

Circle of Trust®

Touchstones for Safe and Trustworthy Space

Choose for yourself when and how to participate.

There is always invitation, never invasion;
always opportunity, never demand.

Make space for silence and reflection.

Slow down and pay attention to the
“inner voice” that is trying to speak.

Embrace differences.

Speak your truth with “I statements.”
Listen with an open mind to others’ truth.

No fixing.

Seek instead, through deep listening
and open questions, to help each other
find his or her own clarity and resourcefulness.

When the going gets rough, turn to wonder.

Turn from reaction and judgment to wonder and
compassionate inquiry: “I wonder why they feel/think
this way?” or “I wonder what pushed my buttons?”

Observe confidentiality.

Safety is built when we can trust that our words and stories
will remain with the people with whom we choose to share,
and are not passed on to others without our permission.

The Practice of Asking Open & Honest Questions

*Adapted from the work of Parker Palmer, John Morefield,
Marcy Jackson and Susan Kaplan.*

Inspired by the work of Parker J. Palmer and Center for Courage & Renewal (www.couragerenewal.org) Open & Honest Questions are a thoughtful pathway for inquiry and discernment, moving us beyond our normal patterns of communication. Often our questions are laden with advice, problem solving, or meeting our needs to be a “competent leader or engaged Helping Professional.” Open & Honest Questions serve to invite a more spacious, authentic conversation. This practice enables us to:

- Create a more authentic and deeper exploration of a problem or question for both the person talking and the one listening;
- Step away from our tendency to jump to solutions, assign blame, or otherwise approach our exchanges attached to a specific end (teaching with a specific goal in mind, defend what we know, problem solve, or respond as a “good educator” would);
- Invite a person to call upon their own wisdom and knowledge of self. This builds capacity for their own leadership from within by exploring their own assets, truth, questions, and answers, inviting a discovery of their own “hidden wholeness.” A person accesses their inner teacher by thinking about the situation in new ways, applying past learning and experience to now, while listening to both feelings and thoughts.
- Support a deeper inner conversation within oneself;
- Slow down the pace of our conversation and develop a deeper mutual engagement;
- Expand and deepen an exploration rather than narrow or restrict possibilities;
- Explore and “hold” important questions or complicated issues. This practice recognizes significant value in listening without judgment with a view for understanding instead of reacting with a quick, simple or incomplete answer for an immediate direction (that may make things worse in the long run);
- Use meaningful metaphors to reframe or help “step out” of the situation;
- Invite more authentic responses rather than second guessing the “right answer”;
- Changes the dynamic of our tendency to want to fix, “save”, change or give advice. In these responses, we see the person as “broken” or with deficits. Our new role is to create a safe and meaningful process in which we help the person access their own “hidden wholeness”.

Framing Open & Honest Questions

1. The best single hallmark of an open, honest question is that the questioner could not possibly anticipate the answer to it. *What surprises you? What moves or touches you about this? What inspires you? What was easy? What was hard?*
2. Ask questions that aim at helping the person rather than satisfying your curiosity. Ask questions directed to the person as well as to the problem – about feelings as well as facts. *Have you ever had an experience that felt like your current issue? Did you learn anything from that prior experience that feels useful to you now? How do you feel about the experience you just described?*
3. Stay with the person's language --- use words the person is using not what you think they might or should be feeling. *You said this was an impossible situation -- could you say more about what this means to you? What do you mean when you said you felt frustrated? as opposed to Don't you ever feel angry?*
4. Formulate questions that are brief and to the point rather than larding them with background considerations and rationale. *What are your expectations or hopes for your project?*
5. Trust your own intuition, even if your instincts seem off the wall. Listen deeply to the story and allow questions to come from your heart rather than your head.
6. Avoid long storytelling or speech making that may draw attention to yourself.
7. Consider waiting to ask a question if you're not sure what type of question it is. If it keeps coming back to you, see if you can re-frame it into an open-ended question.
8. The best questions are simple. *How does this work for you? What questions do you have? What is the hardest aspect of this situation? What is the easiest aspect of this situation?*
9. Avoid questions with right/wrong answers. Consider re-framing *Don't you think you should do this project instead?* to *What interests you about the other approach?*
10. Use images or metaphors that the person might relate to, to open things up in ways that more direct questions do not. *If you were writing a book about this experience, how would you name this chapter? If you were using a roadmap to navigate this issue, what would be on your map – the rest stops, the destinations, the detours?*
11. Know when to use Open & Honest Questions. These questions are not appropriate for all situations. There is a time to give information, to make a decision and to share your own opinion and experience.



