

COMMON
COMMON
GROUND
GOOD



COMMON GROUND / COMMON GOOD

A framework for positive change



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American
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Silicon Valley

“The great project of the twenty-first century—understanding how the whole of humanity comes to be greater than the sum of its parts—is just beginning.”

Nicholas A. Christakis, MD, PhD
and James H. Fowler, PhD, *Connected*

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

What is common good?	8
A Letter from Chris Block, ALF	13

THE COMMON GOOD FRAMEWORK

Framework Overview	22
Principle I: Increase Diversity	24
Principle II: Build Constructive Relationships	32
Principle III: Create a Leader-full Network	37
Principle IV: Conduct Dialogues, Not Meetings	42

CASE STUDIES

Safer San Jose	56
Green Pays	60
Reviving California	63
Recommended Reading	68

WHAT IS COMMON GOOD?



SAN JOSE WAS EMBROILED IN A BATTLE.

Accusations of race-related brutality and unnecessary use of force divided the community.

Community members complained of racial profiling; law enforcement claimed appropriate police practice. Both sides had their hackles up and the battle was played out in the media.

Community clashes of this sort are not uncommon. What is uncommon is how the San Jose community retooled its approach to conflict resolution. The community moved forward by focusing not on issues, but on people. A diverse group of individuals came together to form a network. They built productive relationships with one another and significantly improved the dynamics between them, which laid a path to the common good.

Through our Common Good Collaborative partnership with the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, ALF challenged San Jose to rethink its approach to social unrest. If the community wanted to encourage cohesion between law enforcement and residents, then it needed to foster relationships.

The people who struggled to be heard were those whose lives would be directly impacted by the selection of the next police chief: youth, immigrants, the homeless, the

incarcerated, communities of color. The city, already defensive, struggled to distinguish valuable input from antagonistic clamor.

Without personal relationships to connect these divided community segments, progress would have remained out of reach. One side would “win” and the other would be further alienated. This would not serve the common good.

ALF, working with various stakeholders, hosted and participated in more than 50 dialogues in San Jose. The way we converse with one another has a profound influence on the type of relationships that emerge and on the quality of the solutions that can emanate. By reaching beyond anger—and even past basic civility—to create a deeper discussion, we discover opportunities that would have remained otherwise unknown. New opportunities lead to new answers.

This serves the common good.

RELATIONSHIPS. NETWORKS. DIVERSITY. DIALOGUE. IMPACT.

We live in a world of immense challenges that affect us all—poverty, inequality, brutality. At the heart of **American Leadership Forum – Silicon Valley** is the belief that these massive, often disheartening barriers can be overcome by creating deep connections between individuals, groups, and communities.

In a time of increasing diversity and complexity, we have witnessed a culture of advocacy and polarity severely compromise our society’s ability to solve problems. There are few places for the public to engage in generative dialogue; diversity of opinion has been replaced by a disparity of understanding; a desire to win has trumped a desire to reach solutions. Why? We no longer understand each other because we are missing the deep connections between each other and our communities.

It is our responsibility to reinstate this fundamental component of society if we wish to overcome our community’s biggest challenges.

For 24 years, American Leadership Forum – Silicon Valley (ALF) has been building a deeply diverse network in Silicon Valley. Its work began long before networks were commonplace. A group of visionaries recognized that a successful future relied on a new way of thinking about

community change. These community leaders, the founders of ALF, saw a better future in which the wisdom of many would overcome the limiting power of the few.

ALF continues to imbue its founders' vision of leadership development and networked action into its programs. The organization helps leaders become more curious about others than about themselves, to build deep relationships with those who look and think differently, and to infuse their work with service to the common good.

But to solve today's problems we must address the qualities and challenges that come with living in the 21st century. The very diversity and speed that makes this time exciting also complicates it. For these reasons, the ALF network created the Common Good Collaborative to effectively engage the network in addressing the most difficult problems of our time.

We are all in a perpetual search for the model that will create the kind of successful groundbreaking change we strive for in our communities. The road to transformation is paved with new ideas. Some have been successful in creating transformation, others not. Why?

There is no single answer, but ALF suggests the efforts that have created lasting change do have one thing in common: their solutions grew from positive relationships within a broad spectrum of diverse stakeholders. This is why relationship building is at the heart of what you will find here, the Common Good Framework: a model

for creating the common ground critical to broad-based community transformation.

At American Leadership Forum, we have found that the common good emerges when relationships, networks, diversity and dialogue are put into place and the Common Good Framework will take you through each of these steps. You will also find theories and practical tools that ALF has developed over the past two decades to help other organizations striving for lasting community change.

We hope that you will find this framework helpful. Experiment with the principles and tools and we encourage you to share what you learn with your colleagues, partners, others and us.

This document is not meant to be the last word—ALF is a learning organization that evolves its practices and theories continually. We would love to hear how you've used these tools or others. Feel free to email: chris@alfsv.org.

Sincerely,



Chris Block
American Leadership Forum -
Silicon Valley



**BUILD YOUR OWN
COMMON GOOD
COLLABORATIVE**

PICTURE A MEETING.

