



## 1. Suspension of Judgment

It is difficult for us to stay open to new and alternative views of reality. Because our egos become identified with how we think things are, we need to learn to silence our own interior narratives and hold our positions lightly – as though they are suspended in front of us for further consideration later. This allows others to express themselves fully and freely without fear of judgment or retaliation.

## 2. Identification of Assumptions

The opinions and judgments we hold are usually based on assumptions, inferences and generalizations that are to a greater or lesser extent unexamined. By learning how to identify our assumptions, we are better able to explore differences with others. We can find common ground on which to build.

## 3. Listening

The way we listen impacts how well we learn and how effective we are in building quality relationships. Listening, not just hearing, requires comprehension, minimal distraction and disciplined focus on the person speaking. We need to develop our capacity to stay present to the conversation and remain open to the meaning arising at both the individual and collective levels. We must intentionally slow our pace down so we can listen and perceive at ever more subtle levels. We learn to welcome longer silences between speakers to allow time to absorb what is said.

To listen deeply takes ongoing training and personal mastery. Deep listening takes in body language and the emotional climate. It entails understanding one's own intentions. Am I listening intently to prepare my response or to grasp the perspectives of the person in a way that creates a bond of understanding between me and this person?

Deep listening for the speaker feels kind and meaningful. It engenders a powerful interaction, a stronger relationship and mutual understanding with the listener.

## 4. Inquiry and Reflection

It is through the process of inquiry and reflection that we dig deeply into matters that concern us and create breakthroughs in our ability to solve problems. By learning how to ask questions that lead to new levels of understanding, we accelerate our collective learning. Questions keep dialogue moving. We gain greater awareness of the issues that separate and unite us. We reach common ground that can generate new ideas.

## What Are Blocks to Dialogue?

Blocks are ways to thwart discussion and rupture the bonding process inherent in real communication. There are four primary blocks: passivity, discounting, redefining and overdetailing. Passivity occurs when a person uses withdrawal language or non-responsive behavior. Discounting occurs when someone puts another or themselves down in some way. Redefining changes the focus of the conversation to avoid something. Overdetailing is providing too many details so that the point gets lost in the barrage of information. Other forms of blocking include being too rational, being too emotional, overgeneralizing, lack of directness and lack of honesty. Awareness of these blocks through careful listening enables us to intervene and return to dialogue.

## What Does This Mean for Organization Leaders?

Effective leaders know when to speak, when to listen and when to be silent. Leaders who engage in dialogue consistently uncover the hidden creative potential in any situation. They have the abilities to “(1) evoke people’s genuine voices, (2) listen deeply, (3) hold space for and respect as legitimate other people’s views, and (4) broaden awareness and perspective.”<sup>2</sup>

## Conclusion

Dialogue is not right for all situations. Urgent matters require quick and decisive responses. We need however to invest ourselves in dialogue with each other so that we have a foundational relationship of understanding, a common ground, a treasury of collective wisdom and insight that enables us to address the big questions facing our sponsored ministries in the most creative, inclusive and effective manner possible. We must develop a culture of collaboration and communities of learning grounded in respect, openness and trust for the good of our ministries. Dialogue is necessary and powerful.

## Resources

David Bohm, [On Dialogue](#)

William Isaacs, [Dialogue: The Art Of Thinking Together](#)

George Kohlrieser, “The Power of Authentic Dialogue,” [Leader to Leader](#), No. 42, Fall 2006, 36-40

Peter Senge, [The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook](#)

Brady Wilson, “Quality Linked to Conversation,” [www.refresher.com](#)