

YOU CAN'T STOP US!

Values Reinforcement in Dialogue A Values Count, LLC Position Paper

Our mission is to reinforce the practice of character-building values.

A Parable

A Pennsylvania distribution center operate around the clock to distribute to customers resources needed to keep their plants running smoothly. Having the resources on the shelves, getting the right resources packaged and sent to the correct recipients on schedule, and having them properly invoiced and billed is of great importance. A consultant was commissioned to install a demonstration quality process at this facility. The process went well including the inclusion of the night shift. Members of this shift included those who preferred the less people-active environment of the night shift and who liked to be free during the day to hunt when the seasons made that possible. This group responded well to the training and learned to make good use of the measurements and charts involved in the process.

At the end of the demonstration year, this center was the top quality performer of the company's distribution centers and their record led to adopting the process used there for the whole corporation. To celebrate the value of their demonstration, the top executives came to the center and prepared a meal for the center's employees prior to an appreciation meeting. The consultant opened that meeting with these words aimed at the center's people.

“What would you say if you heard that your efforts have been much appreciated, but for a number of reasons apart from your performance, the company does not plan to continue the quality improvement process?”

There were moments of silence as all present attempted to grasp the significance of this question. The silence was broken by the voice of one of the night shift people who said, “You can't stop us! We know what to do and will keep on doing it because we like it and it makes our work more interesting.”

That center continues its pursuit of continuous improvement and continues to rise to higher levels of quality performance. He got it right: “You can't stop us!” When a change makes things better and causes people to stretch their potential and increases their satisfaction and pride in what they do, motivation is internalized and continuity is based more on that internal than on any external stimulus.

This parable is important to us. We believe that when people discover the benefits of reflecting on their values in dialogue – greater potential is realized, relationships are optimized, and the motivation to practice principles for living worth taking seriously is internalized. It would be hard, if not impossible, to stop that kind of transformation. What follows is a way to encourage that kind of transformation.

Preamble

A cartoon includes a picture, labeled “Moral Compass.” These words are on the various points of that compass.

- Right (Probably)
- It Depends
- Aesthetic Decision
- Completely Personal Choice
- Wrong (For Now)
- Not Sure
- It’s a Matter of Cultural Differences
- Who Cares?

These are choices that many consider when they make moral decisions. Many live in moral ambiguity. Many offer answers/solutions. We offer a different approach. We invite people to reflect on their personal values and then to practice those they take seriously.

Values Count, LLC.

The core product of our company is *The Value Minute*®. This product consists of “sound-bites” that take about a minute to read or hear. They are non-sectarian and draw from the common experiences of life. The features end with questions to stimulate reflection and dialogue. The features are distributed via multiple media. We encourage *thinking* that leads people to better understand their values and to take them seriously enough to practice.

Our book, *MAXIMIZE YOUR VALUES – They Count in Everything You Do*, encourages *dialogue* as a way to discover the deeper implications of the values questions raised and provides 21 “Values Roundtables” to structure dialogue opportunities.

Our process, *Values Reinforcement in Organizations*, provides a way to use our features in dialogue to optimize applications in organizations.

Our workbooks, *Values Roundtables for Organizations*, *Values Roundtables for Pondering*, and others to come, provide resources to encourage values-reinforcement dialogue.

Theoretical Premises of Our Approach

- A. We begin with the concept of continuous improvement. This concept was basic to the quality movement spearheaded by the Japanese after WWII. Dr. W. Edwards Deming mentored Japanese and other leaders on this concept. Applied to people, it means that purposeful living aimed at being optimized includes never-ending initiatives to be better.

To be optimized, calls for continuous improvement.

- B. Abraham Maslow, the motivation researcher, created a hierarchy of needs. He discovered that people tend to be motivated based on their need levels that begin with the basic physiological needs and move on up through security, love, and esteem. Maslow found that when many felt those needs adequately met, they reached toward fulfilling their potential in what he labeled, “self-actualization.” We embrace his additional finding that those who move into potential fulfillment, tend to center their lives on what he called, “Being-Values.” These include Truth, Goodness, Justice, Wholeness, and Beauty among many others.

Those who experience the highest levels of potential-fulfillment tend to be those whose lives are centered on constructive values.

- C. When did constructive values take root in our human experience? Scriptures of our major religions point to chapters in our human history when these values were practiced and violated. Some scholars suggest that these basic values may be rooted in the experience of people living in small bands. Responsibility, caring, sharing, believability based on honesty, and other such basic values are requisites for survival. From whatever source, the practice of these values is deeply planted in human history.

