



# **Stirring the Pot**

## **Ingredients for Effective Communication**

*An Inviting Guide to the Invigorating Art of Dialogue*

Interpersonal Communication  
Strategic Process / Event Design  
Facilitation and Conflict Resolution

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## **Section One: Manual/Workbook Objectives**

This Manual/Workbook is designed to be used either in conjunction with a training or by itself. It is written for Cupertino city staff and volunteers, and other interested parties who seek to enhance their interpersonal communication and event design skills. Whether you are designing a staff meeting, a city-wide forum, or trying to chat up your neighbors to form a neighborhood block association, it is the objective of this publication to help you to be more effective and efficient, and to achieve your communication goals.

### **You Will Learn To:**

- Develop Clear Objectives for Interpersonal Interactions
- Listen Actively and Responsively
- Ask Effective, Thought-Provoking and Engaging Questions
- Analyze the Response Elicited by Various Styles of Communication
- Design a Strategic Communication Process
- Create a Climate for a Productive Event or Meeting
- Differentiate “Dialogue” from Debate
- Identify and Deal With Various Archetypes of Communication
- Solicit Diverse Life Experiences and Stories
- Manage and Encourage Differing and Conflicting Opinions
- Facilitate Discussions that Invite Open and Respectful Dialogue
- Set Standards for Evaluating Your Communication Processes

The writing style of this guide is designed to be inviting, easily accessible, and hopefully humorous at times. There is no reason that learning new techniques and skills should be laborious or make you feel as if you have been shoved back into one of those little desks with someone blabbering on and on. This is a user-friendly manual with exercises that can help you practice new skills. If you read this training material and it sparks a desire for further training, please contact Community Relations Coordinator Laura Domondon Lee at 777-3331, or by e-mail at [laural@cupertino.org](mailto:laural@cupertino.org)

This manual is divided into three sections that build upon one another, but feel free to read them in any order that captures your interest. Following this training material is a series of short exercises that can help you practice the skills presented. This is not a test. There is no quiz. The exercises are just here for your benefit and are designed to be fun and useful. Pick and choose the ones that strike you as the most helpful for your situation.

I hope you enjoy reading this manual and that it equips you to have interpersonal communication interactions that enrich your life and the lives of others. The cornerstone of public service is public communication and it is my goal that the communication perspectives and techniques presented here assist you in your engaging and vital work.

## **Taking a Communication Perspective**

We all communicate every day, right? But how do we view this communication? Is it simply a by-product of living in a society with other people instead of alone in a cave? Or does our method and style of communication have the power to actually **shape and create** the very society in which we live? In the Public Dialogue Consortium, we operate by the principle of “Social Construction.” What that simply means is that we believe that the *type* and *quality* of communication we engage in actually **determines** the kind of relationships we have with others and the way in which we shape our communities and our world.

So instead of looking “through” communication to try to decipher underlying causes of this communication, we choose to focus our lens **at** communication, to look for what we (as individuals or as a society) are creating together. In other words, if you analyze any particular communication episode, you can ask yourself, “What is getting made here?” Is it enriching, engaging, life affirming and positive? Or is it destructive, enraging, life draining, and negative? With every choice we make about how to communicate and interact with others, we continue to choose “what gets made” in any given situation.

So by offering you training in interpersonal communication and facilitation skills and inviting you to practice the techniques presented, we are in fact, also inviting you to help create a better world both for yourself, your family, and your community. As Cupertino City Manager Dave Knapp has said in public trainings, “the quality of your life is directly related to the quality of your relationships with others.” We sincerely hope that what you read in these pages helps to contribute to the quality of your working and private life and to your relationships with others.

Setting all this deep and serious talk aside for a moment, it is my personal wish that you have **fun** reading this manual. When I had the pleasure of learning these skills in graduate school, it was not quite the light read I am trying to provide you, so I hope that the writing style here will encourage you to pick these skills up, treat them as your own, and make them work for you!

## **Section Two: Strategic Process and Event Design**

### **2.1) Strategic Process/ Design Clear Objectives**

How many times have you fidgeted your way through a meeting feeling as if the space between every tick of the clock was an eternity? Many of us have had that experience more times than we care to remember. That is why it is so essential to have a clear focus on what you want to achieve when you invite people to a meeting or to a public event. It is essential that the first thing you do is sit down and think about the process you are initiating.

Is this a one-time event designed to come to a decision or is it a one-time brainstorming event, or is this the first in a series of meetings of events? How you design the event is entirely dependent on where you are in the process. If this is a two year process involving major public input, as well as committees, council meetings, etc. then you are going to want to give a lot of

thought to the sequencing of your events and what how each event will build on the last one, culminating in an event that achieves your intended purpose.

So just what is your purpose? That is the second question to ask you. Oftentimes the head of a meeting has a general idea of a topic they want to have discussed, but he/she has not taken the time to really think out what specific parts of the issues that they want to have addressed. This lends itself to digression and non-productivity.

It is crucial to actually list a series of objectives for your meeting. Start with your overall goal for the meeting or event, keeping in mind your time constraints. Then develop a list of objectives that you would like to see accomplished by the end of your session. It is easiest if these objectives are bullet pointed action items that are easy to replicate on an agenda and clearly indicate *what* will be accomplished. For an example of a list of objectives, you can refer to the Introduction page of this manual. You really want to hone in on exactly what it is you want your participants to leave the meeting/event/training having learned, brainstormed about, or decided on. If it would be useful, make sure that someone takes “minutes” as well as having the recorder making a more detailed record of the event.

## **2.2) Analyze Use of Time**

One of the easiest mistakes to make in organizing an event or meeting is to try to cram too many goals or objectives into the session. Especially if you are new to event planning, it is hard to estimate exactly how long each action item will take. So, you have to do your best to “guesstimate” how long each item will require and then add up the times for all of your objectives and see if it is logistically possible to complete them in the time allotted. It is best to leave yourself some “wiggle” room by padding the time by fifteen minutes to half an hour depending on the total length of your meeting or event. This gives you a chance to adapt to uncertain circumstances. Also be mindful of participants need to stretch once in a while, and perhaps take a food or restroom break. So if your meeting is longer than two hours, make sure to build in time for a quick refresher for your participants.

## **2.3) Develop an Agenda**

Once you have finalized your objectives and guessed at their time requirements, you are at the stage of needing to develop both an internal and a participant’s agenda. You want your guests to know what they can expect during the meeting so that they will follow the flow of the discussion. Additionally having an agenda in hand can help to head off people trying to jump ahead to things they want to cover because they are afraid they are not in your *personal unknown agenda*. You can choose to list approximate times for each item in the agenda, or decided to leave the times off if you are concerned that your guests will hold you too tightly to a certain time schedule. The only thing that you **must** do in terms of time is to be sure to begin and end on time because this builds faith in your process and stewardship of events and meetings.

Your internal agenda differs from the participant’s agenda in that you want to *make sure* to list times on the internal agenda, to help yourselves and others helping you with your meeting/event to be able to track your progress and make adjustments as necessary. You also can use this agenda to write more extensive information and instructions about the process, and give specific instructions to certain people about what their role will be and when and how you want them to perform it.

#### **2.4) Plan Meeting to Achieve Goals**

Okay you've got an agenda in hand, now it's time to take a last glance at your objectives and your agenda and make sure they complement one another. If you follow the sequence and activities on your agenda will you meet your stated objectives? If you had to cut something out based on time considerations, what could you cut? Have you given yourself enough time flexibility that you can follow the passion of the discussion without losing the ability to get through the crucial aspects of your agenda? In Section Four you will learn much more extensive information about how to actually facilitate your meeting to help you achieve your objectives, but at this moment you are concerned with making sure you have planned your agenda to match your objectives. To find out if your guests feel you have met your objectives, ask them to fill out a feedback form after the event, so that you can get objective opinions on how your meeting or event turned out.

#### **2.5) Transparent Objectives and Task Orientation**

In order to assure that you do achieve your goals you need to make sure that everyone at the meeting/event knows what those goals are. So you want to make sure that sometime near the beginning of your event, after the welcomes and logistical announcements, that you make your objectives clear. The only way you can make sure participants join in and meet the stated objectives, is by making crystal clear what they are. Obviously, when you are "floating" an idea, or "testing the waters" on something, or you don't want to share the reasons for designing the meeting/event the way you have, you do need to make your guests aware of what is expected from them. You also have to remind yourself that no matter how interested you may be in the discussion, you are also heading up the meeting so it is your dual function to both facilitate and participate in the meeting while keeping your mind focused on time constraints and meeting objectives.

#### **2.6) Trust and Relationship Building**

While task orientation is obviously a critical part of any event/ meeting or long-term process, equally critical and perhaps more so in some cases, is relationship and trust building. If you want people to be energized by an issue, they have to trust that you believe their contributions are valuable and important to decision makers. Obviously, not everyone's idea gets to be "the one" but everyone has to feel that they have an equal chance of being heard and that their perspective has merit. Sometimes when a meeting or event is at the beginning of a longer process, trust and relationship are the **main** purpose of the get-together. If you are going to ask people to be engaged in a long process they have to feel a certain sense of camaraderie or respect from the other people involved. If you are planning an internal staff meeting it is especially crucial that everyone feel a sense of connectedness and mutual respect.

So just how do you build trust and a positive relationship? Well, most of the techniques covered in the next two sections will provide you with the skills to achieve just that, but in brief, you want to make sure that people know that you are **sincere** in seeking out their opinions, that whatever issue at hand does not already have a foregone conclusion and that this meeting/event is not just "window dressing" or an attempt at "pacification" for those attending. Because if guests do indeed feel that their trust has been violated, not only will they not be likely to

participate positively in future meetings or events, but they may very well make attempts to subvert and obstruct future meetings and events, and “poison the well” so to speak, of public opinion about your process.

### **2.7) Encourage “Ownership” and “Buy-In” of the Process**

Whether this is a stand-alone meeting or event, or one in a series, you want to make sure to invite your participants to have some feeling of “ownership” of the process. Obviously some situations lend themselves better to this than others, since some things are eventually decided by a hierarchy, so in reality participants don’t have a large degree of ownership in the process, but they can still be encouraged to feel some sense of ownership in the progression and quality of the meeting. In other cases it is truly a situation where everyone can participate in some degree on deciding how to proceed forward from this particular meeting. Perhaps they can assist you in future event designs, or in recruiting guests for the event. Whatever way you can come up with to get people involved in your process and to “buy –in” to it’s value, is an invaluable tool in helping your event or project become a success.

