

6 Conversations to Build Community

Week 4

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.

Leadership and Transformation

2:25 start

- Leadership that engages citizens is a capacity that exists in all human beings. It is infinitely and universally available.
- Transformation occurs when leaders focus on the structure of how we gather and the context in which the gatherings take place.
- Leadership is convening and held to three tasks:
 - Shift the context within which people gather.
 - Name the debate through powerful questions.
 - Listen rather than advocate, defend, or provide answers.

Community and The Conversation of Commitment

The Next Conversation in our OLLI course!

Citizens become powerful when they choose to shift the context within which they act in the world. Using the language of context rather than culture puts the choice into our own hands. It acknowledges that our mindset, even our worldview, is subjective and therefore amenable to change.

Peter Block,

Community the Structure of Belonging

The Fabric of Community, Part 1 p35

Community and The Conversation of Commitment, cont.

- The commitment conversation is a promise with no expectation of return.
- Commitment is distinguished from barter.
- The enemy of commitment is lip service, not dissent or opposition.
- The commitments that count the most are ones made to peers (other citizens).
- We have to explicitly provide support for citizens to declare that there is no promise they are willing to make at this time.
- Refusal to promise does not cost us our membership or seat at the table. We only lose our seat when we do not honor our word.
- Commitment embraces two kinds of promises:
 - My behavior and actions with others
 - Results and outcomes that will occur in the world

In other words...



*"Do or
do not.
There is
no try."*

YODA

Constructed Conversation Practice

2:35 start

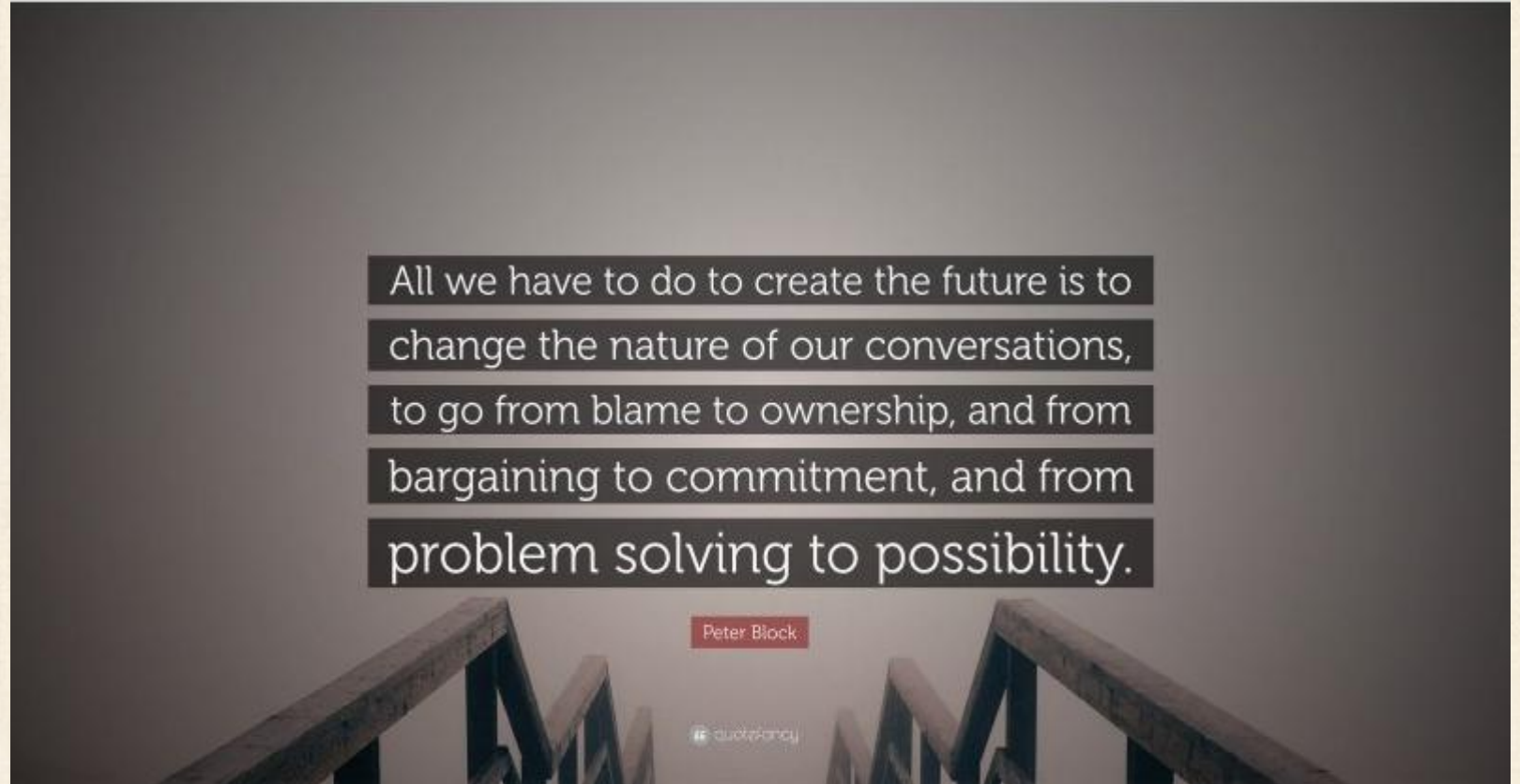
Process:

- 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!