Those values, widely held to be requirements for growth-oriented familial and civil societies, are part of a long history of people forging civilization.

- D. We also ground our approach to values-reinforcement in an implication of the field theory rooted in Quantum Physics. When people, in dialogue, express, challenge and dig deeper into what the practice of constructive values means, they modify their own views and impact those with whom they dialogue. A group that engages in this experience forges a culture that is influenced by their dialogue. They create an environment or a “Field” in which there is a dynamic continuity of values thinking and practice. The *Values-Field* of such groups interacts with similar *Values-Fields* with the result that the dynamic growth and continuity expands. There are many implications of this for friends, families, communities, organizations, and societies. This growth and expansion of *Values-Fields* is at the heart of our mission and methodology.

In dialogue, we grow and expand Fields of constructive values.

E. To reach a critical mass of the population, we draw on one more principle. Vilfredo Pareto, identified what has been called the 80/20 Principle. It includes many variations. 80% of the mistakes on a project are likely made by 20% of the people involved. 80% of the sales of a business are often made by 20% of the salespeople. Our application of this principle is that 20% of any group that takes our dialogue process seriously can transform the remaining 80% of that group. This can be an organization or a nation. This means that an energized minority can have a transforming impact on a much larger population. The *Values-Fields* generated by energized minorities can gain sufficient momentum to reach a “tipping-point” beyond which a larger social group can experience a change in culture and direction.

An energized 20% of those who take seriously their constructive values can change the culture and direction of the larger group to which they belong.

On Dialogue

Dialogue is a critical component in the reinforcement of the practice of values. Dialogue is not a new fad. We build on decades of thoughtful foundations. We acknowledge the contributions of many who recognized and refined our understanding of dialogue as a way to probe the crust of superficiality, and to risk the potential of transformation.

Peter Senge, in *The Fifth Discipline*, underscored the importance of dialogue for team learning. Senge cites David Bohm, a quantum theorist, who affirmed that, “dialogue” occurs when a group, *becomes open to the flow of a larger intelligence*. Senge reports Bohm’s view that, *we must look on thought as a systemic phenomenon, arising from how we interact and discourse with one another.*¹ *The purpose of dialogue, adds Senge, is to go beyond any one individual’s understanding.*²

Joseph Jaworski, in *Synchronicity*, acknowledges the impact of his meeting with Bohm and notes that, *Dialogue does not require people to agree with each other. Instead, it encourages people to participate in a pool of shared meaning that leads to aligned action.*³ Jaworski adds that, *in dialogue, you’re not building something, you’re allowing the whole that exists to become manifest.*⁴

Daniel Yankelovich, in *The Magic of Dialogue*, references Martin Buber’s insights on dialogue and notes that in dialogue, *we listen and respond to one another with an authenticity that forges a bond between us.*⁵ Yankelovich affirms, *I believe that a certain kind of dialogue holds the key to creating greater cohesiveness among groups of Americans increasingly separated by differences in values, interests, status, politics, professional backgrounds, ethnicity, language, and convictions.*⁶

We like Yankelovich's note that, *a round table is an apt symbol for dialogue because it implies that dialogue cannot take place except among equals.*⁷

*It is useful to think of dialogue, states Yankelovich, as a continuum ranging from spontaneous dialogues that last only a few minutes to formal dialogues that are planned in advance and unfold over weeks, months, or even years, and where meticulous attention is given to the setting, composition, and agenda of the group.*⁸ He adds that the link between purpose and length dictates whether the dialogue should be brief, midrange, midrange extended, or extended.⁹

Danah Zohar, author of *The Quantum Society*, in a lecture cited by William Isaacs,¹⁰ addresses the question, "What is the basis of dialogue?" The following are notes from her lecture.

I wondered if the quantum processes in the brain have anything to do with the processes of dialogue. It would seem that the brain itself is doing a natural form of dialogue. When the brain perceives something, its natural response is to process that information in its established information categories. But, when the brain is confronted with a new, unanticipated experience, the brain must go through a much more complex process. It takes all of the perceptual data and puts it into a system akin to the brain's parliament. It suspends its usual categories and says, in effect, 'Let's start new.' And the brain begins to build up a whole new conceptual picture and creates a new set of categories.

This is what is involved in human creativity and it has to do with the quantum processes in the brain. This is what we do in dialogue. We come to dialogue with a set of categories, a set of assumptions. When you engage others, you find that they have a different set of categories, different points of view and your perceptions and theirs clash. And what you must do to have dialogue is to put on hold, to suspend, even to deconstruct your original set of categories and you build up slowly to a new set of assumptions. In doing this, you're doing exactly what your brain does to digest perceptual information. Therefore, dialogue is natural to human beings. It is something we do all the time.

