Resetting the Table

Building Dialogue and Deliberation Across Divides

Louisville Jewish Community

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When discussing "difficult topics," what matters most to people – e.g., how they are connected to the topic and why they care about it – is often left out of the conversation. Yet bringing these personal dimensions to the fore has the potential to transform how we "do" our social and political discourse.

Social psychology research demonstrates that people react to the world with their moral intuitions (the heart and the gut) much faster and more profoundly than they do with their reasoning mind. Those moral intuitions come from core values and direct experiences (especially early-life experiences). In other words, people make rapid intuitive judgments to which they feel profoundly committed, gravitating toward ideas, information, and people who affirm their existing views and rejecting or dismissing those that challenge their existing views. Only *afterward* will they use rational argument to offer reasons for these moral and political judgments. *For the most part, then, we rationalize as a way to justify our intuitive gut reactions to the world*.

The consequences of this truism of human cognition include these kindred psychological phenomena:

Confirmation Bias
A tendency to favor information that confirms our already-existing beliefs. "We can believe almost anything that supports our team" so long as we have even the most minimal evidence for it.

Motivated Reasoning
A more complex version of confirmation bias, whereby as we listen to facts or evidence that go against our beliefs, we go to great lengths to find ways to dismiss, undermine, or ignore them even in the face of overwhelming evidence.

> Overall, if we want people to remain receptive to people or views that contradict their pre-existing moral commitments, our conversations must invite people to share the experiences, concerns, and aspirations that are driving them. Purely analytical engagement obscures the personal commitments that are far more powerful in determining the ways in which they take in and process information and argument.

Patterns of Charged Interactions
Overwhelmed, Narrow, and Disconnected

Charged interactions produce "fight or flight" responses that *greatly* intensify the dynamics of confirmation bias and motivated reasoning while also eroding trust in others.

In the midst of conflict, we tend to:

- Either become argumentative or shut down and disengage
- See those who disagree with us as adversaries rather than allies in any sense
- Assume our adversaries have bad intentions
- Think of those adversaries increasingly in one-dimensional terms, as arrogant, wrong, stubborn, crazy, or in some way "enemy" to be dismissed or overcome
- Make assumptions that our adversaries are unreachable and immovable in their ways
- Focus primarily on how we have been harmed or misunderstood and on who is to blame
- Dig further into our pre-existing views and positions
- Listen to those who disagree with us primarily to prove them wrong or find ways to dismiss them
- Seek out evidence that proves us right and ignore that which doesn't
- Seek out evidence that delegitimizes our adversaries and ignore all else about them
- Seek out people who agree with us and avoid those who don't
- Hide any of our own uncertainties or doubts
- Feel increasingly committed to winning
- Feel frustrated that this situation is happening and wish it would end
- Feel frustrated that we are unable to communicate better, explain our views more clearly, and be heard and seen as we really wish to be heard and seen
- Feel confused as to what we should do, what our options are, and how to get beyond the situation and move forward

Overall, charged interaction tends to *destabilize* us by producing:

- **Self-Absorption:** disconnecting us from those around us
- **Rigidity:** Entrenching and narrowing our views of ourselves, others, and the issues themselves
- **Reactivity:** Overwhelming our capacity to think and act as we would like to

If we want people to remain receptive – even in the face of highly charged differences – to ideas or individuals they might otherwise dismiss, we must support and sustain their flexibility, connection to one another, and receptivity.

Patterns of Entrenched Social Conflicts
Groupthink, Disengagement, Distortion

When the issues being discussed involve long-standing, polarizing social conflict, several social patterns take place that intensify the destabilizing effect of charged interpersonal interaction:

Self-Segregation and Groupthink

- People tend to cluster in like-minded enclaves, both informally and through organizations that serve as "homes" for particular perspectives.

- Meaningful interactions across lines of disagreement grow rare; people rarely have their assumptions challenged and are increasingly unable to connect empathically to other perspectives.

- Over time, people grow increasingly certain of the rightness of their views and increasingly baffled by what seem like unreasonable, callous, malicious, extreme, or crazy beliefs and actions of those who stand on other sides of divides.