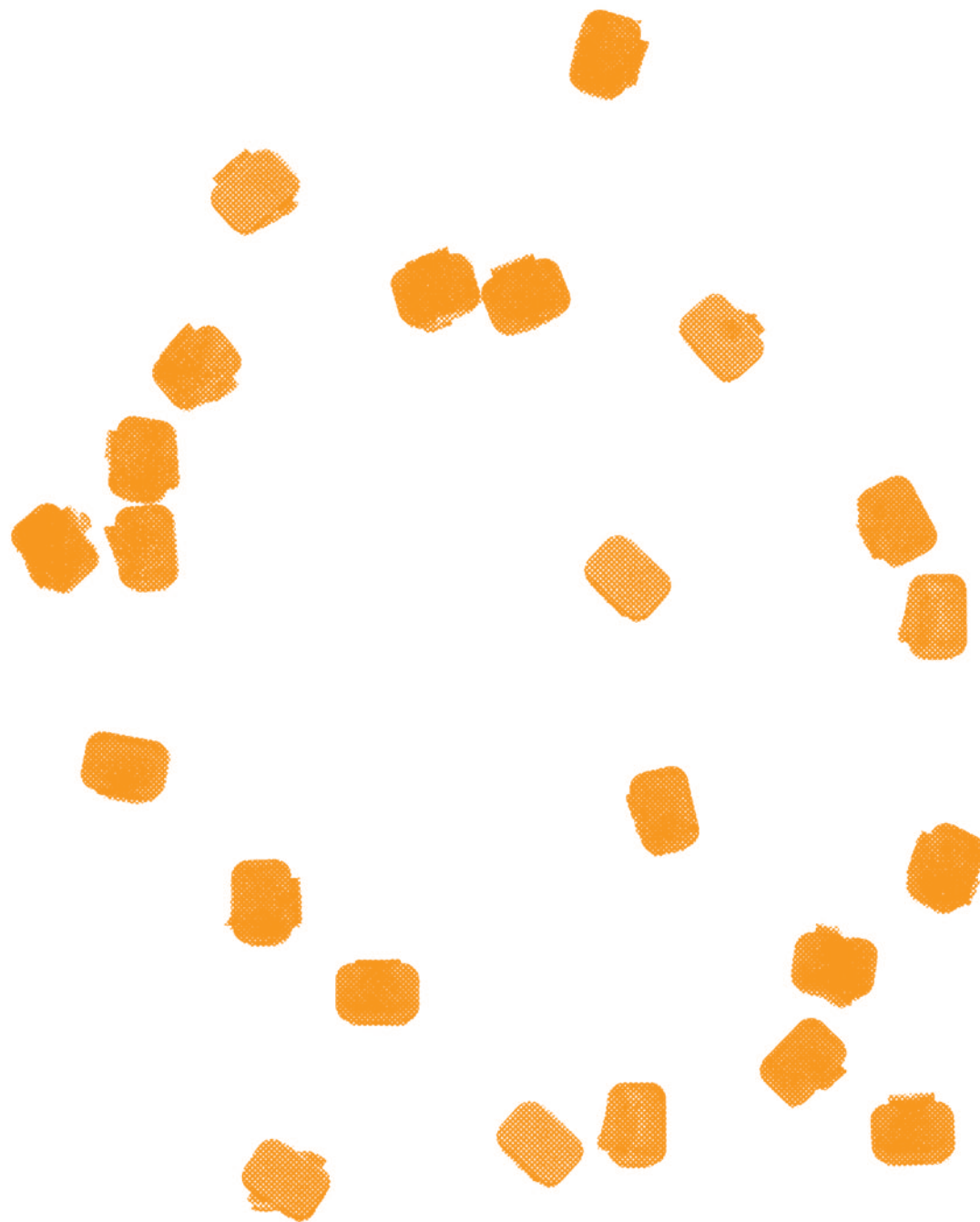
Attendees are struggling with a seemingly intractable issue. Each of them and their organizations have been addressing the issue for years, having impact, but not eliminating the problem. They've formed a collaborative in the hopes that they can make additional progress together. In turn, attendees are providing updates on action items since the last meeting. They are reporting on their research into other successful models, they are suggesting joint projects. But, despite their efforts, not much changes.

Why are they stymied?

Let's look beneath the surface. How often are new voices and perspectives added to the conversation? Does the power dynamic marginalize some voices? Are truly novel ideas given credence? Are some potential directions, despite their validity, considered taboo? And—consider this—if the group was to actually succeed, who among them might be adversely affected?

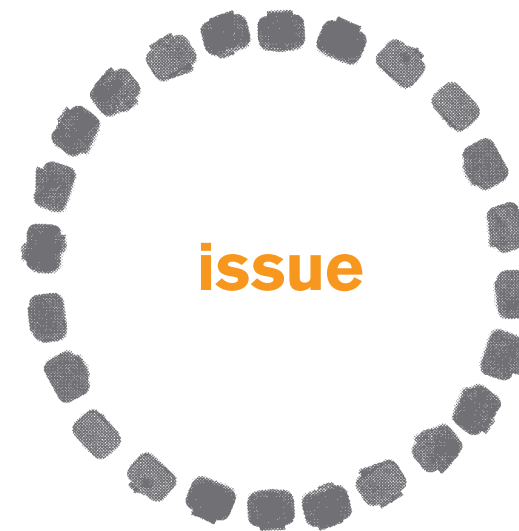
Looking even deeper, who hasn't been invited to the table? Moreover, do those who have been invited truly trust one another?

If participants are guided to consider each other as individuals through a tool like the Common Good Framework, this meeting and any one like it has a chance of being successful. Stakeholders will deliberately seek out the commonality that binds them as a community. They can move closer in a genuine desire to learn and understand each other. In this model, genuine conversations take place and the relationships are formed that lead to powerful, permanent solutions.





**When relationships
are fractured, there is
no unified effort.**



**Mutual understanding
and respect create the
container for success.**

THE COMMON GOOD FRAMEWORK

“[T]he question is not whether we live in a networked world. We do. The question is how to ignite the good that can come from a networked citizenry and mitigate the bad, for there’s ample evidence that the complex social problems of the 21st century can be addressed only through networked solutions that bring together the input and action of many citizens.

Connected Citizens: The Power, Peril and Potential of Networks
Monitor Institute

CREATING A 21ST CENTURY NETWORK

Everyone has at least one, social or otherwise. We used to call them groups of friends or colleagues, but now they are networks. A deeper look will reveal a subtle, but important set of differences between a casual group and a true 21st century network that can effectively address community issues. The principles that follow based on the four characteristics below can help you create a network for the common good.



1. THEY ARE DIVERSE

Diverse networks bring multiple viewpoints to an issue.



2. THEY ARE BUILT ON CONSTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

A relationship-based network places emphasis on the quality of interactions and connections among its members.



3. THEY ARE LEADER-FULL

Modern networks have no center. People operating within a network move in and out of leadership roles as needed. This is especially important when networks are diverse.



4. THEY ARE CHAMPIONS OF DIALOGUE

Networks for the common good know that generative dialogues lead to understanding and ultimately fresh ideas. Relying solely on advocacy promotes the status quo.