### **2.8) Logistical Considerations**

Whether your event/meeting is for ten people or two hundred there are some common logistical considerations that you must take into account. Some of the most basic are:

**Where to hold the event:** If this is a city meeting, then obviously it is probably best held in a city facility that can accommodate the number of guests you are expecting. However if this is a neighborhood event, such as a Neighborhood Watch Meeting or a Block Party, you and your neighbors need to decide whether one of you would like to host the gathering at your home, ask for permission from the City to block off your street, or ask to hold the meeting in a city facility or park.

**Composition of the Guests:** If this is a Staff meeting, then the guest list may well be determined by the content of the meeting and who the relevant stakeholders are in this case your guest list is pretty much pre-determined.

For a private neighborhood event, or a large public forum or event, you want to give careful thought to making sure the demographics of your invitation list match the demographics of the city, and that you are giving adequate thought to balancing people of various ages, ethnicities, cultures, genders, etc.

In any case you want to make sure you are inviting enough people to get a representative take on any particular issue or set of issues, but not so many people that you have not adequately staffed and planned the event to hold that number of people.

**How to Frame the Event:** This is a crucial part of any event or meeting that doesn’t require compulsory attendance. Your invitation needs to “pop,” which means it needs to reach out and grab the person’s attention and use enough active verbs and upbeat language to attract them to your meeting/event. You want to make sure to cover the main objectives, and highlight any fun attractions of your event, such as food or entertainment.

**Serving Food:** is quite literally an icebreaker that tends to make people feel more at ease and



gives them a common focal point. It brings people together and I believe makes any meeting or event more fun and therefore more memorable. But this is always a matter of personal discretion and budget. If you are doing a neighborhood or small cultural event, you could consider asking people to bring dishes to share. If you are hosting a city meeting it is practically a necessity to at least offer water, and hopefully some other refreshments as well, since people are giving up their time to come and be civically engaged instead of watching reality TV. If a meeting is four hours long you will need to serve some type of substantive snack, and if it goes over four hours, it is advisable to serve a meal, if you want everyone's mood as well as their blood sugar to remain up!

**Timing of the Event:** This is one of the hardest items to get just right. In our 24/7 world everyone seems to be on a different schedule, then there are their children's schedules, and then there are school holidays, religious observances, etc. It is virtually impossible to meet the needs of everyone who you would like to have attend, so all you can do is pick a time that you believe will work best for the majority of the guest list, and then vary the times of subsequent events, so that perhaps other people can join in at the alternative times.

**Event/Meeting Room Set-Up:** In order to maximize a feeling of being on an equal footing with everyone else, with no one at the "head" of the table, it's ideal to use round tables. If this is not possible, the people who are truly the "people of power" might want to avoid sitting at the head of the table to avoid appearing "officious" and instead choose a seat somewhere in the middle, which others might find less intimidating.

When setting up a large room for an event you want to keep sight lines under consideration, making sure no one's view is obscured by a large pillar or post, or a big leafy plant! You also need to check with the group to make sure that everyone is hearing everything that they need to. It is best to designate the "front" of the room, or the place from which introductions, etc. will be made as part of the room which is not directly adjacent to the entrance so that late arrivals will not end up walking right by and potentially in front of the speaker. It is also less embarrassing for a late arrival to slip in and find a seat if they are entering from the back. You also need to take care that the front of the room is not directly in front of a large window that is streaming with bright light, because then people have to squint to see or avert their eyes from the speaker.

Make sure to have a table near the entrance with agendas and name tags for participants. It is not only useful and gracious for them, but it can be essential for you when you reach out to shake someone's hand who has been to twenty of your events/meetings only you are blanking on their name and don't want to hurt their feelings! It's great to be able to sneak a peek!

If money allows, it is nice to have some sort of thematic décor, such as Autumn Harvest, or something of the like that is not likely to alienate or disrespect any particular culture, but is rather a generic reflection of the seasons or the theme of the meeting. All things being equal, it's more enjoyable to attend a brightly colored and decorated event with food, than one without those things!

## **2.9) Closing Procedures**

As mentioned earlier, it is imperative to begin and end on time. The beginning is usually sort of a

staggered affair if it is a large city-wide event, but the idea is that at least **you** are ready to begin on time and are not busy making last minute adjustments when guests start to arrive.

But when it's time for the event to end, **it's time for the event to end**. One of the ways to ensure that a participant leaves your event satisfied is to make sure you honor the time schedule that you created when you invited him/her. Energy always starts to lag toward the end of the event, and you want to get everyone out on a high note, so even if you have to make some time adjustments, as I mentioned earlier, it's important to end on time. So make sure you are having your host make a "wrapping it up, thank you" speech when it is five minutes before the end of the event. Depending on the event, and as time allows you may design your agenda so that the last activity is a de-brief of the activities that came before so that people get a chance to ask last questions, contribute last comments, etc. Again, it is also imperative in the closing remarks to remind participants what will be done with the information discussed at this particular event, and to let them know what they can expect in terms of future action or events.

## **Section Three: Interpersonal Communication**

### **3.1) Active Listening**

Truly being listened to can be an incredibly transforming experience in life. How many times have you felt like you had to tell the same story over and over because no one really "got" it? Have you ever felt that someone was pretending to listen while really just waiting for his or her chance to jump in and talk? Active listening requires the listener to be fully present in the moment, in both mind and body. The skills that follow will help you to be an attentive and *active* listener.

### **3.2) Paraphrasing or "Reflecting"**

After you feel that the speaker has had an adequate chance to get across much of what they are trying to say, it is appropriate to then restate your understanding of what they have said. This can take many forms, the easiest of which is to say something along the lines of, "I want to make sure I understand you correctly, what I heard you saying was...did I get that right?" If the speaker affirms that indeed you have understood them, you can move to asking them follow up questions, or if it is a question that has a direct answer, then you can provide it. If instead, they say you did not understand them accurately, then you can say something like, "I'm really glad you were able to clarify that for me, I am really interested in making sure I understand you.

Restating someone's comments may seem like a very simple skill, but it proves to be a very powerful one. The speaker feels acknowledged and understood, and can then move on to deepening the conversation, secure in the knowledge that they are being really listened to. Especially in conversations where there is conflict, or passionate feelings, restating a person's contributions can often go a long way toward disarming their anger or frustration. If you are having a conversation in a group, it also assures that everyone else in the group shares the same understanding of the speaker's comments.

**One of the most dangerous traps to fall into while facilitating a conversation is to**

**assume that you know what a speaker means by certain phrases or statements that are open to various interpretations. Oftentimes people use words like “family” or “community” while meaning very different things, yet assuming that everyone has a shared understanding of these terms.**

**In fact, even the simplest statements are not as clear as they might seem. If a spouse says to their partner, “Honey, we just have to let the baby cry a little while so that she’ll fall asleep,” it might seem very straightforward. But, what is a little while? A little while to one parent might be a minute and a half, to the other parent it might mean a half hour. So, by asking questions for clarification, you ensure that everyone in the conversation has a shared understanding of the words that are being used.**

As a public communicator/facilitator it is your job to make sure that you and the group, if applicable, all understand what the speaker is really intending to convey by their use of terms. You might ask questions such as, “When you said that you wanted Cupertino to be a stronger community, I was curious what a ‘stronger community would look like to you.” Or, “I noticed that you mentioned your passion for appreciating the cultural richness in Cupertino, I am interested to hear more about what you mean by that.”

### **3.3) Non-Verbal Communication**

#### **A. Listen With Your Entire Body**

When you are sitting in a darkened movie theatre engrossed in an exciting movie, do you tend to lean forward at particularly dramatic moments? This is the posture you can aim for when facilitating a conversation.

You want the speaker to feel that whatever they are saying is fascinating to you, and that you are eagerly and attentively taking it all in. If you are facing them and leaning slightly toward them, it non-verbally conveys that they have your full attention, and that you are focused on them.

If you add in the Vice-President or First Lady head bob to indicate that you are hearing and understanding what they are saying, it is also an effective way to indicate that you are listening.

#### **B. Match Eye Contact**

It is an old adage that it is important to make extensive eye contact when communicating with other people in U.S. culture. While this is still the rule of thumb, you want to make sure to be respectful of people from other cultures who may feel that an intense amount of eye contact is intrusive. That is why your goal can be to match the amount of eye contact that your speaker feels comfortable with.

If someone appears to be slightly uncomfortable with continuous direct eye contact, then you want to be sure that while you are not engaging in what he or she might feel is excessive eye contact, that you are still looking directly at them, and not to the side, or past the person.

### C. Limit Extraneous Gestures and Movements

While you are leaning in toward the speaker and maintaining appropriate eye contact, you are likely to be demonstrating active full body listening. What you want to avoid is side-glances at the clock, your watch, someone moving around the room, or other things of that nature. Nor do you want to be fidgeting your hands, your pen, or your feet. Some of us naturally tend toward fidgety behavior when excited, and while it is not actually a sign of disinterest or impatience, it almost always comes across as one.

### D. Avoid “Goldfishing”

Goldfishing is what I call the habit of opening one’s mouth over and over in an attempt to be recognized as the next one to talk. We are often used to models of dialogue (which are really debate masquerading as dialogue) where part of the intricate dance is to be actively waiting for your turn to speak, instead of actively listening to what is being said. This often shows itself in the goldfish gaping for air at the top of the tank face. So, in the words of grandparents of days past, “keep your ears open, and your mouth closed.”

### **3.4) Reflexivity and the Relationship Between Conversants**

Don’t worry, reflexivity and relationships do not relate to how well you can do yoga or build a human pyramid! Reflexivity is the simple notion that each communication utterance (thing you say) calls forth a certain response from the other person in the conversation, which then influences how you respond back again.

The “Relationship” between you and the other person involved in the conversation is also a critical factor in how one comment affects the next. You are very likely to have a quite different conversation with a city official than you would with your spouse or your child. Similarly, if you have generally had a positive history of interactions with any one individual, this is likely to inform how a current conversation will go. Obviously this would also apply to how you approach a conversation with someone with whom you have a negative history of communication.