- People tend to feel that those who don't agree with them are unreachable and immovable.

- Within each enclave, there is less and less tolerance for criticism, doubt, ambivalence, or deviation from the group's views. In-group policing creates pressure to remain within one's silo.

- For each enclave, a series of selective "facts" are seen to comprise the full story of the issue/s at hand, and each enclave translates these selective "facts" into talking points that serve as ammunition against those with whom they disagree.

- The media landscape fractures, creating ripeness for misinformation and undermining a shared sense of reality and facts.

- Public leaders on different "sides" tend to distort their counterparts' motivations, depicting the most exaggerated, unreasonable, and unsympathetic versions of their counterparts' thoughts and actions rather than the most generous.

- Leaders smear each other publicly, often in ad hominem ways that distract from substantive issues and produce cycles of escalation.

- Activists and advocates focus on neutralizing and/or demonizing the other side and on activating their own bases rather than exploring possibilities for collaboration, creative problem-solving, persuasion, coalition-building and/or mutually beneficial compromises to get things done. Many argue that they would be foolish to play by the rules given "who the other side is" and what is at stake.

The Intimidated, Frustrated, and Disappointed Majority

- Many who might otherwise engage with important issues don't do so out of intimidation or frustration, fearing they may be attacked no matter what they say and/or that they "just don't know enough" to enter into the fray; many of them present as indifferent or apathetic.
- For many that do engage – including advocates and activists – frustration and burnout emerge after enduring escalation, adversarialism, and attack.
- Public leaders and democratic institutions (press, judiciary, voting officials, elected officials, etc.) suffer erosions of trust and credibility from large swaths of the public.

A Broken, Distorted Public Conversation

- In ideologically diverse spaces (e.g., faith communities, workplaces, families, Board rooms), political differences become powder kegs, with the potential for volatility always-already in the room; avoidance of important political and moral issues – and/or lost and harmed relationships – often ensue as a result.
- Triggering buzzwords and hyperbolic labels get created that demonize different camps; in charged settings, people tend to reach for such labels quickly, rushing to box others into pre-existing categories ("oh, you're one of those").
- Media, itself ideologically siloed and conditioned to follow controversy and outrage, feeds escalation and reinforces caricatures of ideological counterparts.
- Many who speak on public stages – including elected officials and community leaders –feel they must appeal to their flanks while showing no sign of uncertainty, vulnerability, or compromise.
- Public forums including broadcast news tend to present experts or advocates from rival "sides" either speaking to those who already agree with them or debating one another with talking points. Audience members rarely learn anything new.
- Loyalty to political identities becomes disconnected from actual policy preferences.
- All in all, the public conversation tends to frame critical issues as consisting of two binary sides ("pro"/"anti"), each of whom believes they must win-at-all-costs to protect fundamental values, lives, and our very democracy/country/way of life. Politics becomes an identity-based, zero-sum-game rather than a contestation of ideas and quest to solve problems.

Overall, long-standing social conflicts tend to calcify into a ***self-perpetuating system of destructive conflict*** where virtually all feel their only options are antagonism or avoidance. This intensifies the personal and interactional patterns outlined above, and makes productive cross-conflict communication that much more challenging. Writ large, these breakdowns in familial, communal, and societal communication across divides create conditions that fuel hatred, bigotry, lost insight and problem-solving, and in the worst cases, political violence.

Resetting the Table's Foundational Vision
Generative Disagreement

Our Vision

RTT's vision is to build a civic culture that fosters mutual recognition across political divides in service of social cohesion and a shared future in our country and communities.

Social conflicts – especially our hardest, most enduring ones – are driven by deeply felt passions, such as the desire to fight for good or to protect self and family. As we've just described, many common interpersonal and societal patterns surrounding conflict work to translate those passions into antagonism, avoidance, groupthink, political stuckness, and even violence.