FRAMEWORK PRINCIPLE I

**INCREASE
DIVERSITY**

“... futurists are saying that cultivating diversity and learning to live together on this small planet is the critical leadership issue of this time...”

Latino, Hispanic, Chicano: Who are you?

Juana Bordas

When it comes to diversity, the progress we have made as a global society has been significant and has led to important changes. In many places around the world, children are more likely to grow up with playmates who don't look like them; employees are more likely to work with colleagues from different backgrounds; we find ourselves increasingly in social situations with people who have very different life experiences.

The flipside of this progress is that we struggle to create a common vision. Too often, we are at odds with one another because of seemingly competing interests.

In California, for instance, voters do not feel that they share a common destiny with non-voters. Many voters ask themselves why they should pay for transportation, education or services when the majority of people who use the road or sit in the classroom or receive services aren't like them.

One of the first steps in building a common purpose is the realization that we no longer live in communities where everyone looks the same and shares the same life experiences. When people who share common physical traits gather around a table they can easily convince themselves that they share a common set of values, principles and assumptions. One of the real strengths of diverse stakeholders working together is they can't readily assume a common set of values and principles—they must be intentional.

Only when people of differing opinions come together and a true dialogue ensues can participants create new, innovative and powerful solutions to difficult problems. What's more, relationships are formed that allow these solutions to be implemented.

What are the steps you can take to increase the diversity in your community change effort?

ALF serves one the most diverse populations in the country. What we've learned from two decades of developing networked leadership is that along with the richness of diversity comes a major challenge—fostering a culture of engagement that accounts for widely varying life experiences, perspectives and expectations. Meeting this challenge is critical because this type of broad-based engagement is an antidote to closed power structures, non-representative decision-making, and unsustainable, uninformed solutions.

Operating effectively within a diverse network requires a commitment to showcasing the wisdom of others. It means knowing how to capitalize on, and manage, diverse perspectives. It doesn't mean devotion to compromise. The goal is to foster circumstances in which differing perspectives reveal innovative solutions.

If you find yourself having the same unproductive conversations with the same people, the first thing to consider is who's at the table.


A.

ASK THE HARD QUESTION

Are we here for the common good or are we here to ensure things are done our way? The common good means that all are served well. “Our way,” if not embraced by others, is not likely to be effective.

Unwavering conviction to one particular solution suggests that others are to blame and everyone must change but us. If you can see the value of moving beyond pursuing your own agenda above all others, you have taken the first step toward embracing diversity and the common good.

“What have I done to contribute to the very thing I complain about or want to change?”

Community: The Structure of Belonging

Peter Block

B. CONSIDER WHO IS INVOLVED

Does everyone around the table hold the same perspective? If yes, that's a problem and needs to change. You need diversity.

Open up your thinking, and figure out who in the broadest sense is touched by the issue. People with different perspectives, people who disagree with you, maybe even people who you think are not interested. This diversity will prove your greatest asset in terms of fully understanding the complexity of the issues, thinking through unintended consequences of any action you might take, and discovering possibilities you didn't know existed.

Ask for help, and include participants completely in the process. Remember, you are not trying to make people "feel heard." You are genuinely asking them to be an equal participant in the effort. You must want to hear and understand. You need them. And you will need to do the hard work it takes to incorporate diversity.

Diversity in your network is related directly to whether your network is porous, that is, built to have a constant flow of new people with new ideas entering. If your network has been working on an issue for a year and no one new has been involved, you are fresh out of new perspectives. It is o.k. if people move in and out of your network as things progress. You need a stable core to keep things moving and to avoid unnecessarily rehashing old issues. But in most cases, new perspectives along the continuum of the effort will stimulate progress.

When considering the extent of diverse perspectives around your table, consider asking questions like:

- » *Have we included people from different sectors?*
- » *Which political philosophies are represented?*
- » *Do we have people of varying ethnicities and cultures?*
- » *Is there gender equity and age variance?*
- » *Do people have differing economic statuses?*
- » *Are all "sides" of the issue represented by who's at the table?*

HOW ALF DID IT

When members of the ALF network wanted to answer the question, "Can green tech be a path out of poverty in Silicon Valley?" they knew that they needed the involvement of a broad range of people. They decided to create a green retrofit program that would lower energy bills for low-to-middle income families, fight global warming, and create high-quality green jobs. To do this, they relentlessly sought the active participation of a wide range of constituencies involved in both green efforts and job development. To this end, the group recruited representatives from job training nonprofits, green tech corporations, construction companies, environmental organizations, building and trade unions, workforce development, social service agencies, and governmental institutions. This program was made possible by bringing together an incredible and unlikely mix of people. Only in this way was the network able to develop a program that effectively addressed the complex and sometimes competing needs of the constituencies affected by this issue.

The result has been a fully developed program that includes the first completed business plan by a residential program in the country.

C. FOSTER REAL PARTICIPATION

As we know, people tend to group with others of like minds. And in a culture of advocacy and polarity, this is especially true. Getting diversity into your network will likely take more than an email invitation.

- » Personal outreach is imperative. Know that there will be hesitancy from people who typically operate in advocacy-only mode to participate in a network that includes people from the “other side.” You will need to speak with people, one-on-one, about what you are trying to achieve and what you will be doing to create a safe space for all participants.
- » Make sure you are clear about your motive. You are genuinely asking others to be equal participants in the effort and you must want to hear and understand. You need them. Pretending to be inclusive will not cut it.
- » Don't force anyone to be the lone voice. For example, it's not easy being the only participant with conservative-leaning views at a table full of liberals, or vice versa.

D. USE TECHNOLOGY

Social media tools like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube provide us with new and as yet undiscovered ways to communicate and connect. Experiment with how technology can increase the diversity of, and build relationships within, your network. Here are some suggestions:

- » Can't get young people to attend your meetings, but need their perspective? Meet them where they are: online.
- » What do you do between meetings to continue to build relationships? Post articles, ask questions, launch polls and garner opinions via social media.
- » Want to include people from other regions in your discussions but are hindered by budget constraints? Incorporate video chats.

