

6 Conversations to Build Community

Week 2

An OLLI Discussion class based on Peter Block's
Community, the Structure of Belonging

Anne Brack, Spring 2026

Class Outcomes and Expectations

- By the end of the class:
 - Understand ways to use Peter Block's conversations in your life.
 - Learn Constructed Conversations technique to convene small group discussions.
 - Build relationships with each other and get a deeper sense of community.
 - Learn something about yourself.
 - Attempt to use an example about convening a community discussion.
- In Class:
 - Be prepared to talk candidly.
 - Use something from your life to talk about, you don't have to come in as a Community Organizer.
 - Maintain confidentiality. What is shared in here needs to stay in here.

Class Flow



- Class 1:
 - Class outcomes
 - Introductions and check in
 - Book at a Glance
 - Practicing Community: Small Group Exercises and Sharing
- **Classes 2-6**
 - 2:15-2:25 – Opening Reflection & Check-in
 - 2:25-2:35 – Book at a Glance plus – 1-2 Conversations
 - 2:35–3:20 – Guided Practices in Groups of three, with large group share
 - 3:20–3:30 – Takeaways and Close

Check in with each other:

- Break into groups of 3
- For 1 minute each, take turns answering: Why was it important for you to be here?
- Large group share back: What insight did you have to share with the group?
- Check in – How are you doing listening?

Review

- **Book at a Glance (The Alchemy of Belonging, Part II):**
 - Overall Premise, Operating Guidelines
 - **Context of Restorative Community.**
 - The Inversion of Cause and Accountability
 - Leadership and Transformation.
 - Power of a small group: unit of transformation.
 - Questions are more transforming than answers.
 - Hospitality and Physical Space
- **Six Conversations:** Invitation, Possibility, **Ownership**, Dissent, Commitment, Gifts.

The Context of a Restorative Community

2:40 start

- The existing community context is one that markets fear, assigns fault, and worships self-interest.
- This existing context supports the belief that the future will be improved with new laws, more oversight, and stronger leadership.
- The new context that restores community is one of possibility, generosity, and gifts, rather than one of fear, mistakes, and self-interest.
- Citizens (we) become powerful when they choose to shift the context within which they act in the world.
- Communities are human systems given form by conversations that build relatedness.
- The conversations that build relatedness most often occur through associational life, where citizens are unpaid and show up by choice, rather than in large systems where professionals are paid and show up by contractual agreement.
- The future hinges on the accountability that citizens choose and their willingness to connect with each other around promises they make to each other.
- Citizens have the capacity to own and exercise power rather than defer or delegate it to others.

Community and The Conversation of Ownership

The First Conversation in our OLLI course!

“Our love of problems runs deeper than just the joy of complaint, being right, or escape from responsibility. The core belief from which we operate is that an alternative or better future can be accomplished with more problem solving.”

Peter Block,

Community the Structure of Belonging

The Fabric of Community, Part 1 p35

Community and The Conversation of Ownership, cont

- It asks citizens (us) to act as if they (we) are creating what exists in the world.
- Accountability is the willingness to acknowledge that we have participated in creating, through commission or omission, the conditions that we wish to see changed.
- If we can't see ourselves as part of the cause, our efforts are wishfully dependent on someone else and turn into blame.
- Community is created the moment we decide to act as creators of what it can become.
- Ownership is the decision to become the author of our own experience.
- We want to shift the belief that the world, including this gathering, is ours to construct together.
- Remove the limiting beliefs in our stories and complete them with these questions. Move from parenting to partnership.

In other words...

**THERE ARE 3 SOLUTIONS
TO EVERY PROBLEM:**

**ACCEPT IT,
CHANGE IT,
LEAVE IT.**

**IF YOU CAN'T ACCEPT IT,
CHANGE IT.**

**IF YOU CAN'T CHANGE IT,
LEAVE IT.**

Constructed Conversation Practice

2:50 start

Process:

- Break into groups of 3 (speaker, listener, witness)
- Be conscious about time while in class to give each person equal airtime
- Speaker: Choose one question to answer in 3-5 minutes
- Listener: Use open questions like Why was that important to you? Tell me more?
- Witness: keep an eye on sharing airtime
- Switch roles
- Thank you for sharing!

Ownership, Round 1

- Think of a community in your life you are part of (e.g. a group, project, this class) :
 - How valuable an experience (or project, or community) do you plan for this to be?
 - How much risk are you willing to take?
 - How participative do you plan to be?
 - To what extent are you invested in the well-being of the whole?

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- Roles: Speaker, Listener, Witness
 - It is not our job to fix, advise, rescue or save another adult without their consent. Probe with, “Why is that important to you?” and “Tell me more.”
 - The speaker is the expert in their experiences.

Share Back –
What stood out
for you in this
conversation?



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

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- Roles: Speaker, Listener, Witness
 - It is not our job to fix, advise, rescue or save another adult without their consent. Probe with, “Why is that important to you?” and “Tell me more.”
 - The speaker is the expert in their experiences.

Share Back –
What stood out
for you in this
conversation this
time?



