STEPHEN D. BROOKFIELD
STEPHEN PRESKILL

THE DISCUSSION BOOK

50 GREAT WAYS TO GET PEOPLE TALKING

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The Discussion Book

50 Great Ways to Get People Talking

Stephen D. Brookfield
and Stephen Preskill

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PREFACE

This is a short book so this will be a short preface.

The two of us have long wanted a brief and accessible book—a manual, really—that collected the best techniques to start discussion, keep it going, and stay focused. This would be the kind of book you could stuff into a pocket or purse as you walked to chair a meeting, teach a class, or run a professional development workshop. On the way you could scan it to get a couple of new techniques to try out that day. To paraphrase *Dragnet*'s Joe Friday, we wanted a manual containing "just the facts ma'am" or, rather, just the techniques.

AUDIENCE

Our audience for this book is probably the largest one either of us has ever written for. Essentially we hope that anyone who uses some kind of group discussion process in any setting at all will find it valuable. The convener of a corporate decision-making meeting or the leader of a community town hall or congregation will find this just as beneficial as will a classroom teacher.

We have tried out these techniques in an incredible variety of settings. In addition to the hundreds of schools and colleges we have worked with, these have been used in places as varied as the Occupy movement, corporations (including IBM, 3M, CA

Technologies, ARCO Oil), post-Hurricane Sandy community groups, the military, health care organizations, churches, and nonprofit organizations such as the Theater Development Fund in New York. Educational institutions using them have been as diverse as fashion institutes, schools of mining, chiropractic and Asian medicine colleges, schools for the deaf, seminaries, tribal colleges, and, of course, multiple two- and four-year colleges and universities.

So, if you're looking for some quick and easy techniques to try out in your meetings, workshops, or classrooms that will get people participating, focus the conversation, and keep the energy level high, then this is the book for you!

OVERVIEW OF CONTENTS

This book doesn't have traditional chapters, just a listing of fifty techniques we find applicable for multiple purposes in multiple settings, We imagine readers approaching a meeting, class, or workshop thinking, "I need to get more discussion going today," "as a group we need to listen better to what each other is saying," or "how am I going to democratize the session today so more people participate?"

We created a brief user guide to the book that identifies ten categories, each of which identifies a particular purpose the techniques are suited to. If this is your first time working with a group, you'd go to the first category on getting discussions going and consider trying something from there. If you feel that a few people are dominating the conversation then you'd consult the category on democratizing participation and select one of the ten techniques listed.

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This means you as a reader don't need to look through a list of fifty techniques and pick one that fits. And you don't need to go through this book sequentially. Instead you can start with whichever of the following categories that seem to address your situation the best and see if any of the techniques listed there could work with your group.

- Top Ten Techniques to Get Discussion Going with New Groups
- Top Ten Techniques to Promote Good Questioning
- Top Ten Techniques to Foster Active Listening
- Top Ten Techniques for Holding Discussions without Speech
- Top Ten Techniques to Get People out of their Comfort Zone
- Top Ten Techniques for Text-Based Discussions
- Top Ten Techniques to Democratize Participation
- Top Ten Techniques to Transition from Small to Large Groups
- Top Ten Techniques for Building Group Cohesion
- Top Ten Techniques for Discussions Requiring a Decision

Because many of the techniques we use show up in multiple categories, we end with a list of the Top Ten Techniques That Best Serve Multiple Discussion Purposes.

WEBSITE

As an accompaniment to the book we have created a website devoted to it: www.thediscussionbook.com/. There you can find out how to contact us, reviews and applications of the techniques we've used, and examples of other techniques we couldn't fit into a short manual.

USER GUIDE

Top Ten Techniques to Get Discussion Going with New Groups

- Circle of Voices
- Chalk Talk
- Participation Rubric
- Think-Pair-Share
- Today's Meet
- Appreciative Pause
- Single Word Sum-Ups
- Setting Ground Rules
- The Three-Person Rule
- Quick Writes

Top Ten Techniques to Promote Good Questioning

- Strategic Questioning
- Open-ended Questions
- Nominating Questions
- If You Could Only Ask One Question
- On-the-Spot Questions
- What Do *You* Think?
- Clearness Committee

- Team Modeling
- Question Brainstorm
- Narrative Listening and Questioning

Top Ten Techniques to Foster Active Listening

- Circular Response
- Critical Conversation Protocol
- What Are You Hearing?
- Understanding Check
- Stand Where You Stand
- Clearness Committee
- Team Modeling
- Circle of Voices
- Narrative Listening and Questioning
- Single Word Sum-Ups

Top Ten Techniques for Holding Discussions without Speech

- Newsprint Dialogue
- Drawing Discussion
- Musicalizing Discussion
- Structured Silence
- Writing Discussion
- Appreciative Pause–Sticky Note Plaudit
- Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ)
- Chalk Talk
- Today's Meet
- Quick Writes

Top Ten Techniques to Get People out of Their Comfort Zone

- Methodological Belief
- Justifiable Pressure
- Cocktail Party
- Dramatizing Discussion
- Musicalizing Discussion
- Drawing Discussion
- Stand Where You Stand
- Clearness Committee
- Chalk Talk
- Today's Meet

Top Ten Techniques for Text-Based Discussions

- Hatful of Quotes
- Quotes to Affirm and Challenge
- Jigsaw
- Titling the Text
- Critical Debate
- Deliberative Polling
- Stand Where You Stand
- If You Could Only Ask One Question
- Question Brainstorm
- Quick Writes

Top Ten Techniques to Democratize Participation

- Common Ground
- Deliberative Polling
- Participatory Decision Making

- Circle of Voices
- Chalk Talk
- Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ)
- Newsprint Dialogue
- Circular Response
- Nominating Questions
- Today's Meet