By contrast, **conflicts can be constructive** when those same passionate differences are translated in another way; when we treat them as signs that there is something essential for us to work through and learn together as a community, something that needs our greatest collective wisdom if we are to create the most innovative, comprehensive, and lasting solutions to the problems we face. When we see our most profound differences in this way, we no longer view our relationship to one another in purely adversarial terms. Rather, we see ourselves as **partners in exploration,** in need of collaborative pursuit of the best course of action that takes the widest diversity of needs and concerns into account. We understand ourselves to be interconnected, with a shared interest in solving problems and preventing mutual harm.

Resetting the Table's goal is to embed this sensibility as a communal and national norm, transforming political disagreement into a source of strengthened relationship, collective insight, and creative problem–solving. Drawing from expertise in mediation and dialogue, our unique methodology and toolkit support ideologically divergent parties to overcome the core tendencies of conflict and deliberate over critical issues in partnership with one another, sustaining that same spirit of partnership even while addressing strong differences head–on.

Our Strategies

In the face of immense societal division, RTT is proud to have built one of the most road–tested and effective frameworks for transformative communication across political divides in the country. To date, RTT programs have reached more than 80,000 participants, including faith leaders from multiple traditions, societal storytellers (e.g., journalists, Hollywood directors, etc.) and other multipliers positioned to make far–reaching culture change and impact millions more.

RTT's core activities include:

Train and Educate
RTT trains and offers consultation to faith leaders, entertainment industry professionals, philanthropists, journalists, and other community leaders and influencers, equipping them to facilitate, convene, and model constructive communication across differences and/or produce new narratives fostering empathy, norms, and hope for healthy engagement across divides.

Convene and Facilitate
RTT designs and facilitates carefully curated forums, offering rare opportunities for courageous, productive discussion and learning on contentious issues. We have a track record of bringing to the table religious conservatives, progressive activists, rural people, and other audiences often suspicious of dialogue work itself.

Create and Distribute
Drawing from our ground-game access to diverse communities as well as our developed methodology for stabilizing participants to overcome mutual distortion and confirmation bias, RTT produces original films and creative content that advance mutual recognition and empathy across political and geographic divides. RTT's short film Purple, produced in partnership with Emmy Award-winning Transient Pictures, has now screened in 370+ communities in 49 states.

Our History

Founded in 2014, Resetting the Table is an outgrowth of many initiatives led by Melissa Weintraub and Dr. Eyal Rabinovitch. Melissa was previously the founding Co-Executive Director of Encounter, an internationally-recognized organization building courageous, informed American and Israeli Jewish leadership dedicated to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Eyal was previously a Sociology professor at Wesleyan University, teaching popular classes on Conflict Transformation and Democracy; he retooled as a mediator to focus on political deliberation work in service of democracy-building and social cohesion. Drawing from mediation, peacebuilding, sociology, group therapy, and other frameworks, they teamed up to develop what became Resetting the Table's signature methodology. Since then, RTT has built an all-star staff team and a robust bench of more than 100 skilled facilitators who support communities across the country to speak, listen, challenge each other, and deliberate with honesty, mutual recognition, and respect.

What Can We Do in the Room?
Primary Objectives for Communication

There are several practices of interaction – things we can do as participants to a conversation – that will support productive cross-conflict communication. Below, we outline two such practices, each of which is relatively simple though often hard to access when we are in the midst of charged conversations. Each helps parties to a sensitive conversation prevent or combat the destructive dynamics outlines above. They do so by achieving one or more of the following essential goals:

1. Foster **Connection**
   We seek to identify potential connections among participants and invite them to address and inquire about what matters most to one another.

2. Pursue **Depth**
   We aim to help participants speak from their hearts and guts, allowing personal histories, emotional expression, and deep-rooted commitments to be articulated alongside discussion of objective fact and analysis.

3. Ensure Space for **Self-Expression**
   We strive to make sure that each party that wishes to speak has room to do so and aim to help them articulate exactly what they want to say.

4. Provide **Clarity**
   We wish to ensure that communication between participants is as clear as possible so that misunderstandings, misconceptions, and confusions are addressed.

5. Build and Sustain **Focus**
   We aim to support parties to identify what they most wish to discuss and make choices about which things to address when. When focus is lost, we support parties to re-establish it.

6. Support **Stability**
   We support participants to remain personally centered, open and flexible, even as they engage in thorny conversations across disagreement.

