

**PERSON, PLACE, & THING:**  
BEYOND THE NOUN OF LEADERSHIP



2020-2022

SEMINAR 4

# Conversation Guide

Dialogue (Book) Session



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**Fellowship** FOR HUMAN  
RELATIONS

# Standing Invitations

The Friday Fellowship practices convening skills grounded in commitments to curious inquiry, courageous dialogue, and creative responses to the places where selves, stories, and systems collide. Modeling and leading conversations that invite rest, reflection, reckoning, and relationship, Friday Fellows listen in as they learn forward together. This convening tool moves through an intentional process that builds relationships ready to hear, hold, and honor the work at hand.

Please read this full guide before and as you begin. Would you co-create a convening that feels right to those gathering? As you feel your way forward, keep going back for people, places, and things that matter. **Practice makes possible.**

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## Session Specific Invitations

### Step One: *Calling In*

*As is our shared practice, let's begin by going back for ourselves and for one another. Consider naming what it means to have and hold and honor this particular conversation. How much time do you have? For what purpose? By way of introduction, consider lifting up your answers to one or more of the following. Before you begin, check in with one another about whether you will move around the circle or invite folks – Fellows, too – to speak into the conversation when and as they are ready. Please hold space until everyone has called themselves in. Welcome, all!*

*How does it feel to be you today? And who will you be in this circle?  
How can others support your presence and participation?*

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### Step Two: *Centering*

*When groups come together, especially those convened across lines of difference, hearing a shared invitation and holding space for quiet reverence sets a tone that carries. Please invite someone to read the following aloud or devise another way to hear these words together. After the reading, pause. Would you honor two or three minutes of silence? Or even more?*

*What kind of pause does a page invite?*

*WIDE, the margin between carte blanche and the white page. Nevertheless it is not in the margin that you can find me, but in the yet whiter one that separates the word-strewn sheet from the transparent, the written page from the one to be written in the infinite space where the eye turns back to the eye, and the hand to the pen, where all we write is erased, even as you write it. For the book imperceptibly takes shape within the book we will never finish. There is my desert. Edmond Jabès*

*The book is an unbearable totality. I write against a background of facets.  
Edmond Jabès*

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### Step Three: *Core Values*

*As you proceed into the next step of your convening, will you meet silence with the fullness of your own voice? Please call in the values you both bring to and anticipate from this convening. The following list of P words continues to grow, and you are always welcome to call in values not yet listed here. As you share a value that matters to you, would you also share what it means to you and your communities? And how about those feelings? How does this value impact the way you and others might feel? Please share how you hope this value will be present in this circle. If someone claims your chosen word or value, consider calling in the unexpected.*

**What needs to be named and claimed in order to proceed?**

Pacing matters	Personhood matters.	Practice matters.
Pain matters.	People matter.	Pranayama matters.
Palpitation matters.	Place matters.	Praxis matters.
Pandemic(s) matter(s).	Planning matters.	Prayer matters.
Passion matters.	Play matters.	Presence matters.
Patience matters.	Pleasure matters.	Pretext matters.
Patterns matter.	Poets matter.	Privilege matters.
Participation matters.	Politics matters.	Process matters.
Patriotism matters.	Pondering matters.	Promise matters.
Pause matters.	Position matters.	Prophets matter.
Peace matters.	Positionality matters.	Protest matters.
Performance matters.	Possibility matters.	Purpose matters.
Permission matters.	Potential matters.	Pushing matters.
Perspective matters.	Power matters.	Remembrance matters.

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## Step Four: *Conversing – Dialogue (Book) Session*

*Reading is a core invitation of the Friday Fellowship. Among other things, we read in order to notice our misreadings – of self, and other, and of one another, too. In the spirit of deepening commitments to discern on one's own and in community, 2020–2022 Friday Fellows are engaging six different dialogue texts. As you step into a conversation that spans counties and covers, would you begin by reading the following selections from each of the books quietly to yourselves?*

You must commit to a conversation, even the brief ones, or walk away. If you're too distracted, admit that to both yourself and the other person. Be present or be gone.

It only takes one good conversation to change your understanding of someone else's world, your world, and the world at large.

Through my experience and research, I've identified five key strategies that help facilitate a productive dialogue. They are: be curious, check your bias, show respect, stay the course, and end well. **(Celeste Headlee)**

In principle, the dialogue should work without any leader and without any agenda. Of course, we are used to leaders and agendas, so if we were to start meeting without leaders – start talking and have no agenda, no purpose – I think we would find a great deal of anxiety in not knowing what to do. Thus, one of the things would be to work through that anxiety, to face it.

Real dialogue is where two or more people become willing to suspend their certainty in each other's presence.