The most important thing to remember is that although we all speak “out of a context” (our own life experiences and our particular experience with this person, and the issue at hand) and “into a context,” (the other person’s relationship to us, the issue at hand, and their life experiences) we each also have the power to influence, shape, and change that context by how we “act into” (what we choose to say and how we choose to say it) the current communication interaction. This is where reflexivity comes in. If you say something that elicits a negative response, you can choose to continue going down that path, or you can make a conscious effort to try to call forth a more positive communication experience by not reacting “out of the context” of anger or frustration, but instead attempt to say something (“act into the context”) that will cool the conversation down, or direct it to a more productive and positive path. If you try this technique and persist in it, you will be amazed at how it can transform your communication interactions both in public and in private settings.

### **3.5) Dialogue or Debate?**

In our current society what passes for dialogue about important issue is often quite pathetic.

We've all witnessed the same scenario countless times, where one person on one side of an issue tries to shout down, intimidate, interrupt, and basically discredit the other person's "opposing" view. But what does that really end up creating? Does either person or "side" learn anything from one another? Do we learn the nuanced facets of an issue? Probably not. Instead we may unconsciously learn to model our communication patterns in this same mold, because it is what we have been exposed to and barraged with virtually every day of our lives. Winners and losers, good and bad, left and right, right and wrong.

So what can we do about this? We can consciously reject this unproductive pattern of *debate* and instead choose to practice the satisfying art of *dialogue*. What differentiates dialogue from debate? In contrast to debate, where people are generally trying to "win" and diminish their conversation partners contributions, in dialogue each participant has the goal of truly listening to one another for **understanding** and seeking to identify differences and similarities in one another's points of view. Each conversant encourages the other to **share their story fully and without fear of degradation or ridicule**. While this does not imply that everyone will end up *agreeing* with one another, what dialogue does create is an atmosphere where everyone can fully and richly explore an issue from all perspectives and work together toward a mutually acceptable solution. All of the skills in this manual are designed to help you engage in dialogue and recognize debate for the unproductive and destructive force that it is. Obviously within dialogue there are times for persuasive speaking, but it is done with the goal of inviting someone to adopt a different perspective from the one they started out with, but not with the goal of "badgering" someone into adopting your point of view.

### 3.6) Appreciative Inquiry

Asking questions is something most of us have been doing since we first learned to talk. We all have habits and personalized ways that we ask questions, some based on the society we live in, some on the families we come from. Some of these familiar patterns are more useful than others. Unfortunately, a few of our usual ways of doing the questioning can get in the way of uncovering speakers true opinions.

We are a society who likes to fix things. When we enter into conversations which we know may involve conflict, or with people who we imagine may have divergent opinions, it is easy to fall back on "problem" language. We often begin asking people to begin their conversations with their statement of the "problem." What this gets us is battle lines drawn from the beginning of a conversation.

Especially when people first begin the process of getting together to discuss public issues there is often a tendency for people to start talking about problems. While you do not want to suppress people's legitimate concerns, neither do you want to encourage a complaint session, since "gripe fests" seldom achieve positive visions, or bring about successful change. So your goal is to elicit positive visions and comments from participants. You can do this by avoiding "deficit language," which is language that asks for problems, or points out what is lacking in something. Instead, your challenge is to use (and encourage your participants to use) **appreciative language**, which calls forth positive comments and brings to light the "resources" rather than the "deficits" in any given situation. What does that actually look like? Here are a few examples:

Instead of: *"What do you define as the most important problems we need to solve in the*

*neighborhood?”*

Try: *“What are some of the resources we have for making our neighborhood live up to our expectations?”*

Or: *“If our neighborhood was meeting our highest expectations for a great neighborhood, what kind of things would be happening?”*

Instead of: *“What are some of the problems you see brought about by the diversity of our community?”*

Try: *“Would someone like to share a positive experience they had which grew out of our community’s cultural diversity?”*

Or: *“The group has mentioned that there are some issues that need addressing in light of our community’s growing diversity. What could we do as a community to bring about our ideal vision of how diversity could contribute to the city?”*

Appreciative language attempts to elicit the visions and values that underlie people’s understanding of a particular situation or issue. This technique also recognizes that situations are not static, that there are points where things were different, or a possible future where they might be different. Appreciative language invites people to look at the positive resources in a group or a situation, and encourages people to get beyond a “stuck” place of discussing problems, and move instead to thinking about ideal visions. Once values and visions have been thoroughly explored, the group can move to potential actions, and they will be doing this from a context of having explored the situation appreciatively. In the PDC, we have a saying that we find useful, which is “Don’t question into the pathology.” Simply stated, this means don’t encourage people to plunge into problem language, and instead invite them into an appreciative positive visioning process.

### **3.7) Reframing**

Another useful way to uncover the visions that lie under complaints is to use a technique called “reframing.” This is a useful tool in many aspects of conversation. In this situation, it can enable the facilitator to turn a complaint into a vision. For example, if a speaker is complaining about the state of education, by saying that the state’s schools are awful and the teachers are under qualified, the facilitator might reframe the comments by saying, “I am struck by the passion you have about education, and I hear you saying that you think that the state’s schools could use some improvement. What are some of the positive changes that you would like to see, and how do you think this might be achieved?” This is again making use of appreciative questioning in the re-framing of this question.

### **3.8) Prefigurative Language**

Have you ever been asked a question that seemed to already have the answer embedded in the question? All of us have probably been asked these sorts of questions many times throughout our lives, if not throughout our day! Prefigurative questions are questions that contain language that literally “prefigure” your response and tend to limit your reply options.

“You must feel awful about that! How are you doing?”

“I bet you’re really afraid to start your new job, aren’t you?”

“I’m so sorry to hear that you broke up with Chris. When I first heard the news I knew you must be devastated.”

Oftentimes these questions are asked with the best of intentions, as someone imagines that they are putting themselves in the other person’s place and empathizing with them. But really, they are just limiting their conversation partner’s ability to answer the question fully, and implying that the answer should go a certain way.

As a skilled public communicator it is your challenge to frame (or design) your questions in a way that does not prefigure someone’s reply, but rather invites a multiplicity of possible responses. To turn around the previous questions, let’s look at open-ended versions of the same questions:

“I’m so glad you shared that with me. How are you feeling about the situation now?”

“What do you think your new job will be like?”

“I heard that you and Chris broke up. How are you doing?”

### **3.9) Elicit Stories**

One of the most effective ways to help people hear and understand people with different points of view is to get to the experiences that have shaped that person’s perspective. Instead of just hearing and reflecting on someone’s position on an issue, you want to invite him or her to tell a rich, detailed and nuanced story about the development of their point of view. This can bring about a much deeper understanding of the life experiences and deeply held beliefs of the person or persons you are conversing with, and help them to understand, respect, and relate to other positions and values. In order to do this you could ask questions such as the following:

“I am curious to hear how you developed your strong feelings about (blank.) Could you share with me/us some of the experiences which led you to this point of view?”

“I’d be interested to hear when you first started thinking about this issue. What are some of the things that happened which led to this being very important to you?”

“Are there people you are close to who hold differing opinions on this issue? If so, what are some of the things that you speak to them about when discussing this topic?”

## **Section Four: Facilitation Skills**

### **4.1) Ground Rules**

A very effective and essential way to assure that all conversation participants are respectful of one another and intend to engage in a mutually satisfying dialogue, is to get the group to establish and agree to ground rules before you begin your discussion. Some standard rules might include:

Share the airtime  
Respect one another's opinions and right to speak  
Allow others to finish talking before you begin  
Agree that the discussion is confidential

Having established these rules at the outset and asking everyone to agree with them equips you to better manage the conversation later if a problem arises, because you can refer everyone back to the ground rules that they have already agreed to abide by.

#### **4.2) Neutrality**

One of the most critical things to remember is that as the facilitator of the conversation, you must be completely neutral as to the outcome of the discussion, while being passionately committed to the process. What this means is that although all of us have our own bias and opinion about most topics, especially if it is one that may affect us, when we take on the responsibility of facilitating a discussion, we must leave our personal opinions behind.

It is imperative to focus instead on making sure that everyone in our conversation group has the opportunity to fully explore their opinions in a respectful and supportive atmosphere. One of the ways we can remember to show our neutrality is by being careful not to appear to agree with any one particular statement, person, or point of view. Be careful to agree with the spirit of the contribution, not the content.

#### **4.3) Enriching the Conversation**

An enriching conversation is one in which each participant is encouraged and enabled to tell their story (point of view) richly and without fear of a negative reaction. It is a conversation that doesn't just skim the surface of an issue, but elicits each person's experiences, visions, and values in an atmosphere of trust and respect.

So, you may be asking, just exactly how do I bring that enriched conversation into being? You can create an enriching conversation for your discussion group by facilitating an ongoing atmosphere of sharing, non-judgmental questioning, and active listening. The following segments of this section will help you gain specific skills to maximize the highest potential of each discussion that you facilitate.

#### **4.4) Curiosity and Wonder**

Another typical weakness in our everyday question asking is that we often assume we already know the answer to a question, and we are just asking it to confirm our belief, or to indicate that we believe that we understand what someone is feeling. The very way we frame our question influences the way the person can or is likely to reply. For example, if your child is beginning Kindergarten and you ask him or her, "Are you afraid to leave Mommy and Daddy and go to school?" Then you are likely to get the vehement response, "YES!" However, if you instead ask, "How are you feeling about starting Kindergarten?" you then leave open a range of responses. We discussed this phenomenon earlier in section 3.9 "prefigurative language." But it is instructive to remind ourselves of it here, since being in a state of "curiosity and wonder" makes



it imperative that your questions are framed out of an attitude of curiosity. So, when you are framing your inquiries, be aware of consciously making them neutral and open-ended.

Another aspect of asking a question that is based in curiosity and wonder, is to remember to **actually be in a state of curiosity and wonder**. It is very easy to assume that if someone makes statement A and you've heard statement A before from others, that the current person means the same things, and has had the same experiences that led to this statement. But this is very often not true. People go to and from statement A from a zillion different perspectives, all with reasons that make sense to them. So when you are talking to someone be truly curious why he or she holds the beliefs or ideas that they do. Ask them questions about the experiences that led them to statement A. You can also ask them questions that expand their comments, and ask them to look at their own perspective from other perspectives.

#### **4.5) Pick up the “Power Language”**

Sometimes one of the most useful ways to connect with a speaker is to take careful notice of the “power” words that are used. Oftentimes when people care deeply about an issue there are certain phrases and words that frequently pepper their communication. If you hone in on those words and start reflecting them back to the speaker in your reflecting and question asking, then it enhances their feelings of being understood. You can also use these words as a catalyst for asking them follow up questions which seek to deepen your (and their) understanding of just what they mean by those phrases or words, why they use them, and how examining their underlying thinking might give them an enriched explanation of their own beliefs.