Generative Communication Across Divides
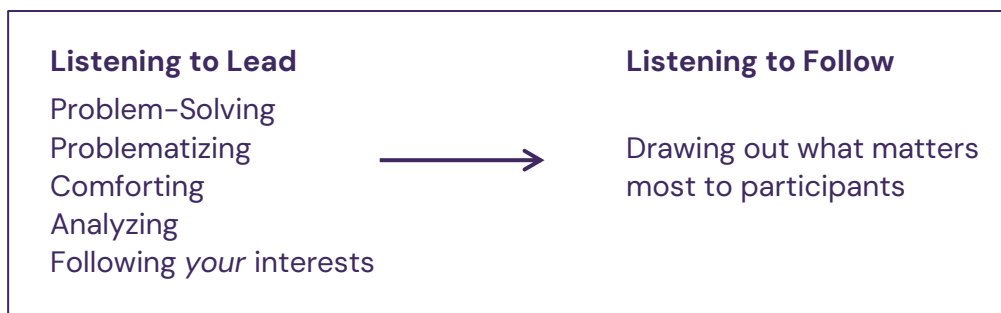*Essential Communication Skills*

The following communication skills maximize the likelihood of achieving and sustaining connection, clarity, stability, and clarity in a charged (or potentially charged) conversation, regardless of how other parties are communicating. These skills ask us to slow the conversation down in order to work with one another to strengthen relationship, insight, and problem-solving. They enable us to remain thoughtful, grounded and connected to others even in the face of strong differences.

Essential Communication Skill #1
Following Meaning

Achieving our objectives requires supporting parties to articulate what they care about most. In a charged conversation, especially when participants are speaking across ideological silos and divides, people often hold distorted or incomplete understandings of one another. Many participants may also be hesitant to share their views and experiences with one another in the presence of strong and charged differences. In this context, it is important for facilitators to draw out and shed light on people's core commitments and motivations.

Successfully excavating these underlying layers of meaning requires a broad postural shift in how most people tend to listen – a shift *from leading to following*.

Listening to Lead		**Listening to Follow**
Problem-Solving		
Problematizing		Drawing out what matters
Comforting	$\longrightarrow$	most to participants
Analyzing		
Following *your* interests		

How do we listen to follow? How do we know what to ask about and follow?

Most of the time, participants do not share their core commitments directly and explicitly. They often share in bits and pieces, leaving much of what matters most to them unsaid. However, as they speak, people almost always offer *indicators* of where there is more meaning for them. By identifying and asking about those indicators – which we call **signposts of meaning** – we invite a speaker to uncover what matters most to them. To do that:

- As parties speak, listen for their **signposts of meaning**, the cues, words, phrases or non-verbal cues that indicate there is more energy, meaning, or life for the speaker. Such signposts may include:

  - statements of identity
  - emotions
  - metaphors
  - energy and/or body language
  - uncertainty or mixed feelings

  - words/phrases that are most repeated
  - hypotheticals ("what if….")
  - moments of shift or change
  - emphatic language ("always," "never")

- Name the signpost(s) directly and ask questions that invite the speaker to expand on the meaning that it holds:

  - "It sounded like _____ is really important to you, but you didn't fully explain how or why. Can you say more about what's important about it?"
  - "You used this metaphor _____. What did you mean by it?"
  - "You said you are frustrated with what you're hearing. What's frustrating you?"
  - "You said you're really not sure what you think about this. What is the point of confusion or uncertainty?"
  - "You said that this experience had a big impact on you. What kind of impact did it have?

We call this process "following the meaning" because we are treating the parties' signposts like clues we need to follow to investigate what depth and meaning they might help uncover.

NOTE #1: Ask about what matters to them, not what matters to you.
You are not asking "questions of curiosity" that are directed by what you find interesting or what you think might lead to a good conversation topic. You are listening for signs of what matters most *to the speaker* and asking about that.

NOTE #2: Be direct.
Questions should go straight to the signposts of greatest meaning – what matters most to the speaker. You do not want to be avoidant or "far away." Go where there is greatest energy and power, while being respectful and tactful.