“TO BE OF THE EARTH”

To be of the Earth is to know
the restlessness of being a seed
the darkness of being planted
the struggle toward the light
the pain of growth into the light
the joy of bursting and bearing fruit
the love of being food for someone
the scattering of your seeds
the decay of the seasons
the mystery of death
and the miracle of birth.

—*John Soos*



Listening Like a Cow

“What I’m trying to construct here is a theory of attention that depends little on therapeutic skills and formal training: listening like a cow. Those of you who grew up in the country know that cows are good listeners. And barns, as I said before, are great contemplative spaces—at least the old ones were. I recommend to you this kind of dairy barn listening. We don’t need fixing, most of us, as much as we need a warm space and a good cow. Cows cock their big brown eyes at you and twitch their ears when you talk. This is a great antidote to the critical listening that goes on in academia, where we listen for the mistake, the flaw in the argument. Cows, by contrast, manage at least the appearance of deep, openhearted attention.”

“If you are listening, if you are turning your big brown or blue eyes on somebody and twitching your ears at them, you are earning your silage. You are listening people into existence. You are saving lives. You are producing Grade A.”

- Mary Rose O’Reilly
in *Radical Presence*,
Heineman and Co.,
Portsmouth, NH (1998)

Asking Open Questions ~ Small Group Discussion

Guidelines:

- Please read the focus person's statement below.
- After reading the statement, reflect as a group to determine which of the questions that follow seem open and which seem more "closed."
- Pay particular attention to the subtle ways in which an apparently open question can actually be closed, leading or even nudging the focus person down a path chosen partly by the discerner. We might think of some seemingly open questions as "cloaked" – veiled in an agenda.
- Make a note of which questions your group considers more closed/open and why, then write a few open questions of your own. Choose one or two to type into the chat when you return from the breakout session.

Focus person's statement:

I am so torn. I have had a chance to add a significant layer of responsibility to my current Extension educator position through an emerging statewide leadership opportunity. It will strengthen my county-based visibility and I think it will heighten my reputation statewide, too. I am in a quandary as to what to do. I am not completely dissatisfied with what I'm doing, but I'm also not energized by it anymore at all. The new role would be potentially exciting, and yet it would mean a much longer day with even more evening meetings. My children are in middle school, so childcare isn't too much of an issue, though we would be exploring afterschool programs that offer later pick up times and I don't know what we would do in the evening. My partner says he'll support me either way. I have to make a decision soon; the path just doesn't seem clear...

In my spare time, I enjoy gardening and have a special interest in growing fruit trees, selecting those which are more drought-tolerant, take longer to mature, but seem to flourish in my backyard. I am also an avid cyclist and have recently taken a painting class that opened up a new area of artistic expression for me. I have loved the way in which this creative work has opened up some new space in my life – and in my mind.

Questions for discernment: does your group see them as open, closed, or "cloaked?"

- Imagine your current situation and this impending opportunity, each as a patch of fertile ground. What can you imagine growing in each?
- Have you read the book *Transitions*? I think it might be helpful to you!

- Does the fact that you are considering this opportunity mean that you want a change?
- What might your executive director offer you as you figure out which path to follow?
- On my leadership journey I learned that it's best to go for it; what does going for it mean to you?
- What are you most longing for as you contemplate the next step?

Working in your small group, please take a few moments to generate a few open questions of your own....

A Purification

At start of spring I open a trench
in the ground. I put into it
the winter's accumulation of paper,
pages I do not want to read
again, useless words, fragments,
errors. And I put into it
the contents of the outhouse:
light of the sun, growth of the ground,
finished with one of their journeys.
To the sky, to the wind, then,
and to the faithful trees, I confess
my sins: that I have not been happy
enough, considering my good luck;
have listened to too much noise;
have been inattentive to wonders;
have lusted after praise.

- Wendell Berry, *New Collected Poems* (Counterpoint, 2012)

Session 2: Questions for Reflection

What are my winter's accumulations that I might want to tuck into the ground and close the trench?

What wonders might I have missed through inattention?

How might the old escape into the new in my life?

Optional invitation: take some time to write those 'accumulations that you want to tuck into the ground' on a piece of paper, go outside and bury it, tuck into houseplant soil, put it into a woodstove or compost bucket -- or otherwise let go of them in a way that is suitable to your setting. Feel free to be creative with this!