While technology doesn't replace in-person relationship building or dialogues, the possibilities of how it can enhance efforts are great.

FRAMEWORK PRINCIPLE II

BUILD CONSTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIPS



You've achieved diversity. Now what?

One of the keys to developing and facilitating the success of a diverse network is building constructive relationships within the network. If you look at people simply as their titles (or alliances or ethnicities) you will miss the most important aspect of the relationship. You will never learn why a person thinks the way that she does, you will never understand his motivations, and you will never feel a sense of responsibility to the others in the network. In short, you will never learn what needs to be learned.

Participants in the group may already know one another. Be aware of their connections. Is it adversarial? Polite, but strained? Your charge is to not only create new relationships, but transform existing negative relationships into positive ones.

By relationship, we don't mean that you are required to become close friends. We mean that you should come to know each other as more than official roles and titles. In order to create constructive relationships, you must be intentional about how you build them.

A.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT PLACE

Be thoughtful about choosing a dialogue venue. When working with diverse groups, turf has meaning. Look at who will be in your dialogue and pick a space where everyone is comfortable.

Look at the venue from all perspectives. Does the room belong to a group that is perceived to have power over others? Pick a different location. Is the venue in a neighborhood considered unfriendly to any specific group? Go somewhere else. If you are unsure, ask.

You must be cognizant of the power dynamics in the room and do what you can to break down those barriers.

Do you always meet in a windowless, cramped, colorless room? Use a little imagination and meet somewhere else.

For example, you can meet at a community center where there is a park so that people can talk outside. Maybe your local museum has an inexpensive rental space.

It has been shown people respond to positive environments, especially when you want to nurture a spirit of hope and possibility.

B. SHARE A MEAL OR TWO

It may seem obvious that food and drink should be served if you are meeting at mealtimes, but refreshments can have a more powerful effect than simply staving off growling stomachs.

As opposed to eating while meeting, share a meal together. Let the conversation flow to topics other than the problem you are trying to solve. Many great relationships begin over a meal. It may at first seem a waste of precious time, but investment on the front end will pay out handsomely when you realize that the relationships that result created the foundation for new solutions.

C. CONSIDER HOSTING A RETREAT

Spending a night away can be a powerful way to build relationships. Yes, this one takes some resources, specifically time and money. However, the progress you can make during this time in building relationships can be tremendous. If the issue is important enough to invest your time in, then it is important enough to invest your time well.

Why an overnight retreat? An overnight retreat is a perfect opportunity for people to get to know one another away from their prescribed roles in the usual setting. It provides the space to explore the big picture

such as why this issue is important to the people involved. And it is ideal for surfacing and working through conflicting perspectives.

What are the important elements in holding a retreat?

- » Consider hiring an expert in dialogue, diversity and relationship building. You do not want a facilitator who is driven by PowerPoint, schedules, and consensus building.
- » Retreat to a natural environment. Most of us do not spend our days in natural settings. Changing the space gives people permission to think differently.
- » Build in unstructured time. Make sure your agenda includes time for people to take a walk together, sit in the sunshine, and have an impromptu chat.

D. SET THE AGENDA TOGETHER

The adage that whoever sets the agenda controls the agenda is true, and not conducive to the common good. One person can propose an agenda, but it should then be reviewed by a representative sample of the network. Once at the dialogue, check in with the group to learn if the agenda works for everyone.

REAL WORLD / Building Constructive Relationships

Bad relationships never lead to anything good. So, if you are striving for transformational change, you can't assume that the same old politics, the same old advocacy strategies, the same old public postures are going to create it. People need to change in order to make change.

HOW ALF DID IT

In San Jose, California, deep feelings of mistrust existed among segments of the population and the police department. The Safer San Jose initiative's first goal was to change negative relationships into positive ones and develop relationships where none previously existed. This was the only way that these groups were going to be able to begin to develop a new and better way of keeping the community safe.

The strategy was to have a community conversation. But, this was not a one shot attempt. In reality the community conversation was held over many months in many forms. One-on-one dialogues, public conversations, and meetings between small groups created a diverse network of people who were no longer relying on shouting messages at each other through the media or bullhorns at City Hall. People developed personal relationships with each other, so that they could talk...face-to-face. They began to be interested in the others' perspectives, so that they could develop solutions together. And, they learned that there were alternatives to status quo methods and they developed productive relationships, changed policies, and created new, more effective mechanisms for addressing police and community issues.

FRAMEWORK PRINCIPLE III

CREATE A LEADER-FULL NETWORK



We have observed the art of leadership evolve from a hierarchical approach to a more distributed model. Of course this is not an either-or supposition, nor is it a linear process. There has always been both collaborative and hierarchical leadership; it is a matter of emphasis and clearly there is much more shared leadership in the world today than there ever has been.

“For all organizations, in today’s turbulent times, engaging people’s best thinking about complex issues without easy answers will be the key to creating the futures we want rather than being forced to live with the futures we get. Leaders will need to develop capacity in the design of ‘inquiring systems’ in order to learn, adapt, and create new knowledge to meet emerging opportunities and challenges in the more fluid organizational structures of the future. For example, the leadership challenges of the next 20 years are likely to revolve around the art of engaging and energizing networks rather than solely managing hierarchies as in the past. Successful leaders will be those who see organizations as living networks of conversation and collective meaning-making through which members create new knowledge and bring forth the future. They will understand how to operate in networks that are both internal and external to their organization.”

The Art of Powerful Questions: Catalyzing Insight, Innovation and Action
Eric E. Vogt, Juanita Brown, and David Isaacs

A. FOSTER NETWORKED LEADERSHIP

The 21st century is marked by diversity and complexity. Being a leader in a 21st century network requires a fluid, flexible and adaptable leadership stance. A networked leader believes that she is responsible for creating the conditions in which the wisdom and inspiration of others can be unleashed. He does not expect to have all the answers. She is more interested in understanding others than being understood. She is comfortable with allowing a conversation to unfold without predetermining the outcome.

Seek out networked leaders within your network or if they aren’t there yet, invite one in. Consider exploring the topic of leadership within the network. Be intentional about defining the type of leadership the network wishes to embrace.