Ownership, Round 3

- What is the story about this community or organization that you hear yourself most often telling? The one you are wedded to and maybe even take your identity from?
- What are the payoffs you receive from holding on to this story?
- What is your attachment to this story costing you?

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- Roles: Speaker, Listener, Witness
 - It is not our job to fix, advise, rescue or save another adult without their consent. Probe with, “Why is that important to you?” and “Tell me more.”
 - The speaker is the expert in their experiences.

Share Back –
What stood out
for you in this
conversation ?



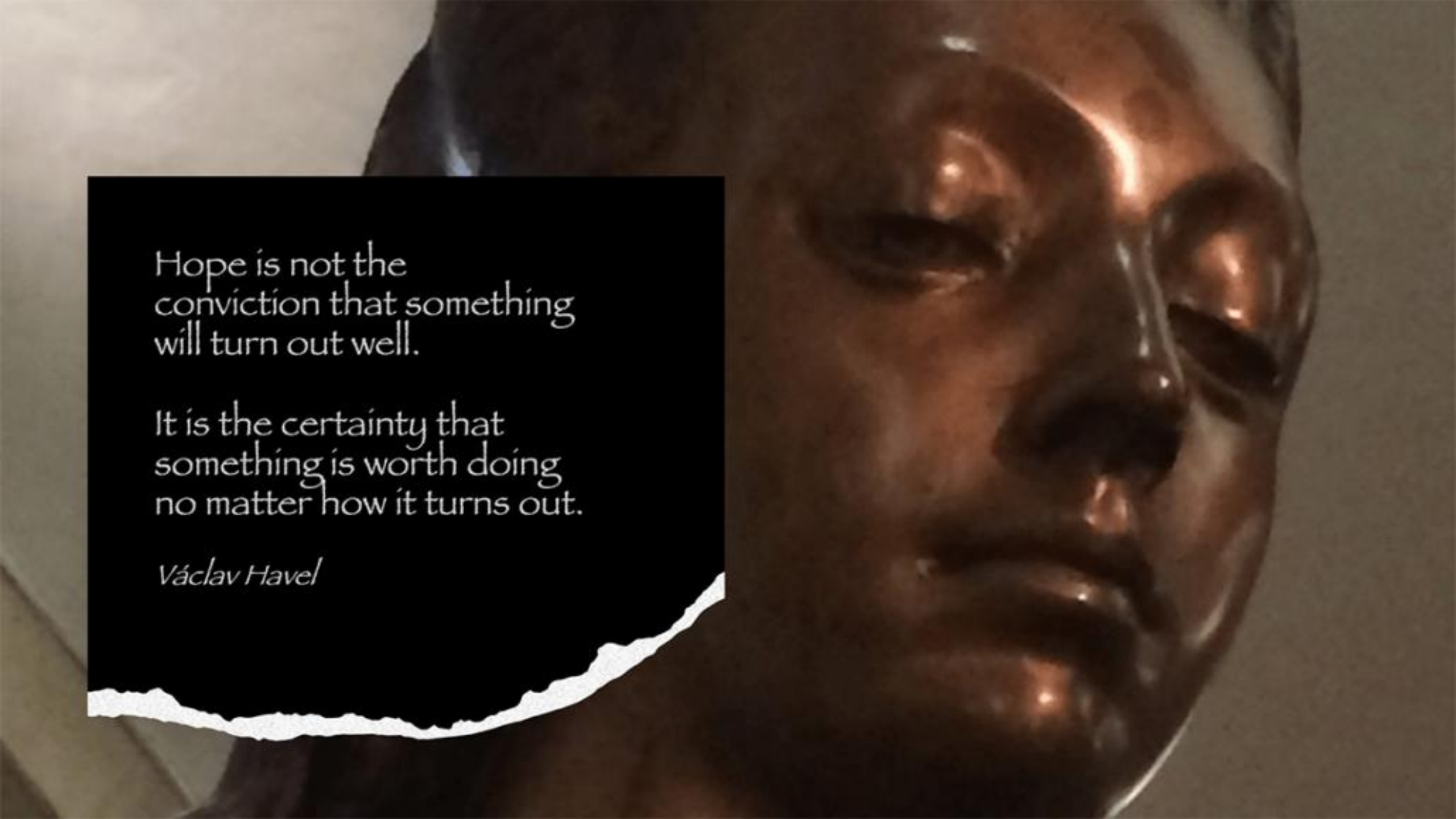
- What has someone in your group done, in this gathering, that has touched you?
- Accept the gift, respond with “Thank you, I like hearing that”
- Share back in the large group how you felt or what you noticed.

Share Back –
What was it like this
time?

NEVER DOUBT THAT A SMALL
GROUP OF THOUGHTFUL,
COMMITTED CITIZENS CAN
CHANGE THE WORLD; INDEED,
IT'S THE ONLY THING THAT
EVER HAS.

MARGARET MEAD

Questions/Feedback?



Hope is not the
conviction that something
will turn out well.

It is the certainty that
something is worth doing
no matter how it turns out.

Václav Havel