#### **4.6) Uncover the “Deontic” Logic Underlying Beliefs**

Just as we have been deluged with voices telling us how and what to think, we have also often been trained about how people “like us” should behave or think. The “us” in this case can be a family, a political party, a religion, a nationality, a class of people, a gender, etc. What matters is that we all have these “shoulds and ought to’s” embedded in our brain, and it is sometimes quite helpful to uncover just what these commands are. Deontic Logic sounds like quite a phrase to remember, but it really just refers to the underlying logic that informs each of our beliefs or actions. An easy way to remember the term is to think of it as a little cartoon character named Deon, who is constantly burrowed in right beneath your skin, influencing your behaviors. As a facilitator, if it seems to you that several of the participants seem to be repeating a familiar set of “talking points” or opinions, it can be helpful to briefly explain the concept of Deontic logic, and then ask if any of the participants would like to examine their own Deontic logic, and explore how it might shape their beliefs, and how those beliefs might change if they altered their “shoulds, and ought to’s” and felt free to respond based on their feelings and thoughts in the moment, rather than out of a sense of obligation to their unconscious assumptions.

#### **4.7) Third Person Positioning**

If you are struck by the fact that someone is quite entrenched in their point of view and does not seem open to divergent perspectives, it is sometimes useful to ask them a question that requires them to step outside of themselves and their usual position to imagine the worldview of someone quite different from them. Sometimes this helps to expand and enrich their understanding of an

issue, or sparks the contribution of someone else in the group. You could phrase your inquiry in various ways, one being:

“I’m noticing that you have a very passionate view on this subject. I wonder if for the sake of discussion you can imagine the point of view of someone who feels quite differently than you, and walk us through what you think might be some of the experiences which would make them hold a differing belief from your own?”

*You can also ask a question of the group at large, to encourage everyone to think of multiple perspectives other than their own. You could say:*

“Obviously we can’t represent every person in the community in our small discussion group today, but can you think of some people who are not represented here, and discuss what you think might be their opinions or perspectives on this issue?”

#### **4.8) Ask Systemic or “Circular” Questions**

If you sense that your group is entrenched in their own positions and could use some help to get past a stuck place, asking systemic or “circular” questions can assist participants to expand their thinking about an issue or point of view. What is a circular question? It sounds like some sort of brain teaser, but actually it is just asking questions that recognize that nothing is static, everything changes depending on point of view, point in time, a person’s position within a system (a work system, a family system, a church system, etc.). Some types of questions that would fall into this category include:

- A.) Was there a time when you felt differently about this issue? When was that and why?*
- B.) What would have to happen for you to feel differently about this issue?*
- C.) Can you imagine why someone in a different position than yourself (you can be specific, i.e. resident, immigrant, teen, senior, etc. or open-ended) might have valid reasons to feel very differently? What do you imagine those might be?*

#### **4.9 Listen for the “Voices”**

Yes I do mean the voices in our heads, but I don’t mean “crazy voices,” but rather all of the conversations we carry on with others and ourselves in our minds. We each store memories of the voices/opinions/points of view of all of the people who are significant to us, and those voices help to shape our beliefs. Sometimes when exploring an issue, or someone’s point of view, it is instructive to ask whose voice they hear when thinking through this topic. What do the various voices say to them? When they really break down the thoughts that influence their perspectives, does the perspective change at all? Sometimes we are so inundated with opinions from the day we are born, that we unconsciously hold beliefs that we have never questioned or thought through for ourselves. When participants feel that they are in a safe environment, they are often confident enough to question some of their own assumptions and positions, in light of contributions and experiences of other participants.

#### **4.10) Communication Archetypes**

While no one person usually fits neatly into just one of these categories, these are some of the

basic communication archetypes you will encounter in discussions. Each present its own challenges and invite different responses from you, whether you are the facilitator or instead just a person having a conversation with them. For our purposes, let's assume you are the facilitator of a conversation group and you encounter a person who possesses these characteristics. What should you do? While as I've mentioned many times that facilitation is an art, there are specific skills you can pull out of your "communication kit" so to speak, to see if you can invite the person into a new conversation pattern. Or, at the very least, if you shine a soft light on their tendency, you may encourage them to tone it down a little if they are an aggressive communicator, or encourage them to participate more if they are a hesitant contributor.

### **Typical Archetypes:**

#### ***Interrupter***

We all know this one, right? How many times have you been driven nuts by someone who just cannot seem to allow themselves to let you finish your point. This archetype is a bit overzealous and tends to hardly be able to contain themselves from interrupting you, or someone else, to get in their point of view or personal story.

#### ***Possible Remedies:***

You can directly, yet gently, ask the speaker to please let others finish their thoughts before he/she shares a point of view. One of the ways to do this is to say, "XYZ, I am really interested in hearing what you have to say, but I am also interested in letting ABC finish his/her point, could you hold your thought for a few moments?"

If this proves ineffective, you can also refer to the ground rules established and agreed to at the beginning of your session, which included a caveat that each person would let the others finish their statements before beginning his or her own.

#### ***Overbearing***

This archetype tends to be long-winded and quite opinionated. Someone is who overbearing often ignores what is said before them, and just go on a tirade about their personal agenda. It is a challenge to get them to stop talking and to not let them verbally step on the contributions of others.

#### ***Possible Remedies:***

The subtlest, yet often effective way to deal with overbearing participants is to let them know that they have been heard, since oftentimes they may be unaccustomed to being truly listened to, so they feel that they must be overbearing to get their point across. So, if you restate what you heard them say, ask if you've heard them accurately, then point to the flip chart and bring their attention to the fact that the recorder had written down their contribution, sometimes it will satisfy their desire to repeat themselves and act obstructively.

Since this person is already overbearing, if the above does not work, as the facilitator you may have to assert your "authority" over the process in a polite yet directive way and let the person know that you feel that he or she has had a turn, and ask if they would mind letting someone else respond to the issue at hand. Again, you can refer to the ground rules where the participants

agreed to “share the airtime.”

### *Quiet*

This person often wants to be a part of the discussion, but is somewhat shy and unsure of what they’d like to say. When quiet archetypes do contribute, they are sometimes so quiet that their conversational contribution goes unnoticed because someone else ends up speaking right over them.

#### *Possible Remedies:*

Be alert for someone who is not participating in equal proportion to the others in the group, and if you can find a way to ask them a question which is a follow up to someone else’s response, or is a non-complicated question, perhaps you can draw him or her into the conversation.

What you *never* want to do is say, “LMNOP” you haven’t said anything yet, what do you think about this?” because you are likely to be greeted with the “deer caught in the headlights” look of panic. Not only have you asked them a question that is very open-ended to which they may have no response, but you have actually *drawn* attention to them in a way that singles them out as having not participated.

When you do notice a shy person starting to participate, make sure to notice and reward that contribution by restating it and asking if you’ve understood them correctly, and then ask a follow up question based on their contribution, whether you pose the question to them, or to another participant.

### *Accommodator*

This person tends to go along with the crowd, agreeing with whatever is said, and repeating the same suggestions already offered by other participants. Accommodators, of course, do have their own differing ideas, but are afraid to voice them for fear others will not like them, disagree with them, insult them, or otherwise make them feel humiliated.

#### *Possible Remedies:*

You can say something along the lines of, “I’ve noticed that you seem to be in agreement with much of what has been said here, and I’m wondering if there are some small points of difference that you have with some of the comments or suggestions that have been made.”

You can also invite them to take on the “shoes” of a third party, which we discussed in third party positioning in section 4.7. By asking them to imagine the perspective of someone who is not in the room, you may free them up to actually start to voice some of their own views that they are leery of having criticized. When they realize that no one starts figuratively “jumping down their throat” then they may feel more comfortable offering perspectives during the rest of the session.

### *Inattentive Listener*

This person may adopt the “posture” of listening because they are not actively interrupting or insulting anyone, yet by the comments they make it is obvious they are not following the direction of the conversation, and do not appear to absorb the things said by other participants.

#### *Possible Remedies:*

You can ask this person to directly comment on the conversation contribution that came before them, which may mean that you have to restate it for him or her, but it also means that the person may now pay more attention, realizing that they may be called on at any time to draw connections between things said in the discussion.

You can also engage inattentive listeners by drawing connections yourself between what they have said, and what someone else in the group has previously said, to bring their attention to the fact that they missed out on something they may well have wanted to comment on or may have sparked an idea of their own.

### *Cantankerous Critic*

This person loves to argue. They have a strong point of view and tend to take on anyone who disagrees with them. In fact, sadly, these critics very intent may be on disrupting the conversation.

#### *Possible Remedies:*

The remedies for this archetype are similar to those for the overbearing contributor. So you can try those suggestions as well as these.

This is the kind of contributor who poses the greatest challenge to a facilitator. But, before you panic, know that most times even someone with this personality style can be brought around. You may need to use both verbal and non-verbal language to let this person know that their actions are inappropriate.

You will find a more extensive discussion of conflict management in just a moment in section 4.12, but a brief suggestion here would be to explicitly mention that you feel that this person is in violation of the spirit of the discussion, then restate again what ground rules the group agreed upon for conversational behavior and review what the objectives of the session are, and you can directly state why his or her behavior is counter-productive to these goals.

If necessary, you can then follow up by asking them if this person would like to agree to join in the spirit of the discussion, or would rather choose to no longer be a part of the discussion. (This is reserved for the most serious of conversational offenders, but it is an option as a last resort if someone is truly subverting the discussion and flagrantly upsetting other participants.)

## *Model Citizen*

This person is a civic communicator/facilitator's dream. Model citizens are respectful of others, listen attentively, offer comments where appropriate, and may even step in gently to keep other people in the conversation in line, if they sense that things are going awry or that someone else in the group is feeling uncomfortable.

### *Possible Remedies:*

Eek! Remedy to what, they are perfect! But in truth, you do have to be careful that this archetype does not consciously or unconsciously take over your role as facilitator and start to step on your contribution and direction for the group. If this happens, thank them for their assistance, but gently reassert your authority as the facilitator by re-directing the conversation where you think it needs to go next to help the group meet its stated objectives.

### **4.11) Conflict is Positive**

When you hear the word conflict, do you cringe? Or do you get excited and imagine jumping into the fray? In general, the connotation of conflict in our society is a negative one. Conflict implies winners and losers, anger and hostility. But what if we chose to think about conflict quite differently? After all, without differing points of view and feelings, our world would be a very stagnant and boring one. Conflict, when well managed, is the site of exploration and discovery. It is a state in which people can open themselves up to hearing the deeply held opinions of others, while still holding on to their own unique perspectives.