B. DEFINE THE INFRASTRUCTURE, NOT SUCCESS

Create a network infrastructure that allows the network to function effectively—do not define success or how to achieve it. The right infrastructure will allow the wisdom of the network to emerge. This can be a longer and more complex process than having one person or group make the decisions. But if you want to move beyond hierarchical leadership, you must invest the time and effort.

REAL WORLD / Creating a Leader-Full Network

What kind of infrastructure do you need for a leader-full network? Ask:

- » *What are we doing to encourage members to get to know and rely on one another and to act collectively?*
- » *Are there always opportunities for different people to take on leadership roles?*
- » *Do we have multiple avenues for communication like Facebook, Twitter, email, in-person exchanges, gatherings via Skype, etc.?*
- » *Have we put into place protocols that ensure decisions are made transparently and with input from network members?*
- » *Is there a code of ethics that establishes generally accepted principles for operating within the network?*
- » *Have we set the expectation that participants share responsibility and leadership for the effectiveness of the network?*

HOW ALF DID IT

ALF's Reviving California initiative is focused on ensuring that Silicon Valley plays an active role in achieving California fiscal and governance reform. The organization invests considerable staff time in this effort. While staff does facilitate logistics and organize the work, the initiative was born out of the network, which is the driver and navigator. Continual effort is put into bringing network members into the initiative. Network members reach out to each other, regenerating leadership and continually pulling in new expertise. They reach into their own networks, so that the Reviving California network continues to expand. The meetings and events are rooted in relationship-building techniques. As a result, the Reviving California initiative has played an important role in achieving reforms and continues to expand its capacity to engage Silicon Valley in reform efforts.

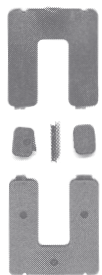
The most relevant and effective model today is a leader-full network.

The primary attributes of servant leadership are: increased service to others, a holistic approach to the work, promoting a sense of community, and shared power in decision making.

The need to take a fresh look at servant leadership would have resulted simply from the increasing stature of people throughout the world, but the concurrent increase in extreme diversity and extreme complexity makes it even more necessary. As a direct result, even a servant leadership model that requires an individual to serve as leader will not be effective because only an engaged network can actually represent diversity and understand complexity. What appears to be the most relevant model today is networked leadership.



Hierarchical leadership structures rely on the dominance of an individual leader. Servant leadership structures, though the leader empowers others, still rely on an individual to keep things moving. Networked leadership structures rely on the leadership of many to move in and out of leadership roles as needed.



FRAMEWORK PRINCIPLE IV

CONDUCT DIALOGUES, NOT MEETINGS

Meetings are designed to move quickly through agenda points and achieve consensus. Successful dialogues are designed to build relationships, increase understanding, spark new ideas and determine how a network should move forward.

Having a conversation seems easy, but having a generative dialogue is a skill. There are many great dialogue models that can be used depending on the situation. At the back of this publication you will find references to some of these so that you can determine which model best suits your needs.

Dialogue is not the antithesis of action. In fact, there is no effective action without communication, so move beyond the simplistic view that dialogue is “just talk.”

Perhaps the single most important element of a productive dialogue is that we should seek not to convince others, but to find new understanding and opportunities, both individually and collectively. As part of a network, it is everyone's job to create a container for these kinds of dialogues to occur.

“In a world where technology has led to the erosion of traditional hierarchical boundaries and where former competitors ... contemplate becoming bedfellows, the glue that holds things together is no longer ‘telling’ but ‘conversing’... The essence of dialogue is an inquiry that surfaces ideas, perceptions, and understanding that people do not already have. This is not the norm: we typically try to come to important conversations well prepared. A hallmark for many of us is that there are ‘no surprises’ in our meetings. Yet this is the antitheses of dialogue. You have a dialogue when you explore the uncertainties and questions that no one has answers to. In this way you begin to think together - not simply report out old thoughts. In dialogue people learn to use the energy of their differences to enhance their collective wisdom.”

Dialogic Leadership
William N. Isaacs

A. GET RID OF THE TABLE

Literally. If you are around a table or in rows, try something new. It's optimal to meet in a living room type of setting. If this is not possible, try moving your chairs into a circle without a table in the center. Try sitting outside. While there may be comfort in the familiar, the familiar often breeds more of the same. By making the setting more informal, you can change people's frame of mind and in turn they are much more likely to be open to other's ideas.

B. BEGIN YOUR DIALOGUE WITH A CHECK-IN

In its simplest form, the check-in process begins with a quiet moment for people to reflect on their thoughts and assess their mood. Each person then discloses some of their inner dialogue that may include expectations, appreciations, or distractions. This technique helps people to be fully present in the conversation that will follow.

Essentially the process integrates individual's internal dialogue with the public conversation. A similar process is followed in the check-out process. Each person discloses their thoughts and mood at the close of the meeting.

The check-in process is detailed in an article by Fred Kofman. (See Appendix.) At first glance, it may seem touchy-feely, but if you are committed to the process, you will find that including this opportunity can prove an extremely effective tool.

“As managers spend more and more time in increasingly unproductive meetings, it is becoming critical that we create environments for more productive conversations. The check-in process is a quality tool for good communication that can create such an environment. Although the mechanics are extremely simple and require little time, the check-in process can dramatically increase the effectiveness of any meeting.”

Check-in, Check-out: A Tool for Real Conversations

Fred Kofman

C. AVOID DEBATES

In a debate, we argue our point of view in an effort to prove the “rightness” of our position and argue against the perspective of others. We disagree in an effort to strengthen our argument and to persuade others to support our point of view.

In a dialogue, diverse perspectives are held together in an effort to explore the complexity of an issue and to discover opportunities for change. We seek not to convince others but to find new understanding and opportunities, both individually and collectively. In debates we ask: Who is winning? In dialogues we ask: What am I learning and where can change occur?

Structure your dialogue around powerful questions in order to stimulate dialogue and avoid debate.

D. VARY GROUP SIZE

If you have a group of participants larger than 10, plan to break it up into small groups for at least a portion of your dialogue.