The Four Courages:

Upon reflection, I recognized that I've had to summon courage at different periods of my life. I discovered four basic courageous actions that have given me the impetus to improve my life:

- ❖ The courage to shut the door...
- ❖ The courage to release history...
- ❖ The courage to wonder...
- ❖ The courage to capture potential...

-Nancee Killoran, "The Four Courages"

It takes
courage
to _____.

It takes courage

to teach
to lead
to serve
to heal
to speak up
to stand out
to look inward
to right wrongs.

It takes courage
to walk your talk
to stand your ground
to make waves
to ride waves
to find wholehearted ways
to be known as vulnerable
to love after loss
to love, period.

It takes courage
to say 'I was wrong'
to say 'I don't know'
to say 'let's find out'
to take enough time
to seek better answers
instead of quick fixes
to give yourself fully
to try making a difference
when the outcome is not
guaranteed.

It takes courage
to choose wisely and well
to go against the grain
to go into the wind
to point your boat
toward your true north
to lead others forward
to have faith in the future
and be fully present today.

It takes courage
to trust in the process
to be part of the process
to process your parts that
are shadows
to embrace your shadows
as part of your self
to also embrace your
beauty and light.

It takes courage
to know yourself well
enough
to choose where your
energy comes from and
goes
to trust it's possible
to trust what courage can
do
and give yourself time to
find out.

It takes courage
to give yourself time to
renew
to give yourself over to
grief
to give silence a chair at the
table
to give doubt a chance to
show other options
to give the world your best
self and ideas
without giving up on your
soul.

It takes courage to
be your whole self
so you can
do your best work
so you can
be the change you want to
see
so you can
do what your worthy cause
most needs you to do.

It takes courage
to ask '*how* shall I be'
so that I can do [what?]
so the world can be
better
for all.

Leadership takes courage
and gives courage, too.

And courage takes trust.

—Shelly L. Francis

The Parable of the Trapeze: Turning the fear of transformation into the transformation of fear

Sometimes I feel that my life is a series of trapeze swings. I'm either hanging on to a trapeze bar swinging along or, for a few moments in my life, I'm hurtling across space in between trapeze bars.

Most of the time, I spend my life hanging for dear life to my trapeze-bar-of-the-moment. It carries me along at a certain steady rate of swing and I have the feeling that I'm in control of my life.

I know most of the right questions and even some of the answers.

But, every once in a while as I'm merrily (or even not-so-merrily) swinging along, I look out ahead of me into the distance and what do I see? I see another trapeze bar swinging toward me. It's empty and I know, in that place in me that knows, that this new trapeze bar has my name on it. It is my next step, my growth, my aliveness coming to get me. In my heart of hearts I know that, for me to grow, I must release my grip on this present, well known bar and move to the new one.

Each time it happens to me I hope (no, I pray) that I won't have to let go of my old bar completely before I grab the new one. But in my knowing place, I know that I must totally release my grasp on my old bar and, for some moment in time, I must hurtle across space before I can grab onto the new bar.

Each time, I am filled with terror. It doesn't matter that in all my previous hurtles across the void of unknowing I have always made it. I am each time afraid that I will miss, that I will be crushed on unseen rocks in the bottomless chasm between bars. I do it anyway. Perhaps this is the essence of what the mystics call the faith experience. No guarantees, no net, no insurance policy, but you do it anyway because somehow to keep hanging on to that old bar is no longer on the list of alternatives. So, for an eternity that can last a microsecond or a thousand lifetimes, I soar across the dark void of "the past is gone, the future is not here yet."

It's called "transition." I have come to believe that this transition is the only place that real change occurs. I mean real change, not the pseudo-change that only lasts until the next time my old buttons get punched.

I have noticed that, in our culture, this transition zone is looked upon as a "no-thing," a no-place between places. Sure, the old trapeze bar was real, and that new one coming towards me, I hope that's real, too. But the void in between? Is that just a scary, confusing, disorienting nowhere that must be gotten through as fast and as unconsciously as possible?

NO! What a wasted opportunity that would be! I have a sneaking suspicion that the transition zone is the only real thing and the bars are illusions we dream up to avoid the void where the real change, the real growth, occurs for us. Whether or not my hunch is true, it remains that the transition zones in our lives are incredibly rich places. They should be honored, even savored. Yes, with all the pain and fear and feelings of being out of control that can (but not necessarily) accompany transitions, they are still the most alive, most growth-filled, passionate, expansive moments of our lives.