Commitment, Round 1

- What promises am I willing to make?
 - What measures have meaning to me?
 - What price am I willing to pay?
 - What is the cost to others for me to keep my commitments, or to fail in my commitments?
 - What is the promise I'm willing to make that constitutes a risk or major shift for me?
 - What is the promise I am postponing?
 - What is the promise or commitment I am unwilling to make?
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- Roles: Speaker, Listener
 - 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.

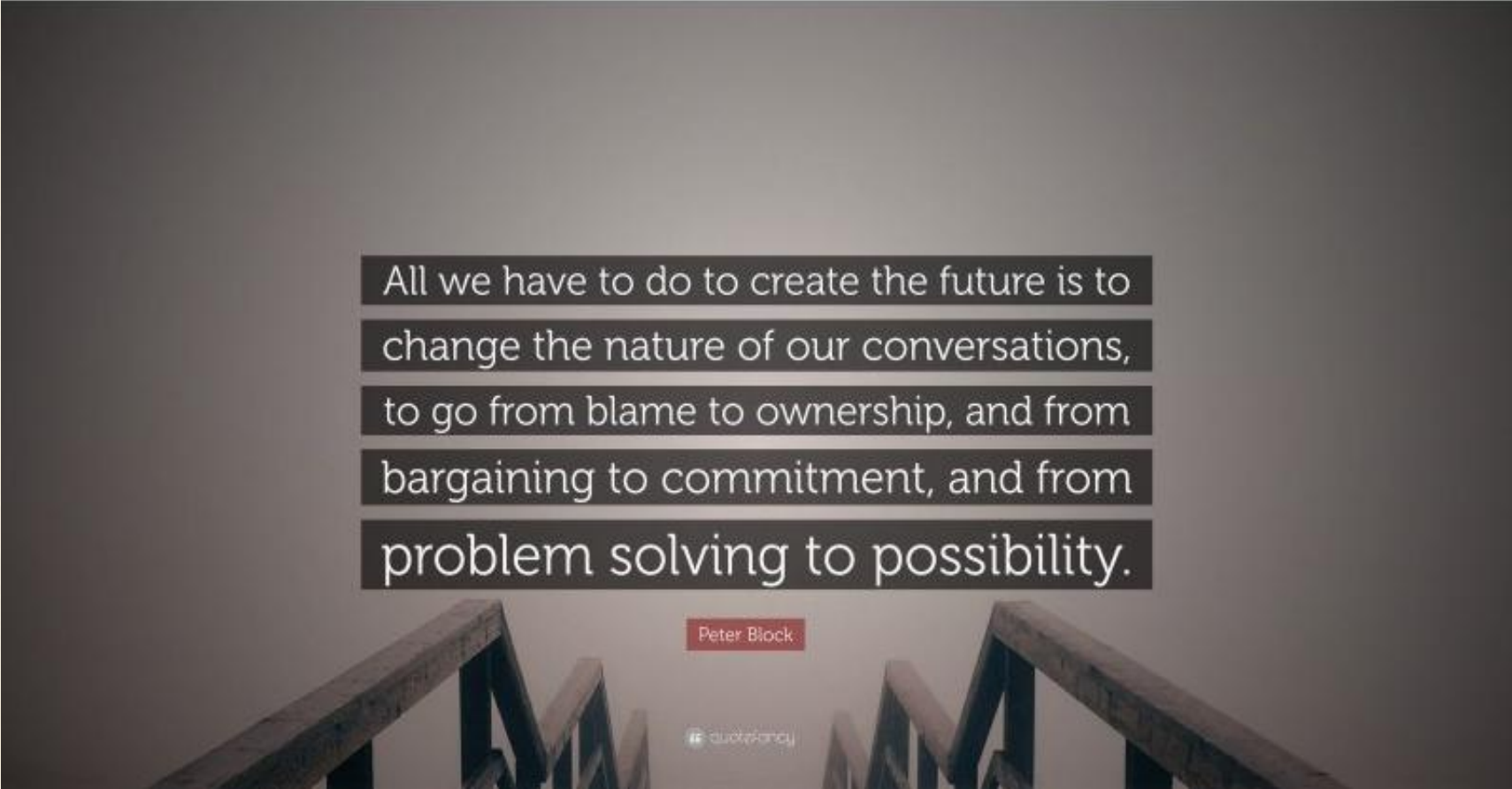
Share Back –
What stood out
for you in this
conversation this
time?



Commitment, Round 2

- What promises am I willing to make?
 - What measures have meaning to me?
 - What price am I willing to pay?
 - What is the cost to others for me to keep my commitments, or to fail in my commitments?
 - What is the promise I'm willing to make that constitutes a risk or major shift for me?
 - What is the promise I am postponing?
 - What is the promise or commitment I am unwilling to make?
-
- Roles: Speaker, Listener
 - 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? How
do you feel?

A dark, atmospheric photograph of a staircase with wooden railings, viewed from a low angle looking up. The background is a gradient of dark grey to black. The quote is centered in the upper half of the image, with each line of text on a separate dark horizontal bar. At the bottom center, there is a small red rectangular box with the name 'Peter Block' and a small white icon of a person next to the text 'quote-fancy'.

All we have to do to create the future is to
change the nature of our conversations,
to go from blame to ownership, and from
bargaining to commitment, and from
problem solving to possibility.

Peter Block

 quote-fancy

- 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? How
do you feel?

**Who am I expecting to
do this work, if not me?**

Luvvie Ajayi Jones

 quote fancy

Questions/Feedback?

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**NOT EVERYTHING THAT IS
FACED CAN BE CHANGED,
BUT NOTHING CAN BE
CHANGED UNTIL IT IS FACED.**

– JAMES BALDWIN