Thus, in dialogue each person does not attempt to make common certain ideas or items of information that are already known to him. Rather, it can be said that collectively they are making something in common. **(David Bohm)**

One reason that doing this with you is important to me, Paulo, is that people will profit from our conversation because they probably have the same kinds of questions that we have for each other. This type of conversation hasn't been possible before because even though we've been together on a number of occasions, the format is that others ask us questions. We never have the chance to ask each other questions. This is a good opportunity for us!

Myles, I think we could start our conversation by saying something to each other about our very existence in the world. We should not start, for example, speaking about the objectives of education. Do you see that this is not for me? You could speak a little bit about your life and work, and I will say something

about my life. Then we could interact in some moments of the conversation, as a starting point.

Here we are trying to decide how to get moments of each other's lives and to bring them into a book, a book which does not lose the essence of life. A dialogue is as the life that comes from the earth's springs. **(Myles Horton and Paolo Freire)**

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Whatever your personal beliefs and experiences, I invite you to consider that we need a new worldview to navigate this chaotic time. We cannot hope to make sense using our old maps. It won't help to dust them off or reprint them in bold colors. The more we rely on them, the more disoriented we become. They cause us to focus on the wrong things and blind us to what's significant. Using them, we will journey only to greater chaos.

I believe we can change the world if we start listening to one another again. Simple, honest, human conversation.

There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about. **(Margaret Wheatley)**

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In a world of infinite choices, choosing one thing is the revolutionary act. Imposing that restriction is actually liberating.

Specificity sharpens the gathering because people can see themselves in it.

Gatherings crackle and flourish when real thought goes into them, when (often invisible) structure is baked into them, and when a host has the curiosity, willingness, and generosity of spirit to try.

You are not alone if you skip the first step in convening people meaningfully: committing to a bold, sharp purpose. **(Priya Parker)**

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The web promises to make our world bigger. But as it works now, it also narrows our exposure to ideas. We can end up in a bubble in which we hear only the ideas we already know. Or already like.

Life is a conversation and you need places to have it. The virtual provides us with more spaces for these conversations and these are enriching. But what makes the physical so precious is that it supports continuity in a different way; it doesn't come and go, and it binds people to it. You can't just log off or drop out.

In the classroom, conversations carry more than the details of a subject; teachers are there to help students learn how to ask questions and be dissatisfied with easy answers. More than this, conversations with a good teacher communicate that learning isn't all about the answers. It's about what

the answers mean. Conversations help students build narratives - whether about gun control or the Civil War - that will allow them to learn and remember in a way that has meaning for them. Without these narratives, you can learn a new fact but not know what to do with it, how to make sense of it. In therapy, conversations explore the meanings of the relationships that animate our lives. It attends to pauses, hesitations, associations, the things that are said through silence. It commits to a kind of conversation that doesn't give "advice" but helps people discover what they have hidden from themselves so they can find their inner compass. (Sherry Turkle)

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With these introductions to different dialogue techniques before you, consider moving through a selection of the following questions that feels right to you and your dialogue partners.

**What is dialogue? And what does it require?**

Is dialogue art or science or both or neither?

Is there a difference between a conversation and a dialogue? Does that distinction matter?

What is the role of relationship in/to dialogue and dialogue processes?

**What kinds of dialogues have you participated in that felt productive or generative?**

What made them so?

How might the dialogue strategies and techniques you are reading about/encountering serve you and the communities in which you work and lead?

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## Step Five: *Clearness Check*

Convenings can deepen our awareness, challenge our knowing, and invite both individual and collective reckoning. As you begin wrapping up your conversations, pause. Can you quiet hearts and minds to reflect on what has been said and offered? Once you've held two or three minutes of silence, invite someone in your group to raise the following question. This is not a rhetorical flourish. Please hear, together, this cornerstone of our convening process.

Are we clear to close?

Being clear to close does not require consensus or completion. Instead, it signals a personal engagement with the fullness of a conversation. Often, convenings can bring up work we each have to do in our own lives. These learnings and teachings are not reason to hold up a closing. Instead, if there are lingering questions that need to be asked or learning that needs to be named and deepened with this group, please take the time to honor unfinished business. If your group is not clear to close, sit with one another to name and honor what needs saying, hearing, and doing. You will not be able to step into substantive work at this time, but you might note if and when and how the conversation needs to continue.

Please hold space for everyone to find their way to clearness before you pivot to closing.

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## Step Six: *Closing*

*Much like a beginning or a return, a closing is its own work. How will you exit this conversation together? You might choose to end by speaking a gift or a learning into the circle. You might choose to lift up a question you will take with you. However you close, be sure to name and honor gratitude for time spent with courage and curiosity, and with intention and integrity.*

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# Person, Place, & Thing:

Beyond the Noun of Leadership



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