Many people are not comfortable speaking in larger groups particularly if the topic is emotional or controversial. In a more intimate setting participants can be on the same level, both physically and verbally—they don’t need to worry about speaking up so the people in the back can hear. In addition, a small group format allows more people more time to hear more voices. All of this leads to a better quality dialogue.

E. DON'T LET “EXPERTS” DOMINATE

While it is important to provide content when needed, people grow weary when they are “talked at” by topic experts. Make sure you design the agenda so participants are able to talk amongst themselves and apply the content to their situation and generate new ideas. Ideally, your experts will join these small group dialogues so the group can benefit from their knowledge without being dominated by it.

A caveat: When a topic expert is present, the dialogue can often devolve into a Q&A— you don’t want this. Everyone should be an equal participant.

The Power of Questions

A POWERFUL QUESTION WILL:

- » **Generate curiosity in the listener**
- » **Stimulate reflective conversation**
- » **Provoke thought**
- » **Surface underlying assumptions**
- » **Invite creativity and new possibilities**
- » **Generate energy and forward movement**
- » **Channel attention and focus inquiry**
- » **Stay with participants**
- » **Touch a deep meaning**
- » **Evoke more questions**

*The Art of Powerful Questions:
Catalyzing Insight, Innovation, and Action*
Eric E. Vogt, Juanita Brown, and David Isaacs

REAL WORLD / Conducting Dialogues

To ensure your community meeting is open enough to transform, but doesn't devolve into a shouting match, you have to create a dialogue. A dialogue challenges the status quo and asks participants to:

- » *Accept that no one is right or wrong*
- » *Forgo canned messages in favor of honest expression*
- » *Have the desire to understand the perspective of others*

HOW ALF DID IT

At the first community meeting ALF held as part of the Safer San Jose initiative, we decided to break into small groups for dialogue and then rejoin for a large group conversation. A woman stood up and vehemently expressed that she thought this structure was a bad idea. She felt everyone should hear everything and that participants were being treated like children. The moderator thanked her for her thoughts and explained that the choice was made for several reasons:

- 1) Some people are not comfortable speaking in large groups and everyone should have a chance to engage.
- 2) Small groups offer a more intimate conversation which enables better understanding of different perspectives.
- 3) Small group dialogues create a calmer environment in which to tackle difficult issues.

So, what were the lessons? First, you won't please everyone. Second, by keeping to our format, we avoided the very type of grandstanding that usually accompanied meetings on this topic. Third, when you strive for transformational change, expect and embrace resistance. Understanding the resistance will only make you more effective.

F. USE MODERATORS, BUT WISELY

A facilitator who dictates the flow of conversation isn't allowing the wisdom of the group to emerge. A moderator should not insist on a direction for the group. She should ask questions to draw people out, to be sure no one's perspective is marginalized, and to help the group understand each other's differences and similarities. The moderator can participate in the conversation, as long as she keeps an eye on the quality of the dialogue.

We should note that a moderator is not always necessary. Many small groups are good at caring for the conversation on their own. In an ideal dialogue, the entire group takes responsibility for the quality of the conversation and individuals will play the role of moderator as needed.

G. GET TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER

The issue you are dealing with may involve old conflicts and deep emotions. It may affect people's livelihoods, lifestyles, traditions, or basic way of life. If these things go unspoken or spoken about only in the hallway, you will never be able to achieve transformational change. If certain topics are taboo, how can you truly explore all the possible solutions? If you can't get to the heart of the matter, you won't get very far.

At ALF we use a simple, but effective model, called The Four Player Dialogue Model developed by David Kantor. Take time within your network to learn this model.

The Four Player Dialogue Model

David Kantor's Four Player Dialogue Model states that a conversation requires all four of these activities to create the foundation for a quality dialogue. Individuals do not take on a specific role or activity: they are attentive to the needs of the conversation and can engage any of the four parts in order to enhance the dialogues. It is therefore important for individuals to develop skills in each of these areas.

1. MOVE

This is usually a statement that advocates a position. By its expression, it moves the conversation in a specific direction.

2. FOLLOW

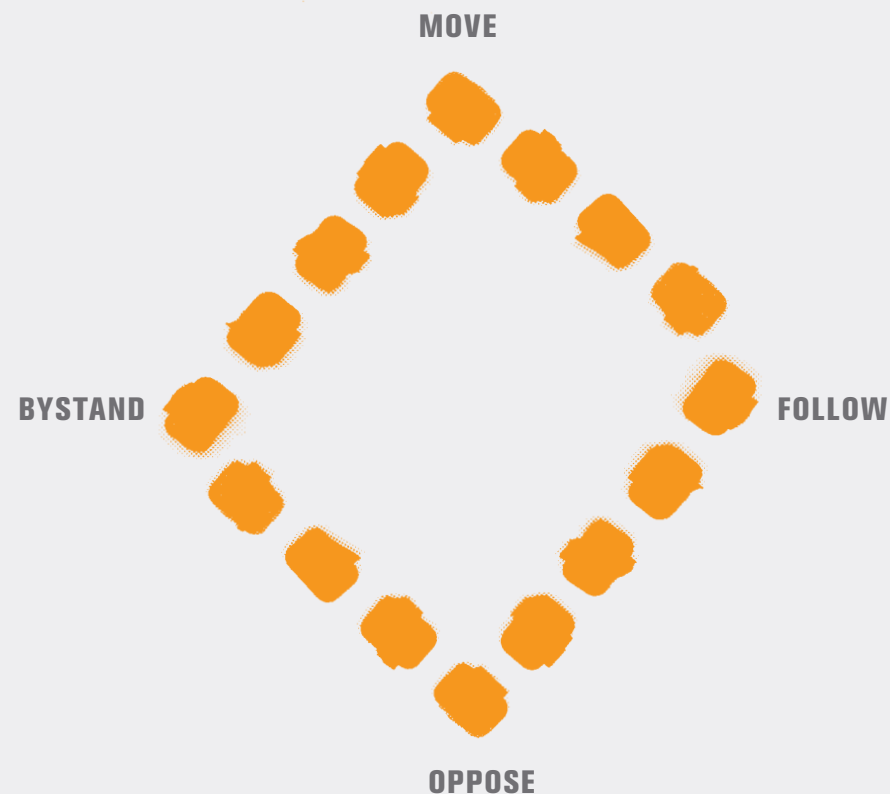
This is usually a question that follows the direction of a move. This is meant to bring out other perspectives on the move statement or to further understand the mover's perspective.