NOTE #3: Focus primarily on their words as reference points.
Pay close attention to what parties actually say and how they say it. Try to refrain from projecting or reframing based on your own experience and lens.

NOTE #4: The following are NOT questions that follow meaning:
Any question that is really about what's important to the *asker* rather than what is important to the *speaker:*

- Peripheral information gathering: asking people about tangential details
- Rhetorical questions: "Would you like someone to treat you badly like that?"
- Leading questions such as those that start with phrases like "Don't you think that…" and "Wouldn't you agree that…"
- Questions that are designed to problem-solve: "Have you considered trying…" "What do you think about doing…"

Essential Communication Skill #2
Demonstrating Understanding: Taking Time to Prove You Get It

Giving a speaker the sense that they are fully known as they wish to be known is our greatest tool for promoting receptivity and flexibility, including to ideas, people, and information they might otherwise dismiss. Often, parties become destabilized because they believe they are being missed, misunderstood, distorted, or judged by others in the conversation. By contrast, there is now a wealth of research that shows that the more people feel that "who they really are" is seen by those around them, the more they feel at ease and connected to those people – even if they passionately disagree with them. If they feel understood and seen, they tend to be more receptive, confident, generous, and courageous (in other words, overcoming the core tendencies of interaction in conflict: self-absorption, rigidity, and reactivity). This is true even when there are strong differences present or the room is highly charged. We can help achieve these shifts by taking the time to demonstrate to speakers that they've been heard as they intended. We call this "demonstrating understanding."

Demonstrating Understanding is an effort to prove to people that, we understand them as they wish to be understood. We aim to do this so well, that people say, "EXACTLY, that's me. Yes!" When this happens, we call that "hitting the bullseye." A successful bullseye reflection truly captures the heart of what matters and what is being communicated by the speaker. Bullseye reflections are often accompanied by a shift in energy, in which speakers feels appreciative, eager to say more, more relaxed, and more invested in the conversation. They produce *space* for receptivity.

The simplest way to demonstrate understanding is to offer a reflection, whereby we tell a speaker their story back to them in a way that accurately captures what they have shared and the energy with which they shared it. A good reflection:

- **Recreates the speaker's lens.** A reflection is not your interpretation or analysis of what is important to the speaker. Rather, it tries to identify the speaker's substance and energy.

- **Captures what matters most.** There is no need to demonstrate that you have heard every detail. Rather, you want to name "the heart of the matter," distilling what is most meaningful. This sometimes (though not always) can be captured in just a few words or a couple of sentences, even if the speaker has spoken for several minutes, by incorporating (or referencing) the core signposts that you have heard.

- **Honors and recognizes the speaker's energy, intensity, or emotion** without minimizing it, agreeing/disagreeing with it, or offering the individual sympathy, validation, or critique.

- **Is correctable.** Parties may correct you if they feel you aren't capturing them correctly. You should welcome their correction and encourage them to help you "get it" as directly and accurately as possible.

Often a great way to begin a reflection is to say **"OK. Let me see if I get it."** After which, you start portraying the speaker's lens back to them. This can be captured in just a few words or sentences, by incorporating (or referencing) the core **signposts of meaning** – the cues, words, phrases, or non-verbal cues that signify where the richest meaning lies – such as:

- statements of identity
- emotions
- metaphors
- energy and/or body language
- uncertainty or mixed feelings

- words/phrases that are most repeated
- hypotheticals ("what if….")
- moments of shift or change
- emphatic language ("always," "never")

You may use phrases along the way such as:

> So, for you, it's about…"
> You're saying that… Is that right?"
> The way you are experiencing this is…Yes?"

NOTE #1: Use their words and energy as your reference points.
Try not to make assumptions or projections that go beyond what they've said. If they have offered you a clue that something is important, but has not yet been said, name that clue (signpost) and ask a question inquiring into that signpost to see if there is more there that the party wishes to share.

NOTE #2: Don't "parrot" what they have said.
Contrary to what is taught in some "active listening" models, we do not want to repeat verbatim what people have said or review in detail each element of the speaker's text. There is a difference between re-stating what was said and capturing what was communicated.