How do we go from a potential shouting match to a well-managed discussion? By adding a skilled facilitator to the mix. Here's where you come in! By reading this manual and working with the exercises provided in Section Six, you will have some new or enhanced skills which will help you set the tone for a positive and productive discussion amongst staff members, community members in a one-on-one or public setting, or your neighbors (hey, and even your family members!) regardless of their diverse experiences and beliefs.

This section will instruct you in the skills needed to facilitate discussions from the perspective of a neutral party. Your focus is to have participants richly delineate their differences and work toward understanding each other's points of view, not on judging who is "winning" or "losing". Understanding does not imply agreement. It means that each person in the group has fully shared an opinion and feelings on a particular subject in an atmosphere of trust and respect, while the others have listened attentively in a sincere effort to understand the point of view of each participant.

Depending on the context of and objectives of your discussion you may not need to worry about trying to get people in the group to reach any consensus decisions, although if they do, that is fine. If however, it is the objective of the session to reach a decision then you can use other skills presented here. Keep in mind that the important skills which you are learning here will not only enrich your personal abilities, but will also be modeling crucial conversational abilities for your small group as you guide them through a positive discussion experience.

## **4.12) Conflict Management**

### **A.) Personal Perspective on Conflict**

As mentioned above, a lot of people are apprehensive about the idea of conflict. One of the first things that are helpful in overcoming that apprehension is to explore for yourself your own perspective on conflict. Having all been brought up in different families and in different cultures, we probably have very divergent experiences with conflict.

Some of us come from homes where conflict was not allowed to be openly expressed. The very idea that family members could hold differing opinions was threatening and disallowed. If this was the case in your family, then you may shy away from discussions or statements that you feel may cause conflict.

On the other extreme are families in which conflict was expressed frequently, vehemently, and destructively. If your earliest memories of conflict involve flying insults and dinnerware, then your attitudes about conflict are also going to be adversely affected. For still others, their experiences with conflict may have been positive, with family members encouraged to engage in dialogue about politics and other subjects. That experience is likely to make an individual less apprehensive about conflict because that person has already experienced divergent points of view as a safe and interesting thing.

Keeping your own relationship to conflict in mind is important as you learn conflict management skills and begin to encourage others to respectfully explore their differences. Also be mindful that there will be a variety of attitudes toward conflict in any group that you facilitate, so it is important to discuss the value of conflict early in your session.

### **B.) Explicitly Frame Conflict as Necessary and Positive**

As you begin your discussion and discuss the ground rules with your participants, it is extremely helpful if you speak briefly about the transformative and positive role of conflict. If you do not, many participants may have existing beliefs that lead them to feel that any conflict is hostile and impolite. You can begin by acknowledging that everyone present has led a different life rich with diverse experiences, and that each person brings something unique to the discussion.

You can continue on to say that the purpose of your time together is to elicit varying perspectives and opinions on different issues, and that you encourage everyone to feel free to express their ideas in an atmosphere of trust and respect. You may want to point out that without “conflict” or differing points of view, that your discussion would likely be a very superficial one in which people did not share their true feelings.

You will also want to stress that you would like everyone to remember the ground rules of sharing the airtime, speaking and listening respectfully, and honoring the confidential nature of each person’s comments. If you set this tone at the very beginning of the discussion, you will likely head off any negativity. If not, then you have put yourself in a good position to remind everyone how they agreed to handle conflict.

### **C.) Acknowledge Differences and Recognize Similarities**

One of the most helpful things you can do as a facilitator is to draw connections between what different people in your group are saying. This helps participants to track the conversation and to be aware of both differences and similarities in other’s comments. It is also quite useful to point

out differences that have similarity if you look underneath the surface of the difference and identify the underlying value. For example, two people may have very different ideas about which items in the city budget are the most important and which ones could be cut if necessary, but they might both be trying to achieve the same underlying goal which could be to increase intercultural awareness, help teens, look out for seniors, etc.

If you point out what you perceive to be similarities, it gives those participants (and others) a chance to reflect on their point of view from a different perspective. Being aware of differences and similarities in participant's contributions is also essential for asking good follow up questions during a discussion.

#### **4.13) Heading Off Trouble or “Upstream Conflict Management”**

Even when you have done a great job of framing conflict as positive and gotten the group to agree to respectful ground rules, there are still times when someone is going to be so enmeshed in their own style of conflict, or their point of view, that they have the potential to become troublesome to your discussion. How might you identify these individuals and encourage them to be productive members of the discussion? In PDC, we call this “upstream conflict management.” This is essentially the skill of managing a discussion upstream before a conflict has time to pick up speed, crash on the rocks, and careen out of control downstream.

##### Spotting Trouble

There are several ways to identify a person with a high potential for negative conflict behaviors. The first, and often most obvious initially, is body language. Negative body language can present itself in many ways including: striding into the event already looking agitated, fidgeting quickly and nervously-showing an impatience to vent their views, joining the circle but not interacting with anyone prior to the discussion, either leaning forward excitedly while someone else is talking with the intent of jumping in, (or down their throats!) or conversely, leaning back shaking their head or rolling their eyes.

Interrupting behaviors, use of a loud or intimidating voice tone, and digressions can be verbal ways this person may try to create conflict or control the conversation. Certain phrases are also clues to a domineering and conflict inducing personality. Some common problematic statements include:

“What you need to know is...”

“Let me tell you a thing or two about...”

##### Heading it Off

One of the most effective tools for heading off potential negative conflict is to “disarm” the contributor. An important step in this process is to know that most people who set out to engage in destructive conflict do so because they have seldom had the experience of feeling truly listened to. They may feel alienated and defensive, and state their views in “over the top” ways because they believe that is the only way they will be heard.

While you are obviously not going to undo a lifetime of personal experiences for this type of participant, you can invite them into a much different experience than they are used to. Keeping



in mind that what they probably want most is to be really heard and understood, as a facilitator you can make sure they have an opportunity to contribute early in the conversation, so that they do not sabotage the contributions of others in an attempt to get a word in. When they have contributed, make sure to validate their contribution by reflecting back to them your understanding of their comments, and then ask a follow-up question of another participant which stems from the comments of the original “contributor.” These actions help to demonstrate that there is no need to be aggressive or alienating because this person is in an atmosphere where all participants are encouraged to share their feelings in a respectful manner. This often works to turn a negative discussion participant into a productive one, but if it does not, then there are other steps you can take to stem the tide of negativity.

If someone is making derogatory, threatening, or rude comments toward anyone in the group, or toward any category of person- you must stop this immediately. The first way would be to call them on it in a nice way such as:

“I am concerned that some of your comments may be hurtful to others, and I’d like to ask you if you can frame your contributions in a way that is true to your beliefs, but also doesn’t make anyone else feel that someone is being ridiculed” You can also say something like: “At the beginning of this discussion we agreed we would follow certain ground rules for the discussion, are you still willing to abide by our group decision?”

If this direct and polite verbal approach is ineffective and the person continues down a negative course, then your next strategy may be to use your non-verbal skills to discourage further negativity. You can hold your hand out toward them like a stop sign, you can turn your back on them and start asking questions of other participants, you can walk around the group and give them direct eye-contact while telling them that you “need them to STOP their negative comments” as they run counter to the stated purpose of the group. Most of the time, when directly challenged on their behavior in a group setting, an individual will begin to back off, either through an increasing feeling of trust in the process, or because of the sheer peer pressure of being “called out on the carpet” (directly asked to stop).

Making sure that everyone is on equal footing is another important part of assuring equal and fair participation. Everyone in the group should ideally be on the same basis of identification, whether that is by first name, last name, or title. Humor can often be an effective way to break up a contentious moment. Sometimes a little levity, or a self-deprecating remark by the facilitator can ease the tension.

#### **4.14) Encouraging Differences of Opinion**

Occasionally you will get a group that continues to agree with everything everyone else says and seems hesitant to express a divergent point of view. The first thing you can do in that situation is refer back to what you said about conflict at the beginning of the session, which is that it is productive and necessary in order to elicit varying points of view.

If people are still not expressing diverse opinions, you can start to ask questions which bring outside points of view into the group. Start asking participants to imagine people in the community who might feel differently than they do on a particular subject, and then ask them to

share their ideas of who might feel differently and why... You can also ask follow-up questions which ask the group to look for points of commonality between these imagined outside points of view and their own.

#### **4.15) Drawing Connections**

To assure that everyone in the group feels listened to and understood it is necessary to reflect the discussion back to the group at what feels like appropriate times. You can do this by reflecting on an individual comment from a group member, or by drawing connections and themes that you see emerging from the discussion and then asking the group how they feel about your summary statement. This can be a jumping off point for expanding the discussion, or clarifying the contributions that have come before. It is also important to remember that although many times you will have a template of questions which you are attempting to address, it is most crucial that you remain “present and in the moment” responding to the things which the group is saying, and letting the conversation go in the direction that they want to take it, as long as it is not an unproductive digression.

It is also imperative to ask people to “say more about” the comments they make. If we take the social construction perspective and keep in mind that “words have uses, not meanings” (courtesy of Communication Theorist Ludwig Wittgenstein) then it is vital that we ask people to share their “stories” which make meaning out of their use of phrases or words that may have different connotations or meanings for other conversants. A way to uncover a particular participant’s use/meaning is to ask questions such as “What does (blank) mean to you? What in your background might have led you to that point of view.”(Shawn Spano, PDC)

#### **4.16) Imagine Possible Futures**

When someone is frustrated with the state of a certain situation it can be very easy for that person to become mired in the “problem” and feel that everything is just a “lost cause” or hopeless. It is often quite useful to ask the person to engage in a visioning process, where he or she puts aside all of the obstacles perceived in the situation and instead, allow himself or herself to envision what it would be like if they were to experience the situation as the best it could be.

This is often quite energizing and helps the person or group move past a stuck place and start brainstorming visions and ideas which generate action plans, or at the very least, help them to crystallize and clarify their positive visions. As they are engaging in this visioning process, they may very well receive invigorating and helpful ideas from others in the group.

