

Values Count, LLC.
NOTES ON DIALOGUE

To reinforce the practice of character-building values

Preamble

A cartoon includes a picture, labeled “Moral Compass,” that includes these words 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 and The Value Minute®

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. We encourage thinking that will lead 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. It includes twenty-one “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*, *Values Roundtables for National Dialogue* and others to come, provide additional resources to utilize dialogue to optimize the growth of serious values inquiries.

On Dialogue

Dialogue is a critical component in the reinforcement of values. Dialogue is not a new fad. Our use of dialogue is based on decades of thoughtful discovery. We acknowledge indebtedness to many people who recognized and refined the understanding of dialogue as a way to probe the crust of superficiality, and 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. The purpose of dialogue, adds Senge, is to go beyond any one individual’s understanding.*¹

Joseph Jaworski, in *Synchronicity*, notes the impact of his meeting with Bohm and adds 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.*² Jaworski adds that, *in dialogue, you’re not building something, you’re allowing the whole that exists to become manifest.*³

Daniel Yankelovich, in *The Magic of Dialogue*, references Martin Buber’s insights on dialogue and adds that in dialogue, *we listen and respond to one another with an authenticity that forges a bond between us.*⁴ 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.*⁵

Recalling 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.

But, What is *Dialogue*?

Yankelovich identifies three core requirements of dialogue:

- empathetic listening,
- equality of standing, and
- non-judgmental surfacing of assumptions.

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/Case Studies

We tested dialogue with the officer team of a large national corporation. Dialogue enabled this group to work through thorny issues and reach understandings that allowed decisions to be made with more agreement than would have been possible without dialogue.

There were, however, barriers that impeded the potential of dialogue. We asked these corporate officers for their perceptions of the five most important barriers to dialogue. Their lists included:

- 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 individualists, not all are team 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, these officers were realistic about the difficulties of relating in the spirit of dialogue. Authentic dialogue does not occur quickly or easily.

We tested our values dialogue process in a retirement community. We conducted twelve 45-minute “Values Roundtables” sessions with small groups of residents. (Each session utilized a pre-publication version of *MAXIMIZE YOUR VALUES*.) An 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.

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

We conducted three 2-hour sessions with managers of the community. The structure included a briefing, three 20-25 minute “Values Roundtable” sessions, and a debriefing session. The evaluations received positive ratings including the following comments of what respondents liked best:

- Interaction and networking with other management
- Liked the dialogue
- Enjoyed the program very much
- Working in small groups
- Opening to other team members
- Being reminded of values foundation
- In-depth analysis of our community’s values
- Very thought provoking
- The ease which with conversation flowed

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 3 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 a potential encounter with *The Eternal Thou* (Buber).⁶

¹ Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline* (New York: Doubleday Currency) 1990, p. 241

² Joseph Jaworski, *Synchronicity* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers) 1996, p. 111

³ Ibid, p. 116

⁴ Daniel Yankelovich, *The Magic of Dialogue* (New York: Simon & Schuster) 1999, p. 15

⁵ Ibid, p. 31

⁶ 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.*