NOTE #3: Reflections are stated mostly in the 2nd person.
"So for you…" "You aren't sure if…" "You really want everyone here to understand that…"

NOTE #4: You can use questions to help get to a full reflection.
As you try to piece together a rich understanding of what matters most to the speaker, ask the questions you need to get a fuller picture.

NOTE #5: It may be valuable to reflect the entire group.
Reflecting the group or a sub-group of participants in a conversation, demonstrates to them that you see what matters to them as a collective: "You all seem to care passionately about x, even as you have important differences. You all feel like there is a lot at stake and that conversations like this are important for you and for your community."

Demonstrating Understanding will likely make several contributions to the conversation:

1. **Connection:** all those listening will get a better understanding of the speaker, which may give them greater empathy and sense of connection.

2. **Depth and Self-Expression:** reflections frequently help people come to expression about what matters most. People will often be eager to share more because they realize the conversation genuinely welcomes and can take in their underlying commitments and nuances, and will support them to articulate the best version of what they have to say.

3. **Clarity:** both the speaker and others may get new levels of clarity and understanding from a good reflection. At times, a reflection can capture concisely something that the speaker has not been able to articulate well on their own.

4. **Focus:** since good reflections get to the heart of the matter, they tend to enable all parties to focus on what is important and ignore the rest.

5. **Stability:** when the speaker feels you have accurately represented them and they are being listened to with seriousness, respect, and empathy, they tend to feel more centered, empowered, generous, and receptive.

In short, getting to "bullseye" transforms self-absorption, rigidity, and reactivity (core tendencies of conflict) into connection, flexibility, and receptivity.

Advanced Communication Skill
Naming Differences: From "Me vs. You" to "We Have a Difference"

Because people frequently experience disagreement as a risk or threat, parties often steer away from their differences for fear of discomfort or escalation.

Though we certainly want to identify areas of agreement and commonality, differences often boil over when not addressed honestly and directly. Even if differences don't escalate, encounters across differences can feel hollow, dissatisfying, or even manipulative when important differences are sidestepped rather than directly addressed. In this regard, Resetting the Table follows the Transformative Mediation framework, which has demonstrated that the strongest way to disarm the destructive potential of differences is to name them clearly, directly, and as soon as they arise – so long as we are able to accurately capture the way each party relates to the difference at hand. The goal is to identify the difference and each party's relationship to it in such a way that all participants would say, "yes, that is a difference between us and you have properly captured my own lens on it." We call this process Naming Differences.

Naming Differences has the potential to transform participants' understanding of themselves, each other, and the relationship between them. When done well, naming differences defuses their charge and enables us to gain a more accurate understanding of where our differences actually lie. In conflict, we tend to narrate differences between ourselves and others with bias and perception gaps baked into our framing. It tends to take the form of something akin to "the difference between us is that I'm reasonable and compassionate, whereas they are deluded and selfish." The practice of naming differences so that all parties would agree: that's it, that's the difference between us, and you get me in relation to that difference – helps us get beyond us/them binaries, where we are good, reasonable, and kind, they are bad, loony, and hateful. It gives us a shared baseline to explore those differences productively, moving us from "me vs. you" to "we have a difference, now let's figure it out together."

This shift may seem subtle, but it can be profound in terms of people's understanding of one another and their willingness to collaborate in a mutual exploration. Naming Difference is a critical first step in producing a productive starting point for communication rooted in a shared understanding.

Properly naming differences may involve the following steps:

1. **Name that there is a difference present.**
   Stop the conversation and report that you notice a difference has emerged and that it may be helpful to get a clear understanding of precisely what the difference is about.

2. **Seek to gain full understanding of the difference.**
   If you are unable to name it directly, recruit parties' help to figure it out. Ask questions that help you name the core difference present.

3. **Offer a HEADLINE for the difference by naming what the difference is about: "there is a difference about x." This may require contextualizing it within areas of agreement.**
   "It seems the central disagreement here is not if we should act, but how. You both think a response is necessary, but you don't agree about how it should happen."

