



MOVEMENT BUILDING PRACTICE:

*Transformative Movement
Conversations*



Developed in conjunction with the Transformative Movement Building Webinar Series. For further exploration, including more movement building practice guides and the archived webinars, visit <http://movementstrategy.org/publications-tools/>.



Transformative Movement Conversations

What is a Transformative Movement Conversation?

Transformative Movement Conversations are conversations that help us discover new insights about tensions in our movements. The most beneficial way to approach this type of conversation is as a practice—something we do regularly and often to discover new solutions.

At the heart of these conversations we seek to build deep connection and understanding together, and to move beyond “either-or” thinking and the limitations of individual perspectives.

Why do we need Transformative Movement Conversations?

Social movements are generated from a critical mass of people aligned around a common vision for society. A key responsibility of a movement builder is to create a “Bigger We” that welcomes everyone invested in that vision.

To do this we ourselves need to be big; we need to be grounded and open in ways that create space and opportunity for everyone around us, and for each other. This bigness is necessary for us to be effective change agents. Unfortunately, our habits often trip us up. We fall into the trap of winners and losers; right and wrong. For example, we often debate and try to convince others that our perspective is “right,” when we really need to be in dialogue to understand how there may be multiple needs that are being expressed, or that there may be multiple ways to understand what is going on.

Being big means building the connection, insight, and momentum we need to make change, rather than falling back into old habits that leave our movements isolated and fragmented. This does not mean creating false unity or settling for something that we don’t believe in. It means listening deeply to discover new insights. The more critical the situation is, the harder -- and more essential -- it is for us to be open.



*When we practice
bigness and openness as
movement builders, we...*

- Reconnect to our purpose, power, and agency;
- Listen more deeply;
- Engage in spirited inquiry without fear;
- Pivot to curiosity when we notice judgment in ourselves or others;
- Discover new perspectives and relationships;
- Make breakthroughs;
- See and generate unexpected solutions and ways forward.



Transformative Movement Conversations

What distinguishes Transformative Movement Conversations?

As movement builders we are called to engage in different types of conversations at different times (for example, to resolve a conflict, to develop a strategy and plan of action, or to build community). The key is to know what is called for in the moment.

In transformative movement conversations...

- We seek to understand before being understood.
- We suspend our judgment and listen and contribute openly – without losing ourselves in the process.
- We listen for insights and solutions that bridge or transcend the core tensions that divide us (move from either/or to both/and), and in the process find new perspective that may uncover unexpected solutions.
- We bring deep honesty, curiosity, and openness so that we ourselves are changed and impacted.

Transformative movement conversations are not an analytical process. They require a different skill that goes beyond analysis. They require being okay with exploring the unknown and choosing to believe that there is a path towards alignment underneath the tension. We look for the highest ground – a place we hadn't seen before - not the lowest common denominator. We can only do this through engagement with different perspectives from an open, expansive viewpoint. When we are courageous enough to try on new perspectives that might feel uncomfortable, more space for transformation becomes possible. Transformative Movement Conversations are crucial for the depth and scale of transformation we seek. Let's all find ways to build the muscle of this practice.



Personal Exercise:

VISUALIZING A POWERFUL,
OPEN ENDED, TRANSFORMATIVE
MOVEMENT CONVERSATION

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Before engaging in a Transformative Movement Conversation, it can be helpful to connect with our own personal values and motivation. This visualization is one way to do that.

Here are potential visualization prompts to ground yourself before going into a transformative movement conversation. If you can, try sitting with these in a calm, peaceful place that puts you at ease. Take note of whatever breakthrough occurs during your visualization so you can remember it if you feel yourself becoming tense before or during the conversation.

Pre-Conversation Visualization Prompts

- *What would it feel and look like if the tensions were resolved in a way that addresses everyone's needs and concerns? Get out of your head and try using your imagination - if it had a color or an image what would that be?*
- *Imagine a time when you have broken through tension before. What helped you to see a different perspective? Ground yourself in the feeling or belief that made this possible rather than the tactic or strategy.*
- *Visualize how love could show up in this situation. What compassion or understanding is possible that you haven't thought of? What does love and compassion look and feel like for you in times when it's hard?*
- *Go to the hardest place. Spend sometime thinking about the core of the frustration, fear, or tension that is most alive for you. What is the essence of it? Sit in what comes up for you and see what is there without judgement or fear.*
- *What would it look like to let go of the core tension that is most alive for you? What would it look like to hold onto it lightly - in a way that honors where you are but allows you to remain open to possibility? Try on both and see what emerges. Try blending the two and see what emerges.*



Transformative Conversation Guidelines

General Orientation:

Transformative movement conversations are a practice in openness and discovery. They are a way of being with each other, rather than a tool or exercise.

We define practice as: a conscious and repetitive action that cultivates specific qualities and capacities. Set an intention to do this practice regularly and often, even trying it at home and out in the world. While we are with each other we can build our capacity to notice when these conversations are arising (which can be at any moment) and to initiate a conversation.

To Initiate:

- **Notice** – a core movement conversation is arising.
- **Name & Clarify** – the core tension and question, or the either-or thinking at play, clearly and directly without using euphemisms. Name why it may be challenging or difficult to have the conversation, including what the concerns may be. For example, “when you took x position, I felt concerned about y.”
- **Lead & Get support** – identify who is ready to lead the conversation; assume a big, open stance to help the group be curious about the tension. Identify facilitators if the initiators are not facilitating.
- **Create a clear container** – name the time frame for the conversation with a defined start and end.

In the conversation:

(See specific steps to take in the Process section ahead)

- Begin the conversation by taking some deep, low & slow breaths together.
- Get into an open, grounded, forward stance.
- Remember the shared purpose for the conversation.
- Notice your body and what you are experiencing;
- Bring your full self - curiosity, honesty, and openness.
- Ask questions to build deeper understanding and connection



Transformative Conversation Guidelines (cntd.)

In the conversation (cntd)

- Be as honest and respectful as possible with yourself and others.
- Name either-or-thinking – ask questions to help tease out nuances and see the whole picture.
- Move towards collective hopes and vision.
- Maintain boundaries on time and energy.

Guiding questions:

- What is the tension, or either-or thinking that is playing out here?
- Where is there alignment?
- Where is there is difference and what is at the root of the difference?
- What are the needs and hopes being communicated?
- If I take a step back, what is a third way, bridge or bigger perspective on this issue?

Reflect and Close:

Find a point to land the conversation for now. The conversation does not need to be “finished” or resolved to close. The actual inquiry will continue to percolate and deepen in the space in-between formal conversation.

End with appreciations, insights, and unanswered questions.



Process



Here is an outline of the process that can be adapted to the time and circumstances of the situation. The goal is to gain more experience in smaller groups, and then build up to large group discussion.

Open: Begin the conversation by taking some deep, low & slow breaths together. Name the shared purpose for the conversation, and remind the group of key elements of this practice.

Journal: 5-10 minutes silent journaling. What is the core tension and question? What is your most honest answer to the question? What are you curious about? What are you struggling with?

Pair-Share: 10-15 minute discussion on the core tension/question with a partner in preparation for a group conversation.

Small Group Discussion: 30 + minute conversation on the core tension/question with a group of 3-5 people.

Large Group Discussion and/or Reflection:

The group may want to do one go around to have the opportunity to hear all voices, especially if you are jumping into the discussion before doing any small group work.

Reflect and Close in the Large Group.

End with appreciations, insights, and unanswered questions.

