

6 Conversations to Build Community

Week 3

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 Inversion of Cause and Accountability

2:25 start

- Citizens have the capacity to own and exercise power rather than defer or delegate it to others.
- We reclaim our citizenship when we invert what is cause and what is effect.
- Explore an idea that listening creates the speaker, citizens create leaders, children create parents, and student creates the teacher. This inversion may not be the whole truth, but it is useful.
- The inversion creates conditions where we can shift from
 - A place of fear and fault to one of gifts, generosity, and abundance;
 - A bet on law and oversight to one on social fabric and chosen accountability;
 - The corporation and systems as central, to associational life as central;
 - A focus on leaders to a focus on citizens;
 - Problems to possibility.

Community and The Conversation of Dissent

The Next Conversation in our OLLI course!

“When we shift from talking about the problems of community to talking about the breakdown of community, something changes. *Naming the challenge as the “breakdown of community” opens the way for restoration.* Holding to the view that community is a set of problems to be solved holds us in the grip of retribution.”

Peter Block,

Community the Structure of Belonging

The Fabric of Community, Part 1 p34

Community and The Conversation of Dissent, cont

- The dissent conversation creates an opening for commitment (holding space).
- When dissent is expressed, just listen. Don't solve it, defend against it, or explain anything.
- The primary distinction is between dissent and lip service. No is the beginning of Commitment.
- A second distinction is between dissent and denial, rebellion, or resignation.
- We help when we realize there is nothing to argue about. We move forward when we get curious.

In other words...

Take your time to
understand. Don't just
do something, be there.

Marshall Rosenberg, Non-Violent Communication

Constructed Conversation Practice

2:35 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!

Dissent, Round 1

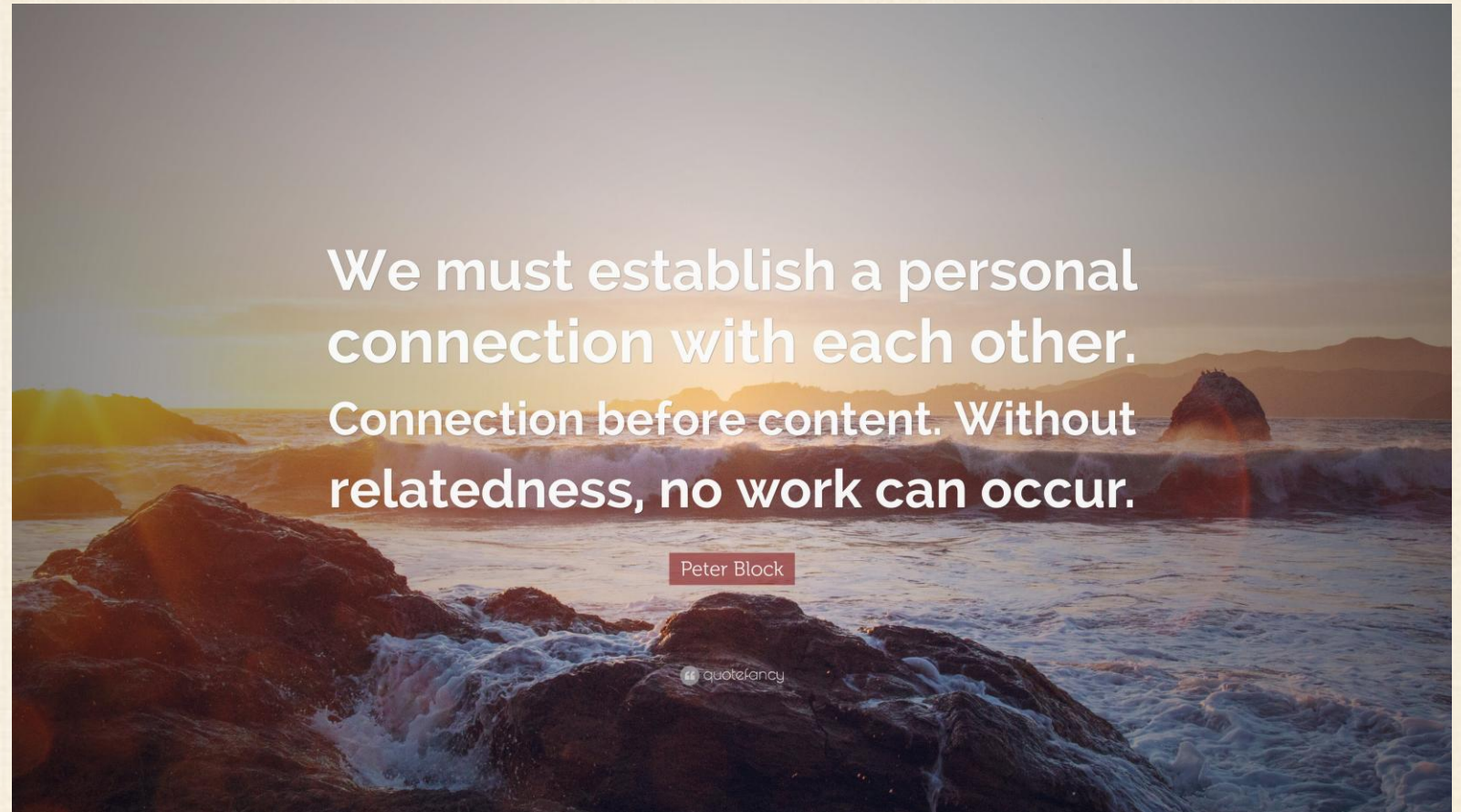
- What doubts and reservations do you have?
- What is the no or refusal that you keep postponing?
- What have you said yes to that you no longer really mean?
- What is a commitment or decision that you have changed your mind about?
- What resentment do you hold that no one knows about?
- What forgiveness are you withholding?