Top Ten Techniques to Transition from Small to Large Groups

- Rotating Stations
- Snowballing
- Canvassing for Common Ground
- Newsprint Dialogue
- Drawing Discussion
- Musicalizing Discussion
- Dramatizing Discussion
- Stand Where You Stand
- Nominating Questions
- Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ)

Top Ten Techniques for Building Group Cohesion

- Mutual Invitation
- Understanding Check
- Circular Response
- Critical Incident Questionnaire
- Narrative Listening and Questioning
- Jigsaw
- Appreciative Pause–Sticky Note Plaudit

- Clearness Committee
- Common Ground
- Participatory Decision Making

Top Ten Techniques for Discussions Requiring a Decision

- Deliberative Polling
- Participatory Decision Making
- Canvassing for Common Ground
- Clearness Committee
- Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ)
- Nominating Questions
- Titling the Text
- Jigsaw
- Critical Conversation Protocol
- What Do *You* Think?

Top Ten Techniques That Best Serve Multiple Discussion Purposes

- Conversational Moves
- Conversational Roles
- Facilitator Summation
- Circle of Voices
- Participation Rubric
- Team Modeling
- Setting Ground Rules
- Today's Meet
- Chalk Talk
- Critical Conversation Protocol

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Stephen Brookfield would like to acknowledge his colleague, friend, and coauthor, Steve Preskill. Steve suggested the book, provided the passion that fueled it, and was a consistently creative, energetic, and funny partner. The two of us have worked on three books together now and all have been a delight. To have a best friend be a professional collaborator is a rare gift and one for which Stephen is eternally grateful.

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Both of us would like to thank all the community members, workshop participants, colleagues, and students who have told us over the years, "I tried that out and here's how it worked." You helped us hone and refine these techniques to serve a wide audience.

THE AUTHORS

Stephen D. Brookfield has written, coauthored, and edited seventeen books on adult learning, teaching, and critical thinking, six of which have won the Cyril O. Houle World Award for Literature in Adult Education (in 1986, 1989, 1996, 2005, 2011, and 2012). He also won the 1986 Imogene Okes Award for Outstanding Research in Adult Education and the 2013 Phillip E. Frandson Award for Outstanding Literature in Continuing Education. His work has been translated into German, Finnish, Korean, Japanese, Polish, and Chinese. He has been awarded three honorary doctor of letters degrees from the University System of New Hampshire (1991), Concordia University (2003), and Muhlenberg College (2010) for his contributions to understanding adult learning and shaping adult education. In 2001 he received the Leadership Award from the Association for Continuing Higher Education (ACHE) for "extraordinary contributions to the general field of continuing education on a national and international level." He currently serves on the editorial boards of educational journals in Britain, Canada, Italy, and Australia, as well as in the United States. During 2002 he was a visiting professor at Harvard University. After a decade as professor of higher and adult education at Columbia University in New York City, he has spent the last twenty years at the University of St. Thomas in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where he holds the title of the John Ireland Endowed Chair. In 2008 he

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Stephen Preskill was most recently named professor emeritus at Wagner College in Staten Island, New York. Previously, he was Distinguished Professor of Civic Engagement and Leadership in Wagner College's Center for Leadership and Engagement, where he helped to advance Wagner's commitment to community-engaged teaching and scholarship and played a significant role in supporting student participation in community-based activism and leadership development. He is the coauthor of three books: *Stories of Teaching* (2001), *Discussion as a Way of Teaching* (2nd ed.) (2005), and *Learning as a Way of Leading* (2009), as well as the author of numerous articles, book reviews, and op-ed pieces. He is passionate about democracy and its potential to transform colleges and communities. He has a BA in history from Ithaca College, masters' degrees in history and education from Long Island University and special education from the University of Vermont, and a PhD in educational policy studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

CONTENTS

	Preface	ix
	User Guide	xiii
	Acknowledgments	xix
	The Authors	xxi
	Introduction	1
1	Circle of Voices	9
2	Chalk Talk	13
3	Circular Response	19
4	Newsprint Dialogue	25
5	Today's Meet	31
6	Giving Appreciation: The Appreciative Pause–Sticky Note Plaudit	37
7	Rotating Stations	43
8	Snowballing	49
9	Conversational Moves	53
10	Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ)	59
11	Strategic Questioning	65
12	Open-ended Questions	71
13	Nominating Questions	77

14	If You Could Only Ask One Question	81
15	On-the-Spot Questions and Topics	87
16	What Do *You* Think?	93
17	Clearness Committee	97
18	Team Modeling	103
19	Question Brainstorm	107
20	Narrative Listening and Questioning	111
21	Participation Rubric	115
22	Critical Conversation Protocol	121
23	What Are You Hearing?	127
24	Understanding Check	131
25	Stand Where You Stand	135
26	Think-Pair-Share	139
27	Drawing Discussion	143
28	Musicalizing Discussion	149
29	Structured Silence	153
30	Writing Discussion	157
31	Quick Writes	161
32	Cocktail Party	165
33	Bohmian Dialogue	169
34	Methodological Belief	173
35	Justifiable Pressure	177
36	Hatful of Quotes	181
37	Quotes to Affirm and Challenge	185
38	Jigsaw	189
39	Titling the Text	193

40	Critical Debate	197
41	Single Word Sum-Ups	201
42	Setting Ground Rules	205
43	Canvassing for Common Ground	209
44	Dramatizing Discussion	215
45	Deliberative Polling	219
46	Participatory Decision Making	223
47	Mutual Invitation	229
48	The Three-Person Rule	233
49	Conversational Roles	237
50	Facilitator Summary	243
	Bibliography	247
	Index	249

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