#### **4.17) Time Management**

Time Management was covered in section 2.2, but it bears repeating here. One of your central goals as a Facilitator is to help the group achieve their goals. So if you have let half of the conversation go by and the participants are still talking about item one on a list of ten items, then you are not achieving your mission. So while you are being mindful of all the other considerations we have discussed as your challenges as a facilitator, you must also keep a subtle eye on your watch and make sure the conversation is progressing on at least a loose schedule that will enable the group to meet its stated objectives. Obviously not all objectives will take the same amount of time to discuss, as some may be more potentially open-ended than others, so

before you begin the facilitation, you want to make sure you are very familiar with the objectives and analyze for yourself approximately how long the group should spend on each segment of the discussion.

#### **4.18) Closing Procedures**

Just as you set a professional context for the beginning of your facilitation, you want to make sure to end in an organized way. Make sure to give the group some time indicators that the discussion is winding down, say at a ten, five, and then two minute time interval before the closing. Then make sure to end by thanking everyone for their participation, praising the efforts of the group to have an invigorating and thought provoking discussion. It is also critical to let them know what the “next steps” will be following this discussion. You want to make sure that their vital contributions are not going to just fall through the cracks. Let them know who will be receiving the notes from this discussion and what they plan to do with them. Also let the participants know how they can check in on the progress of the issue at hand.

### **Section Five: Exercises**

*The following exercises are designed to be used in any order that is most helpful to you. They follow the order of the skills presented in the manual, although there are exercises for only some of the skills, since many are complementary. As I mentioned earlier: this is NOT a test, so you don't have to worry about getting the “right” answer, because in fact, there are a multiplicity of “right” answers to these exercises. They are designed with a social communication perspective and invite you to reflect on what you are creating with your communication choices.*

Creativity is exactly what is called for as you practice any or all of the skills presented in this workbook/manual. As we've discussed, communication is an art. Each artist begins with a different palette of colors, texture of brush, and a varying canvas, so no two efforts will look the same, nor should they.

To help you know you are on the right general track, each exercise has what in our childhood may have been known as an “answer key,” only in this case, the answers are only potential responses that give you a hint that you are going in the right direction with your responses, rather than being THE answers.

If you are struggling with any particular exercise, it might be helpful to go back and read over that topic again in the manual, as although most of the skills are fairly straight forward, there are a lot of new skills presented in the manual, and it can be easy to get them mixed up at times, or just wonder, “what the heck was that about again?”

I hope that you approach these exercises with a “spirit of curiosity and wonder” and with the knowledge that they are meant to be a playful challenge, not a stressful one. Remember, there is no grading, and the purpose of these exercises is to help YOU feel comfortable making the skills presented in this manual your own. As the old adage says, “there is no better way to learn than by doing.” It is my wish that as you practice these skills and start to use them in your work and in



5.) What is the first thing you'd like to change in your neighborhood?

### **Potential Reframing from ‘Deficit’ to ‘Appreciative Language’**

1.) What are some of the best resources Cupertino has for dealing with any potential challenges that it might face?

When things in Cupertino were working best for you and your neighbors, what did that look like? What specific things were happening?

2.) Are there aspects of your job that you like better than others? What is it specifically about these functions gives you the most enjoyment?

Do you feel that you have some currently “untapped” resources that you could bring to bear in your current position?

3.) When you think of your own personal qualities, what are some of the best things that come to mind? What are some of the things that you have received positive feedback for in the past?

If you were realizing your highest visions for yourself, what would that look like? What would you be doing and what would others around you be doing?

4.) Are there some unwanted patterns of communication that you notice cropping up frequently in your interactions with others?

What are some of your favorite aspects of interpersonal communication?

5.) If your neighborhood was functioning to its highest capabilities, what would be happening?

What are some of your goals and visions for your neighborhood?

What are some of the resources you see in your neighborhood for making it the best neighborhood that you can imagine?



## Transforming from Prefigurative to “Open-Ended” Questions

- 1.) Residents seem to be very frustrated with all of the choices we have to make given our budgetary constraints. What do you think are some of the core underlying values they share that could help us to inform our decisions?

How do you think we could encourage residents to turn their “complaints” into visions?

- 2.) I know you realize our time together today is limited, so while I would love to hear every idea that you could each come up with, I’d like us to limit our contributions to things that seem reasonably pragmatic. Does this make sense to everyone?

I know there are so many creative minds in here that we could probably brainstorm all day, but since we are pressed for time, could we each limit our suggestions to the one or two which we think are most unique and feasible?

- 3.) It seems to me that in Cupertino there is sometimes a tendency for people to interact primarily with people of their own culture. What do you think might be some of the reasons for that dynamic?

Can you think of ways that we could encourage interaction and appreciation between all of the rich and diverse cultures we have represented as residents of Cupertino?

- 4.) Were you surprised at what that resident said to you during the Council Meeting? Is that the kind of sentiment that you’ve heard often in Council Meetings?

Is it hard for your not to get angry and frustrated, when it seems that the person addressing you is angry and frustrated?

- 5.) It is widely known that there is a severe State and a City budget crisis this year, how do you think that we can assure residents that we are making the best use of the funds we have available?

Are there ways we could involve the community in making the “hard decisions” so that they will feel that they are part of this difficult process?

## 5.3 Actively Listening and Reflecting

*As we've explored, one of the most satisfying experiences in life is to feel truly listened to. This exercise will help you to hone your listening and reflecting skills so that you are in a position to give your conversation partner a truly valuable experience, as well as assure yourself that you have truly listened for understanding and have captured the essence of what the speaker is attempting to share with you.*

### General Questions

- 1.) What are some of the non-verbal ways that you can show a speaker you are listening?
- 2.) What are some of the non-verbal things you might do that would give the impression that the speaker does not have your full attention?
- 3.) Conversationally, what are some of the things that you can do to make a speaker feel heard and understood?

### Statements to be Paraphrased and Reflected Back to the Speaker

- 4.) I feel like no one in my neighborhood ever talks to one another, it seems like people are constantly moving and I don't even know my neighbors anymore. It doesn't even feel like a "neighborhood."
- 5.) I am so sick and tired of feeling like what I say doesn't matter to city staff or officials. What's the point? You can't fight City Hall!
- 6.) I'm angry that Vallco is just sitting half empty and there are hardly any good stores left in there. What the heck is anyone doing about it?



## Potential Responses to Active Listening Exercise

- 1.) Some of the most effective non-verbal ways to demonstrate that you are listening include: matching eye contact, leaning toward the speaker, bobbing your head up and down slightly, smiling and having an interested expression, and having open body language.
- 2.) Some of the things which you might unintentionally do that would give the speaker the impression that they do not have your full attention would be: fidgeting, tapping your fingers, frequently breaking eye contact with the speaker and looking at something or someone else, continually opening your own mouth as if asking to speak, leaning back in your chair, and checking your watch or the clock in an obvious manner.
- 3.) Conversationally, one of the most important things to do to demonstrate your active listening is to re-state or paraphrase the speaker's statements, to check for clarity and to make sure you have captured everything he or she wanted to say. Asking questions that are logical transitions from their own comments is another powerful way to show that you are attentively listening.

- 4.) I am hearing that you are frustrated that your neighbors do not talk more, and that there is such a high turnover of families that you feel that no one really knows one another anymore? Am I understanding you correctly?

It sounds to me that you have a "vision" for what an ideal neighborhood would be like. Could you share some of your ideas about that with me?

- 5.) Am I understanding that you are feeling a deep level of hopelessness about the potential for being heard by City Hall?

How could City Staff and Officials demonstrate that you are being heard and respected?

- 6.) From what you are saying I am hearing that you are angry and disappointed with the current state of Vallco, and that you would like to find out what is going on there, is that correct?

I am also hearing that you feel that there isn't a mechanism for you to find out more information about the situation. Would you like to hear from someone at the City with suggestions about how you can stay informed about Vallco?

## 5.4 Reflexivity

*When we learned about reflexivity, you may recall that there were several aspects to this concept. What we are going to focus on in this exercise is analyzing how one comment elicits (and affects) another and basically how your choice of how to respond to your conversation partner informs their choice about how to respond to you.*

*For each of the interactions below identify what could be causing an interpersonal communication exchange that is less than ideal. Then suggest a different statement by Speaker Two that you think might have elicited a positive response from Speaker One.*

**Speaker One:** Is there some particular reason you can never remember to put the new toilet paper on the roll, are you trying to be annoying?

**Speaker Two:** Yeah, Honey, I have so much spare time I just sit around scheming about how I could best upset you, and I was so proud of myself when I came up with this toilet paper thing. I was thinking about forgetting to take out the trash next!

**Speaker One:** I am so sick of the fact that you never listen to me and that you are always just going ahead and doing whatever you want, regardless of what I want.

**Speaker Two:** I *never* listen to you? Then why do you never quit *squawking*? All I ever do is listen to you, and then listen to you some more. You talk so much; I couldn't possibly listen to all of it.

**Speaker One:** Okay, which one of you keeps stealing my yogurt out of the fridge? I know one of you weasels is also taking my diet soda. Why can't anyone keep their grubby little paws off of my stuff. What do I have to do, install a hidden camera?

**Speaker Two:** Maybe if you weren't so paranoid, you'd notice that your yogurt has been in there for like a month, and I threw it out because it reeked. No one wants your nasty generic diet soda anyway. You must be hallucinating.

## Potential Alternative Responses in Reflexivity Exercise

**Speaker One:** Is there some particular reason you can never remember to put the new toilet paper on the role, are you trying to be annoying?

**Speaker Two:** I'm sorry; I'm just so tired I forget. But it would help if you didn't act like everything I do is intended to upset you. I just forgot.

**Speaker Two:** I'm sorry, I'm just worn out too, I didn't mean to be so cranky, you do a lot of nice things around here and I appreciate them.

**Speaker One:** I am so sick of the fact that you never listen to me and that you are always just going ahead and doing whatever you want, regardless of what I want.

**Speaker Two:** What exactly have I done that makes you feel like I don't listen to you? I feel like I listen to you all the time.

**Speaker One:** Well I told you that I was going to make dinner tonight, and you still took the kids to McDonalds on the way home. How are they going to be hungry now?

**Speaker Two:** You're right, I screwed up on that one, but it wasn't that I didn't listen to you, it's just that so much happened at work today I was distracted, and I thought I'd save you some work by taking the kids to fast food. How about if I help you refrigerate all that great looking stuff and we can look forward to eating it tomorrow. I'm really sorry.

**Speaker One:** I'm sorry too, I just hurried to make dinner and it's frustrating that it was a waste of time, but you're right, we can eat it tomorrow, and that will give me time to run some errands on the way home.

