

Six Conversations That Matter: A Quick Review by [Peter Block](#)

There is a great deal written and practiced about creating new conversations, all of which is valuable and holds the same spirit as what is outlined here. For example, for some time there has been an important dialogue movement to help people understand their own mental models and listen more deeply as an act of inquiry.

The types of conversations outlined here are a little different in that they are aimed at building community, whereas many of the others are primarily aimed at individual development or improving relationships. Plus these community-building conversations are pointedly designed to confront the issue of accountability and commitment.

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To open the community to an alternative future, start with the invitation conversation. Since all the other conversations lead to one another, sequence is not all that critical. It's important to understand that some are more difficult than others, especially in communities where citizens are just beginning to engage with one another. Certain conversations are high-risk and require a greater level of trust among people than others to have meaning. A good meeting design begins with less-demanding ones and ends with the more-difficult ones.

1. **Invitation conversation.** Transformation occurs through choice, not mandate. Invitation is the call to create an alternative future. What is the invitation we can make to support people to participate and own the relationships, tasks, and process that lead to success?
2. **Possibility conversation.** This focuses on what we want our future to be as opposed to problem solving the past. It frees people to innovate, challenge the status quo, break new ground and create new futures that make a difference.
3. **Ownership conversation.** This conversation focuses on whose organization or task is this? It asks: How have I contributed to creating current reality? Confusion, blame and waiting for someone else to change are a defense against ownership and personal power.
4. **Dissent conversation.** This gives people the space to say no. If you can't say no, your yes has no meaning. Give people a chance to express their doubts and reservations, as a way of clarifying their roles, needs and yearnings within the vision and mission. Genuine commitment begins with doubt, and no is an expression of people finding their space and role in the strategy.
5. **Commitment conversation.** This conversation is about making promises to peers about your contribution to the success. It asks: What promise am I willing to make to this enterprise? And, what price am I willing to pay for success? It is a promise for the sake of a larger purpose, not for personal return.
6. **Gifts conversation.** Rather than focus on deficiencies and weaknesses, we focus on the gifts and assets we bring and capitalize on those to make the best and highest contribution. Confront people with their core gifts that can make the difference and change lives.

Other conversations may also be important, but these six are vital to shift to a future where each citizen, each neighbor, each individual chooses to take responsibility and own their role in shaping the future.

The information contained in this handout is from a posting by Peter Block and was adapted from his book: *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2008). The posting can be found at:

http://www.abundantcommunity.com/home/posts/peter_block/parms/1/post/20110705_six_conversations_that_matter_a_quick_review.html

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