

6 Conversations to Build Community

Week 5

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.

Overall Premise of CTSOB (the book)

9:40 start

- Build the social fabric and transform the isolation within our communities into connectedness and caring for the whole.
- Shift our conversations from the problems of community to the possibility of community.
- Commit to create a future distinct from the past.

The Transforming Community p 73

Community transformation calls for citizenship that shifts the context:

From a place of	To
Fear and fault Law and oversight Corporation and “systems,” Preoccupation with leadership	Gifts, generosity, and abundance Social fabric and chosen accountability Associational life and the engagement of citizens.

These shifts occur as citizens face each other in conversations of ownership and possibility. There are three tasks of leadership:

1. Shift the context within which people gather
2. Name the debate through powerful questions
3. Listen rather than advocate, defend, or provide answers.

Community and The Gifts Conversation

The Next Conversation in our OLLI course!

“As with all the conversations, there may be no immediate and clear answers to these questions. It doesn’t matter. The questions themselves work on us, and when they are asked, this work is activated. In the asking, we are creating space for gifts, which are central to restoration, that wants to occur at this moment. The questions are the transformation, simply by being named.”

Peter Block,

Community the Structure of Belonging

The Fabric of Community, p73

Community and The Gifts Conversation, cont


- The leadership and citizen task is to bring the gifts of those on the margin into the center.
- The distinction is between gifts and deficiencies or needs.
- We are not defined by deficiencies or what is missing. We are defined by our gifts and what is present.
- We choose our destiny when we have the courage to acknowledge our own gifts and choose to bring them into the world.
- A gift is not a gift until it is offered.

In other words...



The most precious gift you
can give someone is the gift
of your time and attention.

Nicky Gumbel

 quote fancy

Constructed Conversation Practice

9:50 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!

Gifts, Round 1

The Gift Each Brings to the World

- What is the gift you currently hold in exile?
- What is it about you that no one knows?
- What gratitude do you hold that has been gone unexpressed?
- What is the positive feedback you receive that still surprises you?
- What is the gift you have that you do not fully acknowledge?

Gifts of the Gathering:

- What gift have you received from another in this room?
- In what way did a person engage you that had meaning?

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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?



Gifts, Round 2

Gifts of the Gathering:

- What gift have you received from another in this room?
- In what way did a person engage you that had meaning?

The Gift Each Brings to the World

- What is the gift you currently hold in exile?
- What is it about you that no one knows?
- What gratitude do you hold that has been gone unexpressed?
- What is the positive feedback you receive that still surprises you?
- What is the gift you have that you do not fully acknowledge?

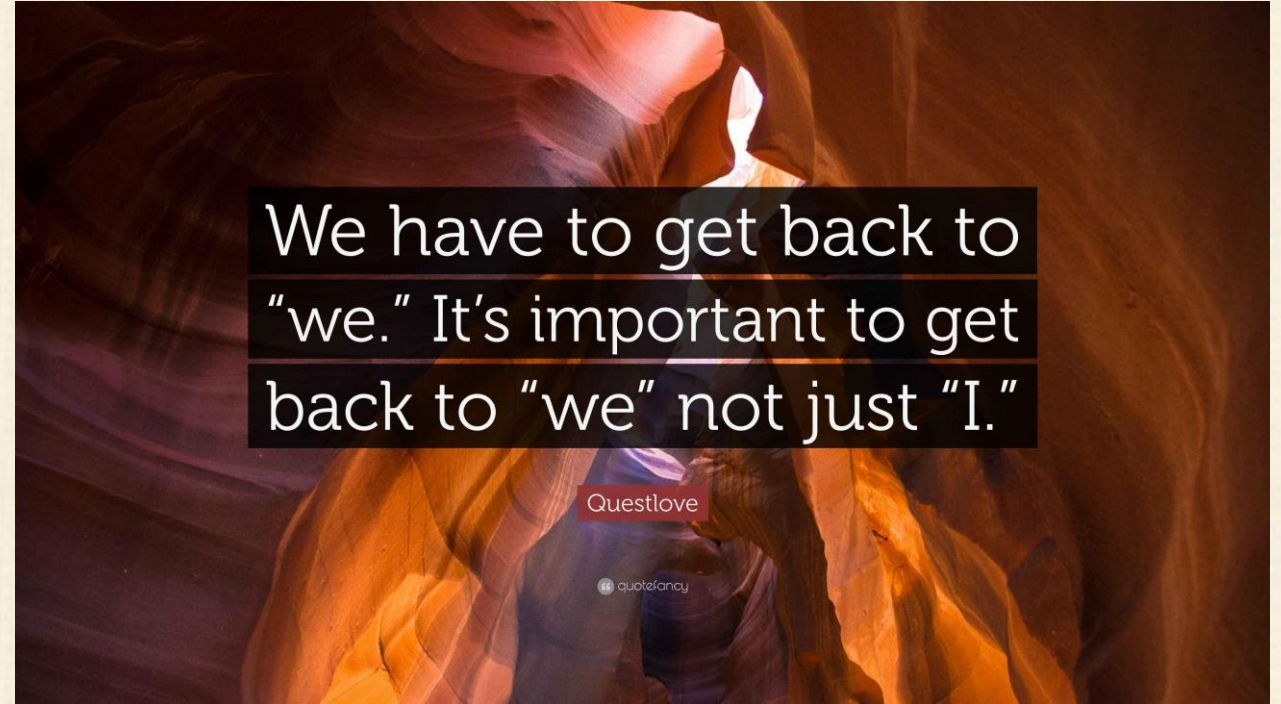
-
- Roles: Speaker, Listener
 - It is not our job to fix, advise, rescue or save another adult without their consent. Probe with, “Why is that important to you?” and “Tell me more.”
 - The speaker is the expert in their experiences.

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



- 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?



Questions/Feedback?

“

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**I AM WHAT TIME, CIRCUMSTANCE,
HISTORY, HAVE MADE OF ME,
CERTAINLY, BUT I AM ALSO SO
MUCH MORE THAN THAT.
SO ARE WE ALL.**

– JAMES BALDWIN