3. OPPOSE

This is usually a statement that offers a differing opinion on the move statement. This can either be a correction of fact or advocacy for a different position.

4. BYSTAND

This is usually an observation of what is happening in the group. This is used to monitor the quality of the dialogue. For example, someone might say, "I notice that some in the group seem very emotional right now. I wonder if we need to take a moment to talk about why?"



CASE STUDIES



How diversity, dialogue and relationships lead to a

SAFER SAN JOSE

CASE STUDY: SAFER SAN JOSE

A cluster of controversial police related events in San Jose exacerbated a strained relationship between the police and parts of the community. Accusations of racial profiling and inappropriate use of force were leveled. Community advocates called for accountability; law enforcement felt unfairly attacked. The battle was being waged in the media. The community and the police department were enmeshed in adversarial relationships, and opportunities to improve the relationship between police and the community to create a safer San Jose were quickly dwindling.

Responding to this situation, the ALF network began a process of community dialogue. We began by developing a powerful question: What will it take to build a safer San Jose? This was the first step in a dialogue aimed at dramatically shifting the combative relationship between the community and law enforcement. What resulted is a new network of police and community. This network is able to work together at a different level because of the relationships participants share with one another. With a focus now on community policing, a task force for the chief of police, made up of a variety of community voices, is developing a community policing plan for San Jose.

DIVERSITY

Several ALF network members who were intimately involved with the communities struggling with this issue wanted to find a more effective and healing process to resolve police/community issues. They called for an ongoing community-wide dialogue that over time would:

- 1) Help build a different, more productive relationship between police and the community, and
- 2) Create a framework for addressing issues through a process conducive to finding sustainable and creative solutions.

The network knew that building and repairing relationships would take time and that leadership for this process had to come from the stakeholders involved: those who felt wronged (the community) and those who felt unjustly accused (law enforcement). The diversity of perspectives within those two groups was immense and it provided both the challenge and the opportunity to find new solutions. We assembled a core group of leaders who championed the effort and did the hard work of bringing their constituents to the table.

DIALOGUE

Working behind the scenes and in public, the ALF network undertook the work of orchestrating an ongoing community-wide dialogue. ALF worked with various stakeholders to host or participate in more than 50 dialogues on this issue. Whether one-on-one or community-wide dialogues, ALF has been a strong influence on the content and format of these conversations by modeling its dialogue philosophies that promote diversity of perspective, an openness to be influenced, focus on relationship building, and generative discussion.

RELATIONSHIPS

Changing relationships was the key component to this initiative as dysfunctional relationships were at the core of the problem. By no means, is the relationship-building work complete. This is a long-term effort. And relationship-building will be a constant process as people move in and out of the community. But a new foundation is being laid that will enable a more balanced approach to community transformation.

How diversity, dialogue and relationships lead to

A GREEN ENERGY PROGRAM

CASE STUDY: GREEN PAYS

What began as a public forum asking the question, “Can green tech be a path out of poverty in Silicon Valley?” has become the Green Pays Energy Retrofit Program. The Green Pays Energy Retrofit Program (Green Pays) is a community-centered, scalable, and ultimately financially self-sustaining program. Green Pays will lower energy bills for low-to-middle income families, fight global warming, and create high-quality green jobs—all through energy retrofits of residential homes using a financing model that involves little or no upfront cost to property owners.

The ongoing development of the Green Pays Energy Retrofit Program has embodied all three of the primary elements in the ALF Common Good Collaborative model: diversity, dialogue and relationships.

DIVERSITY

After extensive research, a small group of ALF network members decided to pursue a home retrofit program that would not only create jobs, but provide career training. Key to this effort was the active participation of a wide range of constituencies involved in both green efforts and job development. To this end, the group recruited representatives from job training nonprofits, green tech businesses, construction companies, environmental

organizations, building and trade unions, workforce development, social service agencies, and governmental institutions.

This sector diversity was essential to creating a program that would be widely supported by constituencies with varying and, in some cases, seemingly competing, priorities.

DIALOGUE

The dialogues in this effort were crucial to building trusting relationships and bringing different perspectives into the open. Longstanding skepticism and mistrust between sectors, particularly business and labor, could have halted the project from the beginning. But a concerted and relentless application of good dialogue practices led to honest, upfront, and respectful conversations. In turn, these conversations led to new relationships and a well-developed program that meets multiple needs.

RELATIONSHIPS

The relationships developed during this process have sustained this long-term effort for two years. Group members feel accountable to each other to see this project to fruition even during setbacks. The atmosphere of mutual respect that has been created enables individual interests to take equal priority.

How diversity, dialogue and relationships are

REVIVING CALIFORNIA

CASE STUDY: REVIVING CALIFORNIA

For three years, ALF has played a primary role in involving Silicon Valley in the movement to reform California governance and fiscal policies. With its robust network and unique capacity to hold dialogues that provide forums for sophisticated examination of complex issues, ALF brings Silicon Valley perspectives to the leading reform advocates, which, in turn, has greatly informed policy development.

On the flipside, ALF's efforts are key to engaging Silicon Valley residents in the reform movement. Creating opportunities for learning and engagement are an antidote to the bombardment of political rhetoric and vitriol that accompanies elections. ALF's Reviving California summits bring together content experts and the general public for in-depth conversations.

The combination of efforts of ALF and others in the reform movement have resulted in the passage of several key reform policies.

DIVERSITY

The ALF network was there at the beginning of the reform movement. And since the beginning ALF has taken a multi-perspective approach to engaging the Silicon Valley community.

For example, as part of this strategy, Reviving California formed the Silicon Valley Collaborative for Reform that includes more than 20 diverse regional organizations. Many of the organizations represent communities that were not engaged in the reform movement. ALF specially tailors its strategies in ways that will appeal specifically to each community.