We return to Yankelovich for an insight from what he calls "Cultural Fault Lines." Recalling Martin Buber's distinction between "I-It" relationships in which we treat one another as objects, and the "I-Thou" relationships in which we treat one another as persons; Yankelovich sees an increasing depersonalization in our culture in which we relate more often as objects. This leads to transactions that border on a lack of civility and an increase in bad manners. His research shows that Americans hunger for a sense of community where, *people know about you, care about you, where you belong.*¹¹

The second fault line Yankelovich calls “The Silo Effect.” He sees a tendency in our culture, *to fragment itself into subcultures so removed from one another as to isolate us into an aggregation of silos.*¹² With journalists, educators, and physicians as examples, he suggests that these subcultures become as if, “Gated communities of the mind.”

Yankelovich sees “Too much Top-Down Talk.” This characteristic results in a fault line between elites and the general public. Included among the elites are: government officials, media pundits, well-placed lawyers and judges, leading intellectuals and scientists, the top military brass, medical establishment, community leaders, and experts of various kinds. He cites V.O. Key who said that if our democracy ever falls apart, he believes it most likely to do so along this divide. This mindset treats people as objects to be manipulated.

These concerns lead Yankelovich to propose, *Proxy Dialogue*. Because it is impractical to consider smaller group dialogue involving millions of people, an alternative approach is needed. He believes that, *television is the only practical medium for conducting mass public dialogue and that a certain kind of televised dialogue can reproduce many of the benefits of small-group dialogue.*¹³

Recalling several examples of the effective use of television to engage the public, he suggests that an essential ingredient of Proxy Dialogue (PD) is to have those on the “viewed” side of the camera be people with whom the general public finds it easy to bond. The general public has identified with people like Walter Cronkite, Oprah Winfrey, and Larry King. PD will work when the initiators of the dialogue are examples of such identification, bonding, and trust and who, *express faithfully the concerns and values of mainstream America.*¹⁴ PD is not like call-in shows, which get callers that almost never represent the views of the majority of Americans.

Yankelovich identifies three additional principles. PD must meet the core requirements of dialogue: empathetic listening, equality of standing, and nonjudgmental surfacing of assumptions. PD will be successful only on issues that are important from the public perspective. PD must be done with the same professionalism as excellent documentaries. This requires judicious editing.

Yankelovich sees the need to mobilize the political will to give the public a greater say in shaping the policies that affect their lives. *The goal is to use dialogue as a lever for moving our society toward new forms of public engagement.*¹⁵ Resistance to this, he adds, is based on the elites’ fear of losing status and, *an unthinking assumption that the public’s views are so ill informed, narrowly self-interested, unrealistic, and moralistic that they cannot add anything of value to the decision-making process.*¹⁶

What Yankelovich calls “relationship leadership,” places emphasis on crossing boundaries, seeking alignment on a shared vision, tolerating complexity, and developing networks of relationships. *The objective is not to get recalcitrant people to follow orders; it is to invite them to take ownership of a vision, a strategy, a set of values. Dialogue is ideally suited to this objective.*¹⁷

In his analysis of our society’s current state, Yankelovich suggests that our leaders appear to be steeped in a paradigm of knowledge based on a dichotomy between values and facts.

*Facts are automatically categorized as knowledge, and values are categorized as feelings, beliefs, and convictions that get in the way of knowledge.*¹⁸ *As a result, we are becoming technological giants and sociological midgets. At an accelerating pace, we produce a mind-boggling flow of technological marvels at the same time as our civic virtues of mutual respect, trust, concern, neighborliness, community, love, and caring are slowly eroding.*¹⁹ Suggesting that wisdom includes blending values with facts, Yankelovich concludes, *But for the truths of human experience---learning how to live together in peaceful, creative, civilized societies---technical expert knowledge is awkward, heavy-handed, and unresponsive. It fails to address the great questions of how to live, what values to pursue, what meaning to find in life, how to achieve a just and humane world, and how to be a fully realized human person---all essentially issues of judgment often arrived at through dialogue.*²⁰

Yankelovich observes the culture shaping influences of technology, free-market ideologues, individualism, and civil society advocates. He remembers a study with alumni of the Harvard Business School class of 1949. This included successful executives and entrepreneurs. They attributed their success to luck and parental influence. More important than luck, Yankelovich found:

*They stressed the values their parents had inculcated in them. Responsibility. Hard work. Family stability. Achievement. Self-Discipline. Practicality. Education. Love of country. High moral standards. ... They were convinced that the technical business skills that they had acquired were of secondary importance to these moral values. None mentioned the business school as the source of moral values. ... They brought the values with them from the larger culture---the influence of parents, schools, friends, the community, the media, the civil society in which they were brought up.*²¹

Changes in our society since World War II have included both advances and declines in the practice of values such as those noted in the HBS study. It would appear that most of us, however, *are hungry for enhanced quality of life, for deeper community, for endowing our communal life with spiritual significance. ... They are ready to meet on that ledge of dialogue of which Buber speaks in order to endow their own lives and those of others with a larger meaning.*²²

Stimulated by the insights of Yankelovich and the hint of a format for a national dialogue, we propose a national dialogue on values. Our proposal is outlined in a document that will appear on our Web site.

www.thevalueminute.com

Dialogue is not a new methodology. But, what is *dialogue*?

Here are notes on dialogue from Peter Senge in *The Fifth Discipline*.

- Dialogue requires that participants suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine "thinking together". Individuals suspend their assumptions - but are free to express their assumptions.
- Conflict becomes productive. The free flow of conflicting ideas is critical for creative thinking. It is not the absence of defensiveness that characterizes dialogue, but the way that defensiveness is faced. Defensiveness routines are like safes within which we lock up energy that could be directed toward collective learning.
- David Bohm's theory and method of dialogue means "becoming open to the flow of a larger intelligence". The result is to bring to the surface the full depth of people's experience and thought in order to reveal the coherence in their thought.
- In dialogue, a sensitivity develops that goes beyond what we normally call thinking. Our sensitivity becomes a fine net able to gather in subtle meanings in the flow of thinking. This sensitivity lies at the root of real intelligence.
- In dialogue there is a cool energy like that associated with a superconductor. With wasted energy diminished, hot topics can be discussed and become windows to deeper insights.

Test Cases

We tested dialogue with the officer team of a large national corporation. We used dialogue to confront thorny issues that involved conflicting viewpoints such as the assimilation of merged businesses. Dialogue enabled this group to work through these issues and reach understandings that allowed decisions to be made with more agreement than would have been possible without dialogue.

In interviews with this group, we asked for perceptions of the five most important barriers to dialogue. Their lists included the following barriers.

- Pride that gets in the way
- Resistance to change – “We’ve always done it that way.”
- Questionable willingness/desire to improve
- Different personalities and personality types – some soloists, not all are players
- Respect for one another may suppress openness
- Getting beyond pre-determined perceptions
- May not see the potential benefits of dialogue
- Lack of trust – resistance to reveal “secrets” – concern for leaks
- Politics – walls of protection and defense between functions especially where functional missions are not aligned with corporate
- Egos – would require increased vulnerability
- Not sure that the “inner circle” of leaders is ready to include the larger group in substantive decision making
- Fear based on “shoot the messenger” syndrome
- In our culture, most conversations stop short of dialogue
- Competitiveness including jockeying for succession
- Not enough time together
- Positions, rank – concern for power – old guard vs. new guard

In spite of experiencing the benefits of dialogue on tough corporate issues, these officers are realistic about the difficulties of relating with one another in the spirit of dialogue. It is clear that authentic dialogue does not occur quickly or easily.

We tested our Values Reinforcement in Dialogue process in a retirement community. We conducted twelve 45-minute “Values Roundtables” sessions with small groups of residents. (Each of the Roundtable sessions in this test utilized a pre-publication version of *MAXIMIZE YOUR VALUES*.) An independent evaluation drew the following comments.

- I enjoyed the exchange of ideas, good mental stimulation.
- Small group helps me to feel more a part of the community.
- Small groups bring introverts and extroverts together.
- Small group gives courage to share ideas, to speak.
- Value of dialogue cannot be underestimated.
- Dialogue concept is incredible.
- These sessions helped me to understand myself.
- It is good to be able to verbalize your inner feelings.
- Verbalizing in a group brings greater self-awareness.
- Values are exciting to talk about, it creates an intimacy.
- Questions are stimulating. The answers are certainly not black and white.
- These sessions helped me to understand that different values trump each other differently in different circumstances.

The group decided to continue once a month, sharing facilitator leadership. When the group gets beyond optimum size, participants will sub-divide and begin new groups.

We conducted five 30-minute “Values Roundtable” sessions with the executive staff of this retirement community. The evaluation comments were affirmative and this experience led to extending the program to all managers of the community.

