



Leader Development Topic #2: *Engaging in Conversations*

Introduction:

Conversation is an integral form of communication, key for relationships and interacting with the world. Some conversations are pretty straightforward and even fun like ordering a meal at the drive through window, catching up with a friend, or announcing an engagement. Others are more difficult, like making a 911 call, negotiating a salary, or disciplining a child.

Bridge Group Goal:

Engage in Community

Bridge Groups have 3 goals: Experience the Gospel, Engage in Community and Equip one another as Bridge Builders.

Groups that successfully engage in conversation with one another are meeting the goal of engaging in community. When a new group forms, people may be reluctant to join the discussion or share from personal experience right away. As time goes by, the leader may notice that more group members are participating and opening up. This is an example of growth in community engagement through meaningful conversation.

The Character of Christ: Intentionality

Intentionality is a crucial character trait for leaders as they engage in conversation. There is no better example of an intentional leader than Jesus. He was intentional in His relationship upward to God, inward to His disciples, and outward to the world. We see Him engaging with large crowds, singling out individuals like Zacchaeus:

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short, he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. Luke 19: 1-6 (NIV)



Jesus also engaged in a deeper, consistent way with his inner circle, the Disciples, who He personally chose and taught.

I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing... This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples... I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other. John 15: 5, 8, 15-17 (NIV)

Within His twelve Disciples, Jesus spent extra time with Peter, James and John. Similarly, in our own lives, there are people that we converse with regularly and that we know at a deeper level and some who we engage with less frequently and perhaps on a more surface level.

Questions:

1. In what ways was Jesus' intentionality a value to Zacchaeus and the Disciples?
2. How could Jesus' model of intentionality be expressed within Bridge Groups?
3. What discipline or habit would help make you more intentional?



Leader Development: Engaging in Conversations

An intentional leader shows value to another person by being purposefully present with them, free of distractions. Whether you are leading your Bridge Group meeting or having a one-on-one conversation with someone in your group—or even in your work, family or free time—good leaders can effectively engage in conversations by asking questions, listening well, and navigating hard situations.

Asking questions

The Gospels show Jesus asking questions all the time – over 300 of them! Great questions lead to insight, bonding, discovery, and transformation. For Bridge Group meetings, good discussion comes from leaders asking good questions. Here are a few tips for asking good questions:

- Ask one simple question at a time.
- Ask questions to gain progressive depth and understanding.
- After asking a question, allow for silence to encourage thought and reflection.
- After a question is answered, paraphrase to show your understanding.
- Ask relevant follow-up questions when it's helpful to the conversation.

Listening well

Wise leaders seek first to understand rather than be understood, and can do so by being “*quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry*” (James 1:19 NIV). Listening—which leads to understanding—is often the first step to determining the direction of a conversation. A good listener:

- Hears what a person says and discerns what someone is thinking and feeling.
- Receives what someone says without involving their own opinions.
- Does not interrupt.
- Gives full attention, refraining from drifting thoughts or preparing the next response.

Navigating hard situations

Challenging situations are inevitable in life. You may have a neighbor who plays loud music late at night, an employer who overlooks you for a promotion, or a Bridge Group member who likes to dominate the conversation at every group meeting. There are some helpful tips to consider:



- Determine if an issue should be addressed or if it makes sense to let it go.
- Keeping the goal in mind can help make the conversation more productive.
- Sometimes it isn't knowing what to say, but when to say it. Timing is key.
- Pay attention to language, tone, eye contact and body language.
- Seeking wise counsel can be helpful, if appropriate.

Reflection:

1. How have you done one of these well in a recent conversation: asked questions, listened well, or navigated hard situations?
2. What went wrong in a recent conversation and how would you do it differently given the information in this lesson?
3. How could asking good questions, listening well and navigating hard situations be useful in Bridge Groups?
4. What is one thing from this leader development that you plan to apply in your next conversation?