So, transformation of fear may have nothing to do with making fear go away, but rather with giving ourselves permission to "hang out" in the transition between trapezes. Transforming our need to grab that new bar, any bar, is allowing ourselves to dwell in the only place where change really happens. It can be terrifying. It can also be enlightening in the true sense of the word. Hurtling through the void, we just may learn how to fly.

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Five Dysfunctions of a Team, by Patrick Lencioni

According to the book, the five dysfunctions are:

- **Absence of trust—unwilling to be vulnerable within the group.**
- Fear of conflict—seeking *artificial harmony* over constructive passionate debate.
- Lack of commitment—feigning buy-in for group decisions creates *ambiguity* throughout the organization.
- Avoidance of accountability—ducking the responsibility to call peers, superiors on counterproductive behavior which sets *low standards*.
- Inattention to results—focusing on personal success, *status and ego* before team success

Positive Approach:

- **We trust one another.**
- We engage in unfiltered conflict around ideas.
- We commit to decisions and plans of actions.
- We hold one another accountable for delivering against those plans.
- We focus on the achievement of collective results.

Session 3: Questions for Reflection

Think of a work, community, or personal situation of which you were a part, in which relational trust was strong.

- What contributed to the presence of relational trust?
- What part if any did you play in strengthening/developing relational trust?
- How did the level of trust impact you?
- What else did you notice?

Now think about a work or community or personal situation in which relational trust was lacking or weak, what contributed to that?

- How did it affect you? What was the ultimate result of the lack of trust?
- What is your work regarding trust? Trusting others? Gaining trust?

How does this impact your journey toward reconnecting with your purpose?

Prompts for Triad Reflection:

What have I discovered these past five months about how I spend most of my time?

What did I learn through time spent with my project or during my Peer Learning Circles?

Why am I doing what I'm doing? For what purpose?

What have I learned about my courage to reconnect with my purpose?

In reconnecting with my purpose, to what am I most faithful?

How/where might increasing relational trust bring more fulfillment to my work life?

What question above, or of my own, might I most appreciate open and honest questions to guide me more deeply in reflection?

Reflection Triads Agenda

1:30 – 2:00	Large Group: preparation for lengthier triads.
2:00 – 2:30	Session 1
2:30 – 2:40	Short Break*
2:40 – 3:10	Session 2
3:10 – 3:20	Short Break*
3:20 – 3:50	Session 3
3:50 – 4:00	Short Break*

*** Take a 10-minute break and when you come back, switch roles.**

Timeframe for each Session:

5 minutes: Speaker introduces topic based on what arose during reflective questions.

20 minutes: Others ask questions. No ‘larding,’ guiding, directing, advising, fixing, please. Our whole aim is to listen and give the speaker much needed room to discern what has arisen and what they will take away during this five-month period of ‘reconnecting with purpose.’

5 minutes: Closing appreciations and celebrations. Offering appreciation to the speaker for their speaking time.

Guidelines:

- Our whole task is not to problem solve, but to provide space for the speaker to think and reflect on what they would like to do.
- Allow our focus to remain on the speaker.
- Only ask honest and open questions – no sharing of your experience or offering advice.
- Double confidentiality – not only will we never repeat what is spoken of, we will never bring it up. Imagine that someone has shared something confidential about their workplace – we would not casually bring that up at a work event, for example.
- Not about satisfying your own curiosity or putting forward any ‘agenda’ of your own.

