

Dialogue Guidelines: Changing Confrontation to Cooperation

<http://traubman.igc.org/dialogue2.htm> You can read more about Dialogue at <http://www.igc.org/traubman/dialogue.htm>

Why dialogue?

Beginning with compassionate listening, dialogue can dissolve boundaries between people, heal relationships, and release unprecedented creativity. Dialogue can result in a wellspring of new social intelligence previously unimagined. Dialogue moves us out of our isolated existence and beyond our restricted views. We begin to understand diversity in perception, in meaning, in expression – in people. With this authentic speaking and authentic listening to each other, to Earth, to Life, together we can invent a way of living that works for the benefit of all.

Communication

Communicate: from *communicare*, to participate, impart, and *communis*, common. To connect; convey knowledge or information; create an opening to, or connection with; transmit information, thought, or feeling so that it is satisfactorily received or understood; open into each other; recount; give; commune; share or participate; possess or enjoy in common; partake of the Lord's supper; reveal clearly.

Not all communication is dialogue. We choose how we wish to communicate. There is *banal communication* which feels boring, oppressive, or depressing. This is common when participants are trying to avoid conflict, intimacy, or surprises. It is reflected in extreme politeness, tightly-controlled meetings, and alienated relationships. *Antagonistic communication* includes debate, conversation, discussion that can't seem to move beyond conflict. Discussion is from the same root word as percussion and concussion, and connotes striking, shaking and hitting. Discussions are more like ping-pong games, with participants hitting their very solid ideas and well-defended positions back and forth. By comparison, dialogue is *creative communication* that engages people's diversity and imagination. It is mutual exploration to build greater shared understanding, meaning, connection, and possibility. The result is better relationships and a new social intelligence.

Commitment

Effective dialogue is "sustained dialogue." It truly is a process, and takes dedication and time. Successful dialogue cannot be a passing fancy or hobby. It must be a preoccupation. Commitment to each other and to the process is important, as in any relationship. The more all participants are aware of the nature of dialogue and committed to bringing it about, the better the chance it will happen.

Dialogue compared with Debate

Dialogue is very different than our usual ways of communicating. The specifics of dialogue can be easily forgotten, so it helps to review the principles.

- *Dialogue is collaborative: two or more sides work together toward common understanding.* Debate is oppositional: two sides oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong.
- *In dialogue, finding common ground is the goal.* In debate, winning is the goal.
- *In dialogue, one listens to the other side(s) in order to understand, find meaning, and find agreement.* In debate, one listens to the other side in order to find flaws and to counter its arguments.
- *Dialogue enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view.* Debate affirms a participant's own point of view.
- *Dialogue reveals assumptions for reevaluation.* Debate defends assumptions as truth.

- *Dialogue causes introspection on one's own position.* Debate causes critique of the other position.
- *Dialogue opens the possibility of reaching a better solution than any of the original solutions.* Debate defends one's own positions as the best solution and excludes other solutions.
- *Dialogue creates an open-minded attitude: an openness to being wrong and an openness to change.* Debate creates a closed-minded attitude, a determination to be right.
- *In dialogue, one submits one's best thinking, knowing that other people's reflections will help improve it rather than destroy it.* In debate, one submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenge to show that it is right.
- *Dialogue calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs.* Debate calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs.
- *In dialogue, one searches for basic agreements.* In debate, one searches for glaring differences.
- *In dialogue, one searches for strengths in the other positions.* In debate, one searches for flaws and weaknesses in the other positions.
- *Dialogue involves a real concern for the other person and seeks to not alienate or offend.* Debate involves a countering of the other position without focusing on feelings or relationship and often belittles or deprecates the other person.
- *Dialogue assumes that many people have pieces of the answer and that together they can put them into a workable solution.* Debate assumes that there is a right answer and that someone has it.
- *Dialogue remains open-ended.* Debate implies a conclusion.

Some Guidelines for Dialogue

Listening

Listen with compassion and empathy from the heart. Avoid quick judgment or blame. Control the urge to argue, counter, dissuade, or fix.

Listen with equal respect to everyone, regardless of status or roles.

Listen for each person's special contribution to deeper understanding.

Listen from a place of learning rather than confirmation of current thinking.

Listen to the quality of your own listening.

Listen for common threads from the collective, from the community, from the whole - the collective mind.

Listen actively. Try not to let your mind wander or think about what you're going to say while others are speaking. Avoid interrupting.

Speaking

Speak from your heart, from your authentic life experience, from the moment. When possible, use "I" statements, instead of "we," "you," or "they."

Be willing to contribute even half-formed, unfinished ideas or thoughts. They may be the seeds of new insights and intelligence for the group.

Ask questions from a place of genuine curiosity, wondering, or not knowing, rather than to make a point.

Speak when you are truly "moved" rather than to fill a void. Allow for silence when appropriate.

Share air time. Try not to dominate the conversation.

Use considerate language. Avoid using labels whenever possible.

Acknowledge your new insights gained from the group.

Speak into the circle, into the whole group, into the stream of growing experience and shared meaning.

Avoid cross-talk, to avoid excluding others and turning them into spectators of one-on-one interaction. When you are silent, indicate your listening presence from time to time in the group, verbally or by eye contact or attentiveness.

Feel free to express your feelings when you have been offended or hurt.

Discovering

Focus on breakthrough-learning rather than being right. Seek to invent a common future with shared meaning, transcending old supposed limitations.

Move back from conclusions, toward observations and discovery. Notice what you're noticing and what meaning you're making of it.

Pay attention to your judgments, assumptions, and certainties. Hold them lightly, explore and examine them, and consider alternatives that may be just as useful.

Be present to what's happening inside you as well as in the group.

Be involved while being detached -- open to outcomes but not attached to specific outcomes.

Allow for pauses and silence -- reflection has its own rhythms.

Look for deeper levels of understanding. What is the "meaning" of something to the other person?

When there is a disagreement, keep talking. Explore the disagreement and search for areas of agreement -- common ground.

Be open to changing your mind. This will help you really listen to others' views.

Respect confidentiality. If you talk about your dialogue experience to people outside of the group, refrain from using people's names or sharing their personal experiences.