

SIX LEADERSHIP CONVERSATIONS

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One: The Invitation Conversation

Invitation replaces Mandate

Transformation occurs through choice. Invitation is the call to create an alternative future.

Sample Question:

What is the invitation we can make to inspire people to participate and own the relationships, tasks, and process that lead to success in our work?

What led you to accept the invitation?

What would it take for you to be present in this room?

What is the price others paid for you to be here?

Who in your life, living or dead, that you value and respect would you want to invite to sit with you and help make this meeting successful?

Two: The Possibility Conversation

Possibility replaces Problem Solving

The Possibility Conversation is one that focuses on what we want our future to be as opposed to problem solving the past. The possibility conversation frees people to innovate, challenge the status quo, and create new futures that make a difference.

Sample Questions:

What is the crossroads that you find yourself at this stage of your life or work or project?

What do we want to create together that would make the difference?

What can we create together that we cannot create alone?

What declaration of possibility can you make that has the power to transform the community and inspire you?

Three: The Ownership Conversation

Ownership replaces Blame

The Ownership Conversation is one that focuses on whose class or project is this? Confusion, blame and waiting for someone else to change are a defense against ownership and personal power.

Sample Questions:

How valuable an experience (or project, or class) do you plan this to be?

How much risk are you willing to take?

To what extent are you invested in the well being of the whole?

How have I contributed to creating the current reality?

What have I done to contribute to the very thing I complain about or want to change?

Four: The Dissent Conversation

Dissent replaces Lip Service

The Dissent Conversation is giving people the space to say "no". If we cannot say "no" then our "yes" has no meaning. People have a chance to express their doubts and reservations, as a way of clarifying their roles, needs, and yearnings within the vision and mission being presented. Genuine commitment begins with doubt, and "no" is a symbolic expression of people finding their space and role in the strategy.

Sample Questions:

What doubts and reservations do you have?

What do you want to say No to that you keep postponing?

What have you said yes to that you do not really mean?

What is a commitment or decision that you have changed your mind about?

What forgiveness are you withholding?

What resentment do you hold that no one knows about?

Five: The Commitment Conversation

Commitment replaces Barter

The Commitment Conversation is about individuals making promises to their peers about their contribution to the success of the whole project. It is a promise for the sake of a larger purpose, not for the sake of personal return.

Sample Questions:

What promise am I willing to make to this project?

What is the price I am willing to pay for the success of the whole effort?

What is the cost to others for me to keep my commitments, or fail in my commitments?

What's the promise I'm willing to make that constitutes a risk or major shift for me?

What is the promise I am postponing?

Six: The Gifts Conversation

Gifts replace Deficiencies

What are the gifts and assets we bring to the enterprise? Rather than focus on our deficiencies and weaknesses, which will most likely not go away, focus on the gifts we bring and capitalize on those. Instead of problematizing people and work, the conversation is about searching for the mystery that brings the highest achievement and success in work organizations. Confront people with their essential core that has the potential to make the difference and change lives for good.

Sample Questions:

What gift have you received from another in this room? Tell the person in specific terms.

What is the gift you continue to hold in exile?

What gift do you hold that no one knows about?

What are you grateful for that has gone unspoken?

Principles

- Questions are more powerful than answers. Questions should be ambiguous, personal, anxiety producing.
- Small groups of 3 or 4 allow everyone to be engaged. People should sit close together, knees 9" from neighbor.
- Participants should not give each other advice. Goal is to express your own ideas and listen deeply to others.

Implementation

1. **Set up the room.** Begin in a circle. All large group activities in a circle.
2. **Begin with a connection question in the large group.**
 - What led you to accept the invitation?*
 - Why was it important for you to be here today?*
 - What would it take for you to be present in this room?*
 - What is the price others paid for you to be here?*
 - Who in your life, living or dead, that you value and respect would you want to invite to sit with you and help make this meeting successful?*
3. **Break into small groups** for one of the six conversations. Use chairs only, no tables.
4. **Come back to the large group** and ask "What struck you about this conversation?"
5. **Cover more questions.**
6. **At the end have a gifts conversation.**

Material on this handout is taken directly from the Civic Engagement Series booklet by Peter Block with approved adaptations for service-learning. The entire booklet can be downloaded at

http://www.asmallgroup.net/pages/content/6_conversations.html