4. **It is crucial to summarize differences honestly and directly.**
   Avoid the temptation to tone down or minimize differences. Doing so will undermine the benefit of naming differences for the participants.

5. **Capture each party's LENS by giving a bullseye reflection to how they view the difference x.**
   "John, if I understood you right, you think it's important to act now. If we don't move now, this opportunity may not come again. But, Anne, you think we should wait because if we rush and make the wrong move, it will be hard to fix it."

6. **Offer participants the opportunity to amend how the difference has been named or how they have been captured.**
   "Does that characterization of this difference as being about how to respond sound right to you?"

   "Anne, John, am I capturing what each of you think should be done and why?"

7. **Once all agree that the difference has been properly named, offer the participants an opportunity, decide what to do next or make "a bridge" (see below) to another party or the group.**
   "Is this a difference you'd like to explore further or should we move elsewhere?"

   "Is there anything you'd like to ask one another to understand each other better?"

   "Andrea, does this difference relate to what you said earlier about...?"
   "How do the rest of you relate to this difference?"

There is a difference about X

Reflection #1   Reflection #2   Reflection #3
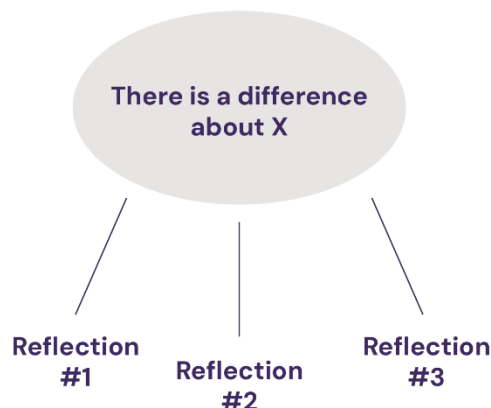
Common Differences

- Positions
- How you feel about x
- Personal experiences/relationships to the topic
- Focus/what to prioritize
- What really matters vs. what is a distraction

- Who is responsible/at fault
- Who has power/agency
- What actually took place
- How to achieve a given value/goal (justice, security, liberty, etc.)
- Interpretations/usage of the same word

NOTE #1: When appropriate, **contextualize the differences alongside commonalities or similarities.** We do not wish to focus on common ground in a way that is avoidant of charged differences. However, it is often useful and even insightful to contextualize differences and disagreements alongside commonalities and agreements.

NOTE #2: There are times when you might have a sense that an important difference may be present, but you are not entirely certain if so and/or are not sure how to name it. In such cases, you might **use the conditional voice** to introduce the possibility that a meaningful difference might invite others to join in clarifying if it is.

> "I'm not fully sure, but from what you've said so far, it seems like there's a lot you agree on in terms of what the problem is, but there might be a real difference over how you see who is responsible for addressing it. Abby, I think from what you said – but please correct me if I'm off here, you see it as each person's direct responsibility to act individually. Whereas, Simon, your focus seems to be on a collective responsibility. Does that feel right to you both? Is that a difference here, and if so, is it one you think is worth discussing directly?"

For parties in the midst of a charged or potentially escalating conversation, naming differences correctly promotes several critical shifts:

1. **Clarity and Focus:** it offers participants new levels of clarity as to what the conversation is really about, which widens parties' understanding of the issues at hand and is often calming.

2. **Depth:** it helps deepen the level of communication because people are better able to speak to the heart of the matter.

3. **Connection:** it reconnects parties to each other, often helping parties to see one another's reasonableness rather than unintelligibility.

4. **Stability:** when we are able to say to participants, "the two of you have a difference about X, for you it's like this and for you it's like that", a subtle but significant stabilizing shift tends to happen. They are no longer just inside the "me vs. you" logic of their disagreement, but are observing it from a new perspective as a relationship between "the two of us."

Life Maps

Before you begin this process, please select an order in which you will share.

The Process

- Speaker shares one or two moments from their list
- Listeners each ask one or two Following Meaning questions
- Speaker offers feedback on the questions
- Decide together on one good Following Meaning question
- Speaker answers the Following Meaning question
- Rotate roles and repeat process until all participants have had the chance to share

Instructions

1. **Life-mapping:** Take a few moments to think about your political and moral lens. Where and how was it formed? Has it changed over the course of your life? Now think of three snapshot moments from your direct experience that most powerfully shaped or formed this relationship.