DIALOGUE

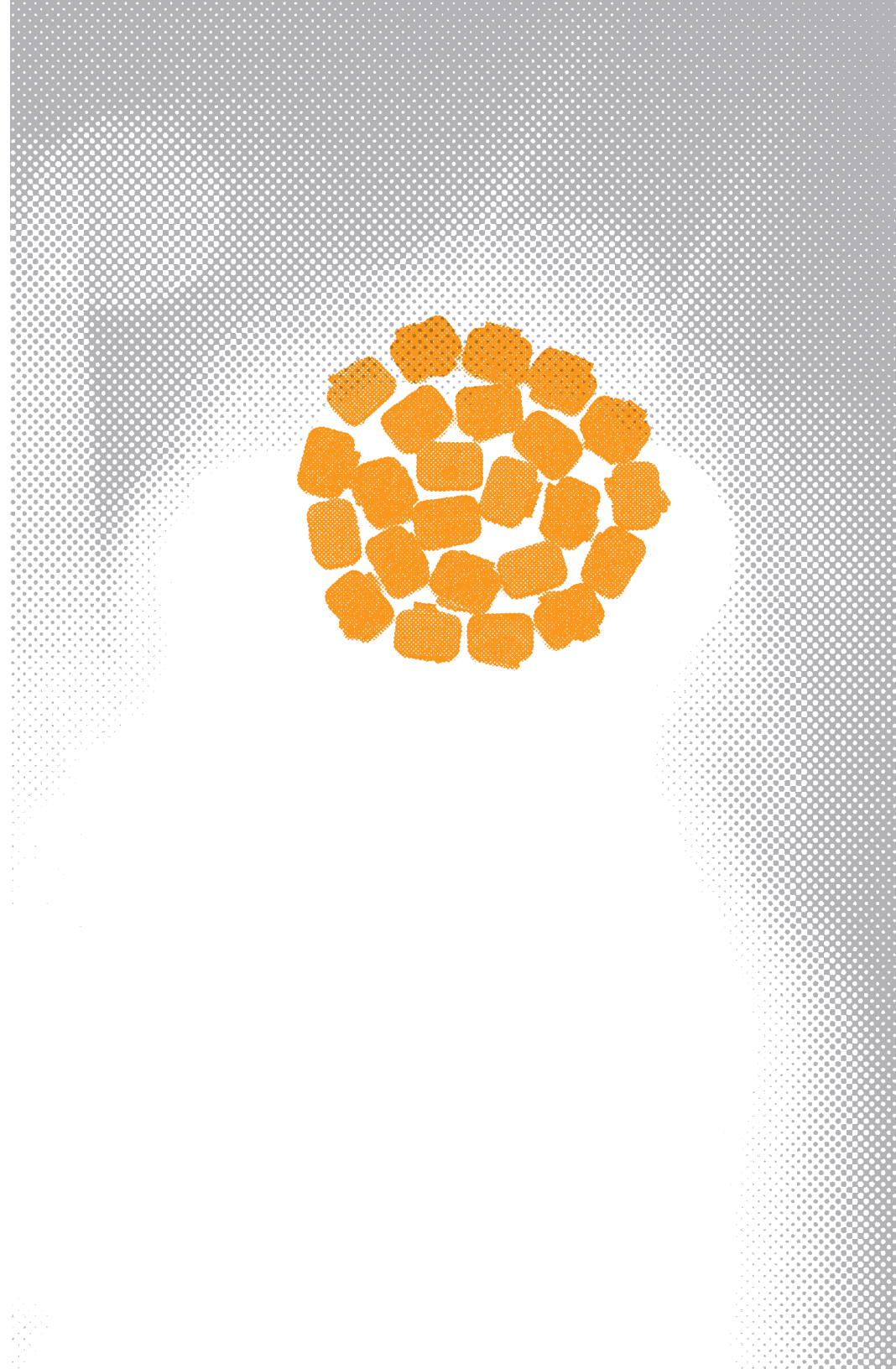
Reviving California is heavily focused on dialogue as a means to more effective engagement in the democratic process of reforming California governance and fiscal policies. The strategy is to utilize a myriad of dialogue types to engage multiple communities. ALF has used everything from online dialogues, large community summits, multi-site convenings linked by Skype, digital town halls to intimate conversations in its strategy to help move reform forward.

RELATIONSHIPS

The robust relationships within the ALF network were the genesis of the Reviving California effort. The network held a retreat that embodied all the elements of the Common Good Framework. While the retreat took considerable time and effort, the result was an in-depth exploration of California governance and fiscal reform and how a networked approach could have impact. The

resulting Reviving California initiative was born from this and made stronger because of its robust beginning.

ALF has capitalized on the strong relationships in its network to move this initiative forward. We have intentionally created new networks. This network of networks approach has consistently enabled us to engage new people in the reform effort.



RECOMMENDED READING

The Art of Powerful Questions: Catalyzing Insight, Innovation, and Action

Eric E. Vogt, Juanita Brown, and David Isaacs
(Whole Systems Associates, 2003)

Check-in, Check-out: A Tool for Real Conversations

Fred Kofman (Pegasus Communications, 1994)

Checking-in and Checking-out for ALF

Greg Ranstrom, American Leadership Forum
www.alfsv.org

Community: The Structure of Belonging

Peter Block (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2008)

Dialogue: The Art Of Thinking Together

William Isaacs (Crown Business, 1999)

Four-Player Model

David Kantor, Ph.D. (Kantor Institute)
www.kantorinstitute.com/fullwidth.html

Leadership in the Age of Complexity: From Hero to Host

Margaret Wheatley with Debbie Frieze (Wheatley, 2010)

Salsa, Soul, and Spirit: Leadership for a Multicultural Age

Juana Bordas (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2007)

Strategic Questioning: Engaging People's Best Thinking

Juanita Brown, David Isaacs, Eric Vogt and Nancy Margulies
(Pegasus Communications, 2002)

The World Cafe: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter

Juanita Brown and David Isaacs (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2005)



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