**Speaker One:** Okay, which one of you keeps stealing my yogurt out of the fridge? I know one of you weasels is also taking my diet soda. Why can't anyone keep their grubby little paws off of my stuff? What do I have to do, install a hidden camera?

**Speaker Two:** I'm sorry you're so angry, I wasn't trying to "steal" anything, I just noticed the yogurt was expired, and I figured no one wanted it, so I threw it out. I didn't know you were still going to eat it. I don't know what happened to your diet soda, but you sound like you're having a rough day.

**Speaker One:** No kidding. I just spent three hours in a meeting where I found out I have a ton more work to do, and it all needs doing ASAP.

**Speaker Two:** Sounds stressful. Anyway I can help you out?

**Speaker One:** No, but thanks. I'm sorry I was biting everyone's heads off about the stupid food; I guess I was just venting. I'm sorry guys.



- 5.) Is this a one time event or meeting, or is this a part of a series? If it is part of a series, what part of the process are we in? The stage of the event will help set the context for the objectives. So are we at the beginning where we want to basically set out the process and begin initial trust and relationship building, or are we nearing the end, where we have to move toward making decisions?
  
- 6.) Who will be coming to this meeting/event? How much prior knowledge do they have of the subject that we will discuss? Do I need to provide informational handouts, or give a very brief presentation that lets everyone know where we are starting from and what we have to work with?
  
- 7.) Should I serve refreshments at this event? If so, what type and at what stages of the event? Water and Sodas? Welcoming/Breakfast food? Lunch or Dinner? Afternoon Snack?
  
- 8.) Do I have the budget or desire to have a theme or decorations for this event?
  
- 9.) Where should I hold the event? Does it call for a small intimate setting, or a larger one?
  
- 10.) Have I made sure that I have invited all of the relevant stakeholders to this meeting/event, and do I have a diverse pool of people on my invitation list?

11.) Have I created invitations that will intrigue and entice my invitees to attend?  
Have I sent them out in enough time to give potential guests time to “save the date?”

12.) How should I set up the room? What would give everyone the greatest comfort level, opportunity to speak and hear, and an unobstructed and uninterrupted view of the speaker?

13.) How shall I arrange the event to make sure that participants do not become bored, and feel engaged in the process?

14.) What sort of follow-up will there be to this event and how can I let the guests know what that will be?

15.) Have I made sure I have all of my logistical details in order? Do I have proper technical equipment such as: microphones, computers, video screens, etc. Also, do I have plenty of nametags, pens, agendas, handouts, etc.?

16.) How should I close out the event so that it will leave people feeling that we’ve had a productive session and that their participation was valuable and appreciated?

## 5.6 Create an Agenda

*One of the most essential resources for a meeting or event that runs smoothly is to have a well planned agenda. This gives you direction, clarity of purpose, helps with time management, and gives participants something to refer to as they frame their own contributions.*

*It is essential to have two different agendas: an internal agenda which lists out times and specific instructions to other people who are helping you with the event, and a brief one page agenda for participants so they can follow along with the flow of the event and anticipate what is coming up next.*

*This exercise is basically a series of questions to help you design a hypothetical or real agenda for an upcoming event or meeting.*

1.) Start with the basics. How much time do you have for the meeting? Where will it be held? When? Who will attend? The answers to these questions will inform your agenda. If you have four hours and 100 people attending, then you have to have strict time management and very well defined objectives. If this is a more informal meeting of 10 people, you still need objectives and time parameters, but it is easier to have “wiggle” room, since you can keep better control over the group during the meeting.

2.) Begin by defining your objectives, keeping in mind that you want to have enough objectives to make your meeting/event a meaningful one, but not so many that it would be nearly impossible to complete them all, as this leaves people feeling disappointed and may give them the impression that the meeting was poorly planned, or that you have inadequate time management skills. Remember that objectives are clear statements of goals that you have for what will be accomplished during your session. If you need a refresher on how to develop objectives, you can refer back to that section in the manual.

3.) Once you have clarified your objectives, you need to get creative and decide what types of activities or conversations would best achieve these goals. Is this a two-hour meeting of 10 people around a long desk, or is this 100 people at round tables for 4-6 hours? If it's the latter, then you need to be sure to break up activities in frequent intervals and make sure you keep participants active and engaged in the process, or you will lose enthusiasm from your guests. No one likes to show up to an event or a meeting to find that he or she is a captive audience for someone's monologue. Remember, this is all about DIALOGUE!

4.) Think about whether you want to vary from small group discussion to large group discussions, groups of two or four, and so on. Ideally if this is a long event with a significant amount of people, you will want to do all of the above.

5.) Typically you want to begin your event/meeting with a welcome and a context setting from the people who are sponsoring or who designed the event. What should they say that would kick off your event in a positive direction?

6.) What usually follows next is some sort of introduction or ice-breaking activity. The length of this will depend on how many participants are involved. If you have a room full of people, you do not want to invite them to all give individual introductions to the group at large, because then you just lost an hour of your event! In this instance, you may instead want them to introduce themselves to the small groups with whom they are sitting.

7.) After the introductions/ice-breaker, you usually begin the heart of your event, making sure that the whole group is on the same page about what the goals are for the event and what their participation in the event will be. Your tone in this section sets the mood for the event, so if you want an upbeat fun event, be fun and upbeat, if however, this is a more formal and official event then you will want to adopt that tone.

8.) Now it's time for you to take the amount of time you have scheduled and figure out how you are going to spend it in order to meet your stated objectives. Make sure to list times on your internal agenda so that everyone working with you has a sense of the time flow, understanding that every event is fluid and adjustments will probably need to be made hourly! That's why you also want to make sure to build in a little extra time here and there so you can "steal" it back when necessary.



9.) Make sure that your internal agenda also clearly spells out who is to do what when. If someone needs to hand something out at a certain time, or set up the luncheon, or direct an activity, you want to make sure they are cued and ready to go.

10.) After you have written down your realistic objectives and divided up the time, it is time to flesh out the content of each activity. Again, the participant's agenda should only have a brief description, and it is not necessary to list times on the agenda, other than the stated starting and ending time.

11.) Once you finish your agenda, really walk in through in your head and ask for the thoughts of others who are working with you. Do you really think it is realistic? Make sure to figure in time for occasions when people need to get up and stretch or go to the restroom, as well as the logistical time loss when people need to change positions for an activity, or gather into groups. Once your colleagues have "signed off" so to speak, on your agenda, then it's time to spell check and you're off!

12.) As always, give proper thought to how you are going to end your meeting or event, because you really want to leave a positive impression in people's minds that you all accomplished something valuable together, and that you demonstrated effective time management skills.

## 5.7 Soliciting Stories

*Although “stories” may either conjure up fables that are not true, or grandpa or grandma going on and on and on about the “good old days,” remember that stories refer to the deeper and more richly nuanced life experiences that underlie people’s feelings on issues and their positions on policies. So if we want to have a facilitated discussion, which gets beyond the surface of people’s skin-deep responses on topics, then we have to try to elicit the rich stories of their lives that lead them to the belief system they live with today.*

*This exercise is designed to build on what we studied in the manual by giving you a chance to create questions of your own that attempt to invite someone to share their stories. I will list a position statement, and then you can think of a question that might get at the underlying story of why the person makes the statement that they do. As always, there is no “right” answer, and the best way to judge whether your questions are “good” or not is to see what types of responses you are receiving to your questions.*

**1.) Statement:** I am so sick of all of the changes in Cupertino. My wife and I grew up here and we can hardly recognize the place.

**2.) Statement:** I am so sick of the “building up” of Cupertino. It’s crowded enough already, why do we have to bring more people here? The buildings are getting taller and more commercial and we are losing our hometown feeling.

**3.) Statement:** Everyone keeps talking about building a “skate park” for teens. Well, that’s all I don’t need in my backyard...A bunch of foul-mouthed teens that cuss and yell and leave all of their trash around.

## Potential Questions to “Solicit Stories”

**1.) Statement:** *I am so sick of all of the changes in Cupertino. My wife and I grew up here and we can hardly recognize the place.*

**Potential Question to Solicit Story:**

It sounds like there are some things that you miss about the way Cupertino was when you were growing up here. What are some of the specific things you miss most? Are there some newer things that you and your wife do enjoy about the changes in Cupertino?

**Potential Question to Solicit Story:**

I would be curious to hear about what Cupertino was like when you first lived here, would you share a little bit about that with us? I’d also be interested to hear from others in the group about what Cupertino was like when they first arrived, and what drew them to the City.

**2.) Statement:** *I am so sick of the “building up” of Cupertino. It’s crowded enough already, why do we have to bring more people here? The buildings are getting taller and more commercial and we are losing our hometown feeling.*

**Potential Question to Solicit Story:**

It sounds like you have a lot of passion about the changing density and housing issues in Cupertino, would you like to share a little about how you came to feel the way that you do?

You mentioned that you felt Cupertino had lost its “hometown” feeling. What are some things that you think might help you to feel like the spirit of that feeling had been restored?

**3.) Statement:** *Everyone keeps talking about building a “skate park” for teens. Well, that’s all I don’t need in my backyard. . . A bunch of foul-mouthed teens that cuss and yell and leave all of their trash around.*

**Potential Question to Solicit Story:**

It sounds like you may have had some previous experiences with teens that have left a bad impression. Would you care to share how you’ve come to view teens the way that you do?

I’d also be curious to here from other people in our group, especially parents of teens what their perspective is on having a teen skate park. Do you feel like it would be in the best interest of Cupertino residents?

## 5.8 Neutrality

*As the facilitator, remember that it is your role to be “passionately committed to the process, but neutral to the outcome.” In simple words, even though we all have our own points of view on various issues, when we are the facilitator, we must suspend them, so that we do not inadvertently appear to be agreeing or favoring certain comments over others, which encourages some participants and discourages or completely suppresses the comments of others. So we remember to show our neutrality by appreciating the comment, not agreeing with the content.*

*In this exercise I will make a statement from a participant and then offer a response from the facilitator, and it is your challenge to see where the facilitator fell off the neutrality beam and landed in the discussion. Re-frame the facilitator’s comments so that they are appropriately neutral.*

**Statement:** I think that we should build more low cost affordable housing for teachers and other public servants.

**Facilitator Response:** Exactly! You’re basically saying how else are we going to keep our workers in our community, right?