We conducted three 2-hour sessions with managers of the community. The structure of these sessions included a briefing, three 20-25 minute “Values Roundtable” sessions, and a debriefing session. The Roundtables were facilitated by three members of the executive staff. The evaluations were all positive including the following comments on what they liked most about the sessions.

- Interaction and networking with other management (mentioned most)
- Working in small groups
- Opening to other team members
- Being reminded of values foundation
- In-depth analysis of our community’s values
- Recognition of slipping of our community’s values
- Very thought provoking
- Ease of conversation

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- Liked the dialogue (mentioned often)
- Things that seemed simple need to be elaborated
- Would enjoy further courses in this
- Do it again – more like it
- We need more in-services like this
- Need more on how to get all employees “on board with values”
- Not long enough to get to bottom of what discussing
- This program you could have 2 sessions of 2 hours each
- I hope we can have more dialogue sessions on other values in the future
- Should be a required annual workshop for all management
- Could be an all-day course – needed more time
- Thoroughly enjoyed this program

Little transformation is likely to emerge from occasional dialogical experiences. Transformation comes from continuous reinforcement. For the retirement community, the following suggestions were made.

- Email the five features each week to all staff.
- Generate dialogue on appropriate features.
- Offer the email features to residents with email who request them.
- Include the five features each on the internal TV channel.
- Include a feature in the community newsletter. Include a note inviting feedback and/or questions. Publish in the newsletter a response to the feedback and questions.
- From time to time, include in the community newsletter a report on values dialogue sessions among residents.
- Once a month, spend 20 minutes of each staff meeting on a values dialogue.
- Include the book, *MAXIMIZE YOUR VALUES* and *The Value Minute* CD for sale in the community gift shops.

Summation

Dialogue is a non-linear journey. Dialogue does not occur in steps like climbing a ladder. Dialogue is communication that grows a community in communion when participants are free for open exchange and clarity. We can create an environment in which dialogue can occur. The notes on page 8 define that environment. In that environment, facets of dialogue may occur in or out of the sequence in which they are noted below. We view these facets of dialogue as experiences that happen in different ways and at different times in a group. The deeper the experience we have in dialogue, the more facets we are likely to discover. The deeper experience we have in dialogue, the greater potential we have for personal and organizational transformation.

Dialogue often begins with an exchange of thoughts and views. These are more like “I-It” relationships (Buber) with normal to high levels of resistance to flow (entropy). These exchanges often lead to probing these thoughts and views. When, in dialogue, there is an exchange of meaning that goes beyond an exchange of words, thoughts and views; there is movement toward “I-Thou” relationships (Buber) with diminished resistance to flow (negative entropy).

When we experience the flow of “cool energy” akin to superconductivity (Bohm) in dialogue, we experience an enhanced sense of coherence – “hanging together” (Senge) and an enhanced sense of alignment – “I-Thou” relationships (Buber). This allows the discovery of deep insights, becoming open to the flow of a larger intelligence (Bohm), and a greater understanding of ontological reality.

In dialogue, transformation is experienced that leads to enriched “fields” of influence, a greater sense of “the whole,” and even potential encounter with *The Eternal Thou* (Buber).²³

¹ Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline* (New York: Doubleday/Currency) 1990, p. 240

² Ibid, p. 241

³ Joseph Jaworski, *Synchronicity* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers) 1996, p. 111

⁴ Ibid, p. 116

⁵ Daniel Yankelovich, *The Magic of Dialogue* (New York: Simon & Schuster) 1999, p. 15

⁶ Ibid, p. 31

⁷ Ibid, p. 43

⁸ Ibid, p. 121

⁹ Ibid. p. 124

¹⁰ Pegasus Communications, Inc – The Systems Thinking in Action Conference, 1994 – “Dialogue: Creating Paths for Transformative Action in Large Systems”

¹¹ Yankelovich, Ibid, p. 151

¹² Ibid, p. 152

¹³ Ibid, pp. 164-165

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 167

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 169

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 170

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 173

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 189

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 191

²⁰ Ibid, pp. 197-198

²¹ Ibid, p. 209

²² Ibid, p. 217

²³ M.K. Smith in his, “Martin Buber on Education” (2000), *the encyclopedia of informal education*, www.infed.org, reflecting on Buber’s view that “all real living is meeting;” observed that, *The meeting involved isn’t just between two people or between someone and the world. Buber believed that ‘every particular Thou is a glimpse through to the eternal Thou. In other words, each and every I-Thou relationship opens up a window to the ultimate Thou.*