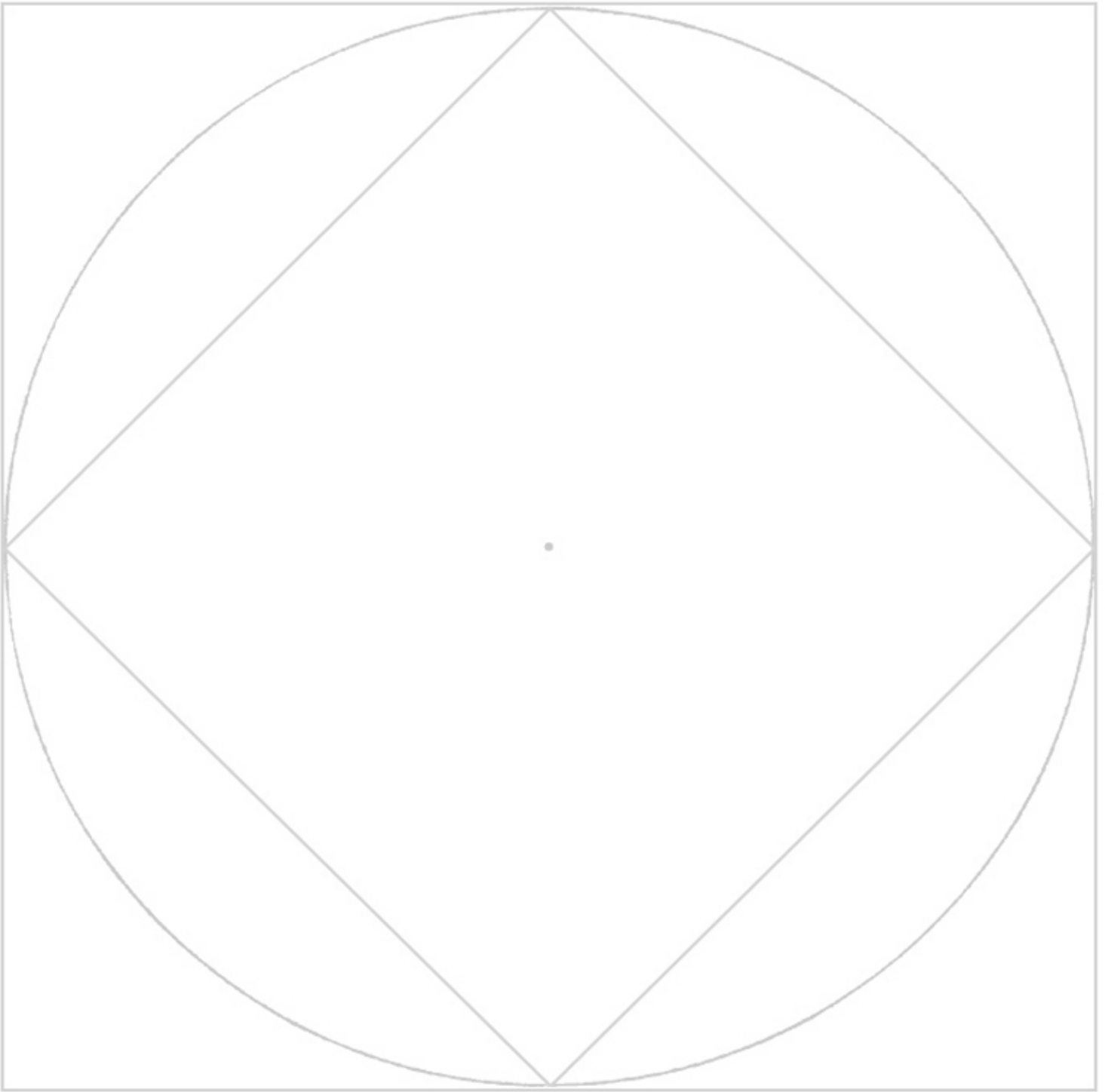
Exploring Wholeness

The divided life may be endemic, but wholeness is always a choice. Once I have seen my dividedness, do I continue to live a contradiction – or do I try to bring my inner and outer worlds back into harmony?

“Being whole” is a self-evident good, so the answer would seem to be clear. And yet, as we all know, it is not. Time after time we choose against wholeness by slipping into a familiar pattern of evasion that can be powerful and persistent:

- First comes denial: surely what I have seen about myself cannot be true!
- Next comes equivocation: the inner voice speaks softly, and truth is a subtle, slippery thing, so how can I be sure of what my soul is saying?
- Next comes fear: if I let that inner voice dictate the shape of my life, what price might I have to pay in a world that sometimes punishes authenticity?
- Next comes cowardice: the divided life may be destructive, but at least I know the territory, while what lies beyond is *terra incognita*.
- Then comes avarice: in some situations, I am rewarded for being willing to stifle my soul.

- Excerpt, A Hidden Wholeness: the Journey Toward an Undivided Life



Create a visual of your 'Inner and Outer Worlds' in harmony

Community

Somewhere, there are people to whom we can speak with passion
without having the words catch in our throats.

Somewhere a circle of hands

will open to receive us, eyes will light up as we enter,

voices will celebrate with us whenever we come into our own power.

Community means strength

that joins our strength to do the work that needs to be done.

Arms to hold us when we falter.

A circle of healing.

A circle of friends.

Someplace where we can be free.

- Dreaming the Dark, by Starhawk