- 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?



Dissent, Round 2

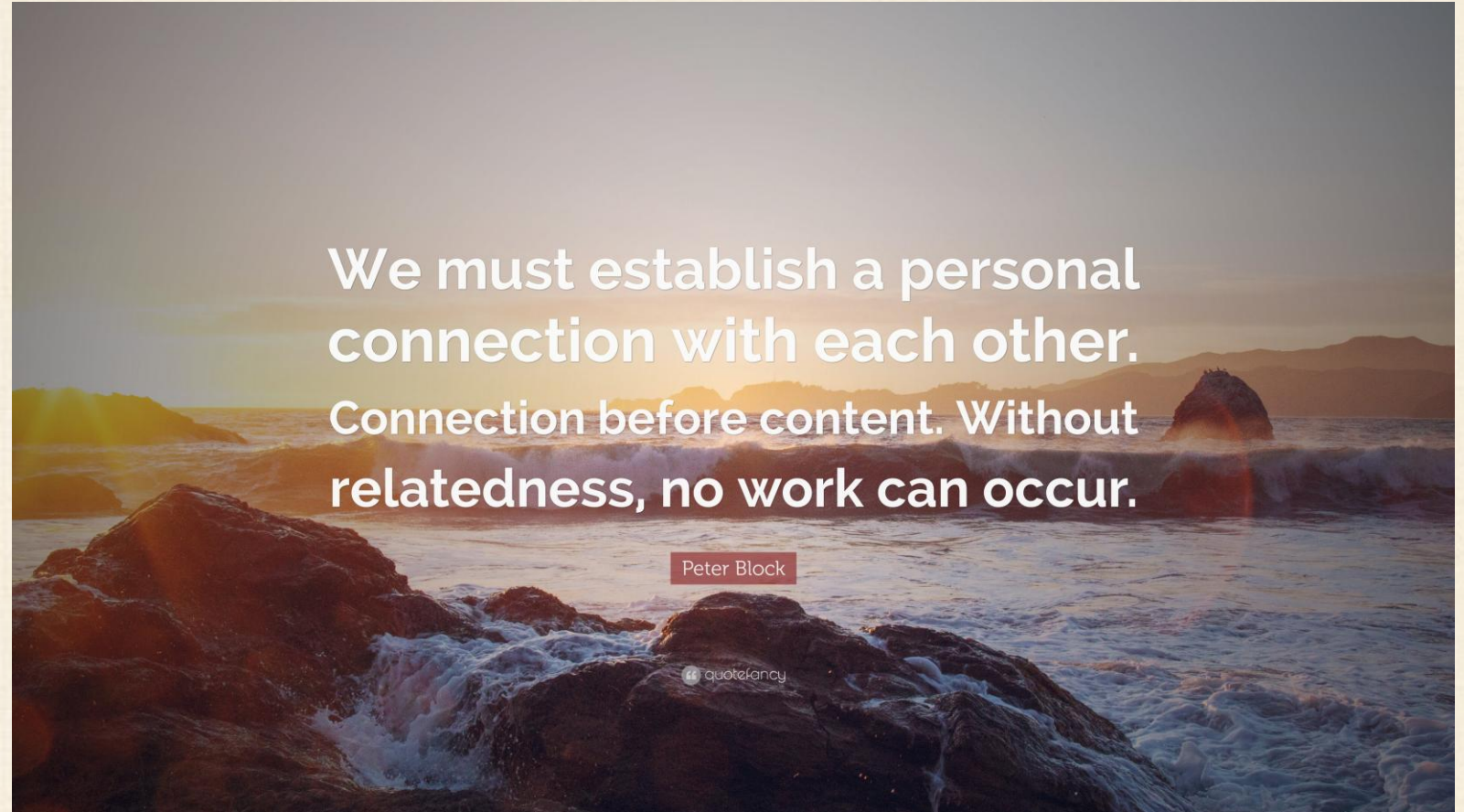
- What doubts and reservations do you have?
- What is the no or refusal that you keep postponing?
- What have you said yes to that you no longer really mean?
- What is a commitment or decision that you have changed your mind about?
- What resentment do you hold that no one knows about?
- What forgiveness are you withholding?

- 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?



- 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 stood out for
you in this
conversation?

When we seek for connection, we restore the world to wholeness. Our seemingly separate lives become meaningful as we discover how truly necessary we are to each other.

Margaret Wheatley

Questions/Feedback?

Understanding the
other persons' needs
does not mean you
have to give up on
your own needs.

Marshall Rosenberg, Non-Violent Communication

