practice and work at Hollyhock. She sees evidence that the most productive conversations and decisions are a result. The alternative, when one listens to reply, feeds into the self-confirmation of your own position and can tend to reduce receptivity to new ideas and information.



Dana and Joel Solomon Image by Sara Dent

Listen To Your Head, Heart and Intuition

When she first stepped in this hallowed spot her close friend said, “You are in trouble, Dana! Your life is going to change now because this is where you are meant to be.” She knew it was true; the work, the people, the very place resonated with her. She went back to California and carried on her life and work in the hospitality industry, but like a rippling stone the reverberations of that experience touched her life. Soon thereafter, Dana was invited to join the Hollyhock board. When the CEO position opened, she decided to apply and so the transition was put into motion. Relocating with her two younger children, she delved into creating and cultivating a place where listening happens on a grand scale. It seems fitting that as she was in route to Cortes, she happened to meet her future husband Joel Solomon.



The Sanctuary Image by Heidi Hueniken

Where Listening Happens

The Sanctuary is found past a beautiful little fruit orchard filled with lots of grassy areas and flowers. This hand built haven is where time stands still and yet many things happen. Every morning, people spend a half hour or 45 minutes to enjoy peace in silent self-guided mediation, listening to the birds singing. Or, on occasion, the haunting melody of the Australian indigenous didgeridoo. A special offering, Shine had just returned to Hollyhock in May 2017, for the second time, teaching a five-night program called ‘Dreamtime Didjeridu.’

Dana’s work reality is not the typical “nine to five” as she orchestrates services and visitors from around the world. Adept at running a virtual organization, many of her team are in Vancouver. The busiest time on Cortes Island runs April to October and then from autumn to spring, she spends

more time working with her team and partners in Vancouver.

What Is Hollyhock?

One needs to understand what Hollyhock is to appreciate the glorious opportunity Dana has been immersed in, supporting, learning from and listening to.

“Hollyhock exists to inspire, nourish and support people making the world better. The not-for-profit educational institute is dedicated to lifelong learning and cultural transformation, through programs, conferences and community.”

There is a campus on Cortes and a virtual one in Vancouver. The broad range of program offerings, trainings and conferences at any moment might include:



Hollyhock Image by Zack Embree

- **Media That Matters: Story, Money, Impact – Bill Weaver, Tracey Friesen & Sue Biely**
- **Evolutionary Leadership – Gibran Rivera**
- **Somatic Yoga: Movement Solutions For Pain Free Living – Rob Selmanovic**
- **Social Change Institute – Joel Solomon & Theodora Lamb**
- **Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy – Mark Lau PhD & Andrea Grabovac MD**
- **Going Under The Words: Creating Fiction and Memoir – Shaena Lambert**

You can also book a staycation holiday away from it all or join in on a global program like the *Galapagos Photography Adventure*. Hollyhock convenes several leadership institute conferences each year: *Social Change Institute (SCI)*, and *Social Venture Insititute (SVI)* on Cortes Island and in Vancouver.

SVI is a partnership with *SFU* and *Vancity*.

Hollyhock is the concept of social enterprise successfully at work. Social enterprise is described as a revenue-generating business that donates all profits back into a charity or cause with the goal of achieving social, cultural, community economic and environmental outcomes. In 1998, when Dana first got involved with Hollyhock, the notion of social venture was a new concept. It is now a mainstream business model with varying principles adopted by businesses, large and small.



Hollyhock Spring Garden Image by Heidi Hueniken

Traits of Women Leaders

After eighteen years, Dana notes the female leaders she has met at Hollyhock have some similar traits. It is evident that powerful and inspiring women:

- Are fierce about their beliefs and values.
- Work effectively towards being a positive influence.
- Dedicate their energy to connecting deeply, working smart and having fun.
- Pursue a personal passion.

Dana walks the walk – her business knowledge and experience allowing her to nurture her own passion, support emerging entrepreneurs, model how to do good with their time and money, and create organizational structures based on social enterprise.

A heart-centered leader, Dana helps others make a better world.

What I Know Now



Raven Meeting Hall
Image by Sara Dent

Dana shared three pieces of wisdom gleaned from her fifty-nine years that may be of use on your life journey:

- Following your dream and taking some personal risk is one of the most gratifying pursuits in life.
- Doing the things that interest you and excite your passion will attract likewise.
- When you are stuck, get outside into nature as quickly as possible. You will change your mindset, refresh your spirit and reset your direction.

What lies next is not immediately clear, but Dana will continue to listen. A lifelong learner, she may now have time to take in some of those amazing programs she has curated and enjoy the fruits of her labor at Hollyhock.

Dana invites you to visit her favorite slice of paradise, spend some quiet time in the Sanctuary and have a listen.

[Learn More About Hollyhock](#)

[Order the Program Catalogue](#)

Have you been to Hollyhock? Where is your favorite place to listen?

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