

Social Designs Dialogue Principles

The Dialogue Principles are a tool for effective and impactful communication. The principles help to frame conversations for colleagues, students, friends, and family. Furthermore, this tool is great to use when communities are struggling to find resolve about issues such as religious intolerance or when company leaders are in the midst of organizational change.

The principles are a guide to help enhance critical conversations. The goal is to seek to understand. However, understanding one another does not equate to agreeing. It is ok to have and welcome different opinions and perspectives. When you engage in rich dialogue, you begin to prioritize understanding instead of debating.

The principles support brave spaces which are environments where participants welcome challenge and diverse communication styles. Whether in the classroom or in the boardroom, using the Social Designs Dialogue Principles will help you to increase critical thinking and interpersonal communication skills, and expand your capacity for grace and patience.



Phases of the Dialogue Principles

Be Curious

Seek to understand the people you are speaking to as much as possible. Ask questions to gain more insight and details about their point of view.

Examples of Curiosity Statements

Why?

Can you tell me more?

Why do you feel this way?

How did you come to this viewpoint?

Do you mind explaining?

What makes you say that?

Listen. Listen. Listen.

Anatomically, we have two ears and one mouth. Engage in the natural manner of the human anatomy and listen more than you normally do. Even when your emotions are motivating you to respond quickly, challenge yourself to listen and breathe before reacting. Practice being more present by listening to understand and not to respond. If you are unable to hear others, pay attention to body language and wait for people to share their complete thoughts. Listen to the 3rd POWER!

Affirm

When you acknowledge the other person's views you increase the level of respect between the two of you. More than likely they will be more open to share with you when you affirm them. This helps to create an atmosphere of "talking with" and not "talking at." Affirmation also occurs through body language or verbal cues. Keep in mind, though, there are varying cultural norms around affirmation. For example, in Brazil, interruptions are viewed as engagement. In the USA, interruptions are perceived as rude. In Japan, direct eye contact is disrespectful. However, in Barbados, looking at someone in their eyes is respectful. All of these examples are with exceptions.

Examples of Affirmative Statements

- I understand.
- I recognize how you have come to think about it that way.
- I hear you, and I disagree.
- I appreciate your perspective.
- Your opinion is very different, and I like it.

Acknowledge Bias

Have you heard the phrase, "Don't judge a book by its cover?" The main purpose of this phrase is to suggest the importance of not treating people different based on what you see. However, all humans form opinions about something or someone they see or something they read or hear based on previous experiences or stereotypes. When you acknowledge biases, you are equipping yourself to understand why you may react to another person's opinion. Our verbal and physical reactions sometimes speak for us without our control if we have not learned how to acknowledge our bias.

Clarify

While communicating with others, there are often moments when people do not understand each other. When this happens, seek to clear up any confusion or assumptions. It is easy for miscommunication to occur especially when coded language like 'culture fit' or other phrases are being used.

Here are two ways to gain clarity:

- 1- Seek to understand ambiguous or unclear communication. Do this by restating what you've heard and understood.
- 2- Recognize and accept your assumptions by asking yourself questions like:
Why did I come to those conclusions? Why do I feel this way about the person who is conversing with me? What are the facts?

Connect & Create

There are endless possibilities of what relationships, perspectives, or solutions you may create when you stay in dialogue long enough to get to this phase. When dialoging, you may have strengthened your own opinions or decreased your bias. People often connect and expand networks or develop innovative solutions to a problem in this phase.

Accept Non-Closure

After a conversation, you may not be able to come to an amicable agreement immediately. This may be because of time, tension, or difference of opinions. It is ok not to feel comfortable at the end of a discussion. However, just because the interaction ended, doesn't mean learning is complete. Continue the conversation with those involved or seek understanding using other resources.