

**Peter Block's Six Conversations**  
***Community: The Structure of Belonging*** (Barrett-Koehler, 2008).

Block affirms that *belong* has two meanings:

- [1] “to be related to and a part of something. . . the experience of being at home in the broadest sense.” (p. xii)
- [2] “being an owner. Something belongs to me.”

“Belonging can also be thought of as a longing to be. Being is our capacity to find our deeper purpose in all that we do. . . . Community is the container within which our longing is to be fulfilled. Without the connectedness of a community, we will continue to choose not to be. I have always been touched by the term *beloved community*.” (p. xii)

Block suggests six conversations that make a difference. Many of our conversations are just talk; they don't move us forward. They don't change anything.

These six conversations do make a difference. They each lead to the next one. Hospitable and accountable community is formed and transformed by them.

The invitation conversation normally comes first, but the sequence of the others will vary. This is a rough order that normally lines up with people's experience. They certainly can be organically interlocking in the formation of a new Christian community.

**I. The invitation conversation.**

We are seeking to engage people in the new possibility of a Christian community. The invitation is the first hospitable step.

In the formation of a new Christian community, there might well be several different invitations.

- 1. For example, you will need connection to networkers, people who know where the resources are, people who know the contexts

in which you are working. These people normally won't become part of your core team or your launch team, but they might. They are invaluable connectors.

Your invitation to them is to be supportive of the new community you envision and connect you with the people you should know. You also can invite them to assist you in knowing the contexts in which you are working.

2. You also can consider inviting people into this adventure as support people who will assist you in getting launched and moving forward but may well not become part of your community. You can invite them into the initial stages of envisioning and creating the work you envision.

3. You will engage with people whom you will invite onto your launch team and into the core group. The work Mary Francis has shared with you can be very helpful in determining who these people might be.

4. You always are inviting people to attend each event, each worship experience, each taste and see. Some of those people might be receptive to another invitation to deeper participation.

You must be prepared for the possibility of refusal. And, refusal is acceptable. Some of those people might well become part of the new ministry once it launches but not be prepared to join a launch or core team.

Part of the invitation is to name the hurdle. It costs nothing to refuse, but it does cost to say "yes." Naming the challenge and the hurdle adds clarity and power to the invitation.

Make the invitation personal, face to face. Email and phone can assist in setting up the conversation, but a personal conversation is the way to make the invitation.

## 2. **The Possibility Conversation**

Possibility involves something other than goals and prediction. And possibility is not dreaming. Possibility has to do with creating something new.

“Possibility . . . is a declaration of a future that has the quality of being and aliveness that we choose to live into. It is framed as a declaration of the world that I want to inhabit.” (Block, p 124)

You are inviting people into the possibility of a new and unique community, into refining the vision of what is possible and into creating that possibility with you.

You can describe that possibility as you envision it at the moment and invite them into shaping and creating that new community with you.

Be careful that your vision is not just a restatement of the problems of the old communities with which we are all too familiar. Vision can be simply a form of problem solving and not a statement of new and unique possibility.

You are inviting people into expressing their gifts in the realizing of this new possibility. They may well be living on the margins of the Christian world.

## 3. **The Ownership Conversation**

In this conversation you are asking people how they can contribute to creating this new community. Are they the connectors who can assist you with the context? Are they the support people who will undergird your preparations for launch? Are they people who can serve on your launch team and core team who will continue with the community? And, how can they contribute.

Accountability lies at the heart of this conversation.  
Examples:

How important to you will this new work be?

How much risk will you take?

How involved are you willing to be?

To what extent are you invested in the well being of this new community?

Block calls this the guilt question, to be asked later.

What have I done to contribute to the very thing I complain about or want to change?

(Block, p. 129)

#### 4. **The Dissent Conversation**

Being part of a new community's creation raises doubts and creates reservations.

Welcoming those embraces diversity. You must guard the space so that people can express their doubts. You must hear them with keen interest. You don't have to overcome them or let them amplify our own. We just have to show genuine interest.

Why do these dissenting doubts and reservations mean so much to them?

If people cannot dissent and say "no," then there is no valid "yes" possible either.

Bringing doubts and dissent into the conversation give people space to move beyond them through the process of conversation.

Block says, "Once expressed, they (doubts) no longer control us; we control them." (p, 133)

"Doubt and 'no' are symbolic expressions of people finding their space and role in the future. . . . The moment people experience

the fact that they can dissent, or in softer form, express doubts, and not lose their place in the circle, they begin to join as full-fledged citizens.” (p. 133)

Questions for dissent (Block, p. 135) (in ascending order of difficulty)

What doubts and reservations do you have?

What is the no, or refusal, that you keep postponing?

What have you said yes to, that you no longer really mean?

What is a commitment or decision that you have changed your mind about?

What forgiveness are you withholding?

What resentment do you hold that no one knows about?

## **5. The Commitment Conversation**

We invite people into a commitment later in the process of conversation, a commitment with no expectation of a return or payoff.

Commitment involves two kinds of promises:

\*My behavior and actions with others

\*Results and outcomes that occur in the world

We make these commitments to our peers in the conversation.

We are committing ourselves to the community.

“What promises am I willing to make?”

“What price am I willing to pay for the successful creation of this new community?”

Commitment questions (Block, p. 138)

What promises am I willing to make?

What measures have meaning to me?

What prices am I willing to pay?

What is the cost to others for me to keep my commitments, or to fail in my commitments?

What is the promise I’m willing to make that constitutes a risk or major shift for me?

What is the promise I am postponing?

What is the promise or commitment I am unwilling to make?

## **6. The Gifts Conversation**

In the creation of new community, we do not focus on the weaknesses or deficiencies of people. Rather, we focus on the gifts people bring and how those gifts can be shared.

We must be particularly keen on bringing the gifts of those on the margins into the life of the community.

We don’t focus on how people need to improve or what didn’t go well or how people should do differently.

Rather, we confront people with their gifts: (p. 140)

The gifts you have received from them

The unique strength that you see in them

The capacities they have that bring something unique and needed in the world.

What they did in the last ten minutes that made a difference.

Questions about the gifts people bring to a gathering. (Block, p. 141)

What gift(s) have you received from another in this room?  
(Specific answers)

What has someone in your small group done today that has touched you or moved you or been of value to you?

Or

In what way did a particular person engage you in a way that had meaning?

Questions about the gifts people bring to the entire venture  
(p. 142)

What is the gift you currently hold in exile?

What is it about you that no one knows about?

What are you grateful for that has gone unspoken?

What is the positive feedback you receive that still surprises you?

What is the gift you have that you do not fully acknowledge?

Summary of the core questions associated with each invitation.

To what extent are you here by choice? (Invitation)

How much risk do you plan to take and how participative do you plan to be in this gathering or project? (Ownership)

What are the crossroads you/we are to appropriate to the purpose of the gathering? (Possibilities)

What declarations are you prepared to make about the possibilities for the future? (Possibilities)

To what extent do you see yourself as cause of the problem you are trying to fix? (Ownership)

What is the story you hold about this community or this issue, and what are the payoffs and the cost of this story? (Ownership)

What are your doubts and reservations? (Dissent)

What is the yes you no longer mean? (Dissent)

What promises are you willing to make to your peers? (Commitment)

What gifts have you received from each other? (Gifts)