2. Participants **share one or two of these pivotal moments**, elaborating on them in any way you'd like.

    If you are listening to your partner's stories, please listen without interruption. Try to listen for what really matters to them. Note your own reaction, but let them speak. While each person speaks, jot down a few questions that you think would help you find what's most meaningful to this person.

3. **Following Meaning Questions:** After the Speaker has shared, the Listeners ask 1–2 Following Meaning Questions. When asking a question, name the signpost you heard that is prompting the question, and then ask a question that invites the Speaker to expand on how or why it matters to them.

4. **Feedback:** Speaker lets the Listener know if they are following core signposts. Should they have picked different signposts to follow? What other questions might they have asked? Decide together on a good Following Meaning question that invites the Speaker to share more of what matters most to them.

5. **Speaker answers one question posed to them.** Which question draws you? Which do you want to answer?

6. **Switch roles and repeat the process.**

Small Group Dialogue

The Process

- Speaker addresses prompt
- Listeners reflect Speaker until one person hits the bullseye
- Rotate roles and repeat process until everyone has had a chance to share
- Once everyone has shared, try to name a difference
- Offer challenges across the difference
- Free-flowing conversation

Instructions

1. **Sharing.** Speaker shares their response/relationship to the prompt for 2 minutes. The other two group members listen without interruption. Listeners: You may want to jot down some notes on the signposts you have heard and what seems meaningful to the speaker.

2. **Demonstrating Understanding.** Listeners seek to understand what matters most to the speaker and then to demonstrate to them that they "get it." Listeners should work together to "hit the bullseye:" the point that that speaker says, "Yes, you have fully understood me and what matters to me." To achieve this, listeners may need to do a mix of asking questions and offering reflections. NOTE: you may spend the entire remaining time in this phase. Frequently, people will say that they have been understood even though they haven't. Seek to push yourselves and each other to make sure you're reaching a meaningful level of mutual understanding. Take advantage of this rare opportunity to listen and to be heard!

3. Once the first speaker has been correctly understood, move to the second speaker and repeat steps #1-2 above.

4. **Naming Differences.** Once everyone has received a bullseye reflection, the next step is to try to **name a difference**. You might say something like: "Now that I understand what matters to you and why, I'd like to name some ways that I see it differently…"

    Try to name the crux of your differences in a way that honors and does justice to all positions (eg. "It seems the heart of the difference between us here is that you don't have any trust in the UN probe given their blatant bias, and I think pieces of it have merit and should be taken seriously."). Probe these differences to make sure you've understood correctly and to find out more about how your respective sources of information and experiences have led to different conclusions. If you share similar opinions, see if you can find subtle or nuanced differences among you along with commonality. NOTE: frequently group members will avoid their differences because it is more comfortable to focus on areas of similarity. Again, push yourself and others to name areas of difference. You will gain the most from this exercise if you are able to honestly seek out and probe the differences that are present.

Facilitator Bio

Michele Freed, Senior Trainer and Facilitator

Michele is dedicated to empowering people to create change for themselves and in their communities and to bringing people together across divides and difference. An experienced facilitator, trainer, and community builder, Michele most recently served as the Associate Director of National Young Leadership at ADL (Anti-Defamation League), where she engaged and mobilized young professionals across the country to address issues of bias, discrimination, and hate. Before her time with ADL, Michele was a Fellow at the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies supporting the foundation's North American Jewish communal portfolio and leadership development work. She graduated from the University of Michigan with a BA in Psychology and Judaic Studies and a minor in Community Action and Social Change. Her facilitation, program development, and training experience spans multiple frameworks of dialogue, intergroup relations, and community building, including experience with Resetting the Table, ADL's World of Difference Institute and The Program on Intergroup Relations at the University of Michigan. Based in Michigan, Michele loves playing basketball, exploring national parks, and cheering on the US Women's national soccer team.

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