**Statement:** If I see one more sign in some language I can’t read my head is going to spin around!

**Facilitator’s Response:** It is really frustrating not to be able to understand signs in your own city, isn’t it?

**Statement:** I feel like no one at the City really ever listens to me. They never do anything I tell them to.

**Facilitator’s Response:** You “can’t beat City Hall,” huh?

**Statement:** I am so angry with all of the out-of-towners moving to Cupertino and driving up the real estate prices.

**Facilitator’s Response:** I hear you, I can’t even afford to buy a house here, and I grew up here and so did my grandparents!

## Potential Responses that Demonstrate Neutrality

**1.) Statement:** I think that we should build more low cost affordable housing for teachers and other public servants.

*The problem with the original facilitators response is fairly obvious in that the first word out of his or her mouth was “Exactly” but since this comment sounds a little bit like reflecting or paraphrasing, it is sometimes easy to miss.*

A more appropriate response might have been: **So I’m hearing that you have a concern that teachers and other public servants can’t afford to live in Cupertino anymore?**

**2.) Statement:** If I see one more sign in some language I can’t read my head is going to spin around!

*This facilitator was trying to be supportive of this person’s contribution, but crossed the line by appearing to agree with the comment.*

A more appropriate response might have been: **I can really hear your frustration about not being able to read all of the signs that are posted in the city.**

**3.) Statement:** I feel like no one at the City really ever listens to me. They never do anything I tell them to.

*This facilitator was probably unsure what to say and tried to make light of the comment with a joke, but the joke was at the expense of the city and implied that the facilitator agreed with the contributor’s statement.*

A more appropriate response might have been: **What could the City do that would make you feel listened to?**

**4.) Statement:** I am so angry with all of the out-of-towners moving to Cupertino and driving up the real estate prices.

*The facilitator egregiously stepped over the line on this one by making his/her own position on this issue quite clear.*

A better response might have been: **Can you or anyone else in the group think of benefits that might be associated with the higher real estate prices in Cupertino?**

## 5.9 Uncovering the “Voices”

*Remember, we are not looking for anyone’s “crazy” voices, just the varying voices they hear in their heads which shape their perspectives and points of view on varying issues, even though most of the time we aren’t even consciously aware of these influences. So sometimes it is very useful in a facilitation to try to help people uncover just what those voices are and attempt to analyze if they really agree with all of those “voices,” or if they are just relying on habit. In this exercise we are going to look at some questions which attempt to “ask about the voices” and then you can create some questions of your own.*

1. When do you remember first thinking about this issue?
2. When someone brings up this subject and you instantly have an opinion, do you hear that opinion in the voice of someone else, perhaps a parent or other adult who was significant in your upbringing?
3. Can you remember a time when you felt differently about this subject, and if so, can you remember what happened to change your point of view?
4. When you think about issue “X” if you had to try to analyze where you developed your perspective on “X” can you remember some of the people with whom you first discussed this issue?
5. When you think about this issue, are there dissenting voices in your head? In other words, do you feel somewhat conflicted, and could that be because people in your life who are significant to you have very different points of view on the subject?
6. If you were to try to magically erase all of the other “voices” in your head that you hear talking to you about this issue and isolate out only your own voice, what do you hear?

## 5.10 Encouraging Third Party Perspectives

*When people are stuck in unproductive patterns of communication, and seem to be sticking to the same talking points, sometimes it is extremely useful to bring in a “third party perspective” by asking participants to imagine what someone who is unlike them might have to say on a particular issue.*

*In this exercise I will model several questions which encourage third party perspectives, and you can use these as jumping off points to create questions of your own which you feel would encourage a conversation participant to broaden their perspective.*

1. It is clear that you have a very passionate position on this issue. Can you imagine how someone in different circumstances than yourself might feel quite differently?
2. When you imagine someone who feels differently than you on this issue what do you think are some of the life experiences that they might have had which have lead them to feel differently than yourself?
3. What would have to happen for you to feel differently about this issue?
4. Was there a time when you did feel differently about this issue? What happened to alter your perspective?
5. Taking into account that no gathering can ever be representative of everyone in the community, is there any group whose point of view that you think may not be getting represented today? What would you think that individual or group might say if they were with us today?

## 5.11 Dialogue or Debate?

Taking the social communication perspective, as a facilitator you want to make sure that the participants in your group stay in a dialogue **with** one another, and do not descent into a debate **against** one another. So what are some of the ways that we distinguish between the two? In this quick quiz, we will take a look at what differentiates dialogue from debate.

1. If someone says, “Look here, you don’t even know what you’re talking about,” is that dialogue or debate?
2. If someone says, “I really want to listen to make sure I understand where you are coming from, even though it appears you and I have very different points of view. Is that dialogue or debate?”
3. When we are in dialogue is it important that we make our point and convert someone else to our point of view?
4. Is it dialogue or debate where it is crucial to listen for our chance to jump in and make our point before someone else can?
5. Do we generally raise our voices louder and louder so that we are listened to in debate or in dialogue?
6. Is there a “winner” at the end of a dialogue?
7. Does debate enhance our social world and create a more nuanced understanding of one another’s life experiences and points of view?
8. In dialogue is it important to throw out a lot of statistics and “sound bites” to make your point of view?
9. In debate, do all parties in the discussion usually leave feeling like they’ve had a positive and enriching experience?

### *Answers*

1. Debate 2. Dialogue 3. No, our goal is to understand. 4. That style is typical of debate and unwanted in dialogue. 5. That generally happens in debate, and you want to discourage it in dialogue, as it is an attempt at intimidation. 6. The “winners” at the end of a dialogue are everyone who feels like they got to make their point, were listened to, and listened to others. 7. Debate does not enhance our world, in fact it often aids in its destruction, as people hurl insults instead of looking for mutually beneficial solutions. 8. Although it is perfectly fine to use statistics as a persuasive tool in debate, they are generally not constantly spit out and used to discredit others as they are used in debate. 9. The only people who leave a debate feeling positive are people who are not truly interested in making the world a better place or in gaining a deeper understanding of issues, but rather who enjoy mudslinging and fighting.



## 5.12 Putting It All Together

Ideally this exercise is best played out at training where you already have access to other participants. However, it could also be done in a staff training, or by a group of residents who wanted to get together to hone their facilitation skills in a relaxed setting. It is ideal to have eight to ten people participating. Less than that and you do not have enough people for a really varied discussion, and more than that is too overwhelming to manage! As the facilitator, choose a topic that is likely to have a wide range of responses from participants. It can be any topic that you think is relevant to the City.

When sharing in a role-play experience it is vital to be in an observational position as well as perform your role. In order to offer the facilitator the ideal balance of challenge and support, you want to gauge your conversational contributions based on how the discussion is going. If the facilitator is having an overly easy time, then you can amp up your acting and provide him/her with further challenges. However, if you can see that the facilitator is struggling, then offer her/him support by toning down the degree of challenge that you present.

### *Coach*

As the coach, it is your job to listen carefully to what the facilitator and participants say in response to one another. Pay close attention to what is elicited by the actions of the facilitator. Take notes that indicate things you feel the facilitator did well, and in which areas he/she could use some more practice. When the role-play concludes, first turn to the facilitator and ask how she/he feels about the session. Then you can invite the participants to offer the facilitator their points of view on the facilitation. Lastly, you give your feedback to the facilitator, **making sure to begin with and stress the positive. When giving a critique of the facilitator's performance, be sure to phrase your comments in as upbeat and appreciative of a manner as possible.**

### *Facilitator*

Your job is to help the group meet their stated conversational objectives. Be alert for the varying styles of the participants, and adjust your facilitation to their needs.

### *Recorder*

It is your job to capture the discussion on flipcharts or paper templates. Try to use as many of the participants own phrases and words as possible, keeping in mind that it is impossible and unnecessary to write everything they say, you want to represent the highlights. You can paraphrase as necessary, and it is perfectly fine to ask participants if you got it right. Remember to number pages, vary ink color by subject, and write as neatly as you can.

### *Interrupter*

You are a bit overzealous and tend to interrupt people to get in your own point of view. You are mindful of the facilitator's efforts to get you to stop, so if she/he does remind you not to

interrupt, respect their efforts. Otherwise, keep interrupting.

### ***Overbearing***

You do not respect the ground rules of sharing the airtime. You tend to be long-winded and quite opinionated. You ignore what is said before you at times, and just go on a tirade about your personal agenda. You do respect the facilitator's efforts to get you back in line, so if he/she asks you to change your behavior, you do. Otherwise keep at it, until he or she does.

### ***Quiet***

You want to be a part of the discussion, but you are somewhat shy and unsure of what you'd like to say. You do not offer any comments, but if the facilitator tries to engage you in the discussion then you slowly start to participate.

### ***Accommodator***

You tend to go along with the crowd, agreeing with whatever is said, and repeating the same suggestions already offered by other participants. You do have your own differing ideas, but you are afraid to voice them for fear others will not like you. If the facilitator asks you for your unique opinion, then start to give it. Otherwise, keep appeasing.

### ***Cantankerous Critic***

You love to argue. You have a strong point of view and tend to take on anyone who disagrees with you. You may even use insulting language. If the facilitator calls you on your behavior, tone it down, and become less belligerent, otherwise keep being cranky and full of complaints.

### ***Model Citizen***

You are a facilitator's dream. You are respectful of others, listen attentively, offer comments where appropriate, and may even step in gently to keep others in line, if the facilitator is having difficulty.

## Section Six: Conclusion and Bibliography

### Conclusion

I sincerely hope that you have enjoyed reading and working with this manual and that it has helped you to enhance your interpersonal skills for use in both your public and private life. As I mentioned in my introduction, it is my wish that the skills presented here enrich your life and the lives of others. A lofty goal for a thirty something page manual, I suppose, but you know what? Making use of the information I used to write this manual *has* enriched my life during the six years I have been doing work with the public in Cupertino. Taking a “Communication Perspective” on my interactions with others has also improved the quality of my personal relationships, so call me a “true believer” but I think these attitudes and these skills make a huge difference in our world.

Thank you for taking the time to read this manual and work with the exercises. I am including a brief bibliography of a few books where you can find much more in depth information about the skills and theories presented in this manual, written by members of the Public Dialogue Consortium. They may not be quite the light read that you have found here, but they are engaging, chock full of information, and quite relevant to what you have been learning, in fact one of them is even based on “The Cupertino Project.”

Good luck in your future communication interactions.

Suzette Tinkess Merchant, for Project Manager, Public Dialogue Consortium

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